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WORLDVIEWS

From "All-under-Heaven" in Ancient China to the "Myriad States" in the Modern World

Introduction: *A Map of the Myriad Countries of the World* and Ancient China's Entry into the Early Modern World

In the fall of 2001, I went to the Italian embassy in Beijing to see an exhibition about missionaries and China. I stood for a long time in the modest exhibition room, staring at a map of the world titled *A Map of the Myriad Countries of the World* (*Kunyu wanguo quantu*). On the map there were five great continents, four oceans, and strange creatures and fishes. For a moment, it was like I had gone back in time.[1] We should not underestimate this little map, for it is an important historical marker that symbolizes a major change in the worldview of ancient China. What was that change? Under the influence of this map, the idea of All-under-Heaven, which was part of Chinese people's long-standing view of themselves as the center of the world, gradually changed from a view that "the center was everywhere" to the "myriad states" (*wanguo,* also "ten thousand states"). From this time on, China was to live in this world (*shijie*) among the myriad states. If we should say that we now live in the era of global-

ization, then we might say that globalization was already in its early stages from the time that this map of the world provided Chinese people with a view of the myriad states.

Originally this map was mounted on six panels. Over the years, the original frame for the panels was lost, and the separate panels were reassembled into one giant map, roughly five feet tall and twelve feet across. Experts believe that these panels were painted four hundred years ago, after a world map titled *Map of Mountains and Seas* (*Shan hai yudi tu*) by a missionary named Matteo Ricci (1552–1610). Ricci, a member of the Jesuit order from Italy, was not a cartographer; some researchers have argued that this map followed another world map that had been made by a European named Abraham Ortelius (1527–1598), and thus it was still very clear and accurate. In 2000 I made a special trip to Antwerp to visit the workshop that had printed Ortelius's map back in those times, where I also saw other maps that had been published then. I realized that, four or five centuries ago, Europeans' knowledge of the world, which followed along with the routes of their ships, was already relatively advanced; even missionaries had learned this new knowledge and information. The fact that missionaries who had lived in that world of learning brought such knowledge to China was something of a coincidence. In those days, Matteo Ricci did not have any particularly deep intentions but thought that the map was a way to gain favor with curious educated elites and officials and to make it easier for other Catholic missionaries to come into China and enjoy greater freedom to spread their faith. He also wanted to use this map of the myriad states to challenge Chinese people's self-regard. He did not consider these questions much further, however, and absolutely did not imagine that his map would have such a deep and lasting influence on Chinese thought.

When Chinese people look at world maps, they may think of those people from earlier times, who began to realize that All-under-Heaven was much larger than they had originally thought—with many more countries—and that China was not as big as had previously been imagined.

Early Modern Western Views of the World and Ancient Chinese Views of All-under-Heaven

By this point you may want to ask me: Before Matteo Ricci's map of the world, how did Chinese people see the world?

I should explain first that, before the Han and Wei dynasties, people in ancient China did not normally use the words "the world" (*shijie*). This word is a Buddhist term. Over a long period in ancient China, Han Chinese people used the phrase "All-under-Heaven," which comes from the saying, "Under the whole Heaven, every spot is the sovereign's ground" (*pu tian zhi xia, mo fei wang tu*). All-under-Heaven is the world beneath the sky or Heaven.

Of course, nowadays anyone with any knowledge knows that the world is big, that the Earth is round, that China is in Asia, that there is an Eastern Hemisphere and Western Hemisphere, that there are other countries on the other side of the ocean, and that you will need a passport and visa to go to other countries. These are all facts of modern times, however, facts that came into being after Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) discovered the New World and after Ferdinand Magellan (1480–1521) circumnavigated the globe. Early modern ideas about "states" and maps of the "world" took shape very late in history. Chinese people of the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries (and many others) did not understand states and the world in this way. When we speak of Europeans like Columbus discovering the New World or of Magellan circumnavigating the globe, some people say that this was imperialism; others say that this was the advance of civilization; others say that these were geographical discoveries. Still others will ask: Since these parts of the world were already there, with people living there, what was the great discovery? Of course it sounds a little bit like postcolonial theory to say that these events amounted to no more than Europeans just showing up in these places. Nonetheless, whatever debates we may have in the present day, a few hundred years ago these events were among the most celebrated in history, because they symbolized the fact that human beings had finally gained a complete knowledge of this Earth on which they lived, this world (*shijie*). Moreover, particularly for Westerners, these events also meant discovering

that the world had so many different types of cultures and traditions and so many different types of peoples and places.

