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## China and the Global Politics of Regionalization

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ASHGATE

Chapter 2  
Regionalization in the Tianxia?  
Continuity and Change in  
China's Foreign Policy

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**Introduction**

In the traditional Chinese worldview there was no conception of "region." Instead, the distinctive concept used by the Chinese was Tianxia, or the surrounding world. Tianxia has been commonly translated into English as "all under heaven." Such literal translation is problematic, for in practice, Chinese rulers, by claiming to be "overlords of the Tianxia," did not intend to lay their suzerainty over the entire known world (Gan 2003, 508). Rather, their Tianxia was more circumscribed, generally referring to the Chinese empire and the adjacent areas with which the Chinese interacted—roughly corresponding to what we today know as Northeast and Southeast Asia and parts of Central Asia.

"Regionalization in the Tianxia" is therefore somewhat of a contradiction. Yet we can still conceive of China's relations with its neighbors as having constituted a distinctive regional order, or the "Tianxia order" as some Chinese scholars have called it (Zhao 2005; Gao 2003). The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the nature of this order from the Chinese side by analyzing the foreign policy motivations and strategy of Chinese rulers. For the purposes of brevity, this investigation is limited to the early Ming dynasty (1368–1424). This makes good sense for at least two reasons. First, for the first time in Chinese history, the early Ming developed a single pattern for the bureaucratic management of all foreign relations which has often been called the "tribute system" (Wills 1984, 14; Fairbank and Teng 1941, 137; Mancall 1984, 13). This period is thus one of the most likely periods in Chinese history when salient features of Chinese attempts to socialize its neighbors might be found. Second, the early Ming saw a consolidation and expansion of Chinese power. Since we are interested in the possible socialization impact of contemporary China on regional order, looking back at a period when China was indisputably the greatest power in the system might be particularly instructive.

The chapter begins with a conceptual discussion on imperial Chinese foreign policy. The second section examines early Ming policies toward Korea, Japan, and the Mongols and asks what kind of "community of practice" emerged between China and its neighbors. The third section discusses the contemporary implication

of traditional Chinese foreign policy, focusing on the aspect of socialization. Socialization was a salient aspect in imperial Chinese foreign policy; it may yet again become prominent as Chinese elites begin to “rethink China” and develop a distinctive set of Chinese ideas for managing international affairs.

### Conceptualizing Imperial Chinese foreign policy

“Traditional China’s foreign relations” was once a thriving field in the historical scholarship. The research efforts initiated by John King Fairbank from the 1940s to the 1960s—particularly Fairbank’s “tribute system” and “Chinese world order” thesis—have had enduring influence on our understanding of premodern Chinese foreign policy (Fairbank 1942, 1953, 1968). Some international relations scholars have also viewed the tribute system as the fundamental institution of the traditional East Asian “international society” (Zhang 2001). Yet the tribute system is first of all an analytical category, “a Western invention for descriptive purposes” (Mancall 1968, 63). It may or may not be useful for organizing our analysis of China’s foreign relations. In contrast to customary practice, this chapter will break away from the tribute system paradigm dominating the study of East Asian diplomatic history. In fact, deconstructing the tribute system as a historical institution might shed more light on the nature of Chinese foreign policy.

If the tribute system is removed, what is left? One might begin by conceptualizing the ends and means of imperial China’s foreign policy. A necessary starting point is to examine the implication of sinocentrism—the Chinese conception of their centrality and superiority in the known world (the classic statement is still in Fairbank 1968). Such a conception is said to have led Chinese rulers to view foreign countries as inferior tributary/vassal states in a China-centered international hierarchy and to require them to pay proper tributes to the Chinese court in the form of local products. But it must be noted that this is only a generalization. In practice the Chinese did not always think this way, especially when dealing with powerful foreign rivals (Rossabi 1983). The assumption of sinocentrism is therefore useful only during certain periods in Chinese history. We can, however, expect its analytical utility during the early Ming. By the time of the Ming—the last Han Chinese dynasty—sinocentrism and other cultural assumptions must have been well developed and passed down to China’s ruling elites. In addition, sinocentrism might have been given strong behavioral expressions in the early Ming since this period also witnessed a new assertion of Chinese power.

