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Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Interpretations and evaluations of China's imperial tradition in recent global historiography. A discourse analysis of historiography on the Sinocentric tributary system of the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1912 CE)“

verfasst von / submitted by

Sebestyen Hompot

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Abstract

The present thesis investigates the current mainland Chinese academic discourse on the early modern (Ming-Qing dynasties, 1368-1912 CE) Sinocentric tributary system of Asia. The thesis is based on the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and focuses on the identification of ‘ideology’, ‘power’, ‘intertextuality’ and ‘interdiscursivity’ in the discourse, situating it in the broader mainland Chinese discourse on global history. The thesis argues that the discourse on the tributary system is still considerably influenced by the modern-era tradition of seeing the nation-state as the primary unit of world/global historical analysis. Furthermore, it is characterized by Eurocentrism at the level of teleological approaches and conceptual frameworks, Sinocentrism at the level of narratives and is primarily based on comparative evaluations of the Sinocentric tributary system vis-à-vis the Eurocentric Westphalian and colonial orders. The thesis also argues that at the same time due to changing regional and global power relations and China’s self-perception as a reemerging global power, the discourse also increasingly concerns the evaluation of the tributary order as potentially having referential value for the construction of the present and future Sinocentric regional order, increasingly revolving around its supposed pacifism and stability in the early modern period.

Keywords: tributary system, imperial China, global history

Abstrakt

Die vorliegende Thesis untersucht den aktuellen akademischen Diskurs in Festlandchina über das sinozentrische Tributsystem Asiens in der Frühen Neuzeit (Ming-Qing-Dynastien, 1368-1912 u. Z.). Die Dissertation basiert auf dem Diskurs-Historischen Ansatz (DHA) der Kritischen Diskursanalyse (CDA) und konzentriert sich auf die Identifizierung von Ideologie, Macht, Intertextualität und Interdiskursivität im Diskurs. Die Arbeit versucht den Diskurs über das Tributsystem im weiteren festlandchinesischen Diskurs über Globalgeschichte zu positionieren. Die Thesis argumentiert, dass der Diskurs über das Tributsystem maßgeblich von der modernen Tradition beeinflusst wird, den Nationalstaat als primäre Einheit der welt-/globalgeschichtlichen Analyse zu betrachten. Darüber hinaus zeichnet es sich durch Eurozentrismus auf der Ebene teleologischer Ansätze und konzeptioneller Rahmenbedingungen, Sinozentrismus auf der Ebene der Narrativen aus und basiert in erster Linie auf vergleichenden Bewertungen des sinozentrischen Tributsystems gegenüber den eurozentrischen westfälischen und kolonialen Ordnungen. In der Thesis wird auch argumentiert, dass gleichzeitig aufgrund der sich ändernden regionalen und globalen Machtverhältnisse und Chinas Selbstwahrnehmung als wieder aufkommende Weltmacht, der Diskurs zunehmend auch die Einschätzung des Tributsystems als potenziell referentiell wertvoll für die Konstruktion der gegenwärtigen und zukünftigen regionalen Ordnung betrifft und dreht zunehmend über den vermeintlichen Pazifismus und Stabilität des Systems während der frühen Neuzeit.

Schlüsselwörter: Tributsystem, imperiales China, Globalgeschichte

抽象

本论文的题目是当前中国大陆学界关于明清时代（公元 1368-1912 年）以中国为中心的亚洲朝贡体系的学术话语。本论文以批评性话语分析（Critical Discourse Analysis, CDA）的话语-历史方法（Discourse-Historical Approach, DHA）为基础，侧重于话语中“意识形态”（ideology），“权力”（power），“互文性”（intertextuality）和“话语间性”（interdiscursivity）的识别，并将其置于中国大陆学界关于世界/全球历史的学术话语的视野中。论文认为，关于朝贡体系的学术话语仍然受到现代中国的传统历史观的影响，即将民族国家视为世界/全球历史分析的主要单位。此外，它的特点包括在目的论方法和概念框架层面上的欧洲中心主义，在叙事层面上的中国中心主义，并且主要基于对朝贡体系与欧洲中心的威斯特伐利亚和殖民地秩序的比较评价。论文还认为，同时由于地区和全球权力关系的变化以及中国作为一个重新崛起的全球大国的自我认知，话语也越来越多地将朝贡体系的评价视为可能对现在和未来的，以中国为中心的东亚地区秩序有借鉴意义，而且越来越围绕其在明清时代所谓的和平主义和稳定性。

关键词：朝贡体系，明清时代中国，全球史

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research question and structure

According to the most common understanding of the term, imperial China's 'tributary system' refers to the practice of pre-modern Chinese rulers to receive tribute and pledge of loyalty from foreign rulers in exchange for gifts and the investiture of feudal titles (in practical terms, recognition of their legitimacy). The term has been debated and criticized since its coining by U.S. American historian John King Fairbank (1907-1991) in the 1940s. Various interpretations of its meaning, from seeing it merely as a set of symbolic rituals to conceptualizing it as the historical regional order of East Asia have emerged. Critics have challenged its analytical usefulness, pointing out that tributary exchanges did not constitute a system and were not imperial China's main way of interacting with the outside world.

While the diversity of interpretations and criticism have to be considered, the term 'tributary system' and its Chinese translations *chaogong tixi* 朝贡体系 or *chaogong zhidu* 朝贡制度 are clearly an important part of the discourse on China's imperial past both in and outside China. Based on the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as described by Ruth Wodak, Martin Reisigl and others, the present thesis poses the research question "what are the underlying 'ideologies' and 'power relations' of the current mainland Chinese academic discourse on the early modern (Ming-Qing, 1368-1912 CE) Sinocentric tributary system?"

The thesis also aims at situating the discourse in the broader discourse on global history in mainland China. As several analysts have observed (see section 3.1.), global historiography in China is Eurocentric at the level of conceptual frameworks and teleological approaches and Sinocentric at the level of actual narratives, taking the 'global' primarily as the context for the development of nation-states, without challenging the 'nation' as the principal unit of historical analysis. These analysts have also observed the assignment of a didactic function to history and the persistence of the modern-era tradition of seeing 'world' or 'global history' primarily as a tool for helping China to follow the 'successes' of the West and Japan in its quest for becoming a major power.

In the present thesis, I will demonstrate that these observations hold true in many ways for the current discourse on the tributary system, since the explicit or implicit comparison of the tributary system with the Westphalian-colonial order is a defining motive of the discourse. Meanwhile, I also wish to emphasize that Chinese historiography on the tributary system is

increasingly written from a position of power, in that the interest to project China's 'peaceful rise' rhetoric and counter the notions of a 'China threat' is increasingly noticeable as well. Furthermore, regarding Tibet, Xinjiang and other regions which became part of China during the earlier half of the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) but engaged in tributary relations with China similarly to other foreign political entities during the Ming, they are usually ignored in general discussions of the Ming-Qing tributary system. In articles focusing on these regions the retro-projection of present-day national borders and supposed cultural and political unity (or a teleology based on the progress towards this unity) is noticeable.

The focus of the present thesis is the academic discourse on the tributary system in mainland China (hence excluding Hong Kong and Macau). The core material used for the thesis includes ca. 30 Chinese-language articles published in mainland Chinese academic journals on the tributary system in the last 20 years, available on the website of the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI).¹ Furthermore, since the discourse in China is to a certain extent interconnected with the discourse on the tributary system in other countries, several books and articles on the topic published in English and outside China were consulted as well. Moreover, analytical works of global historiography in China (written by both Chinese and non-Chinese authors, mostly in English), the English translation of parts of Wang Hui's major work on the emergence of modern Chinese thought (incl. modern historiography) and theoretical works of global history (Conrad, A. G. Frank, Howe, etc.) are also among the literature consulted for the thesis (see Bibliography).

The timeframe of the thesis includes the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties of China. Regarding periodization, it has to be pointed out that Chinese authors rarely use the Eurocentric concepts of 'medieval' or 'early modern' and periodization in Chinese-language works is usually based on Chinese dynasties instead (including terms such as 'early Ming' and 'Late Qing'). Since in many cases the political, social and economic processes discussed in the thesis were primarily influenced by dynastic changes in China, the Chinese and Eurocentric periodizations are both used throughout the thesis (see the list of Chinese dynasties and political regimes in Appendix 1).

Regarding spatialization, the term 'East Asia' which is commonly used in Chinese as well (*Dongya* 东亚), will have two partly overlapping meanings based on its common usages in current Chinese discourse. Firstly, 'East Asia' in a primarily modern context is commonly understood as a geopolitical region containing China and Taiwan, Japan and the Koreas.

¹ <https://www.cnki.net/> (Accessed on 2019-07-29).

Secondly, in a primarily pre-modern context, ‘East Asia’ can refer to the Confucian states of Eastern Asia which in the early modern (Ming-Qing) period included the five states of China, Korea, Japan, Ryukyu² and Vietnam. Since the present thesis focuses on the early modern (Ming-Qing) period, ‘East Asia’ will be mostly used in this sense while ‘Southeast Asia’ will mostly refer to non-Confucian Southeastern Asia (hence excluding Vietnam). It also has to be added, that similarly to other geo-cultural/geopolitical regions, the conceptualization of ‘East Asia’ has its critics. As discussed by Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, prominent and critical Chinese historian Wang Hui 汪晖 (1959-) has described ‘East Asia’ as a European invention to strengthen Europe’s own identity as a distinct world region. While presenting a criticism of Wang Hui’s thesis, Weigelin-Schwiedrzik agrees that the interpretations of Confucian texts varied greatly by regions and historical eras, and based on this the criticism of a supposed uniformity of Confucianism has argumentative strength. Meanwhile, she also argues that a common discourse field connecting the literati of pre-modern East Asian states, based on the knowledge of the Chinese script and on taking the Confucian texts as sources of reference for state-building and social philosophy supports the conceptualization of a Confucian East Asian cultural sphere.³

For the sake of simplicity, ‘Inner Asia’ will be used throughout the thesis as a collective term including the historical regions of Manchuria, Mongolia and Tibet, as well as Xinjiang (traditionally divided into Uyghur-majority East Turkestan and Mongolic-majority Dzungaria), without implying or advocating any kind of long-standing cultural or political unity in the history of this area. ‘Inner Asia’ contains various indigenous ethnic groups that are not part of Confucian ‘East Asia’ culturally (mostly following Tibetan Buddhism and Islam), but have had a long and complicated history of trade, border conflicts, military conquests and assimilation with China. Nevertheless, prior to the expansion of the Qing dynasty in the 17-18th century, none of them was continuously under the rule of Chinese dynasties. Apart from Outer Manchuria (ceded to Russia in the second half of the 19th century) and the independent country of Mongolia⁴, these territories are today part of China and through the retro-projection of present-day national borders into the past they are treated by many Chinese authors as if they have always been so. Inner Asian political entities engaged in tributary relations with the Ming

² Today the Okinawa Prefecture of Japan (incorporated in 1879).

³ Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, “Ist Ostasien eine europäische Erfindung? Anmerkungen zu einem Artikel von Wang Hui [Is East Asia a European invention? Remarks on an article by Wang Hui],” in *Ostasien im 20. Jahrhundert. Geschichte und Gesellschaft [East Asia in the 20th century. History and society]*, ed. Sepp Linhart and Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik (Vienna: Promedia, 2007), 9–21.

⁴ ‘Outer Mongolia’ became independent from China in 1924 while ‘Inner Mongolia’ is today an autonomous region of the People’s Republic of China.

dynasty as independent actors, but as it will be demonstrated, for present-day considerations tributary exchanges with them are usually portrayed differently from the exchanges with the ‘foreign countries’ of East and Southeast Asia.

While ‘East Asia’, ‘Southeast Asia’ and ‘Inner Asia’ can be considered analytically useful categories when cultural and political factors are in consideration, they are much less useful when the focus is on economic history. Throughout history, culture and politics played a much smaller role in trade than it has often been assumed⁵ and trans-ecological frontiers were no less important than trans-civilizational ones.⁶ ‘Eastern Asia’ will therefore be frequently used, especially when discussing economic processes, to overcome the primarily culturally and politically based divisions between East, Southeast and Inner Asia. ‘Eastern Asia’ will also be used several times in a political sense, referring to the geographical range of China’s regular tributary exchanges.⁷

Spatial terms based on new research trends in global history will be used as well. These include the ‘Indo-Pacific maritime space’ referring to the Afro-Eurasian littoral zone between East Africa and Northeast China (interconnected via littoral trade since antiquity), as well as ‘Central Eurasia’ referring to the steppe region between Eastern Europe and Northern China, which has played a crucial role in migration, trans-ecological exchange and transfer of technology in the last 5000 years.⁸

A few notes have to be added on the usage of Chinese characters in the thesis as well. In the main body of the text, Chinese characters for Chinese terms, personal names and pre-modern titles will be added upon their first appearance. Due to considerations of space, Chinese characters for modern titles will not be used in the main body of the text, these can be found in the footnotes (upon their first appearance) and in the bibliography. For the same reason,

⁵ On the interconnection of China/East Asia with other regions see Chapter 2 “The Global Trade Carousel 1400-1800” in Andre Gunder Frank, *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 52–130.

⁶ David Christian, “Silk Roads or Steppe Roads? The Silk Roads in World History,” *Journal of World History* 11, no. 1 (2000): 1–26.

⁷ Ming and Qing China’s tributaries included foreign rulers from Central and South Asia and at times (esp. during the Zheng He missions of the early 15th century) from the Middle East and East Africa as well. During the Qing, European powers (although mostly from their Southeast Asian colonies) sent tribute missions to China as well. Nevertheless, most of the regular Ming and Qing-era tributaries were located in East, Southeast and Inner Asia (see Appendix 3).

⁸ Dietmar Rothermund and Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, *Der indische Ozean: Das afro-asiatische Mittelmeer als Kultur- und Wirtschaftsraum [The Indian Ocean: The Afro-Asian Mediterranean as Cultural and Economic Space]*, 1., Aufl. edition (Wien: Promedia, 2004); Angela Schottenhammer, “The ‘China Seas’ in World History: A General Outline of the Role of Chinese and East Asian Maritime Space from Its Origins to c. 1800,” *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* 1, no. 2 (December 1, 2012): 63–86, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.imic.2012.11.002>; Christian, “Silk Roads or Steppe Roads?”; Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present*, Reprint edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univers. Press, 2011).;

original quotations from Chinese sources accompanying their English translations, included either in square brackets in the main body (as for shorter ones) or in the footnotes (as for longer ones), will not be transliterated into *Pinyin* Romanization.

Regarding the structure of the thesis, chapter 1 (“Introduction”) is divided into two sections, the present section introducing the main research question (see paragraph 2), notes on periodization and spatialization throughout the thesis, as well as its structure. The second section of the first chapter (“1.2 The conceptualization of the tributary system and its critics”) is intended to be an introductory chapter especially for those with a background outside of Sinology, providing an overview on the history of the conceptualization of the tributary system, the various approaches and interpretations of authors advocating its conceptualization, as well as the criticism of authors arguing against the analytical usefulness of its conceptualization. Chapter 2 (“Theory”) will discuss the theory of discourse in general, how discourse relates to the question of historical truth, and what perspective Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides in the investigation of historical truth.

In chapter 3 (“Methodology and operationalization”) it will be presented how the Discourse-Historical Approach of CDA will be applied to the topic of the present thesis. Analytical insights of other scholars into current mainland Chinese global historiography will also be discussed here, in connection with the investigation of the DHA concepts ‘ideology’ and ‘power’ in historiographical discourse. This will be followed by chapter 4 (“State of the Art”) which will summarize recent academic works on the discourse on the tributary system. The main body of the thesis is chapter 5 (“The discourse on the tributary system”) which will be divided into three main sections based on what appear to be the main approaches while discussing the tributary system (examining its cultural roots, its socio-economic aspects and discussing it as a regional political order). Each of these sections will be further divided into sub-sections based on what appear to be the most frequently occurring topics within the discourse. Chapter 6 provides the Conclusion of the thesis.

1.2 The conceptualization of the tributary system and its critics

In pre-modern East Asian documents, the Classical Chinese word *gong* 贡 [tribute] and the expression *jin gong* 进贡 [to present tribute] are frequently used. However, ‘tribute/tributary system’ as a term did not exist in pre-modern Asia. It was first used by U.S. American Sinologist and historian John King Fairbank (1907-1991) and Chinese-born, U.S.-based Sinologist and bibliographer Têng Ssu-yü 邓嗣禹 (1906-1988) in their 1941 article *On the Ch'ing Tributary*

System.⁹ The publication of *The Chinese World Order. Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (edited by J. K. Fairbank) in 1968 further contributed to the popularization of the term.¹⁰ It was subsequently translated into Chinese as *chaogong tixi* 朝贡体系 or *chaogong zhidu* 朝贡制度 and became widely used by Chinese scholars as well.

According to Fairbank,

Non-Chinese rulers participated in the Chinese world order by observing the appropriate forms and ceremonies (*li*) in their contact with the Son of Heaven. Taken together, these practices constituted the tribute system.¹¹

As Fairbank also notes earlier in the same work, the “appropriate forms and ceremonies”, (in Classical Chinese *li* 礼) based on Confucian texts were the defining elements of pre-modern Chinese social interaction. Thus, according to Fairbank, tributary exchange with foreigners was in many ways an extension of social rituals practiced within China to uphold the traditional social order based on hierarchical relationships. According to Fairbank, the tributary system of the Qing period (1644-1912) involved the following practices:

- foreign rulers were granted a patent of appointment and an official seal for use in correspondence and a noble rank in Qing hierarchy,
- in turn they were expected to date their communications by the Qing calendar (the reigning years of the Qing emperor), to present various tribute memorials on statutory occasions, to present a symbolic tribute of local products (*fangwu* 方物), to perform the appropriate ceremonies, most notably the *san gui jiu kou* 三跪九叩 [kneeling three times, kowtowing nine times]
- after the appropriate performance of the ceremonies, they also received imperial gifts in return and were granted certain privileges of trade at the frontier and in the capital¹²

While there were changes in the rites to be performed by tributaries and the degree to which Chinese rulers legalized trade with foreigners, the pattern of tribute and pledge of loyalty/subordination by foreigners in return for the investiture of feudal titles and the conferment of gifts and trading rights by Chinese rulers remained essentially the same during

⁹ J. K. Fairbank and S. Y. Têng, “On The Ch’ing Tributary System,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 6, no. 2 (1941): 135–246, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2718006>.

¹⁰ John King Fairbank, *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, 2nd prtg edition (Harvard Univ. Press, 1968).

¹¹ Fairbank, 10.

¹² Fairbank, 10.

the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing periods.¹³ Regarding earlier periods, Fairbank and subsequent researchers of the topic argue that the tributary system had its earliest origins in the pre-imperial period (prior to 221 BCE) as the tributary exchange between the Zhou monarch and the *zhuhou* 诸侯 [noblemen subordinate to the Zhou monarch], as attested in sources such as the *Shijing* 诗经 [Classic of Poetry] and the *Shangshu* 尚书 [Book of Documents]. According to the most common narrative, from the Qin-Han¹⁴ (221 BCE – 220 CE) until the Song-Yuan period (960-1368 CE) tributary exchanges became increasingly institutionalized and involved an increasing number of foreign countries. Detailed regulation and extensive records of tribute exchanges are usually assigned to the Ming and Qing periods, therefore those advocating the conceptualization of a *system* of tributary exchanges usually base their claims on the way these exchanges were carried out under these two dynasties.¹⁵

Following the early works of Fairbank and others, mostly focusing on conceptualizing the tributary system with regard to pre-modern China's culture and social relations, the economic aspects of the system started to receive increasing attention in the late 20th century. Japanese economic historian Hamashita Takeshi 浜下武志 (1943-) popularized the term 'tribute trade system', referring to the system of legal commercial trade facilitated by and parallel to the official exchange of tributes and also dependent on the global flow of silver. Hamashita's works

¹³ Qing-era changes in the tributary regulations rather concerned its formalities and were intended for strengthening the legitimacy of the new dynasty. Upon coming to power the Qing issued their new calendar, new patents of appointment, certificates for legal trade (*kanhe* 勘合) and official seals. The Qing replaced the Ming-era ceremony of *wu bai san kou* 五拜三叩 [bowing five times, kowtowing three times] with the above-mentioned *san gui jiu kou*. The new dynasty demanded foreign rulers to return all Ming-era patents, certificates and seals and to confirm to the new calendar and ceremonial regulations, seeing any kind of hesitation to do so as a challenge to its own legitimacy, on this see Li Yunquan 李云泉, "Zailun Qingdai chaogong tizhi 再论清代朝贡体制 [Rethinking the Qing dynasty tributary system]," *Shandong Shifan Daxue Xuebao (Renwen Shehuikexue Ban)* [Journal of Shandong Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences)] 56, no. 5 (2011): 93–100; Lü Zhengang 吕振纲, "Cong chaogong wenshu kan Qingdai de chaogong tixi - Jian ping He Xinhua 'Qingdai chaogong wenshu yanjiu' 从朝贡文书看清代的朝贡体系——兼评何新华《清代朝贡文书研究》 [Seeing the Qing tributary system through tributary documents - Review of He Xinhua's 'Research on Qing-era tributary documents'," *Shixue Lilun Yanjiu* [Historiography Quarterly] 2017, no. 1 (2017): 143–47.

¹⁴ Note that 'Han' 汉 has two different but interrelated meanings. The Han dynasty 汉朝 (206 BCE – 220 CE) was China's first long-reigning imperial dynasty following the short reign of the founding dynasty of the Chinese empire, the Qin 秦朝 (221-206 BCE). China's majority ethnic group, the 'Han ethnicity' (*hanzu* 汉族), derives its name from the Han dynasty. Based on common practice in English-language literature, 'Han (Chinese)' will refer to the Han ethnicity (under any dynasty). 'China proper' will be used to refer to the Han-majority parts of China.

