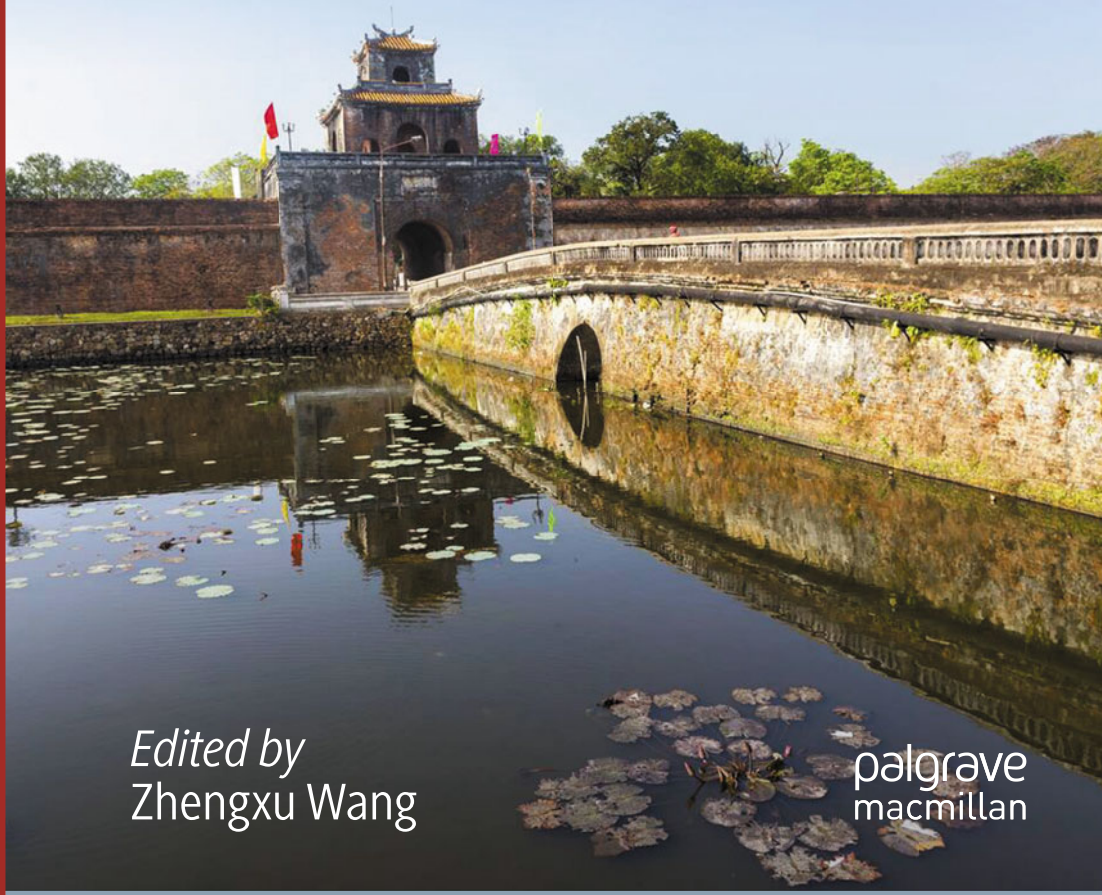
GOVERNING CHINA
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The Long East Asia

The Premodern State and Its Contemporary Impacts



Edited by
Zhengxu Wang

palgrave
macmillan

Governing China in the 21st Century

Since 1978, China's political and social systems have transformed significantly to accommodate the world's largest population and second largest economy. These changes have grown more complex and challenging as China deals with modernization, globalization, and informatization. The unique path of sociopolitical development of China hardly fits within any existing frame of reference. The number of scientific explorations of China's political and social development, as well as contributions to international literature from Chinese scholars living and researching in Mainland China, has been growing fast. This series publishes research by Chinese and international scholars on China's politics, diplomacy, public affairs, and social and economic issues for the international academic community.

Zhengxu Wang
Editor

The Long East Asia

The Premodern State and Its Contemporary Impacts

palgrave
macmillan

Editor
Zhengxu Wang
Department of Political Science
Zhejiang University
Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China

ISSN 2730-6968 ISSN 2730-6976 (electronic)
Governing China in the 21st Century
ISBN 978-981-19-8783-0 ISBN 978-981-19-8784-7 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8784-7

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd.
The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

Contents

List of Contributors

Tongdong Bai School of Philosophy, Fudan University, Shanghai, China

Daniel A. Bell Faculty of Law, University of Hong Kong, Pok Fu Lam, Hong Kong

Tom Ginsburg University of Chicago Law School, Chicago, IL, USA

David C. Kang School of International Relations and the Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California (USC), Los Angeles, CA, USA

Ke Meng School of Public Policy & Management, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China

Kyuri Park The Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center (APARC), Stanford University, Stanford, CA, USA