What, then, might be the effect of sinocentrism on early Ming foreign policy? Sinocentrism would lead to a sinocentric identity on the part of Chinese rulers—the understanding of China as the center of the world surrounded by the “four foreigners” (*si yi*), and as the universal empire and the superior polity that deserves the submission as its vassals from other countries. Chinese rulers would therefore try to satisfy China’s identity needs as the only central, superior, and sovereign entity in the surrounding world. “Sovereign” here means that China had the right

to determine the policies of other countries towards it. Chinese rulers would then try to install other countries as tribute-paying vassals and make them acknowledge Chinese superiority in foreign affairs. This can be fairly called China’s political domination of controlling other countries’ foreign policies toward it (Gan 2003, 490–505).

Further, the sinocentric identity needs might be intrinsically linked with the legitimacy needs in imperial politics. If sinocentrism was entrenched deep enough and becomes a political ideology of some sort, we can expect Chinese rulers to invoke it as the tradition of China’s role in the world. This would compel them to realize a sinocentric world order in order to satisfy the ideological requirement of governing China. Its attainment would therefore partly constitute the Mandate of Heaven—the legitimacy basis of imperial rule. If the rulers wanted to claim the Mandate of Heaven in governing China, they must be able to demonstrate, among other things, that they were indeed the Son of Heaven (*tianzi*) and the “overlord of the Tianxia” or make it seem so.

Chinese rulers would want to create a sinocentric world order by socializing foreign rulers into accepting its centrality and superiority. Socialization is a process of identity- and interest-formation (Wendt 1999, 170). The ideal outcome of Chinese socialization was for foreign rulers to internalize the sinocentric norm and serve as China’s tributaries voluntarily. To this end Chinese rulers would employ a persuasion strategy to achieve political domination—a strategy of constructing the identity and interests of other countries as China’s tributaries through a normative discourse of Chinese superiority. If this could be successful, a “community of practice”, informed above all by sinocentric norms and regularized through tributary relations, would conceivably emerge. In practice, however, East Asian politics during the early Ming fell short of this ideal, despite apparent tributary practices between China and its neighbors.

But realizing the sinocentric identity underpinned by legitimacy needs could not be the only end of imperial Chinese foreign policy. Some scholars have been misled by the somewhat unique notion of sinocentrism and overlooked other equally important foreign policy objectives that Chinese rulers attended to. Security is among the most important such objectives. Faced with security threats on the frontier of their empire, what would Chinese rulers do? This is a complex question that defies simple answers. Some hypotheses, however, can be derived from realist theories of international relations, especially if we focus on the early Ming, a period during which Chinese rulers were confident about their military capabilities as well as their material and cultural superiority.

Realism dictates that the primary means to obtain desired outcomes are to threaten punishment or offer a side payment. Three strategies therefore appear prominent in a realist world: war, blackmail, and inducement. War is the straightforward strategy for eliminating security threats. Moreover, for a powerful regime such as the early Ming, preventive war might also appear an attractive option—employing war to prevent the rise of threatening powers. This, in fact, largely explains early Ming China’s repeated campaigns into the Mongolian

steppe. Blackmail and inducement are less costly strategies than war. China might threaten to take some undesirable action unless the target country complied with its security request. Or it might hope to gain other countries' security cooperation by promising political and economic benefits. Indeed, early Ming rulers, especially the Yongle emperor (r. 1403–1424), frequently bestowed political titles, economic gifts, and trade privileges to foreign rulers.

Such a framework, drawing on both constructivist and realist theories of international relations, shows that although sinocentrism is a noteworthy notion, persuasion and socialization that might logically follow from it are not the whole story of Chinese foreign policy in practice. Because socialization might fail, and because China also had to confront external security threats, Chinese rulers must also employ other strategies such as war, blackmail, and inducement when necessary. If, through persuasion Chinese rulers could socialize foreign rulers into internalizing sinocentrism and becoming China's loyal vassals, then the strategies of war, blackmail, and inducement would be of no use since such a high degree of socialization would have prevented security threats from arising in the first place. But if socialization did not produce its intended effect, we should expect Chinese rulers to employ more power-political means to ensure the security of their empire.

