1 Introduction

> To study the imagination of a society is to go to the heart of its consciousness and historical evolution.
>
> Jacques le Goff

> A historically minded generation is one which looks back, not indeed for solutions which cannot be found in the past, but for those critical insights which are necessary both to the understanding of its existing situation and to the realization of the values which it holds.
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> E. H. Carr

1.1 Introduction: The World beyond Europe – Empires without End

Before today's nation-states there were world empires. Before presidents and prime ministers there were lords of the auspicious conjunction – the alignment of the heavens and planets heralded their arrival. Such rulers were world conquerors, heirs of Alexander the Great and Chinggis Khan. They were Chakravartin, universal rulers who brought justice and order to mythical chaos. They were Sahib Qiran, king of kings. They were the conduits between heaven and earth.

Many rulers have claimed such stature across continents and throughout history. Early Modern European sovereigns were no different. Carolingian and German emperors legitimated their authority by claiming to be the heirs of classical Rome, and thus rightful rulers of the Roman imperial space, the Christian Commonwealth, indeed, rightful rulers of the entire world – symbolically captured by imperial regalia such as the imperial orb.

An historical juncture occurred in the course of the late Medieval and Renaissance periods, arguably commencing as early as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. From then on European conceptions of rule started to move away from universalistic and imperial conceptions to the radically different notion that authority should be conceived as spatially defined and delimited. The claims of Charles V, the Holy Roman

Emperor, to rule all of Christendom in the early sixteenth century constituted some of the last claims of universalist rule in Europe.[1]

The Treaty of Augsburg (1555) and the Peace of Westphalia (1648) became iconic markers of this historical development. The latter came to denote the current system of sovereign territorial states as the Westphalian states system, even though the full articulation of that system only occurred in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The gradual transition to a system of sovereign territorial states thus started centuries before the Peace of Westphalia, and continued for centuries after, even if the Peace of Westphalia is often used as shorthand to indicate this change. Indeed, it became eponymous with the international order that emerged in Europe.

The Westphalian system has several foundational principles. Authority claims are territorially defined and delimited, stretching to the border and no further. Within this defined territory, government is sovereign and exercises full authority throughout the realm. It is not beholden to any higher authority beyond the borders of the polity, unless the state has conceded such authority by choice. The mutual recognition of territorial limits to authority logically establishes the creation of mutually agreed borders. The Westphalian system defines states as juridical equals and as the constitutive actors of the international system. As Harry Hinsley defined it, "the idea of sovereignty was the idea that there is a final and absolute political authority in the political community . . . and no final and absolute authority exists elsewhere."[2]

This political development did not occur in the rest of the Eurasian continent.[3] The three most prominent empires of the Islamic world (Safavid, Ottoman, and Mughal), the Chinese Empire, and dynasties in East and Southeast Asia all claimed universalist rule. Consequently, the emerging European system of sovereign states, with its mutually recognized territorial limits to authority, stood in tension with the logic of universal empire. Universal empire in principle recognizes no equal and sets no limits to its own extension. As Jupiter proclaimed for the destiny of Rome in Virgil's laudatory proclamation, "For these I set no bounds in space or time; but have given empire without end."[4]

[1] There certainly were expansionist drives, such as those of Napoleon and Hitler, but they differed from the universalist claims of their predecessors who conceived of authority in nonspatial terms.
[2] Hinsley 1986, 26. See also Benn 1967; and Hinsley 1969. For full discussions of the emergence of the system, see Spruyt 1994; and Krasner 1999.
[3] Friedrich Kratochwil likewise notes the uniqueness of the European configuration of material and ideational factors when compared to non-European systems. Kratochwil 1986.
[4] Virgil 1916, verse 254.

Rulers in such universalist systems thus legitimated their authority on quite different grounds than sovereigns in the Westphalian system. Vastly different visions informed the Westphalian polities of Europe and the universalist polities of Asia and the Middle East. The rulers and societies of both types of polity had specific and divergent views of what the material and social world *was* as well as what the material and social world *should be*.

But while universalist monarchs proclaimed to rule without limits to their authority, in reality their powers to command and control were limited by those of their rivals. Power radiated from the center, diffusing into frontier zones in which overlapping claims to authority were common. In practice, therefore, merchants, warriors, and rulers interacted across shared space in these contact zones. As global history has reaffirmed, none of these regions beyond Europe constituted closed systems.[5] Politically, culturally, and militarily, dense zones of interaction existed in the Middle East and Asia.