Tuong Vu Department of Political Science, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, USA

Yuhua Wang Department of Goveronnece, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

Zhengxu Wang Department of Political Science, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China

Zhiguang Yin Department of International Studies, Fudan University, Shanghai, China

Jilin Zeng School of Government, Peking University, Beijing, China

List of Figures

List of Tables

CHAPTER 1

The Long East Asia: The Premodern State and Its Contemporary Impacts

Zhengxu Wang

Is there a coherent model of state making and governance in East Asia before the modern period? What are the ideas and institutions that made such a state? How did such a state form, and with what cross-time and cross-country variations in the East Asia region? How does this premodern state still stay with the contemporary East Asia and the contemporary world? How can scholars discover interesting and profitable research questions from this subject? These are some of the questions that drove the making of this volume. This introduction chapter will lay out the intellectual and conceptual framework that brings the various chapters together, and also provide a synthesis of each of the chapters.

The book's argument or thesis is three-folded. First, a coherent state gradually emerged in and unified the central area of the East Asian mainland during the second half of the first millennium before the Christian

Z. Wang (✉)
Department of Political Science, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China
e-mail: wangzhengxu@zju.edu.cn

Z. Wang (ed.), *The Long East Asia*, Governing China in the 21st Century, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8784-7_1

Era. A state name Qin unified the whole "Central Plain" of the East Asian mainland in 221 BC. The "Central Plain" (*zhongyuan*) has both a geographical and a cultural meaning, but at that time it largely referred to the area inside today's China that spans the Yellow and the Yangtze Rivers. Later on, the term Central Plain became more a cultural concept that referred to the state that is China. The polity also obtained the name of "Central Magnificence" or *zhonghua*, which eventually became the name of contemporary China—*zhongguo*, i.e., the country or state of *zhonghua*.

The same state established in 221 BC, i.e., the state of *zhonghua*, together with its intervals of breakdowns and re-establishments by a series of dynasties in the East Asia region, would endure until the arrival of European challenges in the later half of the nineteenth century. Therefore, there was a predominant model of state making and political and social system in the main parts of East Asia for roughly two millennia before the region was faced with the somewhat imposed transition into a modern form of political and social system. During the same time frame, a society of states also existed, different from the modern Westphalia system of nation-states but for most part ensure peaceful relations among the states—interstate wars erupted much less frequently comparing to Europe prior to the eighteenth century, for example.[1]

Second, and this is implied in the conception of this premodern state as an East Asian instead of Chinese phenomena, is that the ideas and institutions related to the making and reproduction of this state, including the cultural institutions such as its written language and social and political rituals, became an East Asia property, forming a pan-East Asia cultural or civilizational zone. For sure, the term "East Asia" is used loosely here. If we take the adoption of the Chinese written language as the defining character of whether a certain polity should be referred to as a member of this "East Asian" society, then for most of the premodern period, it would include what some refers as the "Sinographic Sphere."[2] Alternatively, most people agree with the existence of "East Asian Culture Sphere." Either way, we are talking about China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, and several kingdoms, such as Ryukyu. Other parts of what is contemporary East Asia, such as Mongolia, the rest of the Indochina Peninsular, the rest of Southeast Asia were less direct "members" of this international system,

[1] Kang (2010).

[2] Denecke and Nguyen (2017).

but trade and exchanges of ideas and culture were nonetheless always intensive in the region, resulting in deep cultural links for centuries.

For polities in the Sinographic Sphere, it was clear that their making of state and the ensuing political and social systems are highly influenced by the Central Plain state, or what is referred to as the ancient Chinese Confucian-Legalist State.[3] The important part of the story is that the Confucian-Legalist state carried with it a model of state-society relation, leading to social institutions such as education and community associations acquiring the role to help reproducing the state. The social elite in different countries—in Korea and Vietnam most notably—also acquired the same set of ideas regarding good government, good society, and good personhood, because the education system was based on the study and interpretation of a similar body of classic texts. This meant the social elites of different countries in the East Asian cultural sphere came to form a trans-border epistemological community, greatly facilitating cross-border amenity and amical interstate relations.

Thirdly, the ideas and institutions of this premodern state still play important roles in shaping the social and political practices, including the governance activities and conduct of interstate affairs, of various countries in contemporary East Asia. Many social and political patterns found in the premodern time East Asia can still be found there today. These may include, for example, a strong state tradition, an emphasis or heavy reliance on the bureaucracy part of the state (vis-à-vis the legislative and judicial parts), a merit-based system of upward mobility, and strong emphasis on education for purpose of upward mobility, among others. The separation or detachment of religion from state affairs and politics and the lack of racism and identity politics can also be attributed to the Confucian-Legalist tradition.[4] In terms of interstate relations, more and more people are seeing premodern East Asia as an order highly different but equally if no more viable from the European Westphalia system.[5] The long history and contemporary continuation of this premodern East Asia state and its influences today leads to the idea of a "Long East Asia" of this book.

