New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies

Volume 22 Number 1
June 2020

New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies 22, 1 (June 2020): 19-42

PEACETIME OR PEACEFUL? IDENTIFYING CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN CHINESE GRAND STRATEGY FROM A GLOBAL HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

NIV HORESH
Western Sydney University

Abstract

There is a debate in the academic literature as to precisely when great powers ditch one grand strategy for another. The pertinent historical literature (as well as IR theory) suggest for the most part that rising powers' grand strategies change as their relative power shifts. Rising powers usually become more aggressive over time. So can we assume China's current "peaceful" strategy will also change, e.g. turn more aggressive as US relative power wanes? This article's answer is a qualified yes. That is to say, Chinese grand strategy will only become aggressive or destabilising if Beijing decides to warm to Moscow much more than the facts on the ground currently suggest.

Introduction

This article is aimed at examining whether China's rhetorical grand strategy of "peaceful development" may be being replaced under Xi Jinping with a more offensive one, as realist theory might predict. To that extent, an attempt will be made to offer a typology of imperial grand strategies around the world in times past, including Chinese ones. In passing, a discussion of historical sediments in current Chinese strategic thinking will be offered. The article will then explore what we know of the debate within China at present about the county's future strategic course, and place in the world with particular emphasis on the theories of 'democratic peace' and 'non-alliance'. It will comparatively examine the contours of imperial grand strategy in antiquity, and in early modern Europe by way of identifying Chinese commonality and exceptionality. Finally, it will foreground strategic thinking elsewhere around the world. The Conclusions will show grand strategy will only become aggressive or destabilising if Beijing decides to warm to Moscow much more than the facts on the ground currently suggest.

Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) famously postulated that war was the continuation of politics by other means, and it is that insight that largely informs the difference between strategic culture and grand strategy.[1] That is to say that the latter concept is to a greater degree framed around peace-time civilian efforts and planning,

1 Carl von Clausewitzt (1832), *Vom Kriege* (Dümmler).

spanning diplomacy and economics – as applied to China too.[2] 'Strategic culture', on the other hand, more narrowly connotes use-of-force contingencies, societally embedded violence, and warring techniques.

As such, the term 'grand strategy' was coined by Liddell Hart in 1929 to emphasize that it was not just about winning wars but about attaining lasting peacetime prosperity.[3] However, there is a debate in the pertinent literature as to precisely when great powers ditch one grand strategy for another, and whether democracies – because of frequent changes of power at the helm – may be less adapt at long-term grand strategic planning than dictatorships. For these reasons, defining grand strategy remains a "slippery" endeavor.[4]

American containment policy vis-à-vis the USSR during the Cold War was for example global in its deployment but variable in its application under different administrations.[5] Looking at American history more broadly, Posen and Ross identified four fundamental grand strategies attending different stages in the evolution of American power on the world stage: isolationism in the early 19th century, reluctant engagement in the early 20th century, proactive engagement after World War II and the search for dominance after the downfall of the USSR. Nevertheless, what appears to be the Trump administration's partial lapsing back into isolationism might suggest the four choices are not necessarily consecutive in order.[6]

If the 20th century is commonly considered the 'American Century', many in the PRC might consider the 21st as China's.[7] Yet, until recently, the English-language literature on grand strategy was Eurocentric in nature, and therefore did not easily lend itself to comparative analyses of global dimensions.[8] For US policy-makers the question has therefore been what precisely China's grand strategy might be (if it exists at all),

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2 This article is focused on 'grand strategy' rather than 'strategic culture', and it does so in no small measure from the disciplinary standpoint of world history. For pioneering studies by social scientists that focus on China's 'strategic culture' (to the extent culture influences strategy at all) see e.g. Alastair Iain Johnston (1995), *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, Princeton, Princeton University Press. Cf. Yuan-kang Wang (2010), *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics*, Columbia University Press.

3 B.H. Liddell Hart (rev. 1929), *Strategy: the Indirect Approach* (Faber & Faber). See also hew Strachan (2013), *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge University Press).

4 Hal Brands (2014), *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Cornell University Press).

5 Odd Arne Westad (2019), *The Cold War: a World History* (Basic Books).

6 Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross (1996-7), "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy", *International Security* 21.3, pp 5-53.

7 Mao Haijian (1995), *Tianchao de bengkui* (San Lian), Conclusions.

8 See Paul M. Kennedy's pioneering ed. vol. (1991), *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (Yale University Press); and his *magnum opus* (2010), *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (Knopf). Kennedy's overarching argument was that economic clout ultimately determines power struggles, and that imperial overstretch can by contrast economically debilitate the strategic incumbency.

and how should American grand strategy (assuming it exists) be adapted to deal with it. The options usually entailed engagement, containment or a mix of both ('congagement' in Goldstein's evocative parlance); if a mix is called for, the precise dosage remains in contention not least because it is not clear whether China is socializing into the rules-based US-led international order, or building institutions running parallel thereto.[9]

In 2003, Chinese diplomats coined the term 'peaceful rise' so as to convey China's trajectory would not resort to Western or Japanese-style imperialism as the country amasses more power. Former President Hu Jintao would similarly emphasize in international fora that Chinese culture was uniquely irenic, so military aggression was out of the question. By 2004, however, the term had fallen from grace, and would later be increasingly swept away in favour of a new one – 'peaceful development'. This is because the latter was thought to sound less threatening and contradictory in foreigners' ears.[10]

'Peaceful Development', in a sense, was meant to airbrush from collective memory the militancy of Mao Zedong's foreign policy. But at the same time the concept was crafted in 2004 on the basis of the Five Principles of Coexistence (sovereignty, non-aggression, non-intervention, equality and peaceful coexistence) that date back to the *early* Mao era. In June 1954, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru ironed out these principles, and these were then ratified in the inaugural conference of the non-aligned movement in Bandung, 1955. The egalitarian principles did not just buck the trend of the later Mao era, but also ran counter to China's hierarchical world view in the imperial era.[11]

Whatever the case may be, there is near consensus among Western scholars that PRC grand strategy at present is informed to a greater degree than that of the US by historical path dependency, being as it is an heir to two millennia of imperial statecraft. Not quite a young settler society, the PRC is also less multi-cultural than the US it its orientation, hence it is plausibly cast as less dynamic in its approach to modern-day problems.[12]

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9 https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/images/ia/INTA94_1_6_249_Layne.pdf; see also Christopher Layne (2009), "The Influence of Theory on Grand Strategy: The United States and a Rising China". In Annette Freyberg-Inan, Ewan Harrison, and Patrick James eds., *Rethinking Realism in International Relations: Between Tradition and Innovation* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), pp. 103-135; Michael D. Swaine, Sara A. Daly and Peter W. Greenwood (2000), *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy: Past, Present and* Future (RAND); Aaron L. Friedberg (2006), *'Going Out': China's Pursuit of Natural Resources and Implications for the PRC's Grand Strategy* (National Bureau of Asian Research); Avery Goldstein (2005), *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford University Press)' Eric Hyer (2015), *The Pragmatic Dragon: China's Grand Strategy and Boundary Settlements* (UBC Press).

10 Bonnie S. Glaser and Evan S. Medeiros (2007), "The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy-Making in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of 'Peaceful Rise'", *China Quarterly* 190, pp. 291-310.

11 Liselotte Odgaard (2012), *China and Coexistence : Beijing's National Security Strategy for the Twenty-first Century* (Johns Hopkins University Press).