### Early Ming foreign policy in practice

The chapter will now briefly discuss early Ming China's policies toward Korea, Japan, and the Mongols to evaluate the usefulness of the above framework. The early Ming in fact tried to initiate tributary relations with an unprecedented large number of polities in Northeast and Southeast Asia. Narrowing the focus to Sino-Korean, Sino-Japanese, and Sino-Mongolian relations makes good sense because they encompass a wide range of relations between China and its neighbors, from the most cooperative (Sino-Korean relations) to the most difficult (Sino-Mongolian relations). They are in this sense "representative" of China's overall foreign relations; by examining them one will not miss significant variations in Chinese foreign policy.

#### *Sino-Korean relations*

Korea, along with Annam (Vietnam), Champa, and Japan, was among the first countries that the founding Hongwu emperor (r. 1368–1398) of the Ming dynasty tried to initiate tributary relations with. In January 1369, Hongwu dispatched envoys to the Koryo court to proclaim the founding of his regime. His imperial rescript conveyed two messages. First, it emphasized the transfer of the Mandate of Heaven, the basis of imperial legitimacy, from the previous Yuan dynasty to the Ming. Second, it pointed out the historical precedents in Sino-Korean relations

and implied that Korea should continue the "tradition" of tributary submission to the Chinese emperor (Wu 1980, 13; Clark 1978, 36).

Korea's tributary submission was important to Hongwu because, having just seized power by force from the Yuan, he had to build up legitimacy for his new rule (Huang 1994). It was paramount for his regime to be acknowledged and supported both internally and externally. Internally, Hongwu initiated a series of moves to identify himself with the tradition of legitimate Confucian political authority by cultivating the symbols of Confucian rule and by suppressing the remnants of the heterodox origins of the Ming regime (Dreyer 1982, 66). Externally, he wanted to establish a sinocentric and hierarchic order with other countries serving as his vassals and presenting periodic tributary products. This would demonstrate his superiority and authority in the Tianxia, and confirm his status as the Son of Heaven. Positioning himself as the overlord of the surrounding world, he even sent envoys to offer sacrifices to the stream and mountain deities of foreign countries (Huang 1994, 193–6).

Legitimacy, however, was not the only motive behind Hongwu's missions to Korea. The concern for security, as well as the need for legitimacy, motivated Hongwu's Korea policy. Even during the first mission the Ming envoy carried the task of persuading Korea to sever ties with Naghachu, the Mongol leader in Manchuria (Goodrich and Fang 1976, 1083). Security would become an increasingly important—and one might say obsessive—concern for Hongwu in later years. Such concern was well founded. The Ming was unable to annex the Liaodong region until 1387. Korea's geographical location means that it always had vital security interests in the region, and had indeed historically played an important role there (Ledyard 1983). Korea could damage Ming security interests either by directly challenging Ming power in Manchuria or allying with the Mongols or the Jurchens or both to balance against it. By having Korea as a tributary, Hongwu seemed to have hoped that this would enable him to divide and conquer the other two threats in the northeast: the Mongols and the Jurchens.

Sino-Korean relations in the first few years of the Hongwu reign were cordial, but were soon damaged by Koryo's 1370–1371 campaign into Liaodong. This campaign changed Hongwu's attitudes toward Korea for good. After 1371 he became increasingly suspicious of and hostile toward the Koreans. He accused the Korea King of bad faith as a result of the Liaodong campaign. In 1373 he got angry at the poor quality of Korean tribute horses. In 1374 he reduced the frequency of Korean missions to one every three years, perhaps as an attempt to gain Korean concession and cooperation in its northeast security (Langlois 1988, 166).

By 1380, Hongwu had become so suspicious that he "was incapable of seeing Korea as anything but a wayward border state which had to be intimidated in an effort to head off trouble" (Clark 1978, 163). Even after the new Choson dynasty (established in 1392) adopted a policy of accommodation—*Sadae* ("serve the great")—toward the Ming, Hongwu was still suspicious of Korea's loyalty and worried about Ming security in the northeast. He withheld the new King's investiture and accused Korea of a variety of wrongdoings in a 1393 rescript

(Liu et al. 2005, 31). Although the Mongols no longer posed a threat after the pacification of Liaodong in 1387, the Koreans and the Jurchens were still viewed with suspicion and vigilance. In the last years of his reign Hongwu wanted to prevent Korea from threatening Ming frontier emplacements by reducing contacts between the Koreans and the Jurchens (Clark 1978, 134–135).