¹⁵ See e.g. Yu Changsen 喻常森, "Shilun chaogong zhidu de yanbian 试论朝贡制度的演变 [On the evolution of the tributary system]," *Nanyang Wenti Yanjiu* [Southeast Asian Affairs] 2000, no. 1 (2000): 55–65; Wang Qing 王青, "Zhongguo chuantong duiwai guanxi de liang zhong moshi - Liyi renzhi yu tixi jiegou fenxi 中国传统对外关系的两种模式 - 利益认知与体系结构分析 [The two patterns of China's traditional foreign relations - Interest perception and system structure analysis]" (PhD, Tsinghua University, 2007).

underline the importance of the silver-based economy for East Asia¹⁶, theorized at the global level by André G. Frank and Kenneth Pomeranz.¹⁷

In the last decades, the conceptualization of the tributary system as a political order of early modern East Asia has received significant attention from scholars with a background in political science and international relations. One of the most frequently cited English-language works is *East Asia Before the West. Five Hundred Years of Trade and Tribute* (2012) by U.S. American political scientist David C. Kang.¹⁸ The work is primarily based on a constructivist approach focusing on "hierarchy, status, and hegemony" in the Early Modern East Asian context, citing authors such as Richard Ned Lebow and William Wohlforth as theoretical influences.¹⁹

Kang refutes a merely functionalist or symbolic view of the tributary system, including its dismissal as 'a cloak for trade' (a phrase used already by Fairbank while discussing the potential interpretations of the tributary system).²⁰ Throughout the book, Kang presents a comparative analysis of early modern East Asia's tributary order and early modern Europe's emerging Westphalian order. Kang's main argument is that the Sinocentric tributary system was unique to East Asia and while it was based on formal inequality, it also contributed to long-term stability in the region. He bases his arguments on the small number of military conflicts among the five East Asian states throughout the early modern era, especially in comparison with Europe in the same period.²¹ He also argues that the introduction of the Westphalian system based on formal equality and national sovereignty, as well as the emergence of East Asian nationalisms based on Western models were the main reasons behind the disruption of the regional order in the late 19th century and the subsequent series of major military conflicts culminating in World War II (1937-45 in East Asia). In Kang's view, the conceptualization of the tributary system as a uniquely East Asian early modern regional order is the key to understand the long-term stability of the region in the early modern period.²²

¹⁶ A selection of his translated essays can be found in Takeshi Hamashita, *China, East Asia and the Global Economy*, 1 edition (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2008).

¹⁷ Frank, *ReORIENT*; Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Revised edition (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁸ David C. Kang, *East Asia Before the West - Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 17..

¹⁹ Kang, 17; Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations*, 1 edition (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24, no. 1 (1999): 5–41.

²⁰ Kang, *East Asia Before the West*, 11.

²¹ Kang examines the ca. five centuries from the establishment of the Ming dynasty (1368) until the dissolution of the tributary system by the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. He identifies the Imjin War between Japan and Korea (also involving China) of 1592-1598 and the two Sino-Vietnamese (Ming-Ho 1407-27, Qing-Tay Son 1788-89) conflicts as the only armed conflicts between East Asian states in the period.

²² Kang, *East Asia Before the West*.

Another frequently cited author from the U.S. political science scene is Yuan-kang Wang. In “Explaining the Tribute System: Power, Confucianism, and War in Medieval East Asia” Y. Wang takes a structural realist approach based on the works of Kenneth N. Waltz.²³ Y. Wang mitigates the significance of normative political ‘orders’ (whether tributary or Westphalian) and emphasizes the importance of underlying power realities instead. He points out that notions of tributary hierarchy among rulers, based on Confucian notions of harmony through hierarchy, was a distinct and significant cultural phenomenon of East Asia, but the tributary system was not always Sinocentric even at the level of rhetoric. He bases his arguments on primary sources from the Song period (960-1279) during which East Asia was characterized either by a bipolar regional order (during the Khitan Liao dynasty [916-1125] in the north and the Northern Song in the south [960-1127]) and by the hegemony of the Jurchen Jin dynasty (1115-1234) during the Southern Song period (1127-1279). Rhetoric in Song-era tributary correspondences among the Song, the northern nomad dynasties and other states in the region (Korea, Xi Xia 西夏, Dali 大理, etc.) shows a significant degree of divergence based on frequently changing power relations. As Y. Wang points out, under the overwhelming military power of the Jin dynasty, the Han Chinese Song emperors regularly used Confucian terms in tributary documents to acknowledge their subordinate position to the Jurchen Jin emperors, challenging the notion of a normatively Sinocentric tributary system.²⁴

While the term ‘tributary system’ and its Chinese translations are widely used among scholars today, it also has to be pointed out that the concept has also received a considerable amount of criticism. Most of its critics argue against its analytical usefulness, pointing out that while tributary exchanges occurred in pre-modern Eastern Asia, they did not constitute a *system* and were not the most important way of conducting foreign relations. In two critical articles on the “illusiveness” (*xuhuanxing* 虚幻性) of the ‘tributary system’ published in 2005, historian Zhuang Guotu 庄国土 argues that the tributary system was more a ‘one-sided wishful thinking’ (*yixiang qingyuan* 一厢情愿) of Chinese elites than the reality of pre-modern Eastern Asia’s interstate relations. Zhuang points out that scholarship on the tributary system almost exclusively relies on Chinese primary sources and therefore reproduces a rhetoric based on “unfunded egoism” (*xujiao xinli* 虚骄心理) and “self-consolation” (*ziwo anwei* 自我安慰) instead of focusing on real power and trade relations in pre-modern Eastern Asia. In one of his

²³ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979).

²⁴ Yuan-kang Wang, “Explaining the Tribute System: Power, Confucianism, and War in Medieval East Asia,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 13, no. 2 (August 2013): 207–32, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S159824080000391X>.

articles, Zhuang analyzes Dutch translations of tributary letters issued by the Qing court and points out how the Dutch interpreted tributary missions as being based on equality and primarily serving economic purposes.²⁵

In “Rethinking the ‘Tribute System’: Broadening the Conceptual Horizon of Historical East Asian Politics” (2009) political scientist Zhang Feng 张锋 advocates paying less attention to the tributary system, since in his opinion

Considered as a whole, the model’s biggest problem is that of being ‘a static framework which lacks any sense of change and reflects mainly the world order the Chinese court preferred to perceive’.²⁶

According to Zhang Feng, even if the conceptualization of the tributary system can be defended from an institutionalist point of view, it was only one institution of pre-modern Eastern Asia and not necessarily the most significant. Zhang also argues that the tributary system was primarily a Chinese imperial discourse, its notions not being shared by neighboring countries which all had their self-centered views of the world. Concerning further research on the topic, he suggests that

From a political-science perspective, we need more enduring concepts about international politics than the supposedly omnipotent ‘tribute system’. [...] These concepts, whether time-honoured ones such as power, security and culture, or entirely new ones not yet developed, should be relevant to the understanding of both tributary and non-tributary politics between China and its neighbours, and able to cross the analytical divide created by the tribute system paradigm.²⁷

In “The Tenacious Tributary System” historian Peter C. Perdue presents a harsh criticism of the “current myth of the tributary system [which] ignores historical reality and misleads us about China’s true position in East Asia and the world.”²⁸ According to his assessment,

²⁵ Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, “Lüelun chaogong zhidu de xuhuan: Yi gudai Zhongguo yu Dongnanya de chaogong guanxi wei li 略论朝贡制度的虚幻: 以古代中国与东南亚的朝贡关系为例 [On the illusiveness of the tributary system: The case of tributary relations between pre-modern China and Southeast Asia],” *Nanyang Wenti Yanjiu [Southeast Asian Affairs]* 2005, no. 3 (2005): 1–9; Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, “Lun Zheng He xia Xiyang dui Zhongguo haiwai kaituo shiye de pohuai - jian lun chaogong zhidu de xujiaxing 论郑和下西洋对中国海外开拓事业的破坏 — 兼论朝贡制度的虚假性 [On the damage caused by the Zheng He missions to Chinese overseas expansion - also discussing the fictitiousness of the tributary system],” *Xiamen Daxue Xuebao (Zhexue Shehui Kexue Ban) [Xiamen University Journal (Arts & Social Sciences)]* 2005, no. 3 (2005): 70–77.

²⁶ Zhang Feng, “Rethinking the ‘Tribute System’: Broadening the Conceptual Horizon of Historical East Asian Politics,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 2009, 559, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pop010>.

²⁷ Zhang Feng, 570.

²⁸ Peter C. Perdue, “The Tenacious Tributary System,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 96 (November 2, 2015): 1002, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2015.1030949>.

Clearly, writers who endorse and predict the coming hegemony of China in Asia, especially advocates of the ‘peaceful rise’ theory, find the tributary system concept useful. If the tribute system was the fundamental Chinese method of dealing with the outside world, and tribute relations were inherently harmonious and hierarchical, then China’s efforts to subordinate Asian nations will look different from coercive and exploitative methods of Western imperialists.²⁹

In his article, Perdue goes on challenging the usefulness of the ‘tributary system’ concept, noting that it was not the principal channel of pre-modern China’s handling of foreign relations, the so-called tributary missions were in many cases exchanges based on formal equality (providing the examples of Ming-Timurid and Qing-Kokand tributary exchanges) and the term itself is an “English term, created by Western scholars, to describe a mystical ineffable Oriental reality which is claimed to be inaccessible to Western or Eastern minds – except the mind of the Oriental scholar himself.”³⁰ Perdue also notes that in pre-modern China there was no word for a tributary *system* and pre-modern bureaucrats and scholars did not conceive tributary exchanges as an “institutional complex complete within itself or distinct from the other institutions of Confucian society.”³¹

Criticism of the conceptualization of the ‘tributary system’ has also generated responses from scholars intending to defend the usefulness of the concept. Historian Li Yunquan 李云泉, author of several books on the tributary system³², argues that the tributary system has always been conceptualized as a dynamic system with significant divergence by historical periods and geographical locations. He conceptualizes the tributary system as an organic whole made up of imaginary and real elements (*xu-shi yiti* 虚实一体), in other words of both rhetoric and a set of institutions and regulations.³³

Lü Zhengang 吕振纲 reflects on Zhuang’s analysis of Dutch tributary documents and tributary documents in European and Southeast Asian languages collected by He Xinhua 何新

²⁹ Perdue, 1004.

³⁰ Perdue, 1006.

³¹ Perdue, 1005; quoting Mark Mancall, “The Ch’ing Tribute System: An Interpretive Essay,” in *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China’s Foreign Relations*, ed. John King Fairbank (Harvard University Press, 1968), 63.

³² Li Yunquan 李云泉, *Chaogong zhidu shilun: Zhongguo gudai duiwai guanxi tizhi yanjiu* 朝贡制度史论: 中国古代对外关系体制研究 [On the history of the tributary system: Research on pre-modern China’s foreign relations], 1st ed. (Beijing: Xinhua Chubanshe [Xinhua Press], 2004); Li Yunquan 李云泉, *Wan bang lai chao: Chaogong zhidu shilun (Xiuding ban)* 万邦来朝: 朝贡制度史论(修订版) [All nations come to pay tribute: On the history of the tributary system (Revised edition)], 1st ed. (Beijing: Xinhua Chubanshe [Xinhua Press], 2014).