[3] Zhao (2015).

[4] Ibid.

[5] See a review by Acharya (2022).

In the rest of this introductory chapter, I first elaborate on several aspects of the premodern state of East Asia. These include the emergence and pattern of this premodern state, its main belief system of "*minben*" (People-Rootedness), and its contemporary relevance. The next is a "structure of the book" section, which outlines the content of each chapter and explains how they come together. Then it is a short conclusion and the reader can proceed to the individual chapters.

The Making and Patterns of the East Asian State

While historians have studied ancient China and attempted to explain how its political system worked, the premodern state in East Asia remains largely an untouched subject of sociology and political science. Scholarship of international relations might be able to claim some inroads in looking at the IR thinking and institutions in the China-centered premodern East Asia system, and Confucianism, Taoism, and other schools of thought may also take a decent position in the study of philosophy and ethics, but the premodern East Asian state rarely features in social science's vast literature of state formation, political order, bureaucracy, state-society relations, among others. Some recent work, however, has greatly expand our knowledge regarding how the long-lasting bureaucratic state origin in ancient China, and how this state shape or define the patterns of Chinese history during the two millenniums in which it existed.[6]

While the various schools of political philosophy started to flourish during the Spring and Autumn period, it was toward the latter part of the Warring States they became practically affecting state making and statecrafts. In the period of "total war," absolutism proved to be the most effective concept of political organization in a country. The Legalist school, which emphasized the efficiency and economic productivity, the state's ability to mobilize the society and extract taxes, and the military's fighting capability, finally achieved great success in the state of Qin and prepared the institutional conditions for the unification of the whole country by Qin.

The unification of China by Qin marked the victory of Legalist political ideas and political practice that represented pragmatism and efficient state

[6] Most notably, Zhao (2015).

and military organization. A state relying solely on coercion, however, is not stable. After the rapid collapse of the Qin Dynasty, the Western Han Dynasty experienced the prosperity brought by the early Emperor Wen and Emperor Jing under the influence of Huang Lao philosophy and suffered the feudal crisis again, Emperor Wu fully established the ruling ideology of Confucianism and rebuilt the imperial bureaucratic system. A series of new and practical governance systems were established, and China's Confucian-Legalist State was finally formed. In such a system, Confucian ideas and doctrines provide legitimacy for state power, while Legalist forms of institutions enabled a system of effective governance over social, economic, and military affairs.

The formation (Qin and Han) and consolidation (from Han to Tang and Song) of the unified Confucian-Legalist State in ancient China led to a range of so-called patterns of Chinese history. In a sense, these "patterns" are what made premodern China different from, say, Europe or the Middle East, and they often dominate scholarly inquiries of Chinese history. According to Zhao Dingxin's milestone study, the Confucian-Legalist State can provide convincing answers to these questions. The grand divergence between the Chinese and the European paths of social, economic, and political development can be manifested in several important historical patterns. For example, why did capitalism fail to rise in China? Zhao shows that the Confucian-Legalist state is the structural cause to the absence of industrial capitalism in China, despite the country's long-existing market economy. Under the Confucian-Legalist state, the merchant class could not gain political and military power, so the merchant and manufacturing class could not bring breakthroughs in industrial capitalism, while in Western Europe, the merchants and the emerging urban manufacturing class could compete with political power. This class possessed strong bargaining power vis-à-vis the political authority, and members of them entered political institutions such as parliaments, joined overseas colonial expansion, and at the same time cultivated bourgeois philosophers who provided a set of legitimacy discourses for high profits and personal freedom. These combined to give rise to the industrial capitalism that eventually became the invincible mode of economic production spreading to other parts of the world.

Another example regarding the long-lastingness of the premodern state is found in Confucianism's dominance as a sociopolitical ideology, or a kind of secular religion in traditional China. In the early period of

twentieth century, Confucianism was blamed by Western-influenced intellectuals in China as the cause to China "backwardness," and its prolonged "rule" imposed on China's society became a troubled puzzle. Why did the late Ming ideological trend not bring about Western-European religious reforms, breaking the dominance of Confucianism in China? Indeed, scholars have long debated about the emergence of new schools of Confucianist thinking, led by Wang Yangming, Li Zhi, and others in the late Ming Dynasty. But, these "reforms" failed to break the unifying status of Confucianism. On the one hand, Confucianism is only an ethical system, and the controversy caused by Li Zhi and others is only controversies in the "private domain" and does not involve the ultimate truth controversy like Christianity. More importantly, it is due to the huge differences in political models between China and Western Europe. At that time, Western Europe was composed of many smaller countries and lacked a unified state power. This enabled religious reforms to be implemented in some countries, and many countries also intended to promote religious reforms to increase the state's control over the church, while China's unified Confucian-Legalist state power can completely oppress any theory that it considered to be dangerous, and the new learning in the late Ming Dynasty cannot be transformed into a force for social change at all.