12 David Shambaugh (2013), *China's Goes Global: the Partial Power* (Oxford University Press).

But differences between the American and Chinese polities should not be overstated. Warren I. Cohen suggested for example that the PRC was a product of thousands of years of "ruthless" overland continental expansion, not unlike that of Russia and the US: in all three cases indigenous communities perished as a result. Similarly, the PRC current de-emphasis of communism in its mass-media outreach to domestic and to foreign audiences in particular; the throwback to its imperial cultural roots is not unlike Turkey's tilt at neo-Ottomanism under Erdogan or the rehabilitation of Stalin and the Czars under Putin. Rather than act out Tang-era (618-907) cosmopolitanism as PRC strategic rhetoric at present is wont to,[13] Cohen believed that – once powerful – China would seek territorial expansion reminiscent of the one during the Han Wudi era (BCE 141-87). In other words, for Cohen the official grand strategy of peaceful development was temporary at best. [14] In his 2003 classic, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Mearsheimer similarly predicted that China and the US were on an irreversible collision course precisely because China was primed as a great rising power to expand territorially, and the incumbent US primed to thwart its rise.[15]

In a similar vein, Suisheng Zhao suggested more recently that the irenic historical image Chinese leaders like to conjure up is vacuous. In other words, close historical examination shows imperial China was – in Zhao's view – not uniquely benevolent, nor uniquely violent in times past. Far from reenacting Tang era cosmopolitanism, by rhetorically predicating China's grand strategy on *late* Qing –era (1839-1911) sovereignty crises, and by envisioning a return to *early* Qing grandeur, China's leaders anachronistically cast a shadow over small neighbouring state actors.[16]

Andrew Ericsson similarly believes that the blueprint for China's grand strategy under Xi Jinping is mid-Qing era territorial expansionism rather than Tang era cosmopolitanism. Xi has articulated the goal of achieving middle income status by 2021, the centenary of the CPC establishment. By 2049, the PRC centenary, the goal is for China to become a prosperous, socialist technological leader with a strong military.[17] Implicit in these centennial goals is the notion that fostering normative soft power would not matter as much as it did in the US ascent to super-powerdom.

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13 Zicheng Ye (2011), *Inside China's Grand Strategy: The Perspective from the People's Republic* (University of Kentucky Press), p. 33.

14 On acting out Tang cosmopolitanism, see Niv Horesh and Kean Fan Lim (2017), *An East Asian Challenge to Western Neoliberalism: Critical Perspectives on the'China Model'*, Chp. 2; on Erdogan, Putin and China parallels see e.g. Gilbert Rozman (2014), *The Sino-Russian Challenge to the World Order: National Identities, Bilateral Relations, and East Versus West in the 2010s* (Wilson Centre); Xin Lu and Elena Soboleva (2014), "Personality Cults in Modern Politics: Cases from Russia and China", CGP Working Paper Series; Gabriela Özel Volfova (2016), "Turkey's Middle Eastern Endeavors: Discourses and Practices of Neo-Ottomanism under the AKP", *Die Welt des Islams* , 56.3-4, pp. 489-510.

15 John J. Mearsheimer (2003), *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (Norton).

16 Suisheng Zhao (2015), *Rethinking the Chinese World Order: the Imperial Cycle and the Rise of China*, *Journal of Contemporary China* 24.96, pp. 961-982.

17 Andrew S. Erickson (2019), "China". In Thierry Balzacq, Peter Dombrowski, and Simon Reich, *Comparative Grand Strategy: A Framework and Cases* (Oxford University Press), pp. 73-98.

Martin Stuart-Fox is on the far end of the argumentative spectrum. This is because for him Chinese expansionism is not a question of this or that era but one of an overarching historical pattern whereby regional hegemony is the endgame. In other words, it was not just non-Han dynasties, such as the Yuan or Qing, which pursued expansionism nor was it just one emperor in the image of Han Wudi to blame. Instead, Stuart-Fox argues the Chinese carried out throughout the ages a European-style "civilizing mission" of their own; even the Ming, usually thought of as territorially minimalist, was aggressive in its dealings with Vietnam according to this interpretation.[18]

By way of contrast, Feng Zhang and David C. Kang have powerfully argued in their respective books that Chinese grand strategy would *not* be derived from early-imperial offensive thought. Neither would it be modeled on Qing expansionism. Rather, broader late-imperial tributary concepts would come to the fore, whereby China might employ minimalist engagement with the rest of the world whilst professing universalist appeal at the same.[19]

A few prominent liberal IR scholars also predict Chinese minimalism, although their reasoning is not grounded in historical sediments but in the domestic vulnerabilities hobbling a more proactive PRC foreign policy at present, chief amongst those is the pressing need to preserve economic growth.[20] Zweig and Bi have for exampled highlighted that, as of the late 1990s, China's growing reliance on oil and building material imports explain Chinese foreign policy more than anything else.[21] Mark Frazier largely accepts this view but stresses that China's transition from an export-led to a consumption-led economy this decade accentuates competition between different economic interest groups with foreign-policy implications.[22] On his part, leading US China expert David Lampton suggested that China's hunger for commodities on the world market pre-disposes it toward a relatively benign foreign policy that seeks to avert a backlash in countries where Chinese companies operate.[23]

Chih-yu Shih and Chiung-chiu Huang showed, more specifically, how China pursued a grand strategy designed to rhetorically coach the US into acknowledging its rise to the status of a matching power. But they argue that the importance of

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18 Martin Stuart-Fox (2004), "The Role of History and Culture in Shaping Future Relations", *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 26.1, pp. 116-139.

19 Feng Zhang (2015*), Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History* (Stanford University Press); David C. Kang (2012), *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (Columbia University Press); Ja Ian Chong (2013), "Popular Narratives versus Chinese History: Implications for Understanding an Emergent China", *European Journal of International Relations* 20.4, pp. 939-964.

20 Jisi Wang (2011), "China's Search for a Grand Strategy: A Rising Great Power Finds Its Way", *Foreign Affairs* 90.2, pp. 68-79.

21 David Zweig and Jianhai Bi (2005), "China's Global Hunt for Energy", *Foreign Affairs* 84.5, p. 25.

22 Mark W. Frazier (2010), "China's Domestic Policy Fragmentation and "Grand" Strategy in Global Politics", *Asia Policy* 10, pp. 87-102.

23 David M. Lampton (2008), *The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money, and Minds* (University of California Press), p. 93.

maintaining a stable relationship with the US due mainly to economics has trumped China's core national interest of unification.[24]

Beyond China, Jack Snyder has famously argued in this context that in later industrializing nations' foreign policy can easily be hijacked by relatively small expansionist-minded elites, leading to war in the face of adverse economic and military odds.[25] Similarly, Etel Solingen has shown how profoundly domestic factors intervene with foreign policy irrespective of external agency. Since expanding international trade invariably yields winners and losers in the home economy, interest groups will jostle with one another to adjust grand strategy to their favour.[26] Solingen focused on Western democracies, but the case for China can be made too: offensive measures that may result in US sanctions are discouraged at present for fear they might harm growth: China for example abstained from the vote on Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea partly for that reason.

Mark Brawley has ably shown in a uniquely European context how religion can interpenetrate grand strategy. In 16th Century, for example, when the English Crown had not yet amassed resources through the creation of a national debt, buccaneers like Francis Drake were encouraged to prey on the riches of the Catholic Spanish empire at their own expense. Religion also played a significant role in the outbreak of the Thirty Years Wars (1618-1648) or for example in the formation of the Holy Alliance (1815).[27] It would be hard to find an equivalent role for religion in a Chinese early modern context. Similarly, Chinese buccaneers rarely extended imperial interests in the same way that Drake, the Brooke Family (or Rhodes) had. The Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia was, on the contrary, cut off from China through much of the Qing era (1644-1911).[28]

In a pioneering recent volume on comparative grand strategy, Norrin Ripsman has argued for example that protestant-inspired myths of messianism, exceptionalism, and frontierism have similarly meshed with American foreign policy over the years. Russian expansion westward in the 18th Century was to a large extent also legitimated by the Orthodox mission. Russia's grand strategy at present is otherwise informed in no small measure by the same fear of invasion from the West that typified imperial and Soviet thinking. Moreover, Russia's insecurity can lead to belligerence in the same way that Germany and Japan's energy vulnerabilities precipitated the decision to embark on Wolrd War II.[29]

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24 Chih-yu Shih and Chiung-chiu Huang (2015), "China's Quest for Grand Strategy: Power, National Interest, or Relational Security?", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 8.1, pp. 1-26.