³³ Li Yunquan 李云泉, “Huayu, shijiao yu fangfa: Jin nian lai Ming-Qing chaogong tizhi yanjiu de ji ge wenti. 话语,视角与方法: 近年来明清朝贡体制研究的几个问题. [Discourse, perspectives and methodology: Issues in recent research on the Ming-Qing tributary system].,” *Zhongguo Bianjiang Shi Di Yanjiu* 中国边疆史地研究 [China’s Borderland History and Geography Studies] 24, no. 2 (2014): 1–11.

华 in his major collection of Qing-era tributary documents.³⁴ Countering Zhuang's arguments he points out that just because tributary documents in languages other than Chinese did not share the Sinocentric worldview of Chinese documents and were apparently self-centered and economic profit-oriented, this does not negate the existence of a set of institutions and regulations making up the tributary system. In his view, the tributary system was a mechanism based on "misidentification of which both sides were aware of" (*shuangfang you yishi de wuren* 双方有意识的误认). By this he means that Chinese elites were aware that foreigners saw themselves as principally equal actors motivated by economic gain but interpreted this interaction in a way suitable to the Sinocentric worldview of pre-modern Chinese society. Foreigners, on the other hand, were aware of the Chinese elite's sense of superiority, but due to the importance of securing economic links with China, they interpreted tributary interaction as an exchange between equals and based on mutual economic benefit. In this way, according to Lü, the tributary system was an important platform for economic and diplomatic exchange in pre-modern Asia, with considerable flexibility in its interpretations based on the cultural background of participants.³⁵

Meanwhile, Lü also points out that this flexibility was more restricted in the case of the 'inner circle' (Korea, Ryukyu, Vietnam) of the tributary system. Tributary correspondences with these countries were conducted in Classical Chinese, their elites apparently having a shared understanding of Confucian notions of harmony based on hierarchy. Investigating the language usage of tributary correspondences shows that the Chinese rulers used 'top-down' (*xiaxing* 下行) formats such as *yuzhi* 谕旨 [imperial edict] while addressing tributary rulers (the same formats as addressing their Chinese subjects) while foreign rulers used 'bottom-up' (*shangxing* 上行) formats such as *biaowen* 表文 [memorial to an emperor] (the same formats Chinese subjects used when addressing the emperor). Based on Li Yunquan (2004)³⁶, Lü classifies Korea, Ryukyu and Vietnam as the only 'model' and 'essential' tributary countries (*dianxing er shizhi de chaogongguo* 典型而实质的朝贡国), noting that Korea was arguably China's closest tributary based on the frequency of tributary missions and the number of tributary documents produced (See also Appendix 3). Siam, Laos and other relatively frequent tributaries are classified by him as 'ordinary' tributaries (*yiban de chaogongguo* 一般的朝贡国), while

³⁴ He Xinhua 何新华, *Qingdai chaogong wenshu yanjiu* 清代朝贡文书研究 [Research on Qing-era tributary documents], 1st ed. (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe Youxian Gongsi [Guangzhou Sun Yat-sen University Press Ltd.], 2016).

³⁵ Lü Zhengang 吕振纲, "Cong chaogong wenshu kan."

³⁶ Li Yunquan 李云泉, *Chaogong zhidu shilun*.

the Europeans and other irregular tributaries as 'nominal' tributaries (*mingyishang de chaogongguo* 名义上的朝贡国).³⁷ Meanwhile, based on He Xinhua's collection, Lü also notes that under the increasing influence of the nominal equality of the Western treaty-based order, Chinese-language tributary documents of the late Qing period (second half of 19th century) also became increasingly egalitarian in their style.³⁸

According to Xu Bo 徐波 China's tributary relationships with most of its tributaries were not 'substantial' (*shizhixing* 实质性) as in the case of other world regions (such as medieval Europe). Meanwhile, Xu argues that from a cultural perspective, the importance of rites (*li* 礼) in Confucianism and the Confucian notion of 'rule by rites' (*lizhi* 礼治) has to be considered. Xu argues for conceptualizing the Sinocentric tributary system as a 'ritual tributary system' (*liyixing de chaogong tixi* 礼仪性的朝贡体系), in contrast with 'substantial tributary systems' (*shizhixing de chaogong tixi*).³⁹

A conclusion drawn by various scholars is that China's tributary relations with the 'inner circle' were so much closer and more significant than with other countries that it is only possible to talk about a tributary *system* in the context of these countries or that the conceptualization of several *systems* of different significance is necessary. Even within the 'inner circle', based on the frequency of tributary missions and the extensive regulation and recording of tributary exchanges, Korea is often singled out.⁴⁰ Zhang Feng and Zhuang Guotu argue that if a Sinocentric tributary system can be conceptualized, it can only be applied to describe Sino-Korean relations.⁴¹

The significance of Japan's ambiguous position is noted by various authors as well. While Japan can be considered part of an East Asian Confucian cultural sphere and participated in the Sinocentric tributary system irregularly during the Ming dynasty (see Appendix 3), after the Imjin War (1592-98) and the establishment of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1867) it virtually suspended its tributary relations with China and organized its own tributary relations with Korea and Ryukyu as its subordinates. Meanwhile, David Kang argues that in the early modern period Japan did challenge China politically, but it borrowed and used Chinese concepts

³⁷ Li Yunquan 李云泉, "Zailun Qingdai chaogong tizhi"; Lü Zhengang 吕振纲, "Cong chaogong wenshu kan," 146.

³⁸ Lü Zhengang 吕振纲, "Cong chaogong wenshu kan," 144.

³⁹ Xu Bo 徐波, "Dui gudai Dongya chaogong tixi de zaisikao 对古代东亚朝贡体制的再思考 [Rethinking the pre-modern East Asian tributary system]," *Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu [Journal of International Politics]* 2017, no. 03 (2017): 90.

⁴⁰ On the frequency of Ming-Qing-era Korean tributary missions see Appendix 3.

⁴¹ Zhang Feng, "Rethinking the 'Tribute System'"; Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, "Lüelun chaogong zhidu de xuhuan," 1-9.

to frame its position in the East Asian regional order, quoting Norihito Mizuno stating that “claims and discourses on Japanese superiority had depended on Chinese rhetoric, consciously or unconsciously”.⁴² Weigelin-Schwiedrzik argues that Japan already constituted an alternative regional center in East Asia prior to the modern era, based on a rhetoric of nominal equality between its own ‘Son of Heaven’ (*Tenshi* 天子) and that of China. Hence, according to Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, an alternative way of conceptualizing the early modern East Asian tributary system is an order with two political centers (China and Japan) sharing the same Chinese-originated rhetoric and set of norms.⁴³

As can be seen, the ‘tributary system’ is a debated concept with various interpretations from cultural, economic and political perspectives, as well as with critics of its analytical usefulness. The diversity of its interpretations and criticism will be considered while using it throughout the thesis. Meanwhile, the term ‘tributary system’ arguably has analytical usefulness for the purposes of a discourse analysis of current Chinese historiography since it is definitely an important part of the current historiographical discourse in China. Thus, the term ‘tributary system’ will be used throughout the thesis, in reference to tributary exchanges between China and other countries occurring in the early modern period and regarding the discourse on these tributary exchanges.

2. Theory

Since the 1960s the discourse theory of Michel Foucault (1926-1984) became a widely discussed and accepted criticism of traditional notions on the construction of knowledge and its connection to social relations. According to cultural theorist Chris Weedon, Foucault’s definition of ‘discourse’ can be summarized as follows:

ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them.⁴⁴

As noted by Weedon, the Foucauldian definition also implies a dual function of discourse, in that

⁴² Kang, *East Asia Before the West*, 79; quoting Norihito Mizuno, *Japan and Its East Asian Neighbors: Japan’s Perception of China and Korea and the Making of Foreign Policy from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century* (Ohio State University, 2004), 115.

⁴³ See Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, “Zentrum und Peripherie in China und Ostasien [Center and periphery in China and East Asia],” in *Ostasien 1600-1900 [East Asia 1600-1900]*, ed. Sepp Linhart and Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik (Vienna: Promedia, 2004), 97.

⁴⁴ Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, 2 edition (Cambridge, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 107.

Discourse transmits and produces power; [but also] undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.⁴⁵

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach with its theoretical bases in Foucauldian discourse theory. Professor of linguistics and prominent advocator of CDA Ruth Wodak treats language “as a social practice” and, as also advocated by Jürgen Habermas (1929-), also as “ideological” serving as “a medium of domination and social force”. As Wodak notes, the ‘critical’ component of CDA means that it attempts at “making visible the interconnectedness of things” by uncovering the opaque and transparent structural relationships of power, dominance, control and discrimination as manifested in language.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, as noted by Wodak as well, while language is used to maintain discursive dominance, it can also be used to challenge established power relations. In Wodak’s articulation, one of the aims of CDA is to decipher ‘ideologies’, present critical perspectives on them and in this way to provide opportunities for producing “enlightenment and emancipation”.⁴⁷

The operationalization of CDA in the analysis of historiography has received an increasing amount of attention in the last decades. In “Critical discourse analysis and history”, Mariana Achugar argues that history is a social product inevitably linked to present-day social processes, most notably the work of social actors in identity-building processes. As Achugar points out, a critical analysis of historiographical discourse necessitates the investigation of the socioeconomic, political and cultural locations from which historiographical research is produced and also the functions historiography serves in present-day social processes.⁴⁸

The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) of CDA was elaborated by Wodak primarily for the analysis of the discursive construction of social identities, as well as social inequalities produced by racist, ethnicist and nationalist discourses.⁴⁹ As noted by Wodak in “Discourses about nationalism”, the critical analysis of historical and historiographical discourse is receiving an increasing amount of attention as a reaction to the worldwide strengthening of nationalist(ic) political discourses and historiography produced in connection with them. As Wodak notes,

⁴⁵ Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*.

⁴⁶ Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, eds., *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2nd ed, Introducing Qualitative Methods (London ; Thousand Oaks [Calif.]: SAGE, 2009), 2.

⁴⁷ Wodak and Meyer, 10–11.

⁴⁸ Mariana Achugar, “Critical Discourse Analysis and History,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 298–311.

⁴⁹ Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA),” in *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2016), 23–61.