For a number of reasons, these developments were important for Westerners. First, their system of knowledge about the world finally had a complete image of the globe, which was crucial for arriving at a complete understanding about the planet on which they lived. Second, as they undertook comparisons of the nations and cultures of people in foreign places, Westerners established a sense of their own centrality or relative superiority. In their system of knowledge, especially in the set of values that enabled the universal pursuit of wealth, prosperity, and civilization, the existence of others such as "undeveloped peoples and nations," "Oriental people," and "barbarians" established the position of Westerners at the center of the world, at the pinnacle of status. Third, this definition of the position of their own place and culture gave the West confidence about its ability to master the world. We know that people cannot observe themselves independently, just as we know the other person looks into the mirror, he or she must look at other things in order to define his or her position and image. So, too, when we look into the mirror, even the mirror itself must use that layer of opaque materials to reflect the image of an object. When the West was expanding, the discovery of other civilizations was for them much like finding a mirror. By looking at other peoples and civilizations, and then looking again at themselves, they gained an understanding of how they looked—whether they were ugly or beautiful. Before they had seen other people, they could not have known as much about themselves. The development of anthropology in the West took place for precisely this reason. For these reasons, then, these three points are all important for the definition of values and meaning in the history of knowledge in the West.

It is also fascinating to see China looking back in the mirror. People in ancient China also had a worldview that made Chinese people quite proud. Two or three thousand years ago, people in ancient China had not traveled to every corner of the world, but Chinese people nonetheless had formed an image of All-under-Heaven based on their experiences and imagination. This imagination of All-under-Heaven can be broken into three components. First, where they were was the center of the world.

Second, the Earth resembled a chessboard or was shaped like the Chinese character *hui* 回, extending outward in four directions from the center. The first circle (in the center) was the capital, which was occupied by the ruler; the second circle was the land of the Chinese (Hua-Xia); the third circle was occupied by barbarians (*Yi Di*). It was in roughly the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods that the concept of a "Middle Kingdom" (or China, *Zhongguo*), surrounded by barbarians to the north and south, emerged. Third, within this All-under-Heaven, geographical spaces that were farther away from the margins were considered less cultivated, and the people who lived there were more barbaric, with a lower level of civilization. Those people were called the barbarians of the south, north, east, and west (*Nan Man, Bei Di, Xi Rong,* and *Dong Yi*).[2]

This leads to another question: How did the image of All-under-Heaven come into being?

The Nine Provinces and Five Zones

The "Tribute of Yu" (*Yu Gong*) chapter in the *Book of Documents* refers to the "Nine Provinces" (*jiu zhou*), while the "Discourses of Zhou" (*Zhou yu*) chapter in the *Discourses of the States* (*Guo yu*) chapter refers to the "Five Zones" (*wu fu*). The "Nine Provinces" were Ji (冀), Yan (兗), Qing (青), Xu (徐), Yang (揚), Jing (荊), Yu (豫), Liang (梁), and Yong (雍). Generally speaking, if we look at the map moving clockwise from north to south, from north to east, and then south, and then toward the west, we draw the outlines of a region that more or less includes the modern-day provinces of Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Hubei, Hunan, Henan, Sichuan, Shaanxi, and Shanxi. This area is "All-under-Heaven" as understood by people in ancient China, places that now are, by and large, purely Han regions.[3] According to legend, when Yu the Great brought the floodwaters under control, the space that he was concerned about largely overlapped with "Hua-Xia." What was Hua-Xia? It was the part of the world that people in ancient China believed to be relatively civilized: All-under-Heaven.[4]

The "Five Zones" refers to areas that center around the territory occupied by the king in Luoyang during the Eastern Zhou dynasty. In addi-

tion to the "center" occupied by the Eastern Zhou king in Luoyang, the area that surrounded this center (or "Kingly Domain," *wang ji*) was a Central Zone (*dian fu*) under direct of the rule of the king. The Central Zone, a circle of five hundred *li,* was on the outskirts surrounding the Kingly Domain. (In ancient capitals, *jiao* or "outskirts" referred to the area one hundred *li* outside the city walls. That which was outside the *jiao* was called the Central Zone.) Beyond that, for five hundred *li,* was the Lords' Zone (*Hou fu*), which was the land controlled by the enfeoffed feudal lords, such as the state of Song in Shangqiu (in Henan) and the state of Zheng (also in Henan), or the state of Qi in Shandong. Five hundred *li* beyond the Lords' Zone was the Pacified Zone (*Sui fu*). The character *sui* originally referred to a rope on a cart that would prevent passengers from falling off. Here it is used in the sense of pacifying someone, as in the word *suijing,* "to pacify or appease"; the *sui* is a rope that can be held on to but not leaned on. The next five hundred *li* is the Controlled Zone (*Yao fu*). Here the character *yao* means to arrange or agree on, in the sense that this domain can only be ruled by alliances or mutual agreements between different parties. Most rulers would pay only partial attention and even turn a blind eye to this area. The outermost area was five hundred *li* of the Wild Zone (*Huang fu*); *huang* or "wild" refers to a wild and barbarous place whose people can probably be left to their own devices because they are so far away.[5] In this sense, expanding out from five hundred square *li* of territory outward, there are named regions encompassing five thousand square *li,* we see how people in ancient China imagined the Earth as if it were shaped like the character *hui* 回.

The *Tribute of Yu* dates roughly to the Warring States period, and the *Discourses of the States* is probably also from that period. In these works we see that ideas about the Nine Provinces and Five Zones were very common during the Warring States era; we also see the beginnings of a shared or common geographical space for the Han people. The "Summer Offices" (*Xia guan*) referred to in the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhou li*), which came slightly later, complicated this vision even further, referring to an organization that was dedicated to managing the territory of the state, and expanding number of the Five Zones to the Nine Zones.[6] These additions did not change the structure of space that gradually extended outward from the center and did not change the idea that the

level of civilization gradually fell as one traveled farther away from the center.