Similarly, why there was no emergence of an autonomous civil society in premodern China, can also be attributed to this Confucian-Legalist state. Region wide, the long-lasting Confucian-Legalist state on the mainland of East Asia, also shaped the state making in areas north, east, and south of China. Zhao shows his theory can provide the answer include why nomadic people to the north of China were able to organize a series of empire, a phenomenon not seen in other parts of the Eurasian continent, and others. In this volume, Zhao and Bai's chapters continue to explore this theme too. Other scholars, notably Kang and Vu, have in recent years looked into state making in East Asia's other societies, such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.[7] Much remains to be discovered, however. Several chapters in this volume show, in fact, how promising the study of this premodern East Asia states can be—Meng and Zeng's chapter shows how the Warring State period events can be contributed to institutionalist study of politics, and Wang's chapter shows the long history of the Confucian-Legalist state provided vast data for examining changing elite

[7] Huang and Kang (2022), and Vu's chapter in this volume.

network within the state, and how such changing structures affect state capacity.

In terms of international relations, the study of the peace and prosperities achieved through such a "Confucian society" in East Asia before the European-originated Westphalia nation-state system has now formed a sizable literature too. Zhang gives a rich account regarding the organization of this inter-state society,[8] while Kang has most provocatively argued that the East Asian *tianxia* system was responsible for five hundred years of peace and trade at a time when European states were engaged in fierce warfare.[9] The contribution of premodern East Asian international relation thinking to global order and contemporary IR theories appears to be a highly active field, and we might have a lot to expect in the years to come.[10]

Organizing Concept: Minben Meritocracy

Much has been written about Confucianism and other schools of Chinese philosophy. Yet most of the work was most done by colleagues in the discipline of philosophy and was rarely featured in the discussion of contemporary political theories. Chan, Bell, and Bai, among others, however, have taken the inquiry into the area of political theory and political institutions.[11] Bai and Chan's work brings to us the most focused formulation of a Confucianism as a type of political theory, with the direct implications regarding to what is good government and how to achieve it, while Bell has been the most outspoken regarding meritocracy as a viable principle of political organization. Furthermore, the political science and sociological study of the premodern state in East Asia include related areas of inquiry—how were the various Confucianist ideas and norms actually translated into political and governmental institutions, how well did these institutions perform in achieving the political and governmental purposes they were supposed to achieve, and how did ideas and governmental practices shape each other, among others. While Zhao's *Confucian-Legalist*

[8] Zhang (2020).

[9] Kang (2010).

[10] Archarya (2022).

[11] Bai (2020), Bell (2016) and Chan (2013).

State is a prime example of how the Confucian-Legalist ideas of government were selected and turned into actual institutions, and how such institutions defined the many patterns of the premodern East Asia, there are still vast space for latecomers to engage in this area of inquiry, as some of the chapters in this volume will show.

While Confucianism offers a vision of a good government for Chan,[12] in a recent piece of work, Bai is more interested in showing how Confucianism as a political theory can be pit against some of the key ideas and institutions of liberal democracy. To be sure, we should appreciate the fundamental differences in Confucian understanding of political legitimacy, i.e., the role of government, who should rule, and how the rulers should be selected, as comparing to Western liberal democratic and individualist understanding. That the government is a necessary good, and that government's responsibility should include not just socioeconomic welfare but also moral well-being (i.e., morality or virtue) of the people determine on what criteria a person should be selected to serve in a political office and to what standards he/she should be held accountable—the government should be a government "of the people"—the people are the ultimate owner of the state, and "for the people."

The contemporary challenge is the Schumpeterian procedural definition of democracy (and people's sovereignty) with the institution of "one person, one vote" in choosing political leaders. We can argue that the whole modern political science is built upon this formulation, whether it is theoretical inquiry of democracy (such as Robert Dahl's definition of "polyarchy), or empirical analyses of political development and cross-country comparison. In fact, the basic thinking of categorizing countries around the world according to "regime types," such as using a Freedom House of Polity IV measurement, shows how the field is limiting its perspectives to this Schumpeterian definition of democracy.

Bai argues that seeing people being the owner of the state cannot be interpreted as Confucianism's endorsement of people's sovereignty, if popular sovereignty has to be expressed through one person, one vote. Confucian proposal of good government, as articulated by Mencius, differentiates people that rule from people that are ruled for the following reasons: the need for division of labor for any society with a reasonable level of complexity; the superiority in terms of knowledge, skills, and most

[12] Chan (2013).

importantly, compassion of the former over the latter; the inability of the latter, with its energy consumed by the need to make their own living, to mount enough attention to political affairs. Bai argues that although Confucianism believes that all people are potentially equal (maybe that is also to say that all human beings are born as equals?), it also takes it "as a fact of life that the majority of the people cannot actually obtain the capacity necessary to make sound political decisions and participate fully in politics."