25 Jack Snyder (2013), *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Cornell University Press).

26 Etel Solingen (1998), Regional Orders at Century's Dawn: Global and Domestic Influences on Grand Strategy (Princeton University Press). See also Kevin Narizny (2007), *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy* (Cornell University Press).

27 Mark R. Brawley (2009), *Political Economy and Grand Strategy: A Neoclassical Realist View* (Routledge), pp. 50-59.

28 Anthony Reid (2015), *A History of Southeast Asia: Critical Crossroads* (Wiley).

29 Norrin Ripsman. Chp 13, "Conclusion: The Emerging Sub-field of Comparative Grand Strategy". In Balzacq *et al.* eds., *op. cit*.

As Thomas Christensen has shown, domestic factors loomed large in Sino-American relations in the Mao Zedong era in the opposite direction. That is to say both Truman and Mao often redicalised their foreign-policy rhetoric so as to rally public opinion behind controversial domestic agenda. In Mao's case, the 1958 Taiwan Crisis was one gambit in the Great Leap Forward campaign. And in Truman's case anti-Chinese rhetoric during the Korean war served the broader purpose of mobilizing for USSR containment.[30]

Can China's leaders, who rarely speak in English, think globally let alone capture global audiences in the same way that Barak Obama has ? The answer is moot. In the 1960s, China despite its poverty aspired to lead the Third World. Apart from Albania, Zambia and Pakistan – the economic imprint it had left behind overseas was negligible. Conversely, in the reform era, China's economy was growing, but it was reluctant to shoulder global responsibilities. A bird's eye view of Chinese history, however, situates the reform era (1978-2012) as something of an aberration because ordinarily the Chinese thought of their country as the pinnacle of civilization.[31] Is it reasonable to expect that centuries of cultural supremacism would not leave their mark on the pscyche of contemporary strategists in the era of mutually-assured nuclear destruction and unprecedented global mobility? [32]

Before Xi Jinping came to power, leading scholars like Scobell and Nathan believed China's world view was concentric and rather narrow-minded. In other words, apart from Sino-American relations, all other bilateral relations were greatly affected by distance from China's own borders. Chinese leaders were preoccupied with Asia in the main, and their understanding of the West and Latin America was shallow.[33]

However, Xi Jinping's annunciation of the ambitious Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 and the attendant establishment of the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as putative rival to the Asia Development Bank have persuaded many that a new era in Chinese foreign policy has begun, and that maybe China was beginning rolling out a new world order.[34] In effect, the term Deng Xiaoping had coined for keeping "low profile" on the world stage (*taoguang yanghui*) is nowadays rarely invoked in Chinese official rhetoric, giving way instead to *fenfa youwei* or "striving

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30 *Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton University Press). The primacy of domestic factors in shaping PRC foreign policy is also highlighted by Lukas K. Danner (2018), *China's Grand Strategy: Contradictory Foreign Policy ?*(Springer), and Layne (2009), *op. cit*.

31 John Cranmer-Byng (1973), "The Chinese View of Their Place in the World: An Historical Perspective", China Quarterly 53, pp. 67-79.

32 Cf. Mark Mancall (1963), "The Persistence of Tradition in Chinese Foreign Policy", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 349, pp. 14-26. That Chinese foreign-policy inclinations changed irrevocably in the 20th Century was, on the other hand, argued by Benjamin Schwartz (1968), "The Chinese Perception of World Order, Past and Present". In John K. Fairbak ed., *The Chinese World Order, Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Harvard University Press), pp. 276-288.

33 Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell (2015), *China's Search for Security* (Columbia University Press).

34 William A. Callahan (2016), "China's "Asia Dream": The Belt Road Initiative and the New Regional Order", *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 1.3, pp. 226-243.

for achievements". Nonetheless, the Hu Jintao-era phrase conjuring up an irenic, non-confrontational world (*hexie shijie*) has not yet completely disappeared from sight.[35]

At the height the PRC's international "low profile" era, it was Michael H. Hunt who had precociously predicted that PRC foreign policy would turn more assertive over time, drawing vitality from China's illustrious imperial past. The PRC narrative of the international system at the time had been, as Hunt observed, largely Marxist. But at the same time Hunt warned against taking Marxist orthodoxy for granted when in fact even Mao Zedong had been influenced by imperial-era nativist thinkers like Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692). In fact, Hunt correctly foreshadowed the debate currently under way among Chinese foreign-policy analysts between those who hanker after a greater global role in the image of the Tang dynasty (618-907), and those who think China's posture should be more humbly geared toward competition between equal state players, much like during the Warring States era (BCE 475-221), so as not to alienate the West.[36]

To be sure, whilst the Warring States modality implies Westphalian-style equality of big and smaller nations, the current international system is critiqued in the Chinese historical narrative as one shaped by American interventionism. The Chinese alternative order entails, according to that narrative, a hierarchical structure with China symbolically at the top, but without much top-down intervention in other countries' affairs.[37] But, in reality, as Brantly Womack observed, both the Chinese and American historical narratives were grounded in 'universal' discourse: the all-encompassing imperial mandate ('All Under heaven' or *Tianxia*in Chinese) trope in the Chinese case, and the inevitability of worldwide democratization in the American one.[38] Womack hastened to add, rightly, that the Chinese historical narrative is as yet not seeping into the practicalities of foreign policy. On the contrary, the most basic difference between Chinese imperial and contemporary foreign policy is "the acceptance of international equality".[39]

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Most commentators agree that since Xi Jinping's ascent to power, PRC foreign policy has become more assertive. As indicated earlier, long gone are the days of "keeping a low profile" (*taoguangyanghui*) on the international scene, which had typified PRC foreign policy under Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao (1978-2012). Xi has

35 http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2019-08/13/c_1124867801.htm

36 Michael H. Hunt (1984), "Chinese Foreign Relations in Historical Perspective". In Harry Harding ed*., China's Foreign Relations in the 1980s* (Yale UniversityPress). See also Zhang, Feng (2015), "Confucian Foreign Policy Traditions in Chinese History", *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 8.2, pp. 197-218.

37 See e.g. Mingfu Liu (2015), *The China Dream: Great Power Thinking & Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era* (CN Times).

38 Brantly Womack (2010), *China among Unequals : Asymmetric Foreign Relationships in Asia* (World Scientific), p. 153.

39 Womack (2010), op. cit., p. 177.

for example repeatedly invoked "Chinese wisdom" (*Zhongguozhihui*) as means of resolving pernicious territorial disputes far away from China's own borders.[40]

In 2017, Xi cast himself in Davos, Switzerland, as defender of globalization in the face of US perceived retreat from multilateralism under President Donald J. Trump.[41] However, there is a boisterous debate in the West whether Xi's foreign policy actually amounts to coherent strategy of replacing the US as *de facto* arbiter of the international system, or even perhaps an attempt to re-shape that system along Chinese cultural norms.[42] That China, unlike Russia, did *not* send troops in 2019 to support Maduro's flagging regime in Venezuela is quite telling in this regard.[43]

Yet Theresa Fallon suggests Xi's BRI amounts in fact to adopting a new grand strategy on the back of perceived American decline. She describes the BRI as an attempt to create a new Eurasian economic order that would dislodge the US from this part of the world, paving the way for China to become the next world superpower.[44] To some extent, Fallon's vigilance is shared by prominent China watcher Elizabeth Economy. In her view, Xi's ambition clearly has a dimension of military-deterrence on top of economic might, and this is encapsulated in his use of the term "big country diplomacy" (*daguo waijiao*). If Communist Party of China (CPC) legitimacy had been in the Hu era predicated on economic performance, Xi in many ways has also predicated it on regaining China long-lost global status dating back to the Tang era and beyond. It would be impossible to understand the BRI appropriation of the historical 'Silk Road' otherwise.[45]

Other analyses of the BRI focus on domestic factors like the need to have overseas markets soak up the production overcapacity that has built up in China since the 1990s, the need to quell Uighur separatism through ingratiating Central Asian states, or the need to relocate resources to China's underdeveloped Western provinces.[46]

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40 Jian Zhang (2015), "China's New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping: Towards 'Peaceful Rise 2.0'?", *Global Change, Peace & Security* 27.1, pp. 5-19.