Many readers have probably heard of books from ancient China such as the *Songs of the South* (*Chu ci*), the *Zhuangzi, The Tale of King Mu, the Son of Heaven* (*Mu Tianzi zhuan*), and the *Classic of Mountains and Seas.* These works often imagine the world at China's edges, with the Kunlun Mountains to the west and Mount Penglai to the east. They tell of how King Mu of Zhou went to the Kunlun Mountains to meet the Queen Mother of the West (*Xi wang mu*), or of how people traveled to the Island of Immortals on Mount Penglai to obtain the elixir of immortality. What is most interesting here is that many people have heard something about the *Classic of Mountains and Seas,* a book that records how people imagined the world in ancient times. Each place in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* has a strange creature or story: the flying chariots of the Country of Singlearm (*Qi gong guo*), the flying fish of Mount Blueroanhorse (*Gui shan*), or the animal named Awestruck (*Kui*) on Mount Flowwave in the East Sea.[7] These stories appeared again and again, all the way through works such as the *Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Three Powers* (*San cai tu hui*), an encyclopedia that dates from the Ming dynasty, to *Flowers in the Mirror,* a novel by Lu Ruzhen (ca. 1763–ca. 1830) of the Qing dynasty. Both of these books referred to the Country of Gentlemen, the Country of Giants, the Country of Hairy People, and the Country of People with Deep-Set Eyes.

If we read closely, the vision of the world found in these books is still based on a civilized center that extends out in the four cardinal directions. According to legend, the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* originally included maps and pictures, and the text was meant to be an explication of them. A poem by Tao Yuanming (365–427) says, "I skim through the *Story of King Mu* / And view the pictures in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas.*"[8] The book records information about mountains (the Southern Mountains, Western Mountains, Northern Mountains, Eastern Mountains, and Central Mountains); the southern, western, northern, and eastern parts of the "Regions within the Seas" (*hai nei*); the southern, western, northern, and eastern parts of the "Regions beyond the Seas" (*hai wai*); and the southern, western, northern, and eastern parts of the "Great Wilderness" (*da huang*). In other words, if we were able to look at the

pictures or maps that accompanied the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* today, we would see a square-shaped universe with the Central Mountains in the middle, surrounded by the mountains of the four cardinal directions, which in turn are surrounded by the regions within the seas, the regions beyond the seas, and the Great Wilderness at the edges.

The people on the edges—the barbarians of the north, west, east, and south—are all barbarians in the eyes of the Chinese, who are at the center of this world.

Round Heaven, Square Earth: Imagining Space

Did Chinese people from those times never travel anywhere beyond the so-called Great Wilderness? We do not know. Although some people say it happened, we have no records to prove it. If no one traveled beyond these boundaries, however, how did they know that the world reflected what was in the map? My guess is that this view of the world came from how people in ancient China imagined the relationship between Heaven and Earth. People in ancient China believed that "Heaven [corresponds to] a circle, and Earth [corresponds to] a square (*Tian yuan di fang*)." In other words, Heaven was believed to be rounded like a basket turned upside down, covering the Earth, with the North Pole and South Pole at its midpoint. The Earth was square, like a chessboard, with the area around Luoyang at the center. These explanation of the universe are found in the *Mathematical Classic of Zhou Gnomon* (*Zhou bi suan jing*) and in the *Lü Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Lü shi Chunqiu*),[9] which refers to circular shapes above and square shapes below. In the pictorial stones of the famed Wu Liang Shrine, which date back to the Han dynasty, there is a scene that depicts the mythical figures Fuxi and Nüwa. Fuxi holds a carpenter's square, while Nüwa holds a compass; Fuxi is drawing the Earth in a square shape, while Nüwa lays out Heaven in a round shape.[10] The square Earth and round sky do not quite seem to fit together—so much so that some people might ask: If Heaven is smaller than Earth, then wouldn't the four corners of the Earth might stick out and not be covered by the sky? Or, if Heaven is bigger than Earth, would

there be some places where there is no Earth and only sky? Nonetheless, people believed this idea for a long time.

But why? The reason is simple: it came from their experience of looking at Heaven and from what they inferred about Earth. If you look at the sun during the day and at the moon and stars at night, they all move from east to west (or from right to left), revolving around a "spool" or axis to the north. Doesn't it look as if Heaven is like a broad hat covering over us? Many things in ancient China imitated this mystical space. To give a few examples: the "shi" boards (*shi pan*), a divination tool used in ancient times, had an upper half with a round disc shaped like Heaven and a lower half with a square disc shaped like the Earth. Ancient Chinese chessboards had similar shapes, and the center of the chessboard for Go (or *Weiqi)* is still called the "center of Heaven" (*Tian yuan*). The Luminous Hall (*Ming tang*) and Round Mound (*Yuan qiu*), where sacrifices were performed to Earth and Heaven, also imitated these shapes. Even kings' palaces in ancient times extended out from the center toward the four directions, just as ancient cities were designed with a clear center and outlying suburbs in the four directions. For these reasons, people in ancient China always believed that the place they lived was the center; that their civilizational status was higher that of the people who lived in one of the four directions away from them; and that the lands that extended out in the four directions were always on lesser footing when compared with the center, whether in terms of wealth or the level of civilization. According to this line of thinking, the periphery should be governed and administered by the center. People in ancient China believed that All-under-Heaven was right here, and that the people of the "Middle Kingdom" (that is, China) should look down on the "Four Barbarians" (*si Yi*), and that Chinese civilization should radiate outward in all directions and educate and civilize the barbarians.