On top of Mencius' separation of those who rule and those that are ruled, Bai gave four reasons why one person one vote is a flawed institutions of political selection: it basically leads to suspicion or even hostility of government and political leaders; it cannot ensure the interests of nonvoters, such as people of the future generation, and citizens of the global community, are protected; it tends to trump the interests of the powerful while silencing the powerless; and even the ability of voters to make best judgment regarding their own interest are doubtful. It is in this line that we should take the Confucian-Legalist meritocratic beliefs and ideas seriously. Daniel Bell has attempted to show how the contemporary Chinese political system can be interpreted through a model of meritocracy.[13]

In another, more recent piece, Bell and co-author Wang go on to examine how a "Legalist Confucian" ideal of political meritocracy informed not only the premodern Chinese politics, but also "political reform in China over the past four decades or so."[14] A ranked system ensures those with the talent and virtue are placed in more important (i.e., higher) positions of a political/bureaucratic hierarchy, and the Confucian rules and beliefs ensure such a hierarchical order, including the person with the highest power-the emperor or the ruler, aims to serve the people. This way, it is a just form of hierarchy because its existence and operation increase the welfare of those in the lower levels of the hierarchy. It is just also because such a hierarchy allows role changes among those at different levels—commoners have channels to be admitted into the meritocratic system, and once in the system they enjoy the prospects of promotion. By softening the boundary between the meritocratic state—by expanding public participation at the grassroots level and by introducing sortation

[13] Bell (2016).

[14] Bell and Wang (2022, p. 72).

in the admission of officials, for example, and by promoting a culture that value and reward other career choices other than joining the public services, such a hierarchical meritocratic state system can gain more legitimacy.

In this Introduction as well as in my own chapter in this volume, I refer to the premodern East Asian state as the "minben meritocratic polity." Minben, which literally means people-rootedness or people-as-base, developed out of the Mencian doctrine that treats people, as comparing to the state and the ruler, as the base or foundation of the political community. For the state of premodern East Asia, its meritocratic nature was much better known, but the minben dimension has, until recently, been largely overlooked by most political scientists. Chu Yun-han first used survey data to show the minben-based popular legitimacy of the Chinese state,[15] and Pan Wei is probably the first political scientist to refer to the Chinese state as a minben regime.[16] Put it simply, minbenism represents the Confucian conception of good society, good government, and good life, and how they are made possible through morality, i.e., virtue. The moral virtue of societal members, government officials, and the ruler and the ruling elite are all required alongside the rational meritocratic design of bureaucracy and other social and political institutions. The Legalist contributed by bringing in institutional designs that incentivize and regulate citizens' behaviors, with harsh enforcement of rules if necessary.

Fundamentally, minben doctrines put strong moral demands on the state, which exists only for the purpose of bringing a better life to the people and caring for them. The "mandate of heaven" comes with the moral requirement to care for the people and will be taken away if the state fails to be upright. Asian states, therefore, assume the heavy responsibility to be morally impeccable, a kind of Confucian perfectionism as per Joseph Chan. The meritocratic state is not just meritocracy, but a meritocracy with a soul. It was a meritocratic state for just purposes, a Just Meritocracy, to paraphrase the Wang and Bell's term "just hierarchy."

Advocating the importance of the Confucian/Mencian ideas of good government and effective institutional designs, however, does not negate the importance of democracy as an ideal. For example, Bai's proposal of

[15] Chu (2013).

[16] Pan (2009).

the good type of government is a hybrid design that aims at achieving the Confucian middle way that balances between equality and hierarchy and between mobility and stability. While recommending a fully democratic design for the community-level governance, his proposal for legislature institutions at upper levels combined election and meritocracy—a leveled selection regime, as he puts it. Similarly, Chan also believes in a form of parliamentary democracy that integrates the Confucian ideas of good government and good society.

Contemporary Relevances

No need to say, studying the premodern East Asian state is not simply examining things of the past. In fact, when in the 1980s and 1990s, political economic scholars paid great amount of attention in the developmental state in the East Asian economic miracle, they would have done better understanding of the state had they been led into the premodern roots of strong state in East Asia.[17] The meritocratic elements should clearly bring useful lessons to state building and pursuit of good government around the world, as some later chapters in this volume will show. In fact, the ideas and institutions of the premodern East Asia can help enlightening the reader's thinking of many contemporary political and governance issues, and many other challenges facing human kind of today. For example, the challenge of as climate change demonstrates the imperatives of reviving Confucian ideas and designs, and Confucian ideas can be taken to attend thorny questions such as ethnic relations in China and in the US and the Taiwan-Mainland question.[18]

Besides domestic governance, the premodern East Asia state also carries important ideas regarding inter-state relations. Often called a "tributary" system, it means a pair of states, with one larger or more powerful than the other, can establish relations to the benefits of both parties, and therefore achieving equality or mutual benefits on another level. Today, the challenge is to build peaceful and mutually supportive international relations in a world of great disparities, where states differ tremendously in their size, population, military, and economic strength, and the desire for and willingness to accept a certain level of esteem and

[17] Vu (2007).