41 Malcolm Warner (2017), "On Globalization with Chinese Characteristics", *Asia Pacific Business Review* 23.3, pp. 309-316.

42 Jessica Chen Weiss (2019), "An Ideological Contest in U.S.-China Relations? Assessing China's Defense of Autocracy". Forthcoming in Avery Goldstein and Jacques deLisle eds., *Security and US-China Relations: Differences, Dangers, and Dilemmas*. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3427181 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3427181

43 https://www.france24.com/en/20190524-russian-army-helping-venezuela-amid-us-threats-moscows-ambassador

44 See Theresa Fallon (2015), "The New Silk Road: Xi Jinping's Grand Strategy for Eurasia" , *American Foreign Policy Interests* 37.3, pp. 140-147.

45 Elizabeth C. Economy (2018), *The Third Revolution : Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State* (Oxford University Press), p. 190

46 Tim Summers (2016), "China's 'New Silk Roads': Sub-national Regions and Networks of Global Political Economy", *Third World Quarterly* 37.9, pp. 1628-1643; Michael Clarke (2017), "The Belt and Road Initiative: China's New Grand Strategy?", *Asia Policy* 24, pp. 71-79; Flynt Leverett and Bingbing Wu (2017), "The New Silk Road and China's Evolving Grand Strategy", teh China journal 77 , pp. 110-132; Mark Beeson (2018), "Geoeconomics with Chinese Characteristics: the BRI and China's Evolving Grand Strategy" *Economic and Political Studies* 6.3, pp. 240-256.

The Chinese Debate on Grand Strategy

Just before Xi came to power Randall L. Schweller perceptively suggested China's visions for an alternative world order remained "inchoate" and "contested" within China itself. Rather than offering specific alternatives to US-led institutions, its criticism of the US were more to do with the latter supposedly manipulating the existing arrangements and resorting to military coercions all too often;[47] and with supposed American plots to overthrow the CPC in the same way that the USSR disintegrated. The overarching aim in the Chinese narrative was to restore Chinese "honor".[48]

However, it seems fair to say that during Xi's second term in office the specifics of China's alternative vision are incrementally adduced, focusing in the main on Bandung-era non-interference tropes and having a greater say in the Third World. Whilst Xi is often accused in the West of reviving Maoism, in his foreign-policy parleys to the Third World, he seems to stress much more China's reform-era "developmental" credentials, namely, a willingness to teach poorer countries the best way to industrialise fast. Neither does Xi seem keen to flag Maoism in his engagement with developed countries, where that ideology carries even less appeal.[49]

However, on the extreme right, within the Chinese discourse on international relations, one can certainly find voices advocating a return to a late-imperial style tributary order in East and Southeast Asia. That order is supposed to be governed by the precepts of Chinese philosophy rather than the prevailing international law. And to some degree, the stress on "harmony" and social commons (*datong*) in Confucianism has already seeped into Chinese diplomatic rhetoric too.[50]

Notably, Peking University sociologist Pan Wei suggests the 'democratic peace' theory is a teleological myth, and that China should foster an autochtonous bureaucracy along traditional lines. Yan Xuetong, while skeptical of the feasibility of a return to the late-imperial tributary order, draws lesson from China's *pre*-imperial past to suggest it should offer a better, more humane model of governance than the American one, so as to capture audiences worldwide. All Chinese observers critique the US for waxing lyrical about its democratic checks and balances at home, while advancing what they see as *undemocratic* world order (N.B.: China undemocratically retains a UN veto right under that very same order).[51]

Many other Chinese scholars also reject the sanctity of the 'one man, one vote' principle as ill-suited for China, if not for the developing world as a whole. The most strident example perhaps is that of economist Hu Angan. His analysis is an outlier not

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47 Randall L. Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu (2011), "After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of US Decline", *International Security* 36.1, pp. 41–72.

48 Yong Deng (2012), China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations (Cambridge University Press), p. 9.

49 See e.g. http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2019-11/18/nw.D110000renmrb_20191118_1-01.htm

50 Schweller and Pu, *op. cit*., p. 60.

51 Schweller and Pu, *op. cit*., p. 61-67.

just because of his triumphalist tenor and overt anti-Americanism, which other China visionaries eschew. Rather, what is remarkable about his analysis from a scholarly point of view is his reading of Mao Zedong's era (1949-1976) into the 'China Model' discourse. Until not long ago that discourse had been largely confined to the economic-reform era (1979-present) if not explicitly directed *against* the guiding economic principles of Maoism. On this point, Hu therefore dangerously overturns studies by other economists who contribute to China's emerging leadership narrative, e.g. Justin Lin, Li Daokui, Zhou Tianyong or Ding Xueliang.[52]

Another key question for Chinese strategists is whether to form military alliances so as to indemnify the country's rise on the world stage. To be sure, China had an alliance with the USSR in the 1950s, but the two countries nearly went to war in the late 1960s. China's strategic ties with North Korea and Pakistan have been longer lasting but the latter are poor countries. Moreover, North Korea retains strong counter-balancing links with Russia, and Pakistan has been aligned with the US until recently. Officially, PRC foreign policy still abides by the Bandung principle of non-alliance. Yet observers like Ye Zicheng call on Beijing to revive the pact with Moscow, because in his view US-Japan ties are a mortal threat to the country's national security.[53]

Virtually all students of IR in China, even those leaning toward realism, agree that culture and history matter in shaping foreign policy. However, Qin Yaqing has famously argued that, moreover, Chinese culture can determine the contours of the next world order more effectively than the Westphalian mode. His is an attempt to construct an alternative Chinese theory of IR to replace the rationality-dominated. Western one using Confucian dialectics. The Chinese alternative may still appear incorrigibly naïve, metaphysical and raw to Western readers though. Namely, it stresses the nature of bilateral relations rather than the actors *per se* as the key unit of IR analysis.[54]

On the other hand, there are also many voices in Chinese academe who warn Beijing of overconfidence at perceived Western decline. At heart here is the notion shared by many Chinese scholars that Britain and the USSR declined as global great powers because of imperial overstretch, and that the US may be facing the same problem at present. What is in contention is the extent to which China has been dragged onto the same trajectory in the face of its non-interventionist rhetoric. Yan Xuetong and Shi Yinhong have, in particular, warned against rash political engagement in remote parts of the world, calling instead to first make China a model for other countries to follow through superior governance. China, in other words, should avoid being

52 Angang Hu (2012), *China in 2020: A New Type of Superpower* (Brookings Institution).

53 Zicheng Ye, *op. cit.*, p. 136-8.

54 Yaqing Qin (2016), "A Relational Theory of World Politics", *International Studies Review* 18, pp. 33-47.

perceived as hegemonic rising power.[55] The difference between Shi and Yan, however, is that the latter has called for a pragmatic alliance with Moscow, while Shi calls for the continuation of the non-alignment principle for the most part.