This is not strange; Westerners say that "the center is everywhere." Everyone must look at the world through their own eyes, and thus where they stand is the starting point for their understanding of things, and is also the reference point for north, south, east, and west. What is far from themselves is on the margin, what is behind the focus of their attention is the background; I may be in your view, just as you might be what I am focusing on. The core ethnic groups of ancient China were located in the

central plains, between the Yellow River in the north and the Yangtze River in the south. Of course, they understood this area to be the center of the vast space they imagined as All-under-Heaven and regarded Hua-Xia civilization as superior to the peoples on their periphery.

The Four Directions and Beyond: From "Yan Who Spoke of Heaven" to the Journeys of Zhang Qian

To return to the subject at hand, some people in ancient China who were not convinced by this map of the world. Some even courageously asked, "Is there an even larger world beyond?" According to legend, during the Warring States era there was a man from the state of Qi named Zou Yan, who later came to be known as "Yan Who Spoke of Heaven." In the days after he would have been alive, people often said that because the state of Qi was on the seacoast, the great vastness of the waters made for a greater sense of space in his imagination, and therefore he put forward the idea of the "Nine Great Provinces."[11] According to Zou Yan, the Nine Provinces of China were only 1/81 of All-under-Heaven, and China's real name was the "Spiritual Country of the Red Region." Beyond its borders lie eight other provinces, which, together with China, comprised one of the nine great continents. This continent was surrounded by an ocean, beyond which lie eight other great continents, each of which was surrounded by an ocean. Taken together, these nine continents comprise what was really All-under-Heaven.

Was there any basis to these speculations? Were they imagined by Zou Yan, or were they simply tall tales? We cannot be sure. It is likely that, from very early on, ancient China had all kinds of interactions with the outside world. A chapter on "Meetings of Feudal Lords with the King" (*Wang jian*) from the *Leftover Zhou Documents* (*Yi Zhou shu*) describes a gathering of foreign groups from the four directions.[12] *The Tale of King Mu, the Son of Heaven,* which was recorded on bamboo slips from the Western Jin dynasty (roughly the middle period of the Warring States era) and recovered from the tomb of King Xiang of Wei (d. 296 BCE) in Ji County, also records a story of King Mu of Zhou traveling to the western frontier to meet the Queen Mother of the West.[13] Could there be any

background to the stories that entailed actual meetings or interactions? Indeed, it is difficult to say. It is strange, however, that these imaginings did not change Chinese people's ideas about All-under-Heaven. From the pre-Qin period down through the Qin dynasty and Han dynasty, people in ancient China continued to believe that they occupied the center of All-under-Heaven and looked down from the commanding heights on the barbarians who lived in the four directions of the periphery.

By the Han dynasty, an important opportunity appeared for the situation to transform. From 138 BCE to 126 BCE, during the reign of Han Wudi, a man named Zhang Qian, under orders from the emperor, set out for the Western frontier (*Xi yu*), eventually returning to the Han Empire after thousands of miles of travels. He was said to have described for the Han court and emperor what he saw in Dawan (an area near contemporary Afghanistan), Kangju (an area covering contemporary Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and southern Kazakhstan), Dayueshi (an area from part the Pamir Mountains westward, now in contemporary Afghanistan), Daxia (now contemporary northwest India and Pakistan, near Kashmir), as well as what he had heard about Wusun and Anxi (now within the borders of contemporary Iran), Tiaozhi (near Syria), and Yuandu (India).[14]

This was a critical event in history. First, this journey expanded Chinese people's concrete knowledge of the world on the periphery. To the East, this knowledge now extended to Japan and Korea. To the north, it extended to Mongolia and Siberia. To the south, it extended to the South China Sea and to Southeast Asia. To the west, it extended to the area of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, India, and Iran. In other words, Chinese people during the Han dynasty already had an understanding of what today is the entirety of Asia and regions beyond. What they had known about prior to Zhang Qian's journey was limited to what is now the East Asia region, such as Japan and Korea. (The famous gold seal from the Han dynasty excavated in Kyushu in Japan shows contact between these two places from early times.)

Second, Zhang Qian's journey stimulated desire among Chinese people to explore and interact with the outside world. After Zhang Qian traveled to the Western frontier, other explorations took place, including Zhang Qian's journey to the southeast, journeys by Ban Chao and Ban Yong of the Eastern Han to promote exchange with Western regions, and Gan

Ying's travels to the Persian Gulf. Third, people in the Han dynasty and later were able to encounter and observe cultures and economies from different backgrounds. The opening of the Silk Road and, in the wake of these events, the arrival of Buddhism in China, all took place in this historical context. From this time forward, China's history was a part of world history, or, at the very least, Asia's history.