[18] Bai (2020).

status. The premodern East Asia's inter-state society gives an example how such a goal can become obtainable.[19] A system of "strong reciprocity" between states generates a sense of community among states and produces significant amount of public good for the society of states—the *tianxia*.[20]

Structure of the Book

After this introductory chapter, in Chapter 2, Bai, whose recent treatise on Confucian political theory is certainly a must-read for people interested in this book's subject,[21] outlines the emergence and evolution of the Chinese civilization between its earliest time of origin through the contemporary era. What is most interesting is that the Chinese civilization, in its evolutionary form, is counterposed to what the author refers to as the "center" of human civilization throughout the history, i.e., the Mediterranean and the Middle East region. Bai takes the domestication of horse, the adoption of wheels for transportation, metallurgy (bronze), and the written language as the "four great inventions" that made the advancement of human civilization possible. With the only possible exception of the written language, the early Chinese civilization obtained these inventions from the "central civilization," instead of being the inventor of them.

The late-starter status of the Chinese civilization, however, did not put China on a permanent position of "backwardness." Instead, due to some unique advantages it enjoyed by being at the "edge" of the world civilization, the Chinese civilization in fact made important achievements in the two to three millennia starting from the Zhou period, contributing technological and institutional innovations to the world—such as inventing the world's earliest bureaucracy. The special environment in which the Chinese civilization was in also led that civilization to develop a number of major "problems," as comparing to the "central" civilization. The long physical distance that kept China far away from the "central" civilization, for example, made the Chinese civilization the dominating one in the "world" it was in, i.e., the East Asia region, so that for centuries China was not met with major civilizational challenges, but neither was able

[19] Kang (2010).

[20] Bell and Wang (2020).

[21] Bai (2020).

to benefit from sophisticated civilizational exchanges, partly contributing to its inability to adapt Western ideas and institutions after the rise of Europe in the modern period. In the end, the chapter is a call for a kind of "fighting pluralism" among the world's countries and people, in order for humankind to continue to deal with the common challenges we face.

The several chapters that follow will bring detailed studies that illustrated the scholarly potential of this subject, as well as how it connects to and inform contemporary social science. Chapter 3, by Tuong Vu, shows how the premodern East Asia case can contribute to contemporary social science scholarship, in this case that of state making. Focusing on ancient Korea and Vietnam, Vu examines a key issue in anthropology, sociology, and political science on the relationship between war and state formation. Despite their apparently identical conditions at the beginning, Chaoxian and Jiao (names in Chinese language of ancient Korea and Vietnam, respectively) diverged in the first century AD with Chaoxian witnessing constant and intense warfare in contrast with the relative tranquility in Jiao. A primary cause of the divergence, he argues, was the different geopolitical environments of the two Han frontiers and the various ways Chaoxian people and polities were connected to the steppe and its people.

The steppe and its people between China proper and the Korean peninsula disabled the hegemonic state on the central plain of East Asia from achieving direct rule over the peninsula, as well as spreading war making culture, means, and technology to the polities on the peninsula, leading to fierce wars, which supposedly contributed to state making there. The higher degree of connectedness between the Central Plain (China Proper) and the region that is contemporary Vietnam, by contrast, made it much easier for the state on the Central Plain to maintain its rule of Jiao. The divergence ultimately led to stunningly different outcomes by the seventh century: Chaoxian achieved self-rule and unification under a kingdom led by native elites, whereas Jiao remained part of the Chinese empire but local governments were dominated by immigrant families.

In Chapter 4, Yuhua Wang's focus is on elite networks' impact on the strength of the state vis-à-vis the security of the autocrat, i.e., the emperor of ancient China. Wang shows that China's state development was shaped by elite network structures that characterized state-society relations, rather than representative institutions or bellicist competition. For the 2,000 years of its existence, its rulers faced the sovereign's dilemma: a coherent elite that could take collective action to strengthen the state could also overthrow the ruler. When elites were in geographically broad and densely

interconnected networks—the "start" type of network—they preferred a strong state capable of protecting their far-flung interests, and their cohesiveness constituted a threat to the ruler's survival. In contrast, when elites relied on local bases of power and were not tightly connected—the "bowtie" type of network—they instead sought to hollow out the central state from within; their internal divisions enabled the ruler to play competing factions against each other to secure his personal survival. This capacity-survival tradeoff explains China's historical state development and highlights the importance of elite social relations in understanding alternative paths of state development outside Europe. Wang's study is based on rich datasets generated from a various bodies of historical records, showing the tremendous great promises the historical data of ancient China hold for researchers.