In contrast to Yan, Zheng Yongnian has called on Beijing to do its utmost to avoid being perceived as offering an ideological alternative to the US in eyes of citizens of the world.[56] But, as indicated, most other Chinese scholars do see the US as a flawed ideological model. It is widely recognised that US dominance on the world stage is undergirt by NATO, as well as hub-and-spoke alliances and a host of special relationships, e.g. with Britain, Japan, Saudi Arabia and Israel. So, the question Chinese scholars struggle with is, firstly, whether China should forsake Deng Xiaopin's commitment to non-alignment (*bu jiemeng*), made in 1983, to foster similar military relationship. In the second instance, Chinese scholars struggle with the notion that democracy glues the US to many of its allies more than pragmatic interests. Like Christopher Layne, most Chinese scholars view realism as a much more accurate organising theory with which to explain the current international system than the theory of 'democratic peace'. The latter suggests democracies will not attack one another militarily, hence democracy is the best way to ensure peace and prosperity.[57] Chinese analysts have a veritable epistemological problem here because the empiric evidence suggests that in the post-war era no one democracy fought another with the exception of Peru and Ecuador perhaps.

During the 14th CPC Congress in 1992, Jiang Zemin reiterated the policy of *bu jiemeng* by stating that China 'will not enter into alliance with any country or group of countries and will not join any military bloc'. Since then, the principle has been quoted at various times in Party speeches and government reports. And despite current alarm in the West about the true intentions of the BRI, and Xi's rapport with Putin, the Chinese President has himself reiterated non-alignment on various occasions. What the BRI has created instead of military pacts are a host of 'comprehensive partnerships' with countries of various geo-political hue.[58]

Looking at China's periphery and beyond, few military-alliance candidates readily suggest themselves. Sun Ru warns that allying with such underdeveloped countries in Southeast Asia or the Pacific would place a heavy burden that would far exceed any potential benefits, not least in bringing regional US allies to band together more closely in order to counter China. Like-minded mainstream IR scholars in China do not believe

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55 Xiaoyu Pu and Chengli Wang (2018), "Rethinking China's rise: Chinese scholars debate strategic overstretch", *International Affairs* 94.5, pp. 1019-1035; Xuetong Yan (2013), "Cong taoguangyanghui dao fenfayouwei Zhongguo jueqi shi buke dang" *Zhongguo jingji zhoukan* 43, pp. 44–7. Cf. Yinhong Shi (2016),""Triumphalism" and Decision Making in China's Asia Policy", *Economic and Political Studies* 1.1, pp. 107-119.

56 http://memo.cfisnet.com/2016/0112/1303687.html

57 Christopher Layne (1994), "Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace", *International Security* 19.2, pp. 5-49.

58 Zhongping Feng and Huang Jing (2014), "China's Strategic Partnership Diplomacy", ESPO Working Paper No. 8. Available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2459948 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2459948

that China's current security problems stem from a lack of allies, arguing that they are instead due to the complex interaction of domestic and international politics.[59]

Even amongst those IR scholars who recommend alliances a debate ensues as to where to turn: the BRI represents the majority view of those recommending focus on Central Asia as an area least strategically contested by the US. But minority voices call for more focus on Southeast Asia, not least in view of the existence of a large Chinese diaspora there.[60] Chinese apologists for the BRI also stress it is defensive in nature, and that its origins in fact date back to Hu-era deliberations on ways to tackle economic slowdown after the Global Financial Crisis.[61]

If BRI 'comprehensive partnerships' are bilateral, the hoped overall cumulative effect here is one of forming a 'community of common destiny' (*mingyun gongtongti*) – a nebulous term that some Western scholars have described as re-enactment of the Japanese imperialist 'Co-Prosperity Sphere' in East Asia.[62] Thus, it is unclear if China can rise to global super-powerdom without military alliances, especially as it is so far behind the US and (Russia) in military technology. Though not focused on China, Mansoor and Murray's pioneering historical work suggests ascent to global super-powerdom is impossible without forming military alliances: in accordance with realist theory predictions, even isolationist Britain at the height of its power had to form an alliance with France by the end of the 19th century. Similarly, the 1823 Monroe Doctrine isolated the US from European power struggles, but American independence itself had been assured between 1765-1783 in no small measure through a military alliance with France against Britain.[63]

Ancient Grand Strategy and Statecraft

The comparative literature on ancient grand strategy and statecraft owes much to Eisenstadt's pioneering work.[64] Well before the rise of world history as a field of study in Western academe, Eisenstadt had stood out with the ambitious global framework

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59 Ruoran Liu and Feng Liu (2017), "Contending Ideas on China's Non-Alliance Strategy", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 10.2, pp. 151–171. On the other hand, US-based scholar Maochen Yu suggested China was disinclined to form alliances because of historical big-power cultural conceit. See:– https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/south-china-sea-beijings-strategic-culture-shaped-by-history-16145

60 Nien-chung Chang-Liao (2016), "China's New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping", *Asian Security* 12.2, pp. 82-91.

61 Yong Wang (2016), "Offensive for Defensive: the Belt and Road Initiative and China's New Grand Strategy", *The Pacific Review* 29.3, pp. 455-463.

62 https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2017/11/23/chinas_new_greater_east_asia_co-prosperity_sphere_135602.html

63 Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray eds. (2016), *Grand Strategy and Military Alliances* (Cambridge University Press), Conclusions.

64 Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (rep. 2017), *The Political Systems of Empires* (Routledge**).**

of his work, which incorporated China at a time when Eurocentricism was the norm. Eisenstadt had perceptively identified China's historical uniqueness in antiquity as grounded socially in the gentry rather than in having aristocracy, and in maintaining civil-service mobility irrespective of religion. However, the field of world history has progressed in leaps and bounds since, and comparative generalizations are easier to make as a result, albeit crudely.

We know today more to both reinforce and question notions of Chinese exceptionality from different historical angles. If Fairbank's classic left indelible mark on the Sinologist mind in conjuring up a Chinese tributary world order, Bang and Kolodziejczyk's pioneering work suggests many other powers in antiquity made universal claims to suzerainty; like the Chinese in antiquity, they rhetorically cast neighbouring societies as "barbarians" but were pragmatic in their dealings with them. To be sure, nomadic steppe peoples have always had a military edge in the ancient world. What is missing from the Chinese setting is an equivalent to literate society peer-power detente like the one obtaining between the Parthian and Roman empires.[65] In other words, China was usually seen as culturally superior if sometimes militarily weak – this is all the more so since the sedentary Japanese and Korean societies willingly embraced Chinese script. This feature is important because the historical evidence we have from Europe is that peer competition results in increased military outlay, and eventually in more intensive tax regimes.

It is well known that China did not enshrine primogeniture as opposed to most parts of Europe and Japan (but not the Near East). Monson and Scheidel's pioneering work tends to reinforce the uniqueness of the Chinese polity in antiquity in other ways too. To be sure, China's tax collecting bureaucracy was not particularly big compared with e.g. Rome but the latter relied much more heavily on commercial indirect taxation, while land tax (either monetized or in kind) and poll tax were preponderant in China. More generally, tax farming was quite rare in the Chinese setting but rife elsewhere in the ancient world, suggesting stronger unifying ethos and state legitimacy, quite apart from the absence of full-fledged feudalism after 221 BCE. In addition, metropolitan Roman society was much more patrician than the capital population in China; slavery and religion similarly played a much smaller part in the Chinese grand strategic setting, e.g. in levying tax or forming alliances.[66] However, the early modern Ottoman setting was also lacking a truly aristocratic element before the 17th Century even if tax farming there had been rife.[67]

Crucially, the overall tax burden in China – at least in the late imperial era – was lighter than elsewhere.[68] Montesquieu claimed in fact that the type of political

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65 Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kolodziejczyk eds. (2012), *Universal Empire: a Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History* (Cambridge University Press), Introduction.

66 Andrew Monson and Walter Scheidel (2015), *Fiscal Regimes and the Political Economy of Premodern States* (Cambridge University Press), Introduction.