Unfortunately, however, for reasons we can't explain, these events did not result in real changes to deeply held beliefs in ancient China about All-under-Heaven. From the Han dynasty onward, even though Zhang Qian, Ban Chao, Gan Ying, and many others traveled to faraway places, China stayed at the center of All-under-Heaven in the imagination of Chinese people. At most, they contributed to a sense of a growing number of "barbarians" in all four directions. In this map of the world, however, the center was clear, while the edges were blurry and indistinct. This was Chinese people's map of the world: even though, taken together, Central Asian and west Asian countries like India, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, along with Japan, Southeast Asia, Korea, and the grasslands to the north all added up to vast territories that were much bigger than China, from the Han dynasty through the Tang dynasty, people in medieval China continued to believe that people in these places had no culture to speak of and, therefore, there was no other "world" (*shijie*) outside.

The Separation of Ideas from Knowledge: The Persistence of the Chinese View of All-under-Heaven

Why did people in ancient China cling to this idea of "All-under-Heaven" for so long? I believe it is because, aside from Buddhism, China never faced a serious challenge from another civilization. Chinese people continued to believe, then, that they were the center of All-under-Heaven; that Han civilization was the peak of human civilization; that the people on the periphery were barbaric; and that people who did not follow the moral system of the Han needed to be saved. Those who could be saved were considered Chinese (*Hua-Xia zhi min*), while those who could not be saved were to be cut off and kept away from the center.

Generally speaking, Chinese people were not inclined to use military means to bring All-under-Heaven under their control, but rather believed that their civilization could "pacify foreign lands" (*wei fu yi bang*) by what came to be known as "conciliating" or "cherishing men from afar" (*huai rou yuan ren*). At times, however, the Chinese were unable to control the situation, resulting in tensions that grew into outbursts of anger. In the Western Jin, for example, Jiang Tong (?–310) wrote an essay titled "Discourse on Moving the Rong" (*Xi Rong lun*), which called for separating the living space occupied by the Han from other nationalities,[15] but this argument for separating out the Chinese from foreigners did not seem to carry much influence at the time. We need to realize that, for people in ancient China, *Zhongguo* (China, or the Middle Kingdom) often referred to a civilizational space, not a modern state with clearly drawn borders. Chinese people believed, therefore, that all of the countries on their periphery occupied a lower rung on the hierarchy of civilizations and should study, pay tribute, and make obeisance to China. As in the *Illustrations of Tributaries* (*Zhi gong tu*) that was so frequently painted in ancient China, which depicts the peoples of the periphery making a tribute to the dynasty of the Central Lands, the Chinese emperor is always painted in a way so that he is very large, while the foreign envoys are distinctly petite. In various kinds of maps from ancient times, such as those from the Song dynasty, we have the *Map of Chinese and Barbarian Lands* (*Hua Yi tu*), which shows the lands of China and the barbarians of the four directions, and the *Map of Territories* (*Yu di tu*), which shows all of the places that can be reached by a wheeled cart, and also the *Geographical Map* (*Di li tu*), which shows the geography of the known world. If you look at these maps, you will see that they all place China in the center, and when they do include surrounding countries, they are so small that they look like little parasites on the body of the great state of China.

These images have no relationship to Chinese people's actual knowledge of the world. We know that after Zhang Qian of the Han dynasty, routes of exchange between continental Europe and Asia had already been opened, with groups of traders and Buddhist monks traveling great distances between East and West.[16] By the time of the Tang dynasty, China had even greater interactions with the outside world, with roughly 150,000 "foreigners from the north" (*Hu ren*) living in the capital, Chang'an, where

people recorded seeing "Kunlun slaves" (*Kunlun nu,* dark-skinned slaves), foreign dances and music, and fashionable foreign clothes. In later times, the territories of the Mongol Yuan dynasty seemed to extend on forever. At that time, a Persian named Jamal al-Din created a globe with vertical and horizontal lines that depicted "three continents and seven oceans."[17] By the time of the Yongle emperor (r. 1402–1424) in the early years of the Ming dynasty, the eunuch admiral Zheng He (1371–1433) led a fleet of ships across the oceans. Although scholars do not believe the theory put forward by Gavin Menzies, an English amateur historian, that Zheng He discovered the New World,[18] we do know that he went as far as the east coast of Africa, that the distance he covered in his travels was far greater than the entire territory of China, and that people in China already knew of many other civilizations.

It is interesting, however, that despite these events, the ancient Chinese ideas and imaginings of All-under-Heaven, "China," and the "Four Barbarians" never changed.

Buddhism Did Not Conquer China, but It Did Give China an Opportunity

Historians are not supposed to imagine replaying history, but they, too, are ordinary people, and sometimes they will imagine, "What if . . ." Of course, looking back on history of ancient China, they might also think that there was an opportunity for thoroughgoing change in the ancient Chinese idea of All-under-Heaven.

