

博士論文（要約）  
PhD dissertation (summary)

A hierarchical vision of order:  
Understanding China's diplomacy toward Asia

(中国の階統的国際秩序観と、そのアジア外交への影響)

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As China becomes an ever more prominent actor on the international stage, its designs for the wider world have emerged as a topic of much debate and discussion. This dissertation seeks to contribute to the debate by offering an answer to the question: What kind of international order does China want? More specifically, it focuses on Asia, China's immediate neighborhood – or its “periphery”, as it calls it – that is of most concern to it and where its presence is most deeply felt. The concept at the center of the analysis we conduct is that of hierarchy. China today stands out for its disproportionate size and power relative to that of its neighbors, marking the return to what had been a frequent state of affairs in Asia in the centuries before the military incursion of Western imperial powers in the early-to-mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. We argue that this asymmetry in size, power, and for a long time of civilizational refinement between China and its neighbors has shaped its understanding of the form international order in the region should take. Indeed, China believes that to be stable, this order must reflect a difference in status between it and other states. To explain China's reasoning, we look to its past for guidance.

This dissertation thus has two objectives. First, it details how China's imperial past and its traditional political philosophy continue to be a relevant lens through which to understand its behavior on the world stage today. To demonstrate this, we construct an ideal-type of hierarchical order grounded in foundational texts of Chinese political thought. This ideal-type is composed of five elements: a strong concern with order as a value in and of itself; the association of order with hierarchy, understood as the rationalization of natural human inequalities; the justification in moral terms of the superior position of some social actors over others; the maintenance of the hierarchical order through ritual, understood broadly as behavior in accordance with rules of propriety; and the mobilization by those in power of three tools of statecraft – a mastery of language, the awesomeness derived from military might, and an ability to offer material benefits – to enforce compliance with ritual norms.

Having built our ideal-type, we use it as a point of reference to examine how the concern with hierarchical order has shaped Chinese diplomacy in the imperial era, how it survived China's traumatic entrance in the modern society of states, and how it has continued to matter for successive generations of leaders of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The core of this dissertation is thus a historical study of the enduring attachment of Chinese leaders to a set of ideas about how their country and its neighbors should interact with one another, which together form a coherent vision of

international order where China's superior position is ensured. Conducting such a study allows us to fulfill the second objective of this dissertation, namely offering a historically informed, original and nuanced understanding of China's contemporary designs for order in Asia.

Our argument is structured in the following way. After the introduction, the second chapter sets the stage for the rest of the dissertation by looking at three systemic features of Asia that have shaped and continue to shape China's behavior in a structural way, independently from its immediate intentions in matters of foreign relations. This includes "physical" or "mechanical" factors such as the distribution of power within the system and China's military strength relative to that of its neighbors, as well as the state of communications and transport technologies. This also includes, though, system-wide "rules of the game" that are so deeply anchored in the mind of participants and so well accepted that they have become "soft structures" that form the unquestioned basis of interactions between states and condition their behavior to an extent. The understanding that today's international society is formed exclusively of legally equal sovereign states qualifies as such a soft structure. This chapter on Asia as a system thus considers what impact changes in the balance of power between China and other states, the evolution of transport and communication technologies, and the existence today of some universally accepted norms forming the basic parameters of inter-state relations have on China's ability to realize its vision of order. It notes that China is today in a position of strength, both in terms of its superior power compared to that of its neighbors and of economic attraction, that approaches the one it occupied at the apogee of the greatest imperial dynasties. It also points out, though, that the basic norms of the contemporary international society and an exponential increase in the volume and intensity of inter-state interactions between Asian states present new challenges as it seeks to shape international order in its surroundings.

The third chapter lays out the ideal-type of hierarchical order as it exists in traditional Chinese political thought and analyzes in detail its five constitutive elements, which were already listed above. In order to do so, it delves into the foundational texts of Confucianism and Legalism, the two parts of what came to form the cultural mainstream of the Chinese imperial state. The ideal-type thus constructed then serves as a guide for the rest of our argument. It is composed of four chapters covering the five constitutive elements of the ideal of hierarchical order one after the

other (the first two are discussed together) to examine how they have been reflected in China's foreign policy as the country transitioned from imperial to modern times and through the successive periods of the history of the PRC. Chapter four to eight are thus similarly divided in chronological subsections covering the imperial era, the decades of modern transition covering the late Qing and Republican period (circa 1850-1949), the Maoist period (1949-1978), the period of reform and opening up (1978-2009) and the contemporary period dominated by the figure of Xi Jinping (2009-2019). They trace the continuity and change in the elements of the ideal of hierarchical order as they transpire in Chinese diplomacy.