67 Carter V. Findley (2005), *The Turks in World History* (Oxford University Press), p. 18.

68 Roy Bin Wong (1997), *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Cornell University Press).

constitution determined the burden of taxation around the world. He maintained that the burden of taxation was higher where the population was freer and had more rights. Thus, he perceived the Ottoman and Chinese Empires to have a lighter fiscal regime than most European states as compensation for excessive despotism, whilst in Europe citizen were willing to pay higher taxes of their own volition.[69]

On his part, Edward Luttwak has shown that grand strategy could shift in antiquity just as it would later shift in the early modern era. He discussed at length how Augustus inherited an offensive mind-set from Julius Caesar, but as the Roman empire matured Augutus' approach became much more judicious, less war-prone and more alliance-forming as regards Rome's many colonies and the tribute tax they forwarded. Eventually, however, client state elites were absorbed into the Roman civilizational cradle. Then the Teutonic 'barbarian' threat turned the empire even more defense-mined, not unlike Ming China (*q.v.* Hadrian's Wall, the Great Wall).[70]

In another classic work, Luttwak suggested that the Byzantine empire, which continued the late Roman one, was still more defensive in nature.[71] Yet religion and kinship-derived aristocracy played a bigger role in legitimating the Byzantine empire than in coeval China even if a 'Senate' did not exist in either locale. To boot, the Byzantine elite switched to Greek from Latin, whereas Mandarin Chinese remained elite constant.[72] In summary, as Goldstone and Haldon argue, there had been three main modalities in the ancient world insofar as the cultural treatment of conquered peoples was concerned: the Assyrians demanded full assimilation or death, the Achamaenids allowed autonomy and the Romans embodied an intermediate approach.[73]

Early Modern European Grand Strategy

Historical analyses of grand strategies owe much to Paul Kennedy's seminal work, yet his was mostly focused on early modern Europe. The overarching conclusions Kennedy drew suggested super-powerdom entailed the fostering of strong armed forces. However, prior to that, super-powerdom had been contingent on amassing *economic* power. Arguably in contrast to the Chinese trajectory at present, his work also showed that alliances were indispensible to rising powers as they contested the established order.[74]

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69 Monson abd Scheidel, *op. cit*., p. 12.

70 Edward N. Luttwak (1976), *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century A. D. to the Third* (Johns Hopkins University Press).

71 Edward N. Luttwak (2009), *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Harvard University Press).

72 See e.g. Alexander Yakobson (2014), "The First Emperors: Image and Memory". In Yuri Pines, Gideon Shelach, Lothar von Falkenhausen and Robin D.S. Yates, *Birth of an Empire: the State of Qin Revisited* (University of California Press), pp. 280-300.

73 Jack A. Goldstone and John F. Haldon (2009), "Ancient States, Empires, and Exploitation: Problems and Perspectives". In Ian Morris and Walter Scheidle eds., *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires : State Power from Assyria to Byzantium* (Oxford University Press), pp. 3-30.

74 Kennedy, *op cit*.

Britain, at the height of its power, is thought to have remained aloof from Europe, playing one continental power against another, whilst focusing on its maritime global empire irrespective of religion. This contrasts with the formative stage in England's rise (16th–17th Century) when national identity had been forged on the back of religious feud with the Vatican.[75] Palmerston famously observed that Britain had neither permanent friends, nor permanent enemies, just national interests. Popularly, this approach was captured by the fictional Sir Humphrey in the BBC television series 'Yes Minister'. However, in the modern era the *entente cordialle* with France and the special relationship with the US were crucial to British national security. So was the treaty with Japan signed in 1902.

More recent work on European-power grand strategy stresses the role of religious chasms in alliance building, a dimension largely absent from the Chinese historical setting. Espinosa has shown for example how the protestant reformation militated claims by Charles V for universal rulership, drawing him closer to the German Hapsburg principalities, while neglecting Spanish naval defences against the Ottoman empire. The latter strategy, Espinosa claims, would have better served Spanish economic interests, since the waging of religious wars in Europe drained Spanish resources to a greater extent than containing the Ottomans would have. The upshot was Spanish decline wherein even catholic France sought a countervailing alliance with the Muslim Ottomans.[76] Earlier, one might add, the crusades' eastward mobilization was abetted by the Byzantine empire. Supra-religious interests meant, however, that the main protagonists were Frank knights but *not* German forces, all of which at a time when – to the west – Iberia had still been partly occupied by Muslims. In theory, the crusades could have focused on driving out Moors, but the Byzantine factor changed the 'plotline'.[77]

Philip II of Spain (r. 1556–98), the son of Charles V, actually presided over both Spanish rise and decline. From 1556 until his death in 1598, he ruled the first global empire in history. The reason why the Spanish armada was defeated by England under his watch were analysed by Geoffrey Parker. It partly had to do with a bureaucratic information overload reminiscent of how Ray Huang described the Wan Li emperor's reign in China (r. 1573-1620). Sinking endless resources into fighting in the protestant Netherlands, Philip II's main goal was the defence of Catholicism on the back of silver flowing into the imperial treasury from Latin America. And although there were no comparable religious wars prosecuted in the Wan Li reign, the very same silver unwittingly reconfigured the Ming economy. Thus, "financial illiteracy" in Parker's parlance can be attributed to both Spanish and Ming decline.[78]

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75 Lind Colley (2005) *Britons: Forging the Nation*, *1707-1837* (Yale University Press).

76 Aurelo Espinosa (2005), "The Grand Strategy of Charles V (1500-1558): Castile, War, and Dynastic Priority in the Mediterranean", *Journal of Early Modern History* 9.3, pp. 239-283.

77 Peter Frankopan (2015), *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (Bloomsbury), Chp. 3.

78 Geoffrey Parker (2000), *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (Yale University Press). Cf. Ray Huang (1981), *587, a Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (Yale Univesrity Press).

Within the European setting, forming countervailing alliances was particularly crucial for the survival of the landlocked Habsburg empire, which later became Austro-Hungary. This was because it was on the territorial expansion path of both the Ottoman power to the east, protestant expansion to the North, and French pressure to the West. Suleiman the Great, Freidrich the Great and Napoleon all eyed its territory. Internally, the Hapsburg Empire was polyglot and multi-ethnic thus vulnerable. Foreign Minister Metternich (in office 1809-1848) famously saved it through alliances and appeasement of the empire's stronger neighbours: the Russian, Prussian, and Ottoman empires. But the Hapsburgs also spent many resources on ground forces. Thus, unlike the other European powers to the north, it could not pursue lucrative maritime expansion, eventually resulting in financial overstretch.[79]

Lisellote Osgaard observed that this Hapsburg weakness called for an essentially defensive grand strategy not unlike that of China at present. In other words, she argued "peaceful development" is the weapon of militarily weaker powers so long as they are weak. But it is liable to change as military power grows.[80]

If Metternich was ever conscious of the alliance imperative, Louis XIV of France is thought to have neglected them in favour of autocratic, unilateral and mercantilist policies. Moreover, he revoked the Edict of Nantes, which allowed relative freedom to the protestant Huguenots. Reflecting the perceived splendour of his reign, Louis adopted no less than the Sun as his emblem, and spent lavishly on the construction of new awe-inspiring palace at Versailles. Yet, before the Seven Year War (1756-1763), France remained strong thanks to his previous endeavours.[81]

Metternich aside, the *locus classicus* of the pro-alliance historical argument revolves around Prussia under Bismarck's stewardship of course (1862-1890). Bismarck famously pursued Prussian unification while realising the vulnerability of his nascent empire. For these reasons, military campaigns under his watch were selective, and he largely adopted irenic foreign policy with which to buy peace-time for further German industrialization. By contrast, his domestic policy agenda was autocratic in nature. It was only after Bismarck's forced retirement that German grand strategy shifted from defense to offense.[82]

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79 A. Wess Mitchell (2019), *The Grand Strategy of the Habsburg Empire* (Princeton University Press).

80 Liselotte Odgaard, *op. cit*.

81 Murray Williamson (2011), "Thoughts on Grand Strategy". In idem and Richard Hart Sinnreich and James Lacey eds., *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War* (Cambridge University Press), pp. 3-33.