Chapter 5 continues with such theory testing exercise using premodern East Asian data. Examining wars as the locus where domestic meets with international politics, Meng and Zeng challenge the conventional wisdom that a ruler's freedom of action is conditioned by the coalition structure he is in, and the general tendency in international relations to treat states as unitary actors. The conventional explanations of war, based on the selectorate theory, argue that leaders with larger winning coalitions tend to be more selective about the wars they fight. This argument assumes that the winning coalition is exogenously given and therefore not subject to change. The authors challenge this assumption, arguing that interstate warfare can be a way for leaders to rearrange the winning coalition and thus secure their power. It then follows that threat posed by winning coalitions can give leaders an incentive to wage war abroad. To test this argument, the authors rely on original panel and dyad datasets on domestic politics and international affairs of major states in China's Warring States period (476–221 BCE). The cross-level theory of war, which intertwines domestic and international levels of analysis, receives empirical support from historical inquiries and quantitative analysis. As a result, the chapter advances an institutional explanation that points to the domestic origins of interstate warfare, as well as bringing a new perspective to the unification of China by the state of Qin.

Chapter 6 links two important subjects regarding the study of premodern and contemporary China—the premodern idea of *tianxia* and the contemporary assertion of Chinese nationalism. On the one hand, it is a detailed study of how Chinese intellectuals made the transformation from a tianxia worldview, which does not categorize people into

races or nations, to the worldview of independent nation-states. On the other hand, it is a critique of European way to define nationalism against an ethno-centric ideal China represents a clear case in that meaning of nationalism in the non-Western world emerges through the long history of anti-imperial and anti-colonial domination. It demonstrates how *minzu* in Chinese becomes a non-hegemonic, and non-ethnic-centric notion in the process of pursuing an anti-imperialist modernization. It is very informative in that it first presents a brief etymological development of the word *minzu* and other related concepts such as people, race, and nationalism in the context of nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when China encountered Western colonial expansion. It shows how the development of *minzu* understanding in China was closely related to the political experience of China being subjugated to the global expansion of imperialism at the time. By doing so, it also challenges the Eurocentric interpretation of the Chinese notion *tianxia*, taking it as a hegemonic order and in contrast with modern state-centric world system. By bringing in the revolutionary experience in the making of the connotations of *minzu* in China, in the later part it elaborates on why *minzu* in Chinese deviates from the Westphalian connotation of exclusiveness and emphasizes on the issue of equality through liberation of the oppressed peoples in the world.

Chapter 7, co-authored by Kyuri Park and David C. Kang, looks at how the premodern East Asia was an international system with a hegemon, which is China. They argue that a unipolar world is possible because there is a cultural dimension of hegemony. The historical record in East Asia reveals that East Asia was an enduring hegemonic system with one unipolar power within a multi-state system: China. The China-derived historical tribute system of East Asia depended crucially on moral authority. Despite China's rise and fall over the centuries, for almost two millennia Chinese hegemony was attractive, not compellent. The Chinese role in that system should inform greatly our contemporary discussion regarding the rise of China and how China's rise will change the world order. The East Asian history shows, they argue, that China's increasing economic, and possibly military power, will not bring real challenges to the existing order. While China might be becoming big and rich, it has no moral authority—its culture, values, and norms do not attract. This view of hegemony leads to a clear prediction about the twenty-first century: no matter how big or rich China becomes, until it has crafted a moral and cultural vision for itself and the world that is attractive, it will not be a genuine challenger to the United States. The same discussion also leads

to the question about the United States: no matter how big or rich the United States remains, can it retain moral authority in the twenty-first century? From withdrawing from various multilateral economic institutions to the domestic troubles, they argue, the answer to this question is not clear at this point.

Chapter 8 takes up a similar topic that looks at East Asia's transition from the premodern into the modern era, and it takes up a highly understudied institution, i.e., the monarchy. This transition meant either the termination or continuation of the institution in various East and Southeast Asian countries, therefore the study of it expands our understanding of both the past and the present. The theoretical locus, furthermore, is at the bargaining between the monarch and the political elite during the time of transition, therefore the various country cases form a kind of structured comparison of the elite political interaction when the international and domestic situations put the old political setting on a challenging position. The chapter starts from general ideas about the origins, legitimation, and frequency of monarchy, including the functions of monarchy, as well as the key issue of succession. Then, drawing on standard bargaining models in political science, it explains how kings bargain with elites to try to survive in a changing world. The results of these bargains depend in part on material and normative resources the kings can bring to bear. Here, premodern ideas served as beliefs that conditioned the survival of monarchy in the face of major social and political upheavals. Therefore, in the late nineteenth century, Chinese ideas about dynastic replacement meant that the late Qing had difficulty rallying support when its material capacities were clearly in decline. During the same period, Japanese ideas of an unbroken imperial line presented the then-weak emperor as an available solution to collective action problems among elites. Precisely because he had no prior power, the Meiji emperor could unify the diverse coalition that overthrew the Tokugawa in the 1860s. Japan's Emperor *integrated* the country, while China's *disintegrated* it.