The end of the Hongwu reign brought a turning point in Sino-Korea relations. Hongwu had frequently tried to threaten the Koreans for security reasons. His successors took a much more favorable view toward Korea. Persuasion rose to prominence and coercive means such as blackmail took a back seat. The Yongle emperor, for example, swiftly invested the Korean King in 1403. Such enthusiasm was largely motivated by Yongle's need for legitimacy. Because his rule was established through a violent struggle with the legitimate heir to the Ming throne (the Jianwen emperor, r. 1399–1402), Yongle had to build up the legitimacy of his rule, transforming himself from usurper to the rightful heir. His investiture of the Korean king and his enthusiastic reception of Korean missions were meant to be part of the process in achieving this effect. Moreover, he was not as worried about a potential Korean threat in Liaodong as Hongwu once was, primarily because he waged a successful campaign of peaceful pacification of the Jurchens in Manchuria, displacing Korean influence along the way (Serruys 1955).

#### *Sino-Japanese relations*

The patterns of Sino-Japanese interactions were broadly similar to those of Sino-Korean relations. Early Ming emperors tried to politically dominate Japanese foreign policy in areas of tributary relations and policies regarding Japanese piracy for essentially the same reasons: the need to demonstrate legitimacy in order to consolidate their political regime and a concern with security along the Chinese coast. They also employed the strategies of persuasion, inducement, and blackmail to achieve these ends.

Hongwu's first mission to Japan in February 1369 invoked tributary precedents of the past and in effect asked for Japan's acknowledgment of his superiority and Japanese tribute to his court (Cheng 1981, 149; Wang 1953, 10). Like his first mission to Korea, this one was also an attempt to revive the sinocentric order believed to have been created by such great dynasties as the Han (206BC–220AD) and Tang (618–907) in the past. And essentially for the same reason: making Japan a tributary of the Ming would help demonstrate his legitimacy to rule China.

Hongwu did not receive any reply from Japan. Instead, what he heard was news of Japanese pirates (Wako) pillaging China's Shandong peninsula (Zhang and Yu 2004, 6725). Greatly concerned with the Wako problem, the emperor sent his second mission in March 1369. This time the rescript was far harsher in tone. Hongwu demanded that Japan offer a proper petition to the Ming court and control the Wako. To that end, he threatened Japan with invasion—"to bind their kings with ropes," as he described (Wang 1953, 10). His envoys, however, were imprisoned by Prince Kanenaga in Kyushu for three months.

Hongwu was nevertheless willing to try diplomacy once more. In April 1370, he sent another mission with a new and longer rescript. He at the same time advised the desirability of peaceful Sino-Japanese relations and warned about the serious consequence should Japan fail to comply with his requests. In his characteristic style, the rescript ended with a warning: "Be cautious so as to prolong your line of succession" (Wang 1953, 11).

The emperor must have been somewhat pleased by Kanenaga's mission to the Ming court in 1371, though the latter soon failed to send "proper" tributary missions and increasingly defied the Ming. When Yoshimitsu of the Ashikaga shogunate sent a mission in 1374, Hongwu was apparently confused by Japanese politics. He chose to deal with Kanenaga as the ruler of Japan and reprimanded "illegitimate" missions from all others.

In the next few years the emperor's attitude toward Japan steadily soured as a result of continuing Japanese piracy along the Chinese coast, several "improper" or "illegitimate" Japanese missions to his court, and the perception of the political chaos in Japan. In January 1381, for example, he became so annoyed by erratic Japanese missions and the worsening Wako problem that he called the Japanese "stupid eastern foreigners" (Wang 1953, 17). After 1381 Sino-Japanese relations were beyond repair. The Ming court treated Japanese missions badly in 1382, 1384, and 1386. In 1387, after discovering Prime Minister Hu Weiyong's alleged coup to overthrow his rule with the help of Japan—which was a probably fabricated case—Hongwu decided to completely break off relations with Japan (Zhang and Yu 2004, 6728). Afterwards his Japan policy was solely focused on coastal defense against the Wako.