Despite the fundamentally different conceptions of authority and rule in universalist empires and the Westphalian state system, a substantial amount of scholarship in international relations still claims that relations between such polities conformed to similar patterns of behavior, patterns analogous to the behavior of today's state system.[6] Actors, be they classical Greek city-states, universalist world empires, or modern nation-states, interact with each other in ways that we can readily comprehend, and their actions follow similar patterns of behavior. We can thus grasp Thucydides' writings, or Pericles' orations, on the same terms as the classical Greeks did. We can thus unproblematically claim that the motivations behind the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta must have been the struggle for power in a bipolar world, not dissimilar to the Cold War contest of the United States and the Soviet Union. Their world and ours are one and the same.[7]

Particularly in the Structural Realist reading of history, the condition of anarchy – the absence of hierarchy in the world system – is taken as the key

[5] For all the insights of contemporary studies in global history, it might be worth recalling that William McNeill already spoke of the Eurasian ecumene as present at the beginning of the first millennium. McNeill 1963, 295.

[6] The term "inter-national" relations already conveys our specific, modernist view of relations between polities. We are prisoners of our own language and the concepts by which we understand our world. In Chapter 3 I discuss this more fully and justify my choice to use concepts such as "state" and "international" even though the early modern polities were neither states in the modern Weberian sense nor nations.

[7] Thus Robert Gilpin and Kenneth Waltz, among others, have read Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War as a useful account of the past and as a guide for the future. Gilpin 1981; Waltz 1979.

determining feature of international relations. Given the condition of anarchy, order in international systems hinges primarily on the distribution of power. Analysis of such distribution thus suffices to explain politics across time and space. "International structures vary only through a change of organizing principle, or, failing that, through variations in the capabilities of units."[8] Structural Realism thus argues that order hinges on the presence of one dominant actor (a view shared by hegemonic stability theorists), or a stable balance of power among the Great Powers. Consequently, changes in the relative distribution of power are inherently dangerous. Indeed, some see major power war as inevitable due the current rise of China and the relative decline of the United States.[9] Structural Realism in this sense adheres to a positivist epistemological view.[10]

To the extent that a positivist view acknowledges any principles and rules to regulate international behavior, it adheres to a thin view of society: actors only create such principles instrumentally to obtain particular benefits through material or economic cooperation. Cultural perspectives, morality, or normative considerations rarely play a role. If they do figure into such accounts they operate merely as the veneer for underlying "real" motives of material interest.[11] I contend that such scholarship misconstrues the non-Western world, misunderstands motivations in politics and individual action, and fails to recognize multiple sources of social order in international relations.

1.2 Toward a Cultural Understanding of International Society

One of the main objectives of this book is to dispel such a positivist and rarified empiricist view of history and of international relations. As I discuss in greater detail in the next chapter, a positivist perspective assumes that the methods applicable to the natural sciences are equally

[8] Waltz 1979, 93.

[9] John Mearsheimer and adherents of long cycle theory believe that major power wars are strongly related to the decline of the extant leading power and the rise of contenders. Hence, the rise of China will likely lead to a major power conflict. As he notes, "great powers do not merely strive to be the strongest great power . . . their ultimate aim is to be the hegemon – that is, the only power in the system." Mearsheimer 2006, 160. For a discussion of Long Cycle Theory, see Goldstein 1988.

[10] For a discussion of the positivist foundation of Structural Realism, see Dunne 1998, 15–16.

[11] See, e.g., the discussion of the relevance of cultural values and differences between the feudal order and the modern state system in Ruggie 1993. Markus Fischer's 1992 argument that international politics is always the same is decisively rebutted by Hall and Kratochwil 1993.

suitable for the social sciences. It draws no distinction between the observation and study of natural objects and social phenomena. Consequently, the study of meaning is superfluous. Moreover, the study of the natural and the social world should aim toward cumulative knowledge containing nomothetic statements.[12]

However, as the following chapters demonstrate, the non-European orders that are the subject of this book were based on shared sets of beliefs regarding the nature of the material and social world around them. Religious and cosmological beliefs served as models on which the political order should be based. They served as exemplars and reference points to justify and legitimate authority. In order to fathom their world – and thereby gain insight into the limitations of our own understanding – historical study and contextual nuance are critical.