Since the memory of the past shapes the conception of current collective identity, right-wing populist parties usually see their engagement in politics of the past as an integral part of their overall identity politics.⁵⁰

According to Wodak, a critical analysis of historical and historiographical discourse involves the notion of ‘imagined communities’, referring to all communities which exist beyond the level of face-to-face interaction and are primarily mental constructs involving the imagination of their members. Thus nationhood, just like other social identities based on a sense of membership in such communities, is produced, transformed, maintained and dismantled through discourse. According to Wodak, the discursive construction of national identities comprises the construction of a shared (often grand or grandiose) culture, as well as of shared political past, present and future.⁵¹

Proponents of the DHA regard ‘critique’, ‘ideology’ and ‘power’ as its core concepts. Regarding ‘critique’, Reisigl and Wodak note that it refers to examination, assessment and evaluation from a normative perspective and can be related to a quest for truth, appropriate text exegesis and self-reflection among others. Following Kant, Reisigl and Wodak also note that ‘critique’ also refers to the ‘propaedeutic’ (preliminary) examination of the conditions and possibilities of knowledge.⁵²

Reisigl and Wodak define ‘ideology’ as follows:

Ideology, in the DHA’s view, is seen as a perspective (often one-sided), i.e. a worldview and a system composed of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes, values and evaluations, which is shared by members of a specific social group. [...] Ideologies serve as important means of creating shared social identities and of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations through discourse, e.g. by establishing hegemonic identity narratives or by controlling the access to specific discourses or public spheres (‘gate-keeping’).⁵³

Regarding ‘power’ and its relation to ‘ideology’, they note:

Power relates to an asymmetric relationship among social actors who have different social positions or who belong to different social groups. [...] Power is legitimized or de-legitimized in discourses, but power relations also limit and regulate discourses by various

⁵⁰ Ruth Wodak, “Discourses About Nationalism,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 416.

⁵¹ Reisigl and Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA),” 408–9.

⁵² Reisigl and Wodak, 24.

⁵³ Reisigl and Wodak, 25.

types of controlling procedures. [...] We focus on the ways in which linguistic forms are used in various expressions and manipulations of power.⁵⁴

Based on discourse theory and CDA, academic discussions of the tributary system constitute a discursive formation in which social actors (in this case scholars) are participating in a process of collective identity formation, are competing for discursive dominance, and are both influenced by and influencers of ‘ideologies’ and ‘power relations’ characterizing Chinese society. As noted by Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, world or global historiography in China – in which the tributary system has received a considerable amount of attention in the last decades – plays an active role in the ongoing process of collective identity formation oriented towards the principle of the nation-state.⁵⁵ The significance of nationhood in the discourse and the DHA’s focus on the discursive construction of social, including national identities supports the choice of DHA as the principal methodology of the present thesis. In the following chapter, the DHA methodology and its operationalization in the analysis of the Chinese discourse on the tributary system will be introduced in more detail.

3. Methodology and operationalization

The thesis is primarily based on the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as described by Wodak and Meyer⁵⁶, as well as Reisigl and Wodak⁵⁷. The present chapter introduces how key points of DHA methodology, namely ‘critique’ and the investigation of ‘ideology’, ‘power’, ‘intertextuality’ and ‘interdiscursivity’ will be applied throughout the thesis. The chapter also discusses how ‘ideology’ detectable in the discourse on the tributary system can be related to (and how it is in ambiguous relationship with) the official, state-promoted ‘ideology’/‘ideologies’ (in this context the framing of world history and international relations) in the People’s Republic of China.

3.1 ‘Critique’, ‘ideology’ and ‘power’

‘Global history’, at least in Western academia, is a critical field of study. As it is emphasized by its advocates, global history attempts to challenge the modern-era tradition of writing history from the perspective of nations and nation-states. Global historians argue that

⁵⁴ Reisigl and Wodak, 26.

⁵⁵ Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, “Weltgeschichte und chinesische Geschichte. Die chinesische Historiographie des 20. Jahrhunderts zwischen Universalität und Partikularität [World history and Chinese history. Twentieth century Chinese historiography between universality and particularity],” in *Globalisierung und Globalgeschichte [Globalization and global history]*, ed. Margarete Grandner, Dietmar Rothermund, and Wolfgang Schwentker (Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2005), 139–61.

⁵⁶ Wodak and Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*.

⁵⁷ Reisigl and Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA).”

since nation-states were not the main actors behind historical processes for most of human history, historiography should pay more attention to alternative units of analysis (local, regional, global) and alternative actors (empires, plants, bacteria, etc.), as well as to the interaction between/among these units and actors. Global history is also self-reflective about the Eurocentrism of modern-era historiographical knowledge production and the resulting Eurocentric teleological approaches of traditional ‘world history’. It challenges commonly held assumptions about concepts such as ‘civilization’, ‘development’ and ‘modernity’ among others. Furthermore, global history is open to include the critical perspectives of minority histories, feminist history and environmental history among others, based on a commitment to contribute to an inclusive and sustainable future of humanity.⁵⁸

Since the focus of the present thesis is Chinese historiography, and since as it will be detailed in the next paragraphs, the nation as an uncontested basic unit of historiography is persistent in Chinese historiography, the present thesis will be critical about discursive strategies used for retro-projecting present-day discourses of national unity, of current national borders and perceived national interests, etc. on the past. The thesis will also be self-reflective about the Eurocentrism of analytical frameworks used in present-day historiography, especially since the topic of the thesis concerns non-European history and historiography.

Meanwhile, following the line of Wang Hui, the so-called ‘binaries’ of writing global, East Asian and Chinese history will also be criticized.⁵⁹ As Wang Hui and other specialists of China and East Asia have argued, dividing history into a modernity which only emerged in the West and seeing the histories of non-Western civilizations as being essentially and completely ‘unmodern’ and different from the West needs to be questioned and challenged as well. While it is arguable that the nation-state as a discourse was created in the West, the idea that early modern East Asia had most of the characteristics (or proto-characteristics) of what made Westerners think of themselves as ‘modern’ and conceptualize themselves as nation-states has considerable argumentative strength.⁶⁰ These characteristics included centralized bureaucracy, relatively uniform written language (Classical Chinese in most countries), a considerably well-defined state ideology (neo-Confucianism after ca. the 13th century) with canonized

⁵⁸ Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 37–61.

⁵⁹ Hui Wang, *China from Empire to Nation-State*, trans. Michael Gibbs Hill (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), Chapter 1 “Two Narratives of China and Their Derivative Forms”, pp. 3–29.

⁶⁰ Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories And Approaches In A Connected World*, Reissue edition (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 206–12.

authoritative texts and commitment to rationality in state-building⁶¹, clearly defined ‘international’ borders among the Confucian states and arguably a set of diplomatic rules (the tributary system) as well.⁶² The common observation that present-day national borders of former colonies were created by the colonizers and present-day national identities emerged after the creation of these borders is probably true for Africa, the Americas and other regions of Asia, but is highly questionable when applied to East Asian history. Binaries of modern vs. non-modern, nation-states vs. empires and other traditional ways of socio-political organization, as well as the lumping together of everything non-Western and contrasting it with the West (as many of the so-called post-colonialists do), should also be treated with criticism.

Since the primary focus of the thesis is the academic discourse on the tributary system in mainland China, the main questions regarding ‘ideology’ and ‘power’ will be what kind of ideology or ideologies (assumptions, teleological approaches, etc.) is/are prevalent in the mainland Chinese academic discourse on the tributary system and what are the underlying power relations (both domestic and global) behind the discourse in mainland China? The thesis will also situate the discourse on the tributary system within the broader discourse on global history in mainland China, since ‘ideology’ and ‘power relations’ are interconnected in the two.

As most analysts of Chinese global historiography note, while ‘global history’ in Western academia is often seen as a critique of nation-state-based historiography, in the Chinese context *quanqiu shi* 全球史 [global history] or *quanqiu hua shi* 全球化史 [history of globalization] in most cases means a difference rather in geographical extent than in approach. According to Spakowski, “the ‘global’ in China’s global history is not the substance of the historical process but rather the context for the development of nation-states as the uncontested basic historical unit.”⁶³ She further notes the ongoing impact of the ‘century of humiliation’⁶⁴ on global historiography in China and the assignment of a didactic function to historiography in general, also rooted in pre-modern traditions.⁶⁵

⁶¹ The canonization of the so-called Four Books and Five Classics (*si shu wu jing* 四书五经), mostly based on the works of Song-era philosopher Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 (1130-1200). Also note that the term ‘Neo-Confucianism’ is used in foreign languages only, its Chinese self-designation *lixue* 理学 meaning ‘the study of reason/logic’.

⁶² Kang, *East Asia Before the West.*, Chapter 3 “States. The Confucian society” pp. 25-53.

⁶³ Nicola Spakowski, “National Aspirations on a Global Stage: Concepts of World/Global History in Contemporary China*,” *Journal of Global History* 4, no. 3 (November 2009): 476, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022809990179>.

⁶⁴ In Chinese *bai nian guochi* 百年国耻, a frequently used term in China to refer to the period from the First Opium War of 1839-41 until the end of WWII in 1945, emphasizing the weakness of China and foreign domination.

⁶⁵ Michael Puett, “Classical Chinese Historical Thought,” in *A Companion to Global Historical Thought*, ed. P. Duara, V. Murthy, and A. Sartori (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 34–46, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118525395.ch2>.

Regarding Eurocentrism in teleological approaches, Edward Q. Wang argues that global historiography in China is “intrinsically and inexorably West-centered, because it has pursued the aim of helping China to catch up with the industrialized world.”⁶⁶ Spakowski also points out the “persistence of a deeply embedded Eurocentrism [...], albeit one that is self-imposed and manipulated for national purposes”.⁶⁷

On the centrality of nationhood in Chinese global historiography, Weigelin-Schwiedrzik argues that global and national history in China are both parts of a still ongoing process of collective identity formation oriented towards the principle of the nation-state. However, she also notes that among modern-era Chinese historians an ongoing struggle is noticeable between those who want to position China in world history and therefore look for universality in Chinese history and those who stress China’s particularity and therefore focus on national history.⁶⁸ Sachsenmaier points out that “in a climate of opinion which is, generally speaking, in favor of nationalism and globalization at the same time, alternative political imaginaries to the nation as a historically grown and territorially defined body do not play a very prominent role.”⁶⁹ He further notes that “It would be erroneous to assume that in the Chinese context, field designations such as “global history” are treated as largely congruent with critical perspectives of nationhood or nationalism.”⁷⁰

A further observation by various scholars is that global historiography in China is Eurocentric not only on the level of teleological approaches but as a result of unequal power relations in the modern-era production of knowledge in its conceptual frameworks as well. Liu Xincheng argues that “the whole box of tools [...] at hand is purely Europe-made, something that it is perhaps impossible to replace at the moment.”⁷¹ Wang Gungwu, also noting the same condition, advocates a return to pre-modern Chinese concepts such as *Tianxia* 天下⁷², *wenhua*

⁶⁶ Q. Edward Wang, “‘Rise of the Great Powers’=Rise of China? Challenges of the Advancement of Global History in the People’s Republic of China,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 19, no. 64 (March 1, 2010): 289, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670560903444223>.

⁶⁷ Spakowski, “National Aspirations on a Global Stage,” 494.

⁶⁸ Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, “Weltgeschichte und chinesische Geschichte. Die chinesische Historiographie des 20. Jahrhunderts zwischen Universalität und Partikularität [World history and Chinese history. Twentieth century Chinese historiography between universality and particularity].”

⁶⁹ Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History*, 212.

⁷⁰ Sachsenmaier, 218.