A turning point, however, was reached when Yoshimitsu finally overcame his rivals and consolidated his position in Japanese politics around 1400. Before the Yongle emperor even sent out his envoys to announce his enthronement, Yoshimitsu's mission arrived in Nanjing in November 1403. What is more, the envoys carried a petition written in perfect Chinese literary style in which the Japanese shogun explicitly called himself a "vassal" of the Chinese emperor (Cheng 1981, 254; Wang 1953, 24–25). This extraordinary and yet unexpected mission pleased Yongle greatly.

The emperor sent a return mission one month later, during which the Chinese envoy completed a novel commercial agreement with the Ashikaga shogunate, opening the official "tally" trade between China and Japan. The Japanese were permitted to send periodic trading ventures to China under the guise of tribute-bearing missions. Yongle was primarily motivated by his desire to control Japanese piracy in extending tally trade privileges to Japan, as the use of tallies gave him a system whereby official Japanese envoys could be readily distinguished from unauthorized traders and pirates (Wang 1953, 38–39). But it must also be said that Yongle was much more active and flexible in his maritime policy than Hongwu had ever been, particularly in terms of his willingness to induce foreign rulers with material incentives.

During 1401–1408 Sino-Japanese relations were remarkably harmonious. Yoshimitsu's gestures of loyalty toward China were rare among all rulers in Japanese history. He was the only one that seriously tried to meet the Chinese request of suppressing piracy during the Ming period. Yongle, on the other hand, never failed to flatter and please the Japanese with material incentives.

The harmony, however, ended with Yoshimitsu's death in 1408. Yongle tried to keep the new shogun Yoshimochi as loyal and cooperative as Yoshimitsu. Yet except for the first couple of years, Yoshimochi was aloof and consistently rejected Yongle's request for tributary relations. During 1411–1417, official contact between China and Japan was nonexistent. Yongle, still hoping to win Japan over, sent back captured Japanese pirates in 1417 in a show of Chinese magnanimity. But his 1417 and 1418 rescripts also carried explicit threats and demonstrated his increasing frustration with Japan's detachment (Wang 1953, 48–51). The emperor finally gave up any hope of resuming Sino-Japanese relations after Yoshimochi replied to decline relationship with China and deny all responsibility for Japanese piracy.

#### *Sino-Mongolian relations*

Do we see the same patterns—the strategies of persuasion, inducement, and blackmail for the ends of legitimacy and security—in early Ming China's policies toward the Mongols? Yes, except that Sino-Mongolian relations were much more confrontational and that Chinese rulers also frequently resorted to the strategy of war.

The prominence of war should not be surprising. The Ming and the Mongols were bitter enemies as the Ming dynasty was established after overthrowing the Yuan and expelling the Mongols from China proper. The Mongols remained a serious threat in two ways. First, their incursions into the Ming frontier constituted a physical security threat. In the 1370s the Northern Yuan still vaguely hoped to restore dynastic rule in the south. Second, the Mongol pretension to continuing Yuan rule posed a legitimacy threat to the Ming regime.

Hongwu hoped for a formal acknowledgment of Ming superiority from the Northern Yuan ruler Ayushiridara and a renunciation of the latter's claim to the imperial throne (Dreyer 1982, 74). After the 1370 campaigns which successfully established Ming rule in eastern Inner Mongolia and the Gansu corridor, Hongwu in July and November of the same year sent rescripts urging Ayushiridara to submit. But Ayushiridara and other prominent Mongol leaders held their ground, compelling Hongwu to try both war and diplomacy. In 1372 the emperor ordered a massive campaign to conquer all Mongolia. The campaign ended in a major failure, forcing the Ming to adopt a largely defensive posture in the next few years. Meanwhile Hongwu intensified diplomatic efforts. He sent envoys to Ayushiridara and senior Yuan officials to persuade and induce them to submit. But the Mongols were still unimpressed and the Ming had to resume military expeditions. In 1387, the Ming managed to receive surrender from Naghachu, the most prominent

Mongol leader in Manchuria. Shortly afterwards Hongwu decided to take on the remaining Mongol resistance—that of the Northern Yuan court in the Mongolian steppe. In 1388 the Ming army largely achieved this objective by destroying the unity of the Northern Yuan (Zhang and Yu 2004, 6833; Dreyer 1982, 143).