I argue that the positivist perspective – the view that our understanding of international relations across history is universally valid – is itself the product of our own cognitive biases, of our own broad sets of beliefs that influence how we see the social and political world hinge together. I thus join a large body of scholarship that has favored an interpretivist and societal approach to the understanding of international systems and societies.[13] I develop a historically informed account of international societies in the early modern period till the late nineteenth century to demonstrate how specific norms and principles informed the polities beyond the Westphalian system. Distinct from accounts that focus on the instrumental calculation of actors, I advance the claim that international societies fundamentally revolve around shared conceptions of the political and social world. International societies consist of interacting polities that have in common a similar perspective of the ontology of the system of which they are part. Their interactions and dispositions to each other conform to a particular pattern, and they form an international order. As Jacinto O'Hagan describes, international societies consist of polities that are bound together by webs of meaning that "are embodied in shared institutions and codes of rules that help to govern interaction among members and differentiate them from those outside this intersubjective realm."[14]

[12] Exemplified by the "unity of science" approach, such as that expounded by the Vienna Circle, and Otto Neurath as one of its proponents. Neurath argued for the "elimination of unempiricist statements" in order to create "a lingua franca of unified science." Neurath 1944, 2.

[13] Tim Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit persuasively draw no distinction between system and society. International society is "a particular kind of social structural formation, preceded by, and embedded within, wider networks of global social and political interaction." Dunne and Reus-Smit 2017, 33. In short, all systems are social.

[14] O'Hagan 2017, 185.

In taking a historical-interpretive approach, this book thus seeks to dispel some positivist misconceptions.[15] But positivist approaches are not alone in misconstruing the non-Westphalian societies. Historically informed scholarship has made errors as well. Some scholars suggest that the non-European international societies were self-contained and stagnant, unreceptive to change.[16] Others conclude that the East Asian tributary system and the Islamic world did not even constitute international societies. They claim that the non-European regional orders lacked norms and principles to regulate behavior between their constitutive polities. International society originated in Europe and was then transposed globally.[17] Yet others incorrectly argue that these polities were unwilling and unable to adjust to the Westphalian state system, since they were premised on universalist legitimations of their rule.

This book challenges those claims. First, all systems are inevitably also social systems. As the discussions of the East Asian tributary system, the Islamic empires, and the Southeast Asian kingdoms will show in Chapters 4–9, international societies were hardly the sole prerogative of Christian Europe. Such a view results from myopic perceptions and misplaced self-importance rather than empirical fact. Shared collective beliefs regarding the nature of authority, the legitimation of rule, and the form of the polity created a foundation from which interactions took place. They defined the parameters of what was considered internal or external to the polity, as well as who was a member of that interstate society and who was not.

These principles were not derived from the material distribution of power alone. No doubt material factors mattered as permissive conditions – but the ends to which humans organized themselves, the particular legitimation of political authority, and the very notion of where the boundaries of one's own political community lay hinged on shared mental frameworks. These frameworks influenced how polities acted in the face of material constraints and opportunities. Collective imagination influenced collective political order.

[15] There is a large body of scholarship that has similarly emphasized the merits of interpretivist and comparative historical scholarship. Bukovansky 2002; Buzan and Little 2000; Cronin 1999; Hall 1999; Nexon 2009; Reus-Smit 1999, 2018; Phillips and Sharman 2015.

[16] Wallerstein 1974, for example, argues that such universalist empires constituted world systems with political rule extending over the main area of economic transactions. I discuss this point more extensively in Chapter 3.

[17] Ironically, this was the view of Hedley Bull, one of the founders of the early English School. Bull 1977. Martin Wight, by contrast, conceived of the possibility of international societies beyond Europe. Wight 1977. The School went on to pave the way for scholarship on comparative historical systems and international societies.