⁷¹ Xincheng Liu, “The Global View of History in China,” *Journal of World History* 23, no. 3 (2012): 508.

⁷² *Tianxia* literally means “(All) Under Heaven”, “the entire world”, and in classical Chinese texts also often refers to the realm of the Chinese emperor. Its abstract sense, a community of all humankind (based on Confucian ethics) has been emphasized by Wang Gungwu and other modern scholars.

文化 [culture] and *wenming* 文明 [civilization] instead of relying on Western-made concepts such as ‘empire’ and ‘nation’ while writing about the Chinese past.⁷³

In summary, most analysts conclude that ‘ideology’ in China’s global historiography is based on Eurocentric conceptual frameworks and teleological approaches, coupled with the assignment of a didactic function to history and a nation-state-based (Sinocentric) approach in narratives, such as assessments of economic and geopolitical interest. ‘Power relations’ in the domestic sense are defined by an authoritarian state interested on the one hand in generating nationalistic political discourse for the maintenance of its political legitimacy and on the other in profiting from economic globalization at the same time. ‘Power relations’ in the global sense are defined by China’s experience of ‘semi-colonization’, underdevelopment and lack of global political influence for most of the modern era. The question is how these insights regarding ‘ideology’ and ‘power’ in the broader Chinese academic discourse on global history can be related to the discourse on the tributary system.

Regarding the discourse on the tributary system, I would point out that international power relations in East Asia and on the global scale are in rapid transformation at the present time and as it will be demonstrated throughout the thesis, this also has an impact on historiography produced on the tributary system in Chinese academia. The modern-era tradition of writing history in an explicitly or implicitly comparative manner with the West is still a defining factor. Self-victimization through emphasis on the past intrusions of foreign colonizers, mitigation of pre-modern China’s expansive behavior, as well as polarization of Asian history into a supposedly pacifist/non-expansionist and (from a Chinese perspective) economically unprofitable Sinocentric tributary system and an expansionist and (from a Western perspective) economically profitable colonial system remain frequent discursive strategies. However, based on recent scholarly works on the tributary system, it is also obvious that Chinese historiography is increasingly written from a position of power instead of the position of an underdeveloped and politically less significant member state of the global community. In many works, the framing of the history of the tributary system is increasingly based on China’s promotion of its ‘peaceful rise’ narrative vis-à-vis notions of a ‘China threat’ in other countries.

It also has to be pointed out, that while discussing the tributary system in general, most authors base their claims on its history in East and Southeast Asia, usually ignoring that China also had extensive tributary relationships in Inner Asia, with the nomadic and semi-nomadic populations on its northern and western frontiers (Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans, Uyghurs,

⁷³ Gungwu Wang, *Renewal: The Chinese State and the New Global History* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2013).

etc.).⁷⁴ The inconvenience of the topic is apparently related to the fact that these regions and ethnic groups are now mostly part of China and they became part of it through the military conquests of the Qing dynasty during the 17th and 18th centuries, although many of them had already been under Chinese control for certain periods of time during previous dynasties. Treating China as an unchanged territorial and social unit throughout history is common among Chinese authors writing on the topic and is apparently also related to the strong emphasis on territorial integrity and state sovereignty in official political discourse. This retro-projection of China's present-day borders into the past is a useful tool for those arguing for Chinese non-expansionism under the tributary order.

Meanwhile, throughout the thesis I wish to emphasize that Chinese historiography is not a uniform field of study and diverse opinions, including critical opinions regarding the tributary system, can regularly be encountered. I would identify the mainstream as closely converging with the country's official framing of both domestic and international relations, emphasizing principles such as territorial integrity, state sovereignty, and non-interference in foreign countries' affairs. In the East and Southeast Asian context, while criticism is mostly directed at the *hou wang bo lai* 厚往薄来 [giving generously, receiving little], in other words from a Chinese perspective the wasteful nature of the tributary system, there are also critical opinions about the supposed pacifism of pre-modern China towards East and Southeast Asia.⁷⁵ There are also case studies of China's tributary interaction with certain Inner Asian ethnic groups, pointing out that Chinese dynasties applied a realist foreign policy in these relations, combining trade, tribute and warfare.⁷⁶

The divergence of opinions regarding the tributary system is apparently rooted in the fact that the official 'ideology' or 'ideologies' of China promoted by its currently ruling authoritarian Communist Party provide little clue about how to interpret and evaluate the tributary system. These official ideologies include the official state ideology of the so-called

⁷⁴ Exceptions include Wang Qing pointing out that "intentionally or unintentionally, only focusing on China's tributary system in the east and south and generalizing China's foreign policy traditions based on this, is one-sided." Wang Qing 王青, "Zhongguo chuantong duiwai guanxi," 13.

⁷⁵ Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, "Lun Zheng He xia Xiyang"; Xu Bo 徐波, "Dui gudai Dongya chaogong tixi," 2017.

⁷⁶ On Han-Xiongnu relations see Wang Qing 王青, "Zhongguo chuantong duiwai guanxi"; on Ming-Mongol relations see Jin Xing 金星, "Ming-Meng chaogong maoyi de jiji zuoyong yu juxianxing shulun 明蒙朝贡贸易的积极作用与局限性述论 [On the positive effects and limitations of Ming-Mongol tributary trade]," *Guangbo Dianshi Daxue Xuebao (Zhaxue Shehui Kexue Ban) [Journal of Radio and Television University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)]* 2017, no. 1 (2017): 77–80.

‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’⁷⁷ and in the field of foreign affairs the so-called ‘peaceful rise’ (or more recently ‘peaceful development’)⁷⁸ foreign policy model made up from elements such as the insistence on national sovereignty, non-interference and pacifism, as well as the promotion of the economic (and geo-political) meta-strategy known as the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’.⁷⁹

In any of the works analyzed for this thesis, including Wang Hui’s detailed China-focused analysis of the relationship between empires, colonialism/imperialism and Marxist historical thought in *China from Empire to Nation-state*, there is no mentioning that Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping had ever theorized imperial China’s tributary system. There are a few authors consulted for the thesis (He Aiguo 2001, Xu Bo 2017) who tie their analysis of the tributary system to Marxist historical theory and point out that the tributary system was China’s pre-capitalist way of conducting imperial foreign policy. They also contrast it with early modern Western colonialism being the ‘primitive accumulation’ phase of capitalism. Wang Hui refers to Vladimir I. Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Polanyi among others to emphasize the widespread view of imperialism and colonialism as being rooted in capitalism, and points out that pre-modern China’s tributary system was primarily rooted in pre-capitalist social relations and modes of production instead.⁸⁰

There is far more implicit and explicit attention paid to China’s so-called ‘peaceful rise/development’ foreign policy model in the discourse on the tributary system. Meanwhile, as it will be demonstrated in the thesis, there is a large amount of ambiguity on how to interpret and evaluate the tributary system in this context as well. On the one hand, relevant primary sources from the early modern (Ming-Qing) period are permeated with a rhetoric of the nominal superiority of China’s emperor and the obvious lack of modern notions of state sovereignty. On the other hand, the opinion that despite of this the early modern East Asian states had regulated borders with each other and experienced long periods of interstate peace and the tributary system had an important role in achieving this early modern stability, is also commonly held among scholars (more on this in 3.3). The adaptation of Western notions of nation-states and

⁷⁷ Ch. *Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi* 中国特色社会主义, usually framed as including Marxism-Leninism (*Makesi-Liening zhuyi* 马克思列宁主义), ‘Mao Zedong thought’ (*Mao Zedong sixiang* 毛泽东思想) and ‘Deng Xiaoping theory’ (*Deng Xiaoping lilun* 邓小平理论).

⁷⁸ The term ‘peaceful rise’ (*heping jueqi* 和平崛起) was first used officially in the first years of Hu Jintao’s leadership (2002-12). Since 2004, the term ‘peaceful development’ (*heping fazhan* 和平发展) has been used instead in official parlance, in order to avoid the possible negative connotations (of necessary conflict) attached to the word ‘rise’. Nevertheless, the term ‘peaceful rise’ as a reference to China’s official framing of its role in the international system is still frequently used by non-Chinese scholars.

⁷⁹ Ch. *Yi dai, yi lu* 一带一路 (also known as the ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative).

⁸⁰ Wang, *China from Empire to Nation-State*, 21–23.

national sovereignty which are at the core of the official framing of world history and international relations until the present day, are in turn increasingly recognized as being responsible for the breakdown of the early modern regional stability in the second half of the 19th century and ultimately leading to the traumatic experiences of World War II.

The vigorous promotion of China's present-day global economic and geo-political meta-strategy, the so-called Belt and Road Initiative often borrows the images of past official interaction with foreign countries, most notably of the court admiral Zheng He engaging in tributary exchange and trade with foreign rulers (more on him in 5.2.2). Refuting accusations of neo-colonialism, Chinese leaders also often emphasize the traditions of economically 'win-win' interaction (*hezuo gongying* 合作共赢) with other countries of the Global South and contrast it with the exploitative nature of subsequent Western colonialism. Meanwhile, there is near consensus among Chinese scholars that in most geographic locations and for most of the time during the Ming and Qing dynasties, the tributary system was economically detrimental for China itself. This is based on records on the value of 'feudal gifts' conferred by the Chinese emperors upon their tributaries, usually by far exceeding the value of the tributes paid by those (more on this in 5.2.1). Hence, to use the tributary system as a historical precedent for China's present and future global economic meta-strategy is anything but unproblematic.

China's evolving self-perception as a re-emerging global power results in a growing demand for new frameworks of Chinese and global history among its scholars. The tributary system is among these frameworks gaining prominence in the academic discourse during the last few decades. The official and all-pervasive 'ideologies' promoted by the authoritarian one-party state provide no exact guidelines about the interpretation and evaluation of the tributary system. Therefore, to a large extent the diversity of opinions stems from the emphasis of various authors on various aspects of the tributary system, all reacting to some elements of the official 'ideologies' (state sovereignty, pacifism, 'win-win' economic relations, etc.) but often in contradiction with each other. Meanwhile, it also has to be emphasized that as Ruth Wodak argues "discourse is structured by dominance" but language can also be used to change power relations.⁸¹ Therefore, scholars are not only influenced by the officially promoted (dominant) ideologies of a given society but in the long term can also be influencers of it. In their contest for discursive dominance, Chinese scholars present various interpretations and evaluations of the tributary system and the question of a discourse analysis is not only how they were

⁸¹ Wodak and Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 1–13.

influenced by already extant ‘ideologies’ but also what impact their approach can have on the evolving framing of world/global history and international relations in China.

3.2 Intertextuality

As Reisigl and Wodak point out, texts are interlinked in the past and present and they are re-contextualized and/or de-contextualized in order to be used as part of discursive strategies.⁸² ‘Intertextuality’ is arguably one of the most crucial aspects of a discourse analysis of Chinese historiography. Due to China having an advanced historiographical culture since the 1st millennium BCE⁸³, there is an immense amount of written primary sources on the tributary system from the pre-modern period. Most of the time while discussing the tributary system, authors base their claims on these primary sources. While discussing the tributary system, authors tend to make normative statements (e.g. arguing for China’s overall pacifism) based on a limited number of quotations from pre-modern primary sources. The selective and biased nature of quoting from a corpus too big to allow the formation of normative assumptions is pointed out by some more critical observers.⁸⁴ Based on DHA methodology, the present thesis will identify the ideological background of the selection of quotations from pre-modern sources, as well as the discursive strategies which they are part of.