The Yongle emperor had to deal with a bipolar Mongol world divided between the Eastern Mongols led by Arughtai and the Oirats led by Mahmud. In the first few years Yongle tried to persuade and induce both camps to submit as his tributaries. Initially he was patient with the Mongol defiance, but when in 1408 his envoy was killed by the Eastern Mongols he decided to retaliate. He invested Mahmud who came to present tribute at this time, thus keeping the Oirats on his side in the upcoming campaign against the Eastern Mongols. In March 1410 he embarked on his first Mongolian campaign. Arughtai was defeated, then sent an envoy to present tribute horses to the Ming court. Although Yongle knew that the tributes from Arughtai and Mahmud did not reflect their "true submission," he nevertheless allowed their pretense to continue. Such "submission," pretended or otherwise, was at least useful for demonstrating his superiority over them.

Yet peaceful tributary relations were also the cause of trouble. Mahmud, benefited from years of tributary relations with the Ming and the defeat of Arughtai, became so restless and defiant that Yongle felt it necessary to destroy him by force. In waging another personal expedition in 1414, Yongle was not so much concerned with Mahmud's "insincerity", which he knew all along, as with the Oirats' increasing defiance, growing power, and their capability to do damage to the northern frontier. The pattern would repeat itself in Ming relations with the Eastern Mongols. The defeat of Mahmud by the Ming army again disrupted the balance of power in the steppe. Strengthening his horde from years of tributary relations with the Ming, Arughtai again tried to harass the Chinese and establish hegemony in the steppe. During 1422–1424, Yongle launched three additional campaigns against Arughtai to eliminate the threat posed by the rise of the Eastern Mongol power.

#### *A "community of practice"?*

Did East Asia during the early Ming embody a "community of practice" (Adler 2005)? According to Adler (2008, 196), "communities of practice" refer to "likeminded groups of practitioners who are informally as well as contextually bound by a shared interest in learning and applying a common practice." Since the concept is broad and expansive—so defined, "communities of practice are everywhere" (Adler 2008, 200)—the early Ming East Asian order can also be interpreted as a form of a community of practice. Indeed, one is easily tempted to conceive of it as a "sinocentric tributary community." Such an argument could be conveniently made from a standard tribute system perspective: The apparent tributary practices between China and its neighbors formed a community mediated through the institution of the tribute system. Two points, however, should be noted. They do not dispute the conception of the early Ming East Asian order as a

community of practice per se, but call into question the nature of such practice—i.e., how “sinocentric” such practice in fact was, and how accurately a “sinocentric tributary community” reflects the nature of the larger relations between China and its neighbors.

Adler (2008, 196) argues that practices, the background knowledge that constitutes them, and the environment in which they are performed make possible the socialization and persuasion of political actors. There is no question that by sending envoys to neighboring countries, early Ming emperors wanted to persuade and socialize foreign rulers into accepting the sinocentric conceptions of world order. They also expected China’s cultural excellence to somehow transform foreigners into accepting Chinese norms and worldviews. Such socialization attempts, as already indicated, emerged from the domestic political linkage between the legitimacy needs of early Ming rulers and their sinocentric identity informed by past experiences. Yet, it is far less clear what outcomes these socialization efforts in fact achieved. Foreign rulers—including those most amenable to Chinese influence, such as the Koreans—rarely fully internalized sinocentrism or voluntarily served as China’s tributaries during the early Ming (Zhang 2009). Tributary practices, therefore, frequently failed to change the social structure into a sinocentric one in the sense that major political actors in the system collectively believed in Chinese centrality and superiority.

A second reason why the label “a sinocentric tributary community” can be misleading is that tributary practices were not the whole story of regional politics. Indeed, in terms of Sino–Japanese and Sino–Mongolian relations, tributary relations were not even the major part of the story. The Japanese and the Mongols at various points simply rejected such relations. This is one reason why a tribute system perspective is not as useful as it might seem. Moreover, how would one put the Chinese strategies of war, blackmail, and inducement into a community of practice informed by sinocentric tributary norms? The claim here is not that there was no common practice—tributary relations initiated by China were clearly present—but that tributary practices were not the only kind of practice going on. We need to examine what and how much such tributary practices can tell us about the nature of regional politics during the early Ming.

### Socialization, then and now

Is an historical perspective as outlined above helpful for thinking about contemporary Chinese foreign policy, particularly socialization in its regionalization strategies? Scholars have typically focused on how China has been socialized by international norms and institutions (Johnston 2008). The question of whether China is also socializing other states is therefore an interesting and yet somewhat neglected one.