We know that there are internationally recognized territorial boundaries, that there are ideas about the sovereignty of the state, as well as ideas about the nation-state; all of these ideas have to do with early modern and modern times. In ancient China, the word *guojia* (now translated as "country" or "the state") was seen frequently. On the back of copper mirrors from the Han dynasty, we often see inscriptions that express wishes for "the state (*guojia*) and the people to be at peace and without trouble," and for "the northern barbarians to be wiped out and the lands of the four directions to submit and obey."[19] As we mentioned before, however, generally speaking the state in ancient China was a cultural concept that had

a clear center and blurry edges. "If he is of our kin, he is sure to have the same mind." This statement means that anyone who comes from the same culture can be part of the same state, even though the notions of the state or All-under-Heaven are not particularly clear. "If he is not my kin, he is sure to have a different mind."[20] Anyone who is culturally different from me is one of the Four Barbarians; he does not belong to the same state as me, and is not even part of All-under-Heaven; we refer to him as someone with whom "we cannot live under the same sky." The standard used for whether or not people identify with one another lies in whether or not their "mind is the same." According to the philosopher Lu Jiuyuan (1139–1192), "Within the four seas, minds are the same, and principle (*li*) is the same."[21] This statement expresses a type of universalism that argues that All-under-Heaven is one family; its standard of identification is culture. From this point of view, then, legally defined borders are not particularly important. According to the "Royal Regulations" chapter of the *Book of Rites,* which was completed in the early part of the Han dynasty, "the people of those five regions—the Middle Kingdom, the Rong, the Yi (and other wild tribes among them)—had all their various natures, which they could not be made to alter."[22] Any group of people who shares the same cultural identification can be included as vassals of China and as part of All-under-Heaven, because "under the whole Heaven, every spot is the sovereign's ground; to the borders of the land, every individual is the sovereign's minister." A group of people who, in terms of culture, are not compliant, are then considered to be from different lands with different customs, and, in the end, are not a part of All-under-Heaven. In ancient China, therefore, the state, civilization, and truth all overlap. We can say, then, that behind statements such as "All-under-Heaven are one family," "within the four seas, we have those who truly know us," and "all men within the four seas are brothers," there lies a China-centric particularism. On the other hand, however, it is also a universalist worldview, a worldview that argues that there is one center of civilization and that argues for a universal application of the idea of civilization throughout the world.

Despite the fact that, from the Han dynasty onward, a great deal of cultural materials, knowledge, and material goods entered China, and

despite the fact that a great deal of strange-looking foreigners also came to China, neither goods nor people presented a fundamental challenge to the civilization that was already established. The reasons for this are quite complicated, but to put it simply: on the one hand, although the territory of historical "China" underwent many significant changes, it remained by and large centered on the Nine Provinces occupied by the Han people, with the ocean to the east, the high plains and mountains to the west, ice-capped mountains and snowy plains to the north (along with the Xiongnu, Tukric peoples, Khitans, and Jurchens), and with lush forests to the south. It was quite easy under these circumstances for a closed view of All-under-Heaven to form. On the other hand, it is usually the case that, for a state such as China that possesses a long history of civilization, it is only when another highly developed civilization that can rival it appears that we begin to see fundamental influences on its tradition.

Buddhism, which began to arrive in China in the Eastern Han dynasty, brought a deep shock to Chinese culture by showing that there were at least two centers of civilization in the world. Three aspects of Buddhists teachings simply could not be accepted in Chinese civilization at that time. First, Buddhism taught that the power of religion could stand alongside the secular power of the emperor, occupying a primary position in the social hierarchy and social values. Believers need not pay respect to the emperor or their parents, but they absolutely had to respect the Three Jewels of Buddhism: the Buddha (enlightened ones), the *dharma* (Buddhist teachings), and the *sangha* (Buddhist community). Second, Buddhism taught that, in terms of the religion, the center of All-under-Heaven was India, not China. Third, Buddhism taught that the highest truths, the most superior people, and the most correct ways of living were to be found not in Confucian teaching but in Buddhism. Buddhism was a higher level of "civilization," or at least was another viable culture and civilization that had established itself in the world.[23]

How could a China centered around the Han people accept these beliefs? If these beliefs had been accepted, then China would have been a different place, not the China that exists now.

Buddhist Views of the World and the Buddhist Worldview

As is well known, Buddhism later was "Sinified," not only through the combination of "three teachings in one" (*san jiao he yi*) but also through other developments in which Buddhism yielded to mainstream Chinese ideology and Confucian teachings. We should remember, however, that Buddhism posed a challenge to the idea that China was the only civilization in All-under-Heaven. As Buddhism made its way to China, some Chinese people were forced to admit that Hua-Xia civilization was not the only civilization, and that China was not the center of All-under-Heaven. This was an opportunity to rediscover the world, especially because Buddhism's ideas about the nature of the world were fundamentally different from those previously held in China.