The chapter goes on the give a comprehensive survey of the various monarchies of Southeast Asia. The Thai monarchy was able to navigate the challenges of the twentieth century through deft coalition building, while those of Laos and Vietnam fell. Cambodia and Malaysia's monarchs were able to provide symbolic legitimation for elites and so restored as constitutional figureheads, occasionally playing a political role. While monarchy has now existed in very small number of countries around the world, this chapter does lead us to first pay more attention to this form

of state making and second think more broadly about the state making process each country needs to go through.

Chapter 9 is a contemporary examination of China's premodern political tradition, what the author Daniel Bell refers to as Legalist Confucianism. It gives a brief summary of the main arguments of the two schools of political thought (Confucianism and Legalism) as related to issues such as the human nature, the ends and means of politics, the understanding of family and the state, and the foreign policy of a state, among others. It also gives a review of how the two schools became part of the Chinese political practice, beginning from the Zhou period and through the end of the imperial time. In this regard, the first half of the chapter serves as a handy guide to the main ideas of the two schools, how they were employed in actual politics, and how they defined the patterns of traditional politics and governance in China—and for that matter, political patterns of other East Asian polities that emulated the middle kingdom's political and cultural institutions. The combination of the two schools in premodern China's statecraft and politics leads the author to give this tradition the name of "Legalist Confucianism"—pursuing Confucian ideals with Legalist institutions and tactics, so to speak.

The second part of the chapter first lays out the "dead" ideas related to the Legalist Confucian state and social system. No doubt, some of the ideas and beliefs of that model is no more viable in the contemporary world, such as the Legalist belief in using ruthless coercion and aggressive warfare. Yet, given some of the still highly attractive social and political ideals of Confucianism and Legalism's contribution to effectiveness in achieving social and political goals, the chapter goes on to show three examples in which the Legalist Confucian model can serve good purposes today. These are China's effort to limit or even eliminate drunk driving, its effective response to the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 and early 2020, and the state's strong effort in cracking down government corruption since 2012. Coming from a keen observer of China's contemporary society and government from within China, the chapter should prove a highly eye-opening one.

In Chapter 10, I show how the premodern Chinese state's important legacies are still significantly shaping politics in society in China today. Specifically, its belief in the search of a people-rooted meritocratic government has endured. This belief system continues to reproduce itself in the form of political and literary texts, public discourse, and policy and

political debates. Therefore, this belief system remains a vibrant factor affecting the public's political beliefs and attitudes. The study of political psychology of the public, i.e., political culture, therefore, must take this into account. This chapter provides a case study of how the contemporary Chinese public's political attitudes are shaped by this belief system inherited from the premodern Chinese state.

This premodern minben-, or people-rooted meritocratic state emerged and evolved with its minben-meritocratic belief system. This chapter will show how a theory of political culture developed out of the minben-meritocratic belief system holds stronger explanatory power to political trust in China—i.e., how and why the Chinese public show such a high level of trust in their government, especially the central/national government. The analysis of large-N survey data finds that a minben-meritocratic political culture theory can well explain the main empirical findings in China's political trust research—namely China's sustained high level of political trust and the phenomenon of significant differential political trust. At the same time, this theoretical framework can better accommodate the empirical phenomenon that it cannot explain—that is, the phenomenon of a certain degree of decline in the level of political trust in China in the past two decades. In both regards, it outperforms the conventional liberal-democratic theories of cultural changes such as Inglehart's postmaterialism theory and Norris's "critical citizens" thesis. The chapter's implication is that, as comparing to the liberal-democratic belief system, the minben meritocratic belief system represents a viable alternative as we strive to build good society and good government.

References

Acharya, A. (2022). Before the "West": Recovering the Forgotten Foundations of Global Order. *Perspectives on Politics*, 20(1), 265–270.

Bai, T. (2020). *Against Political Equality: The Confucian Case*. Princeton University Press.

Bell, D. A. (2016). *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy*. Princeton University Press.

Bell, D. A., & Wang, P. (2020). *Just Hierarchy: Why Social Hierarchies Matter in China and the Rest of the World*. Princeton University Press.

Chan, J. (2013). *Confucian Perfectionism*. Princeton University Press.

Chu, Y. H. (2013). Sources of Regime Legitimacy and the Debate over the Chinese Model. *China Review*, 13(1), 1-42.