Shakespeare once noted that “comparisons are odious,” and this seems particularly pertinent to historical comparisons. There are, at least, two reasons

that make it difficult to infer the trajectories of current or future Chinese foreign policy from history. First, the regional and international context in which China finds itself today has changed dramatically. Both the agency and the structure of the East Asian system have been transformed in the past two hundreds of years. China is no longer the dominant power in the system, foreign policy norms are now diverse and in some cases heavily influenced by Western practices, and extra-regional factors such as globalization and the US military presence play important roles in regional politics and economics. Nobody would be so naive as to expect the return of a sinocentric tributary order, if such a “Chinese world order” (Fairbank 1968) ever accurately captures the realities of historical East Asian politics.

Second, the past does not offer straightforward lessons because China’s historical statecraft was informed not by one but several traditions simultaneously (Hunt 1984). Many Chinese scholars believe that China had a dominant tradition of Confucian pacifism. This is incorrect and parochial. Confucianism promotes morality and benevolence, yet Legalism emphasizes the importance of power and punishment, and these are just two among China’s many schools of thoughts developed in the ancient Chinese world. Sometimes China displayed a pacifistic approach in foreign affairs, yet during other periods China appeared highly opportunistic in realizing its self-interest through power politics. At times China appeared to be a factor for peace in East Asia, yet often it also disrupted regional stability. Will contemporary China be peaceful? Will it seek hegemony and domination in East Asia? No useful answer can be given to such simplistic questions because from a historical perspective, there was simply no single pattern of Chinese foreign policy. As Victoria Hui has pointed out, the coexistence of *realpolitik* and *idealpolitik* impulses in traditional Chinese foreign policy makes any simple linear projection from China’s past to the future misguided (Hui 2008, 63).

History, however, can offer useful perspectives if historical reasoning is used with caution. It can, for example, suggest clues for thinking about the question of socialization in Chinese foreign policy. The above historical analysis shows that early Ming rulers tried to initiate tributary relations with foreign countries by reminding them of tributary norms and persuading them of Chinese superiority. Such socialization by way of persuasion stemmed out of the domestic political linkage between legitimacy needs and their sinocentric identity. Early Ming emperors tried in varying degrees to convince foreign rulers of China’s centrality and superiority and of the “moral correctness” for them to pay tribute. This was first of all a matter of foreign recognition of the founding of a new regime in China—and extremely important given the fact that Hongwu established his rule through a violent struggle with the Mongol Yuan and that Yongle in fact usurped the throne from the legitimate Jianwen emperor. In some cases the recognition game went longer and deeper. In Sino–Korean relations, for example, Hongwu tried to sever Korea’s relations with the Northern Yuan and only succeeded in the late 1380s.



One question we might ask about the People's Republic of China (PRC) is therefore: What are the domestic linkages between the needs of the PRC regime and its identity conceptions that might lead to socialization efforts in its foreign policy? Socialization is not merely persuasion; persuasion is a strategy or mechanism that might lead to a high degree of socialization. Successful socialization must result in the internalization of values, roles, and understandings among the targets of socialization so that they assume a "taken-for-grantedness" (Johnston 2008, 21–22).

In the post-Cold War world Beijing has been trying to persuade other countries that it is a force for stability and prosperity in East Asia. Although initially regional institutions such as the ASEAN Regional Forum are where China has been socialized, the socialization effects may work both ways—ASEAN states may be changed by China's participation as well (Ba 2006, 162). It increasingly appears that China is trying to socialize other countries into accepting its role as a responsible and peaceful great power by offering political and economic cooperation in "ASEAN plus" institutions and by taking an active stance in diplomatic initiatives such as the Six Party Talks. In the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and to a lesser extent the East Asian Summit, China has taken a leading role in facilitating regional initiatives.