In the Buddhist system of knowledge, the world is not a piece of land with China located at its center. Rather, it is divided into four great continents, and China is one among these continents. According to legend, the center of the world is Mount Meru, which is surrounded by four great continents. China is located on Jambudvīpa, one of the continents of the Earthly Realm; there are also the continents of Pūrvavideha, Aparagodānīya, and Uttarakaru. According to such works as the *Sutra of the Great Conflagration* (*Da louyan jing*) and the *Precious Grove of the Dharma Garden* (*Fa yuan zhu lin*),[24] the sun, moon, and stars all revolved around Mount Meru, illuminating All-under-Heaven. Each of the four great realms has two central continents and five hundred lesser continents; the four great realms and the eight great continents are all occupied by humans, while the two thousand lesser continents may or may not be occupied by humans. Among these places, it is said that the *phala* (fruit of one's actions) is the most positive in the northern continent, where there is much happiness and little bitterness and the people live for a thousand years. In this place, however, no great leader like the Buddha would appear. The people of the southern continent are fierce and courageous, with sharp minds. Because they have karmic activity and are able to learn Sanskrit, Bodhisattvas will appear among them. The land of the eastern continent is vast, while in the western continent there are many oxen, goats, jewels, and gems. Buddhist documents also mention "Four Sons

of Heaven." The renowned French scholar Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) wrote an essay on these Four Sons of Heaven that discussed how, in the Buddhist imagination, there are eight princes in Jambudvīpa and four Sons of Heaven.[25] To the east is the Son of Heaven of Jin, who is the emperor of China; to the south is the Son of Heaven of Sindhu, who is the ruler of India; to the west is the ruler of Great Qin, which probably refers to the emperor of Rome; and to the northwest is the Son of Heaven of Yuezhi, who probably is the ruler of the Kushan Empire. At that time, followers of Buddhism in India believed that Jambudvīpa was "ruled by four kings. The land to the east was called Zhina (China) and was ruled by a man-king. The land to the west was called Persia, and was ruled by the treasure-king. The land to the south was India and was ruled by the elephant-king. The land to the north was called Xianyu and was ruled by the horse-king." These ideas probably made their way into China as well. The Tang-era *Supplement to the Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Xu gaoseng zhuan*), compiled by Daoxuan, mentioned these stories when discussing Xuanzang, the famed monk who traveled to India to collect Buddhist scriptures.[26]

It is important to remember that religions have their own particular perspectives. Because Buddhism made its way to China from India via Central Asia or South Asia, generally speaking, believers in Buddhism will to varying degrees oppose the worldview that takes China to be the only center. The reason for this is simple. If China is the only center of the world, then what of India, where Buddhism began? Since these religious truths emerged from India, then India should be the center. It is not possible to say this, however, in China, and thus one can only say that there are two centers (India and China) or three centers (India, the Western frontier [that is, inner Asia], and China), while others say that there are four centers (Persia, India, China, and Xianyun [that is, the territories north and west of China]). This imagined map of the world is quite different from the traditional Chinese view of "All-under-Heaven," which is centered on China. Where once it had been said, "The state cannot have two rulers, and the sky cannot have two suns," this imagined map of the world is quite different. For these reasons, the only maps of the world that we know of today from ancient China in which China is not taken to be

the only center of All-under-Heaven are found in three maps of the world from the Buddhist *Complete Records of the Buddha and the Patriarchs* (*Fo zu tongji*). Before the Song dynasty, it presented a vision of a diverse world that was extremely rare for its time. Its *Geographic Map of the Land of China to the East* (*Dong Zhendan dili tu*), *Map of the States of the Western Regions During the Han Dynasty* (*Han Xiyu zhu guo tu*), and *Map of the Five Indian States in the West* (*Xi tu wu Yin zhi tu*) depicted a world with three centers,[27] providing Chinese people with resources by which to transform their worldview.

We should pay attention to the fact that this worldview is quite different from China's idea of All-under-Heaven. In this worldview, China is no longer the center of All-under-Heaven. In this respect, it resembles the "Nine Provinces" described by Zou Yan. Much later, these discussions of four realms and Nine Provinces would indeed become a resource through which Chinese people would accept new imagined maps of the world. It is unfortunate, however, that although Buddhism brought these new resources for matching the world and that, following these events, Arabs during the Yuan dynasty brought maps of the world with an even larger vision, which led Chinese people's knowledge of neighboring lands to exceed by a great measure those ancient ideas about the "Five Zones" and "Nine Provinces" or so-called divisions between Chinese and barbarians,[28] these challenges did not bring about a fundamental change in Chinese people's views of the world. It was only several hundred years later that this change took place—during the globalized sixteenth century, when Westerners arrived in China.[29] It was only in the twelfth year of the reign of the Wanli emperor (1584), when Matteo Ricci's *Map of Mountains and Seas* appeared in Guangdong, that Chinese people finally got a glimpse of "the world." After this, a symbol that foreshadowed a collapse in Chinese thought appeared.

After Matteo Ricci's *Complete Map of the World:* The Transformation of China's View of All-under-Heaven

Let us return to the *Map of the Myriad Countries of the World* (*Kunyu wanguo quantu*) mentioned at the beginning of the chapter.