Since all pre-modern texts also have their own contexts, a short introduction has to be included regarding the most frequently used primary sources in the discourse on the early modern tributary system. The most frequently cited sources are the so-called *shilu* 实录 [‘veritable records’] and *zhengshi* 正史 [official histories]. *Shilu* is a generic name for collections of court documents (edicts, court diaries, etc.) of Chinese emperors. The format of each collection’s name is ‘[name of dynasty] + [name of emperor] + *shilu*’, hence in the case of e.g. Emperor Taizu of Ming, *Ming Taizu Shilu* (for a list of Ming and Qing emperors and the overview of their various names, see Appendix 2). The collective names *Ming Shilu* and *Qing Shilu* to refer to all the *shilu* collections of the Ming and Qing emperors will also be used in the thesis.

⁸² Reisigl and Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA),” 28.

⁸³ The *Chunqiu* 春秋 [Spring and Autumn Annals] (5th century BCE), an account of the history of the State of Lu, traditionally attributed to Confucius, is usually regarded as the earliest Chinese historiographical work. The *Shiji* 史记 [Records of the Grand Historian] of Sima Qian (c. 145-86 BCE) is usually considered as the first major historical record of the history of China as a whole.

⁸⁴ Wang Qing 王青, “Zhongguo chuantong duiwai guanxi”; Xu Bo 徐波, “Dui gudai Dongya chaogong tixi,” 2017.

The so-called *zhengshi* or ‘official histories’ of imperial Chinese dynasties were in most cases compiled by groups of court historians of the subsequent dynasties after which they were written on. The frequently quoted *Mingshi* 明史 [History of the Ming], although based on sources from the Ming era (1368-1644), was compiled under the subsequent Qing dynasty (in the first half of the 18th century). Therefore, it has to be kept in mind that it was inevitably influenced by the official Qing-era framing of Ming history. The *Qingshi Gao* 清史稿 [Draft History of the Qing] was compiled in the 1920s and later attempts to complete it were made in post-WWII Taiwan. The *Qingshi Gao* is rarely referenced in articles on the Qing-era tributary system, the most common Qing-era sources being the *Qing Shilu* and *Da Qing Huidian* 大清会典 (collection of Qing-era laws and regulations).

In the thesis it will be indicated what primary sources were used in the articles under investigation. As pointed out by some Chinese observers, authors in China rarely use primary sources from any other country than China while discussing Chinese tributary relations with the outside world.⁸⁵ This is understandable to some extent in the case of the Inner Asian nomads and semi-nomads and the Indianized and Islamic polities of Southeast Asia, since even if they kept records of tributary interactions with China, they used languages other than Classical Chinese which are not readily understood by authors from China. Meanwhile, this is not the case with the countries of the ‘inner circle’ of the tributary system (Korea, Ryukyu, Vietnam) who used Classical Chinese as their literary language and left a considerable amount of records on their tributary exchanges with China.⁸⁶ Records from these countries are also rarely included among the primary sources used for the articles analyzed in the thesis.⁸⁷

I would further note that the overwhelming majority of quotations and references to Chinese primary sources go to the above-mentioned ‘official histories’ compiled in the Ming and Qing courts. Ming and Qing-era historical treatises written outside the court, such as the *Dong-Xiyang Kao* 东西洋考 [Inspection of the Eastern and Western Oceans] by Zhang Xie 张燮 (1574-1640), *Minshu* 闽书 [Book of Min/Fujian province] by He Qiaoyuan 何乔远 (1558-1632) and the *Tianxia Junguo Libing Shu* 天下郡国利病书 [Book on positive and negative conditions throughout the prefectures of the empire] by Gu Yanwu 顾炎武 (1613-1682) are

⁸⁵ Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, “Lüelun chaogong zhidu de xuhuan”; Li Yunquan 李云泉, “Huayu, shijiao yu fangfa.”

⁸⁶ Lü Zhengang 吕振纲, “Cong chaogong wenshu kan.”

⁸⁷ For quotations from Korean sources see Liu Xinjun 刘信君, “Zhong-Chao yu Zhongguo he Dongnanya fanshuguo chaogong zhidu zhi bijiao 中朝与中国和东南亚藩属国朝贡制度之比较 [Comparison of the Sino-Korean tributary system and the tributary system between China and its Southeast Asian vassal states],” *Guangdong Shehui Kexue* [Guangdong Social Sciences Journal] 2011, no. 1 (2011): 122–130.; For quotations from Vietnamese sources see Li Yunquan 李云泉, “Huayu, shijiao yu fangfa.”

much less frequently used. This way it is inevitable that the narratives of the Ming and Qing ‘centers’ (the imperial courts) are reproduced without considering marginal voices on the history of the early modern tributary system.

The unit of analysis regarding intertextuality will primarily be the level of quoted passages and not of entire texts. The extent of diversity in the selection of texts as primary sources is limited in the discourse, since most authors primarily rely on the above-mentioned ‘official histories’ (*zhengshi*) and ‘veritable records’ (*shilu*). What reveals more about the ideologies and discourse strategies of the various authors is the question which passages they select from these texts (e.g. whether these passages emphasize pacifism towards foreigners or include threats of violence, see the debate on pacifism in sub-section 5.3.1). As it will also be demonstrated, there are certain frequently quoted passages serving certain reoccurring discursive strategies (e.g. the *Huang Ming Zuxun* and arguments for pacifism).

3.3 Interdiscursivity

‘Interdiscursivity’ between the discourse on the tributary system and other discourses is investigated throughout the thesis. As it is argued throughout the thesis, most authors conceptualize the tributary system as a regional order of pre-modern East Asia and to various degrees of neighboring regions. Therefore, either explicitly or implicitly most authors make comparisons with the Westphalian-colonial order expanding into Eastern Asia during early modernity and becoming East/Eastern Asia’s regional order by the late 19th century. Thus, the most relevant interlinked discourses include the discourses on the definitions and role of nation(s), nation-state(s) and nationalism in Chinese, East Asian and global history, as well as on the definitions and role of empire(s), imperialism and colonialism in Chinese, East Asian and global history.

Some authors argue that based on the Weberian model of modernization through centralized bureaucracy, as well as on the existence of proto-capitalist economies, the East Asian states have already been proto-modern nation-states since ca. China’s Song dynasty (960-1279).⁸⁸ Others argue that the Western-originated concept ‘nation-state’ (Chinese *minzu guojia*

⁸⁸ In *East Asia Before the West* Kang argues that despite the term “nation” was borrowed from Western languages in the 19th century, early modern East Asian states were comparable to modern nation-states due to their centralized bureaucracy, official state ideology (neo-Confucianism), official languages and clearly defined borders with each other; On the discussion of the Song Chinese proto-nation state see Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History*, 208; referring to Wang Hui 王晖, “Dangdai Zhongguo de sixiang zhuangkuang yu xiandaixing wenti 当代中国的思想状况与现代性问题 [The state of affairs in contemporary Chinese thought and the question of modernity],” *Wenyi Zhengming 文艺争鸣 [Forum of Literature and Art]* 1980, no. 60 (1980); and Wang Hui 王晖, *Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi. Diguo yu guojia 现代中国思想的兴起·帝国与国家 [The emergence*

民族国家) which did not exist in the Chinese language prior to the late 19th century, in fact cannot be applied to a multiethnic and culturally defined ‘cultural/civilizational state’ such as China. Still others consider modern China an ‘empire disguised as a nation-state’.⁸⁹ The so-called ‘sprouts of capitalism’ (Ch. *zibenzhuyi de mengya* 资本主义的萌芽) discourse, occurring in several articles on the tributary system analyzed for the thesis, revolves around the claim that a certain form of proto-capitalism has already emerged in the urban centers of pre-modern East Asia, independently from the West.⁹⁰ These approaches challenge the notion that there was only one ‘modernity’ emerging in the West and later being adopted by East Asia and suggest instead that the West and East Asia both had their own ‘modernities’. These started interacting with each other due to Western expansion and influence since the 19th century, the present-day East Asian societies being formed through this interaction.

In global historiography, an increasing amount of attention has been paid to the role of empires in global history, often based on a comparative analysis with the role of nation-states. In *What Is Global History?* (2016) Sebastian Conrad discusses recent trends in global historiography, pointing out that

we can distinguish five such motors of change that dominate historiography: technology, empire, economy, culture, and biology.⁹¹

Stephen Howe defines ‘empire’ as follows:

a large, composite, multi-ethnic or multinational political unit, usually created by conquest, and divided between a dominant centre and subordinate, sometimes far distant, peripheries.⁹²

Various authors argue that China is the only ancient empire which avoided enduring disunity and – although with changing borders and ethnic composition – ultimately survived into the modern era as a nation-state. The question why China avoided ‘imperial overstretch’ and disintegration is investigated by various Sinologists and historians.⁹³ Meanwhile, it is also important to point out that there are critics of the usefulness of putting traditional China and

of modern Chinese thought. Empire and nation], Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi 2 (Beijing: Shenghuo-Dushu-Xinzhi Sanlian Shudian, 2008).

⁸⁹ On this discourse see chapter 4 ‘China’s Modern Identity and the Transformation of Empire’ in Wang Hui, *China from Empire to Nation-state* pp. 101-145.

⁹⁰ Xu Luo, “Reconstructing World History in the People’s Republic of China since the 1980s,” *Journal of World History* 18, no. 3 (2007): 286; Q. Edward Wang, ““Rise of the Great Powers”=“Rise of China?” 345; Li Bozhong 李伯重, “Yingguo moshi, Jiangnan daolu”.

⁹¹ Conrad, *What Is Global History?*, 102–3.

⁹² Stephen Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 30.