82 Christopher Clark (2007), *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947*(Penguin).

Non-Western Early Modern and Modern Grand Strategies

As a late industrialiser, Russia's imperial grand strategy offers parallels with Qing China on several fronts. First, Russia's territorial expansion was overland, not maritime. Second, its expansion was restricted by residual Islamic power to the South and east, and by Western naval superiority. Thirdly, the adoption of Western military technology under Peter the Great was qualified: in fact serfs were anachronistically employed to build the military industrial complex; and as late as 1800, long after Czar Peter's reign, a decision was made *not* to use steam engines. The Qing similarly circumscribed the use of Western military knowhow, and left the anachronistic civil examination system largely intact. Moreover, the Czars used Kalmyk tribesman, Cossacks and Livonian aristocrats to stabilise Russia's periphery in much the same way that Mongol bannermen were critical to Qing military force. Yet there are also stark differences between the two settings: the Qianlong Emperor exterminated the Zunghars although they were Buddhists like him. In the Russian setting, by contrast, the Orthodox mission played a larger role in legitimating cross-Eurasian expansion.[83]

Russian expansion across Eurasia in the late 19th Century aroused much concern in London for the safety of colonial India in what became known as the 'Great Game' between the two powers. However, much like the later pact between the West and Stalin to contain Hitler's expansionism in Europe, London put Eurasian considerations aside, seeking to form an alliance with Moscow by 1907 so as to better contain Germany.[84]

As McNeill famously showed, the use of firearms was not limited to the West and Russia in the early modern era. In fact, these were widely used by the Ottomans, Mughals and Safavids, as well as by the Ming and Qing empires. McNeill called Islamic powers using to one degree or another firearms – 'Gupowder Empires'. The technological difference between East and West in that regard lay in scale and improvement, not familiarity with firearms *per se*. However, firearms were much later arrival to Arabia, thus contributing to a Turkish sense of superiority over Arabs, and Arab resentment, that permeates political discourse even today. In other words, none of the Muslim powers of the early modern era was Arab. Ottoman territorial expansion otherwise differed little from that of their European counterparts; Suleiman the Great's Ottoman Empire in the 16th Century was not necessarily less warlike than Louis XIV's France during the 17th Century. Moreover, Ottoman *Ghazi*-style raids and pirating were not unlike Drake's afore-mentioned raids. Neither were Christian-born Janissaries serving in the Ottoman army and exception: as mentioned earlier ethnic minorities served both in the Czars' army and as Qing bannermen.[85]

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83 John P. LeDonne (2004), *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650-1831* (Oxford University Press). Cf. Peter C. Perdue (2009), *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Harvard University Press).

84 Frankopan, *op. cit*, pp. 306-336.

85 Joshua W. Walker (2009), "Turkey's Imperial Legacy: Understanding Contemporary Turkey through its Ottoman Past". In Jerry Harris ed., *The Nation in the Global Era: Conflict and Transformation* (Brill), pp. 384-398.

Nevertheless, much of the Ottoman success in expanding into Arabia, the Balkans and beyond from the 14th Century onward is attributed to their ability to peacefully negotiate ethnic and religious tensions. When compared with most early-modern Western powers, the Ottoman Empire was more pluralistic in its imperial policies. Ottoman rule, especially in the Balkans and Middle East, was built on the principle of institutional flexibility. In addition, the Ottomans were relatively more flexible in their approach to border demarcation, not unlike Ming-Qing China. By contrast, European absolutist states from the 16th Century onwards showed a penchant for 'hardening' their borders, coupled religious repression.[86]

Like the Ottomans, the Mughals' was a 'Gunpowder Empire', namely one that did not resile from embracing (to some degree) Western firearms. However, if pre-modern history seeps into the modern Turkish and Chinese outlook – until recently, there had been a debate in the pertinent literature as to just how much sediments of Mughal grand strategy still inform Indian strategic outlook. In 1992, RAND analyst George Tanham famously argued that other than retaining some Hindu cultural features, modern Indian strategic culture is for the most part a-histrorical in nature.[87] More recently, there has been greater interest shown by Indian scholars in Mughal and more ancient strategic traditions.[88]

Observers have noted that like the late Ming and early Qing, Mughal military history is largely devoid of epic battles with external state actors. The Mughals leveraged their capacity to project power that was often greater than the actual military capability they were able to deploy.[89] Since the Mughal nobility was not sustained primarily along heredity lines, absorption of warlords and recruits ensued. However, the existence of such warlords led Akbar (1542-1605) to adopt various manipulative strategies like the relocation of military commanders from their *jagir* territorial revenue assignment, so as to avert their local power base.[90] Notably, such mind-set also informed the frequent relocation of governors from province to province under the Qing imperial system.

The Mughals were relatively tolerant in their treatment of the Hindu majority, spawning a hybrid political culture. But their tolerant attitude was incremental in nature: early emperors saw themselves as protectors of the faithful, while a later reformist tradition abjured the narrow interpretation of Islam. The key issue in contention was the extent to which the powers of the ruler were to be circumscribed by *Sharia* law. Notably, induction into the Mughal nobility did not entail conversion to Islam, whereas for example Habsburg nobility was synonymous with Catholicism.[91]

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86 Burak Kadercan (2017), "Territorial Design and Grand Strategy in the Ottoman Empire", *Territory, Politics,* Governance 5.2, pp. 158-176.

87 George K. Tanham (1992), *Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay* (RAND).

88 Kanti Bajpai, Saira Basit and V. Krishnappa eds. (2014), India's Grand Strategy: History, Theory, Cases. War and International Politics in South Asia (Routledge).

89 JayashreeVivekanandan (2014), "Strategy, Legitimacy and the Imperium: Framing the Mughal Strategic Discourse". In Kanti Bajpaiet *et al.* eds., *op cit*., pp. 63-85, ff. 66-67.

90 *Ibid.*, ff. 69-71.

91 *Ibid.*, ff. 71-76.

In that sense, of the three Islamic 'Gunpowder Empires' – the Safavids were arguably most closely associated with faith, as protectors of the *Shi'a*. Like the Mughals, however, the Safavids considered themselves heirs to Tamerlan'se universalist legacy, and competed with Mughal claims in that regard. Early Safavid rulers did have grand territorial ambitions, though neither Shah Ismaʿil nor Shah ʿAbbas I were driven by the kind of "messianic imperialism" that Philip II of Spain exhibited. Like the Ottomans they employed minorities (mainly Armenians) in administration, but were somewhat more adept than both the Ottomans and Mughals at playing one Christian power against the other: their alliance with the protestant English for example allowed for the expulsion of the catholic Portuguese from Hormuz in 1622.[92]

If a debate obtains as to whether current Indian grand strategy is in any way informed by history, Luttwak suggested in 1983 that Soviet grand strategy was essentially the same as it had been during the Czarist era. Namely, irrespective of ideology, a peculiar combination of relative military strength and a feeble economy led Moscow to seek eastward expansion where regional adversaries were weaker. For Luttwak, the key example was the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, and he predicted the next stage would entail a Soviet attack on China. If the scale of the Roman empire was bounded by the feasibility of grain cultivation, the USSR was more offensive in Luttwak's interpretation.[93] In the event, however, Gorbachev would seek accommodation with Beijing on the eve of the USSR disintegration, contrary to Luttwak's prediction.[94] This, in turns, seems to call for caution in assigning offensive capabilities to rising China at present.