Chapter four discusses the concepts of order and hierarchy themselves. It points out the enduring attachment of Chinese imperial statesmen to the preservation of order and their unshakable conviction that establishing China's superiority over its neighbors was a prerequisite for harmonious ties between them. This conviction could not be shaken even by adverse circumstances that regularly saw the empire forced to recognize the equality or even superiority of some powerful neighboring states. The traumatic encounter with Western imperial powers posed a challenge greater than any that had come before, though, which forced the Chinese understanding of order and hierarchy to adapt without extinguishing its concern with those ideas. Chinese statesmen and intellectuals of the late Qing and Republican period saw the modern international society they were thrown in as brutish and ruled by power politics. This negative assessment transformed their vision of order. Since international society was chaotic, order could no longer be "maintained". It needed rather to be achieved sometimes in the future by making international society evolve out of its current parlous state.

This aspiration was inherited by the founders and successive leaders of the PRC, who only differed in their degree of tolerance for and adherence to an international order that they saw as deeply flawed. China's modern understanding of hierarchy is similarly two-sided. The society that China encountered at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was seen as a hierarchical one based on raw power and oppression, despite all the Western talk of equality. The new order that China aspired to create would see it receive true equality with Western states while still positioning it above other Asian states in a gentler kind of hierarchy. Here too, this understanding carried on to the PRC, taking different forms in successive periods that reflected China's evolving assessment of its international environment. While Maoist China aspired to

be recognized as the center of a worldwide revolution, or at least as the vanguard of the struggle of non-Western states against the “tyranny” of the West, the period of reform and opening saw a shift in focus toward steadily climbing the ranks of the prevailing international hierarchy of power while being recognized as a leader of inter-state cooperation in Asia. Under Xi Jinping, a stronger China has become much clearer about its expectation that other Asian states should accept its role as overseer of order in the region and behave with the necessary deference.

Chapter five then turns to the question of morality and to the Chinese claim to be uniquely virtuous. During the imperial era, it was considered self-evident that the Chinese emperor was a supremely benevolent being. When his actions did not live up to that standard, various arguments were advanced to preserve the façade of virtuous rulership, such as delegating the responsibility of moral leadership to Confucian scholar-officials overseeing the imperial government, or even redefining what virtuous behavior meant to include military triumph and a capacity to adapt to changing international circumstances. The experience of becoming victim to imperial predation from Western great powers and a Westernized Japan in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century convinced the Chinese elite of the time that those states were morally corrupt and unworthy of the elevated status they enjoyed in international society. They thus went about finding ways to justify their country’s eventual return at the top of the international hierarchy through the advocacy of a better and more moral form of leadership than the one offered by the West. The theme of struggle against imperialism was prominent in the arguments advanced by intellectuals and statesmen of the Republican period. The two most impactful ones were first a communist-inspired appeal for an international proletarian revolution, led by China and aiming to create an utopian socialist brotherhood, and second call-backs to China’s own imperial past, idealized to depict the country as a benevolent and just overseer of Asia, much more worthy of leading the region than brutal and exploitative Western powers.

These arguments formed the basis on which various leaders of the PRC built a narrative of Chinese virtue and Western depravity that endured from the 1950s to today. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence enounced in a joint declaration with India (but proposed by China) in the early years of the PRC were integral to this narrative, serving as the basis of China’s proposal for an alternative and more just mode of international relations. They were regularly updated after the end of the Cold War to reflect changing international circumstances, eventually being expanded into

the “community with a shared future for mankind” promoted by Xi Jinping. Today’s China continues to depict itself as uniquely virtuous and its leaders have more than ever recruited an idealized vision of its imperial past to argue that their country is inherently benevolent and thus deserving of the deference of its neighbors.