My approach borrows from the Annales School's study of *mentalités collectives*. In Roger Chartiers's words collective mentalities are:

> Schemes or the contents of thought which, even if they are unexpressed in the style of the individual, are, in fact, the "unthought" and internalized conditionings that cause a group or society to share, without need to make them explicit, a system of representations and a system of values.[18]

As John Ruggie rightly suggests, the term *mentalité collective* is virtually untranslatable. I thus interchangeably use the terms "collective beliefs," "shared cognitive script," and "collective imagination," or what John Ruggie terms "collective consciousness," to denote the habits of interpretation and repertoires of action.[19] The Annales historians themselves use various terms, sometimes speaking of collective imagination, civilization, or simply culture.[20]

Like the Annales scholars I am keenly aware that collective beliefs do not operate in a vacuum. Instead I aim to show how the mental, the imaginary, and the material are inevitably interconnected.

Examining such other international societies and their collective belief systems demonstrates that shifts in the relative distribution of power provide the context in which international relations unfold, but they are not determinate. Interstate orders can emerge even in the absence of a dominant hegemon or a consortium of cooperating Great Powers.

Closer historical inspection also dispels the claims that these universal empires were self-contained. Far-flung trade networks traversed the Eurasian space. Similarly, a global historical approach demonstrates how the various regions were mutually influenced by political ideas, cultural motifs, and organizational practices.[21] Frontiers proved to be zones of encounter rather than rigid barriers.

This book also challenges the claim that the polities in East and Southeast Asia and the Islamic empires that made universalist claims to rule were incompatible with the Westphalian system. From a doctrinal perspective the two distinct claims to authority appear to be diametrically opposed: Westphalian principles declare that territorial borders delimit the extent of the polity and the legitimate claims of its ruler, whereas universalist claims recognize in principle no territorial limits to their authority.[22]

[18] As cited in Gismondi 1985, 213. [19] Ruggie 1993, 157.
[20] Duby 1980; Le Goff 1980, 1988.
[21] For detailed accounts in the historical literature, see Curtin 1984; Tracy 1990, 1991. See also Spruyt 2017, 82–101.
[22] Recent claims to restore the caliphate in the Middle East give this question added salience. Can communal identities that are transterritorial in nature be reconciled with a sovereign territorial system? While movements such as the Islamic State in Iraq and

However, historical and contextual reflection shows that the Westphalian system and universalist concepts of rule were not incompatible. Modes of legitimation and conduct in practice must be distinguished from each other. Legitimating one's rule as "world conqueror" in theory necessarily implicated the inclusion of multiple religions and peoples in one's domain in practice. To be a universal empire required rulers to be inclusive and accommodating. To rule "all under heaven," as the Chinese emperor proclaimed, meant that other communities somehow had to be incorporated into the existing polity. Universal empires had to be many things to many people. Legitimation had to be multivocal.[23]

This flexibility of universal empires also translated to their ability to adapt to changing circumstances. While at face value these universal empires would seem logically incompatible with the notion of sovereign, territorial states, in practice many found ways to accommodate the incipient Westphalian system. While extolling supremacy above all others on doctrinal grounds, universal emperors found ways to recognize the rulers of other polities as peers – as the rulers of the Mughal, Safavid and Ottoman rulers did with each other, and as the Ottomans gradually extended to Christian monarchs. Similarly, while founding their claims to rule on world suzerainty, with others rhetorically conceived as inferiors or vassals, in practice they had to recognize material limits to their powers. In time, they even accepted Western rules of diplomatic protocol and exchange. Indeed, their exclusion from the Western system had as much, or more, to do with the European disregard for non-Western societies as it had to do with a lack of innovation or willingness to adapt. Conveniently, such disregard for the "uncivilized" and "despotic" regimes paved the way for European empire. While European powers created a "civilized" core consisting of sovereign – and increasingly national – states, denying such status to the non-European world served to legitimate imperial practices toward the "uncivilized."

The classification and creation of the non-European "Other" thus served to bring the Westphalian project to its full articulation within Europe itself. The transformation of the European collective belief system from late feudal to modern, replete with its material manifestation of recomposing subjects to citizens, the making of citizens into Frenchmen, Germans, and

Syria (ISIS, or the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, ISIL) have captured recent attention, the question of whether translocal communities of believers, such as the Muslim *ummah*, could be reconciled with a system of sovereign states is not new. See, for example, Piscatori 1986; Parvin and Sommer 1980, 1–21. I turn to this issue at length in Chapters 6 and 7.