The US and Chinese Strategic Shifts Compared

James Kurth showed that the US rise to power was contingent in the longer 19th Century on a modicum of 'non-alliance': from 13 Atlantic colonies originally, the US expanded to the Pacific and Alaska not least by taking advantage of Mexican weakness, Anglo-French and Anglo-Russian rivalries. After the Civil War, the US became more aggressive, and eventually reached out off shore, usurping Cuba and the Phillippines from Spain. However, Hawaii was largely peacefully annexed and intervention in Latin America in the 1910s-20s was largely indeirect through 'dollar diplomacy'. In other words, Kurth suggests US grand strategy was not linear: it shifted time and again between defense and offense. But the main thrust of US geo-strategic involvement across Eurasia boild down, in Kurth's interpretation, to ensuring no one power dominates that land mass. Economically, the US is less interested in Central Asia, South Asia and Africa – so one might conclude the BRI is not necessarily a *casus belli*.[95]

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92 Rudi Matheee (2010), "Was Safavid Iran an Empire?" , *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, pp. 233-265

93 Edward N. Luttwak (1983), *The Grand Strategy of the Soviet Union* (St Martin's Press).

94 Sergey Radchenko (2014), *Unwanted Visionaries: The Soviet Failure in Asia at the End of the Cold War* (Oxford University Press).

95 James Kurth (1999), "America's Grand Strategy: A Pattern of History", *The National Interest* 43, pp. 3-19.

The current phase in US grand strategy is indeliably shaped by the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The same effect applies to the PRC too, and in that sense historical analyses may be admittedly limiting. That is to say that Truman's policy of USSR containment had to be watered down by Eisenhauer once the USSR detonated thermonuclear weapons of its own, yielding the famous stalemate of 'Mutually Assured Destruction' (MAD).[96]

The theme of minimalism which we encountered in a Chinese setting earlier can be revisited from an American perspective too. For it defines the US rise historically as a "new type of superpower", as Colin Dueck famously argued. Vietnam and Iraq aside, US reluctance to get entangled in prolonged warfare overseas is exemplified throughout US history: Wilson was unable to secure US membership in the League of Nations; Truman's failed in his attempt during the late 1940s to contain the Soviet Union with inadequate military forces; Bill Clinton selectively intervened in Bosnia; Bush invaded Iraq without a plan for post-war rehabilitation. On the other hand, Dueck argues that that the main danger in the US strategic mind-set is that it allows embattled presidents to capitalize on external threats – whether real or imagined – to frame questions of peace and wars in terms of colliding values.[97]

Buzan and Cox have valuably surveyed the key points of similarity and difference between the United States and China during their respective rise. Crucially, the US took part in both world wars but did not initiate those wars. On its frontier, the US enjoyed friendlier relations with Mexico and Canada by the turn of the 20th Century, whereas the PRC was embroiled in border disputes with many of its neighbours right until the 2000s, not least which with Russia. Both countries are continental in size with large populations, but the US is much more demographically diverse, thus perhaps better adept at internalising external threats. Interestingly, both countries' global outreach is informed at present by a universalist narrative (democracy and human rights vs. 'harmonious world' and 'peaceful development'); yet China under Mao was isolationist, and so was the US in the interwar period.[98]

US politicians often blame the PRC for being protectionist in its economic policy, and a 'free rider' on the back of US-led international institutions. Yet, the US too was fairly protectionist in its trade policies in the pre-war era, and otherwise reluctant to join the League of Nations. As American power matured, Washington was encouraged to take a leading role in securing peace after World War II. Both societies, in Buzan and Cox's judgement, are patently patriotic and entrepreneurial, and both share mutual appreciation in the face of geo-strategic rivalries, or else PRC leaders would not send their children to study in Ivy League universities.[99]

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96 Ionut C. Popescu (2018), "Grand Strategy vs. Emergent Strategy in the Conduct of Foreign Policy", *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41.3, pp. 438-460, ff. 445-6. For a similar view see also Sir Lawrence Freedman's (2015) *magnum opus Strategy: A History* (Oxford University Press).

97 Colin Dueck (2006), *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton University Press).

98 Barry Buzan and Michael Cox (2013*), China and the US: Comparable Cases of 'Peaceful Rise'? The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 6.2, pp. 109–132.

99 *Ibid.*

In sum, Buzan and Cox seem to suggest – quite persuasively – that grand strategies shift as powers rise to power. In that sense, China's rhetorical grand strategy of 'peaceful development' may be being replaced under Xi Jinping with a more offensive one, as realist theory might predict.[100]

However, China's advance westward as part of the BRI does not seem to threaten vital US interests as yet in the absence of a more solid military pact between Moscow and Beijing. Indeed, Washington and Beijing seemed to be cooperating in stabilising Afghanistan, even as Beijing and Moscow were applying pressure for the removal of US air bases in Central Asia. The lessons of the Great Game herein seem to suggest that Eurasia may become secondary when tensions in Europe boil up. That the US still retains much of its overseas military forces in Western Europe is quite telling in that regard.

Concluding Remarks

The foregoing passages show that universalist claims of rulership were quite common in the ancient world. They are *not* confined to the Chinese tributary world view. The historical record otherwise shows much similarity between Chinese and other non-Western grand strategies, particularly the Mughal and Ottoman ones.

Where China does stand out historically is in the near irrelevance of literate peer-society competition, and religion more broadly, to the formation of statecraft, and the legitimation of power alliances. That said, in the early modern period, the Iberian marriage of religion (Catholicism) and empire began giving way to supra-religion considerations too. The Thirty Year War (1618-1648) was arguably the last grand military fray in Europe where religion was at the forefront of strategic thinking. For example, several European powers courted the Ottomans so as to counterbalance other powers in Europe. And even long before, during the Crusades, German principalities largely stayed out of the fray as a result of political tensions with the Franks.

In the Cold War era, ideology has to a large extent replaced religion as the main rationale for an arms race. Subsequently, in the post Cold War era economic doctrines have become less polarising, as the PRC shares with the US at present *some* free market principles, and feisty entrepreneurial culture. Since the Trump administration seems to be pulling back from the promotion of democracy worldwide, ideology seems even less critical to the shaping of current PRC-US rivalry. Rather, 'old fashioned' crude economic interests and geo-strategic power struggles seem to be at stake.

So long as China refrains from solidifying its military ties with Moscow, the BRI march westward may be manageable from Washington's perspective, not least because the latter is less interested in Central Asia than Europe. In that sense, the 'peaceful development' mantra may be more than just temporary strategy. The problem is that the historical record suggests great powers may become more aggressive as they amass

100 https://thediplomat.com/2014/06/the-united-states-just-closed-its-last-base-in-central-asia/

more economic might. So, equally, China's current strategy may merely turn out to be peace-time expediency. In sum, Chinese grand strategy will only become aggressive or destabilising if Beijing decides to warm to Moscow over and above current levels of cooperation.

On balance, China pitches itself as exceptional, and that may be cause for optimism insofar as the durability of *bu jiemeng* is concerned. The US post-war trajectory certainly shows a different modern (read: a-historical) mode of great power relying on international institutions and soft power, not just military might.

This article has highlighted an intense debate among Chinese academics as to whether a new grand strategy is called for. By the same token, it has highlighted the limitation of China's current universal message, as one blighted by the empirical strength of 'democratic peace'. This in turns goes to the heart of Beijing's regime insecurity, and may militate against new offensive measures.

If China misinterprets President Trump's transactional approach as a sign of weakness, and decides to forsake its 'non-alliance' posture, ominous bipolarity may ensue in the face of nuclear deterrence. History suggests here that alliance formation is key to understanding world politics, if not the human condition. The US and PRC rise to power may have some elements in common, but the former has been on the whole more cyclical. Geographically, the PRC is at a disadvantage because it is closer to peer competitors like Russia or Japan, and it may be therefore exceedingly risky for it to emulate the US trajectory too closely. On its part, the US for various reasons has facilitated the PRC reform-era grand strategy, so the consequences of a shift toward an outright containment of Beijing may greatly destabilise the CPC grip on power.

Biographical Note

Niv Horesh is a researcher at Western Sydney University, Australia. He was also Visiting Professor in China Studies at the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University, United Kingdom. Besides his academic work, he is also a frequent commentator on current affairs in newspapers such as the *South China Morning Post* and *Haaretz*.