Chapter six focuses on the question of ritual. In imperial times, the basic assumption of China’s centrality and superiority over other polities translated in practice in an insistence that all visitors to the Middle Kingdom follow court rituals and use proper forms to address the emperor, so as to demonstrate their acknowledgment of his supremacy. “Correct” diplomatic interactions were thus central to the maintenance of the Sino-centric hierarchy and any challenge to China’s authority was framed as a breach of propriety. The offering of tribute and investiture through the granting of imperial titles were only the most prominent institutions associated with ritual diplomacy, but there were others like a system of fictive kinship maintained with many nomadic polities in Inner Asia or more broadly the exchange of envoys and of ritual correspondence, as well as the invitation of foreign representatives to participate in major state ceremonies conducted in the Chinese capital.

With the switch to the modern norms of Western-style diplomacy, affirming China’s superiority became much more challenging, but its statesmen remained obsessed with concretely enhancing their country’s status on the international stage through every means available, seeking marks of respect from other states and striving to obtain various status symbols, such as the chairmanship of committees in international organizations. The leaders of the PRC continued to seek diplomatic recognition of their special position among the members of international society, and paid particular attention to their interactions with close neighbors, on whom they still sought to impose standards of “correct” behavior. Xi Jinping has doubled down on those efforts, both in trying to define standards of conduct for China’s neighbors and in seeking to establish a pattern of Asian diplomacy that regularly reaffirms China’s place at the center of the region. The PRC has packed the region’s diplomatic calendar with a series of forums, summits and expos that regularly see other states’ high officials assemble on Chinese soil. The Belt and Road Initiative, among its many functions, has served to supercharge this strategy to dominate the Asian diplomatic stage. The flip side of this diplomatic activism is the definition of clear red lines around China’s “core interests” (virtually anything that affects Chinese sovereignty

and control of outlying territories, including disputed islands in its near seas). Any neighboring state engaging in behavior that endangers said interests is accused of breaching Chinese standards of propriety and of harming the harmony and stability that Beijing says it strives to maintain, thus opening itself to “punishment”.

Chapter seven finally discusses the use of three traditional tools statecraft, namely the mastery over names, the awesomeness that comes from superior power, and the provision of material benefits to incentivize compliance. Firstly, the Chinese belief in the power of names transpired most clearly in imperial times through the ranks and titles system used to organize the empire’s foreign relations into a coherent, stratified classification system. It has continued to make itself felt broadly in the CCP’s efforts to maintain a sophisticated propaganda apparatus, used internationally to try and shape the international discourse on China’s place in the world. More recently and more pointedly, China has recreated something close to a modern ranks and titles system, namely its network of partnerships that began to take shape in the late 1990s and has grown ever since. Secondly, the use of force was traditionally viewed as a means to awe neighbors into submissions and to punish those considered to have violated the rules of propriety. The same logic continues to guide China’s use of force today, whether it be in its desire to establish its might in the eyes of any potential adversary and of any neighbor that would dare to challenge it, or in the way it frames its use of force as a retaliation against others’ “provocative” or “offensive” behavior. Thirdly, China’s imperial rulers consciously used the lure of the profits to be gained from access to China’s vast market and sophisticated products, as well as sumptuous gifts offered to “barbarians” who came to pay their respect, in order to incentivize compliance with their vision of order. A similar reasoning lies today behind the PRC’s use of its growing economic resources to induce deference from other states, by promising to share the fruits of China’s development with all Asian states so as to create a “community of shared interests” throughout the region – while also threatening to cut economic bridges with anyone who offends it.

In conclusion to our enquiry, we bring the various elements of the ideal of hierarchical order back together and discuss what considering them as a whole can tell us about Chinese statecraft in different historical periods, while also considering the implications our findings hold for our understanding of Chinese foreign policy today. We highlight in particular the importance China puts on moral principles and, more concretely, on ritualized diplomatic interactions as means to sustain international

order and to regularly reaffirm its superior position within said order. Participation in this pattern of ritualized diplomacy and restraint from any act that would disrupt the image of harmonious ties between China and its neighbors constitutes the “standard of behavior” that Beijing seeks to impose so as to consolidate a new Sino-centric order in Asia. The future of the region will in large part be determined by how much China’s neighbors comply with this standard, or on the contrary resist it.