[23] On multivocality, see Nexon 2009, 99–110. As he notes, others have used the term "polyvalent signaling."

so on, was made possible by differentiation with non-European civilizations. The nation-state could be imagined by a process of contradistinction. Inchoate hybrid forms of authority were swept away in the tide of the modern nation-state. Early modern political forms that still lingered in nineteenth-century Europe – remnants of feudalism, local prerogatives, and identities – were now associated with the world outside the West, thereby legitimating as well the final extinction of these forms in Europe itself.

Rather than simply constituting a one-directional encounter of a well-defined and already fully articulated Westphalian state system with non-Westphalian polities, the encounter was bidirectional. The Western polities (the Euro-American states) came to define themselves, their identities as nation-states, and the Westphalian system because of, and through, the encounter.

1.3 The Argument to Come

In Part I of this book I clarify some of the scholarship that has influenced my work. Chapter 2 discusses how sociological and historical scholarship provides a more satisfactory approach than positivist epistemology and methodology. For now, suffice it to say that my critique of positivism does not foreclose making causal claims or empirical analysis. However, historical-interpretivist analysis confronts methodological and epistemological challenges of its own. Consequently, I devote Chapter 3 to clarifying my particular approach to history and the study of international relations.

This book focuses on three distinct international societies that existed coterminously with the emerging Westphalian system in Europe. Part II, Chapter 4 of this book discusses the logic of order of the Chinese tributary system. Undoubtedly, the Chinese Empire was materially more powerful than its neighbors, Korea and Vietnam, and to a lesser extent, Japan. However, as David Kang demonstrates, interstate war was a rarity during the Ming and Qing dynasties.[24] A shared set of collective beliefs, revolving around Confucian principles, and others, played an integral role in this political system. The Chinese imperial system shared norms and principles of interaction with its tributary states; among which the ritual deference to the emperor played an important part.

Chapter 5 discusses and challenges the claims that the Chinese tributary system could not adjust to the Westphalian system.[25] While the

[24] Kang 2010a.

[25] Throughout this book, I will use the term "Western" or the "West" as shorthand to denote the European colonial powers but also the United States and other polities that were considered part of the European cultural heritage.

Japanese adoption of Western practices with the Meiji Restoration has been well recognized, some scholarship argues that the Chinese Empire failed to engage in innovation, and that the universalist perspective made it impossible to switch cognitive frames. Thus, the Qing dynasty could not reconcile itself with a sovereign territorial system. I will take issue with those views.

I then turn in Part III to discuss three powerful empires that shared an Islamic heritage. The Islamic world evinced political fragmentation from its inception. By the early modern era, three empires – the Ottoman, the Safavid, and Mughal – controlled a vast area from Hungary to South Asia. Mindful of fallacious assertions of the Islamic polities as part of a singular unified entity, I nevertheless suggest that these empires were part of an integrated social space. Shared religious principles intertwined with other foundational beliefs, which harkened back to the Turkic-Mongol tradition of the Islamic empires and provided cultural unity. Chapter 6 thus clarifies how the Islamic world constituted an international society despite the absence of a clear hegemonic power.

The next chapter discusses how the universalist claims of the Islamic rulers, specifically the Ottomans by the nineteenth century, were deemed incompatible with the West. A common narrative suggests that only imposition by the European powers forced the Ottomans to gradually alter their system and adapt to Westphalian principles. As with the Chinese Empire, the European powers demanded adjustment to their standards of civilization, only admitting the Ottoman Empire to the Concert System in 1856, and only as a lesser partner.

I argue in Chapter 7 that the Ottoman Empire underwent major transformations well before the European pressures of the nineteenth century. Contrary to their universalist claims, Ottoman rulers reconciled themselves with key elements of the Westphalian system. And indeed, somewhat similar to Japan, the Ottomans thought that they could appropriate Western imperial discourse to serve their own imperial projects in Northeast Africa. Nevertheless, the European powers denied them legal equality, even after 1856, as part of a process of creating a distinctive "Other" in opposition to European self-identity.

The Southeast Asian "galactic empires" provide an even greater contrast to Western conceptions of political order, as I show in Part IV. This region was never dominated by any single polity. Moreover, unlike the Islamic world, this region was not united by any monotheistic religion (although Islam would start to make some inroads by the late fifteenth century). Nevertheless, collective beliefs and visions created a shared political and social order, as Chapter 8 demonstrates. These determined