In 1584, the twelfth year of the reign of the Wanli emperor, the Italian missionary Matteo Ricci arrived in the city of Zhaoqing in Guangdong province. With the support of the city's prefect, Wang Pan (*jinshi* 1565), Matteo Ricci engraved and printed the *Complete Map of the World* (*Shanhai yudi quantu*), the first Western-style map of the world to be printed in China; this map was the predecessor to the *Map of the Myriad Countries of the World,* which was printed slightly later, in about 1602.[30]

From the latter half of the sixteenth century through the seventeenth century, all kinds of maps that had been based on this map from 1584 were produced, twelve of which survive today. At that time, even Matteo Ricci was concerned that if the emperor saw how small China was on this map, he would think it showed disdain for Chinese people and would take offense. (Indeed, many prominent conservatives attacked this view of the world. They argued that the maps deliberately exaggerated the size of foreign lands and offered an ungainly portrayal of China. Some officials even argued that the map combined the versions of the world imagined by the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* and by Zou Yan, resulting in nothing more than an absurd product rifled from ancient Chinese texts that "treated China's immense lands as one continent, full of absurdities that fall apart under the slightest examination."[31]) The worldview represented by the map was accepted by many key figures, however, including intellectuals such as Li Zhi (1507–1602), Fang Yizhi (1611–1671), Xie Zhaozhe (1567–1624), Li Zhizao (1565–1630), and Xu Guangqi (1562–1633). More important, the Wanli emperor himself was pleased with the map. Although he did not understand the significance of a change in the notion of All-under-Heaven, this emperor, who would later be buried in the ostentatious Ding Ling tomb outside Beijing, ordered the court eunuchs to have *Map of the Myriad Countries of the World* reproduced on the panels of a large screen. In this way, the map gained legitimacy; with official approval, it was seen as rational, and thus won the approval of the educated class.[32]

In fact, Matteo Ricci's map was crafted with certain goals in mind. He hoped to make China abandon its ideas about the superiority of Chinese culture and accept Catholicism. He said, "Once they see that their own country is much smaller by comparison then other countries, the barriers can be lowered a bit, and they will be willing to develop relationships with other countries."[33] Indeed, ancient China's relationships with

other countries were always conducted in terms of "pilgrimage," "tribute," and "presentation" to the superior Chinese ruler, or in terms of China "pacifying foreigners," "pacifying men from afar," "nurturing barbarians," or "managing foreigners," none of which had much of a sense of equality or diversity. During the Sui dynasty, the Japanese ruler wrote "a letter to the Son of Heaven in the place where the sun sets, from the Son of Heaven in the place where the sun rises," which managed to offend Chinese people.[34] Much later, the English embassy to the Qianlong emperor, led by George Macartney (1737–1806), did not result in more open relations because of all the problems surrounding hierarchy and ritual that arose during the meeting.[35] Nonetheless, in terms of intellectual history, this map resulted in significant changes, because it told people in China the following:

1. The world in which humans lived was round, not flat.
2. The world was extremely large, and China occupied only one-tenth of Asia. Moreover, Asia occupied only one-fifth of the world, and thus China was not a massive country with limitless borders.
3. Ideas about "All-under-Heaven," "China," and the "Four Barbarians" handed down from ancient China were incorrect. China was not necessarily the center of the world, and the Four Barbarians might also come from civilized countries. In fact, in the eyes of these so-called barbarians, China may in fact be one of the "Four Barbarians."
4. Chinese people should accept the idea that "from the eastern sea to the western sea, minds and reason are the same." So, too, should they recognize that civilizations throughout the world are equal and have equal validity, and that there are in fact some universal truths that transcend the boundaries of the nation, the state, and their territories.

From All-under-Heaven (*Tianxia*) to the Myriad States (*Wanguo*)

If these ideas gained acceptance, then, fundamental assumptions that held that the Chinese Empire was the center of All-under-Heaven and that

China was superior to the Four Barbarians would be completely destroyed. For people in earlier times, however, these fundamental assumptions, with their long history and deep cultural background, were of paramount importance and could not be held up to serious scrutiny. In the world of traditional thought, they were a part of the foundation of Chinese civilization—if they were removed, wouldn't the Heavens collapse and the Earth be rent?

This so-called collapse extended over a relatively long period of time, across the centuries spanned by the Ming dynasty and Qing dynasty. Nonetheless, we see the fissures it created in the traditional Chinese view of the world. This is true not only for educated gentry elites but also for ordinary educated people, as seen in works such as the *Encyclopedia of Maps and Books* (*Tu shu bian,* 1613) by Zhang Huang, *Gleanings of the Terrestrial Landscape* (*Fangyu sheng lüe,* 1610) by Cheng Bai'er, *Draft for Investigating Things and Extending Knowledge* (*Gezhi cao*) by Xiong Mingyu (b. 1579), and *Woof of the Earth* (*Di wei,* 1624) by Xiong Renlin, all of which accepted new ideas about "the world" (*shijie*). These traces of textual evidence demonstrate that these maps and their worldviews had already begun to break apart this knowledge, thought, and faith of ancient China. Although real change would only become evident in the late Qing dynasty, and although the period of later times is also quite complicated,[36] from the late Ming onward, changes in the imagined map of the world foreshadowed the fact that China would be forced to accept the bitter truth that China was no longer the center of the world, and that China's view of the world would be forced to cross the distance from "All-under-Heaven" to the "myriad states."[37]