Surely policies in these areas are motivated by a variety of considerations; the link between socialization and identity is nevertheless important. A key question for future Chinese foreign policy is how the identity of a "responsible great power" might shape China's socialization attempts and influence its overall foreign policy evolution. If the discourse of "responsible great power" is no cheap talk (as it appears for the time being), it ought to have important behavioral implications. Given the awareness that the PRC has elicited suspicion and fear among its neighbors in the past and that its rising power is again causing anxieties in the region, Chinese leaders might initiate more socialization attempts to alleviate these concerns. As yet we know little about what a "responsible great power" identity actually means and how it might manifest itself in foreign policy behavior. Indeed, the Chinese themselves are trying to figure out how China as responsible great power ought to behave in the international arena.

Socialization might become an increasingly prominent aspect of Chinese foreign policy in another important sense having directly to do with its history. As China's power continues to grow, the recent past of the so-called "century of humiliation" will have less relevance for its foreign policy than the more distant past of imperial glory. Indeed, Chinese analysts have for several years been calling for a "great power mentality" to replace the "victim mentality." Michael Hunt speculated long ago that "The rise in appeal of the imperial past seems likely to happen in any case, for it offers the only indigenous benchmark for measuring progress toward a position of restored national power and pride" (Hunt 1984, 38).

If the influence of the imperial past has not been readily observable in Chinese foreign policy behavior, it has already manifested itself in scholarly and

popular discourse. Some Chinese scholars have already called for reexamining China's past and preparing for China's growing role in international affairs in the contemporary world by drawing lessons from the past. The past they are talking about is no longer the "century of humiliation." Indeed, according to one analyst, the "century of humiliation" is but an aberration from the normal trajectory of Chinese history, mystified all the more by Eurocentric perspectives since the late nineteenth century (Xiang 2007). According to the philosopher Zhao Tingyang (2005), who wrote a popular book that fascinated China's international relations scholars, the historical East Asian order centering on China provides an almost perfect model for the future world order. It is argued that compared with Western ideas, traditional Chinese thought, by virtue of its emphasis on peace and harmony, is a superior source for thinking about the future world order. These scholars are now calling for the Chinese to "rethink China," to start an ideological debate with the West, and to think about how China can contribute to the making of the future world order.

Admittedly many substantive arguments these scholars make can be challenged for various reasons. As mentioned, harmony is not the only feature in traditional Chinese culture, nor is peace in traditional Chinese foreign policy. The alleged Chinese superiority in these areas in the imperial past may be just as much myth as Chinese "inferiority" since the mid-nineteenth century. Yet the significance of their arguments lies not so much in their validity as in how they, embedded in a network of knowledge production in the Chinese intellectual community, might be able to influence official foreign policy ideas (Callahan 2008). As Chinese elites reexamine history and evaluate contemporary situations, they will increasingly see China as possessing a distinctive, if not always superior, set of history, culture, and value for the management of international affairs. As a result, we can expect to see more Chinese socialization about Chinese approaches in managing regional and international issues. As Chinese foreign policy becomes more proactive, so will its socialization attempts in a variety of institutional settings.

Meanwhile, of course, other countries and non-state actors will continue to try socializing and persuading China to behave more to their liking. These countries will want to see China become a "responsible great power." And since China has already declared its intention to become a "responsible great power," the question becomes where and how these conceptions of China as a "responsible great power" differ and converge. In the coming years, we will likely see an interesting pattern of increasing adjustment and adaptation of the different "worldviews" in the interactions between China and other countries.

## Conclusion

Chinese rulers in imperial times tried to socialize foreign rulers into accepting their centrality and superiority in the surrounding world and construct a sinocentric world order. Socialization and persuasion is not the only aspect of imperial Chinese



foreign policy. In the early Ming Chinese rulers also employed the strategies of war, blackmail, and inducement. But socialization was always present because it grew out of the domestic political linkage between legitimacy needs and the sinocentric identity. Thinking about socialization in contemporary Chinese foreign policy, one can begin by considering how the identity of contemporary China might lead to distinctive socialization attempts. History's relevance is in providing sources for the construction of an evolving Chinese identity in the contemporary world.

As Chinese power continues to grow, as Chinese foreign policy becomes more proactive, and as China replaces the "victim mentality" with a "great power mentality," socialization will become an increasingly prominent aspect in its foreign policy. Such socialization will of course no longer be about sinocentrism. We have no way of knowing its exact content since China's national identity will continue to evolve in the twenty-first century. What we can be sure, however, is that China will increasingly advance its own distinctive worldviews on international affairs and will no longer be content with simply being socialized by other actors in the international system.