⁹³ On the importance of China in the discourse on empires in global history see Howe, 41–45; For a discussion on why China avoided “imperial overstretch” see Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1976); See also Chapter Four in Wang, *China from Empire to Nation-State*, 101–45.

other large multiethnic political entities under the common label ‘empire’. As they point out, the word *diguo* 帝国 [empire, lit. ‘emperor country’] did not exist in Chinese prior to the late 19th century when it was borrowed from Japanese *teikoku* 帝国, itself being a recent translation of the Western concept of ‘imperium’. The term ‘Chinese Empire’ was not used as an official designation in traditional China (in contrast with *Imperium Romanum*). Ruling dynasties named their realm based on the name of their dynasty, such as *Da Ming* 大明 [Great Ming] and *Da Qing* 大清 [Great Qing] during the Ming and Qing dynasties. As these authors point out, the Western concept of ‘imperium’ is based on the heritage of the Roman Empire and has little to do with the worldview of pre-modern China. While ‘imperium’ comes from the Latin word *imperare* [to command, to rule] assigning a primarily political function to the superior ruler, traditional China’s worldview was based on assigning a more comprehensive, religious-political role to the *Tianzi* 天子 [‘Son of Heaven’, the Chinese emperor], to rule the *Tianxia* 天下 [‘(All) Under Heaven’, the entire world] based on the Confucian principles of *wen* 文 [culture, civility] and *de* 德 [virtue].⁹⁴

At the same time, there are also authors pointing out that despite whatever religious-philosophical rhetoric existed on the nominally universal authority of the ‘Son of Heaven’, Chinese rulers were rational actors just like their counterparts in any other part of the world, having a clear sense of the *de facto* limits of their authority and conducting rational foreign policy with actors outside of it. Hence, they mitigate the importance of rhetoric and focus on real power relations instead.⁹⁵

A much less popular topic in China, but investigated by several (mostly non-Chinese) authors is whether colonialism can be regarded as a distinctly early modern/modern phenomenon pursued by the so-called ‘colonial empires’ of the West, Japan and Russia or it was part of the policy of other empires as well throughout history. In China, the term *zhimin zhuyi* 殖民主义 [colonialism], translated from Western languages, has a strongly negative connotation and association with the activities of Western countries, Japan and Russia in China during the 19-20th centuries. ‘Colonialism’ and ‘imperialism’ are used by various non-Chinese authors for Qing China’s military conquest, genocide and settlement of Manchu, Han and Hui

⁹⁴ For an in-depth English-language discussion of the issue see Chapter Two “The Empire/Nation-State Binary and European ‘World History’” in Wang, *China from Empire to Nation-State*, 30–60; see also Wang, *Renewal*, 6–9, 135.

⁹⁵ Zhang Feng, “Rethinking the ‘Tribute System’”; Perdue, “The Tenacious Tributary System.”

populations in Xinjiang and Tibet.⁹⁶ Regarding maritime colonialism, ‘proto-colonialism’ has been suggested to describe China’s maritime policy during the major tributary missions led by Admiral Zheng He in the early 15th century, also including the establishment of trading posts and garrisons in the Straits of Malacca and occasional military confrontations with those opposing the Sinocentric order.⁹⁷

Especially due to the sensitivity of the topic regarding present-day inter-ethnic relations in Xinjiang and Tibet, the term ‘colonialism’ is very rarely used in Chinese-language works to describe Chinese activities.⁹⁸ Wang Hui agrees that armed expansion, expropriation and ethnic domination was part of imperial China’s history, however, he regards the modern-era phenomenon ‘colonialism’ being rooted in capitalism and the organized restructuring of colonized societies and economies to serve the industrialization of the colonial power. According to Wang Hui, there were instances of major socio-economic reorganizations of newly-conquered territories in China’s imperial history (mentioning the Dali Kingdom conquered by the Ming dynasty), but China’s tributary system was often “not at all interested in making changes to local customs and structures of production.”⁹⁹

It is also often argued that Qing China was essentially different from the Western, Japanese and Russian colonial empires since it was an empire whereby an ethnic minority (the Manchus) ruled over the majority Han population.¹⁰⁰ Authors advocating this idea tend to emphasize the diverse administrative system of the Qing empire assigning significant autonomy to ethnic minorities and contrast it with the ethnic nationalism of the ‘colonial empires’ dominated by ethnic majority elites.¹⁰¹ It is arguable that the politically dominant Manchus, their long-time Khalkha Mongol allies and the Han majority enjoyed stable and peaceful relations throughout most of the Qing period. Meanwhile, authors praising the Qing as a positive example of multiethnic co-existence in an ethnic minority-ruled empire also ignore

⁹⁶ Kirk W. Larsen, “The Qing Empire (China), Imperialism, and the Modern World,” *History Compass* 9, no. 6 (June 1, 2011): 498–508, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2011.00780.x>; Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road*.

⁹⁷ Geoff Wade, “The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment,” *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 78 (January 1, 2005): 37–58, <https://doi.org/10.2307/41493537>.

⁹⁸ Zhuang Guotu uses ‘colonizing activities’ (*tuozhi shiye* 拓殖事业/ *zhimin shiye* 殖民事业) for overseas Chinese settlement in Southeast Asia in his two articles (see Bibliography); Wang Hui discusses the relationship between colonialism and imperial China in chapter One of *Empire to Nation-state*, 3–29.

⁹⁹ Wang, *China from Empire to Nation-State*; referring to Hui Wang, *The Politics of Imagining Asia*, ed. Theodore Huters (Harvard University Press, 2011), 10–62.

¹⁰⁰ Zhang Yongjiang 张永江 and Ye Zimin 叶子民, “Lüelun Qingdai shuguo 略论清代属国 [On the vassal states of the Qing dynasty],” *Qing Shi Yanjiu* 清史研究 [Research on Qing History] 1999, no. 4 (1999): 50–56; Yi Qiaorui 尹巧蕊, “Qingdai Menggu chaogong falü zhidu zhong de duoyuan fawenhua 清代蒙古朝贡法律制度中的多元法文化 [On diversity in the legal culture of the Qing-era Mongol tributary law system],” *Lantai Shijie* 兰台世界 [Lantai World] 2017, no. July/2 (2017): 101–102.

¹⁰¹ On this debate see Chapter One in Wang, *China from Empire to Nation-State*, 3–29.

major atrocities against those nationalities unwilling to submit to Qing rule. This includes most notably the virtual extermination of the Dzungar Mongols in the Qing military campaign of 1755-58. After the genocide, the city of Dihua 迪化 (lit. meaning ‘enlightening [the uncivilized]’, today Ürümqi, capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region) was established and the organized repopulation of the territory with Han, Hui and Manchu settlers began. Tibet and various ethnic minority areas of the Southwest became part of the Qing empire through military conquest as well.¹⁰²

While comparisons between the West and the Western-originated concepts of nation, empire, colonialism, etc. are at the center of the discourse, there are also authors who make comparative analyses between the Sinocentric tributary system and Southeast Asia’s so-called ‘mandala system’. Recent Chinese academic works on the topic are apparently in many ways reacting to the discourse on the Sinocentric tributary system and try to make comparisons between the two regional orders based on pre-modern Chinese concepts used for describing the tributary order, instead of Western-originated concepts (more on this in sub-section 5.3.3).

Apart from this, some authors focus on comparing Ming-Qing China’s foreign policy with that of the earlier Chinese dynasties (especially the preceding Song [960-1279] and Yuan [1279-1368]), emphasizing the relative openness for commercial trade and migration during the earlier periods. Xu Bo and Zhuang Guotu argue that during the Song and Yuan periods tribute played a much less significant role in China’s foreign relations, commercial trade and migration was far less restricted, hence China was outwardly more open and coastal populations benefitted more from maritime trade than under the Ming and Qing dynasties. They also point out that Song and Yuan-era Chinese maritime geographical knowledge was more advanced by the standards of the era than during the Ming and Qing.¹⁰³

These insights can be connected to the scholarly interest and discourse on outward openness, as well as ethnic and cultural diversity in Song and Yuan China’s coastal urban centers. As recent scholarship has demonstrated, Guangzhou and Quanzhou were home to large districts of foreign (mostly Middle Eastern and Indian) merchants during the Song and Yuan periods and served as focal points of cultural interaction as well. In Quanzhou, the archaeological findings dated to the Song-Yuan period include a large number of Muslim inscriptions (mostly epitaphs and founding inscriptions of mosques), as well as a Tamil-language inscription of a former Hindu temple. Buddhism, Eastern Christianity and

¹⁰² Larsen, “The Qing Empire (China), Imperialism, and the Modern World,” 500.

¹⁰³ Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, “Lun Zheng He xia Xiyang”; Xu Bo 徐波, “Dui gudai Dongya chaogong tixi,” 2017.

Manichaeism also made inroads into China through Quanzhou.¹⁰⁴ Following the fall of the Mongol Yuan dynasty (which patronized non-Han-Chinese in leading positions throughout the empire), most foreign communities fled China's coastal cities and no comparable ethnic and cultural diversity is attested in Ming-Qing-era coastal China. At the same time and also contrary to the Ming and Qing periods, Chinese emigration to Southeast Asia remained relatively unrestricted as well, leading to the formation of the earliest overseas Chinese communities and trade networks.¹⁰⁵

Interdiscursivity with broader discourses on Chinese, East Asian and global economic history can be detected to various extents. The issue receiving by far the largest amount of attention is the supposed isolationism of Ming-Qing China, facilitated through their prohibition of non-tributary trade during the so-called 'maritime bans' (*haijin* 海禁). However, the idea that Ming and Qing China was in practical terms isolated from the outside world due to these official policies, has been criticized by various authors. They point out that China in fact engaged in active bulk trade with the outside world throughout the Ming and Qing eras and Chinese merchants dominated the Eastern Asian maritime space throughout the period despite the restrictions on foreign trade.¹⁰⁶ Theories of global economic history, such as those of Andre G. Frank and Kenneth Pomeranz on the Sinocentric, silver-based early modern global economy receive far less attention than the discussion of Ming-Qing economic policy (although their major works have been translated into Chinese). The two authors both argue that despite the official bans on private trade during the Ming-Qing period, China remained the center of the global economy ("the sink of the world's silver") until the early 19th century.¹⁰⁷

Regarding the regional economic history of East and Southeast Asia, the works of Hamashita Takeshi on the relationship between the regional flow of silver and the tributary system are especially notable. Hamashita popularized the term 'tribute trade system', pointing to the interconnections between regional silver flows and the dynamics of the tributary

¹⁰⁴ Donald Daniel Leslie and Ahmad Youssef, "'Islamic Inscriptions in Quanzhou', a Review," *T'oung Pao* 74, no. 4/5 (1988): 255–72; Hugh R. Clark, "Muslims and Hindus in the Culture and Morphology of Quanzhou from the Tenth to the Thirteenth Century," *Journal of World History* 6, no. 1 (1995): 49–74; Roderich Ptak, "From Quanzhou to the Sulu Zone and beyond: Questions Related to the Early Fourteenth Century," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 29, no. 2 (1998): 269–94; Angela Schottenhammer, ed., *The Emporium of the World: Maritime Quanzhou, 1000–1400* (Brill, 2000), <https://brill.com/view/title/6983>.

¹⁰⁵ Kenneth R. Hall, "Local and International Trade and Traders in the Straits of Melaka Region: 600-1500," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47, no. 2 (2004): 213–60; Tansen Sen, "The Formation of Chinese Maritime Networks to Southern Asia, 1200-1450," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 49, no. 4 (2006): 421–53.

¹⁰⁶ Gang Deng, "The Foreign Staple Trade of China in the Pre-Modern Era," *The International History Review* 19, no. 2 (1997): 253–85.; See also Appendix 4.

¹⁰⁷ Frank, *ReORIENT*; Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence*.

system.¹⁰⁸ However, Hamashita's theories are rarely discussed in detail and he is mostly simply noted for being an advocator of the conceptualization of the tributary system. Hamashita's passage from the Chinese translation of his work *Kindai Chūgoku no kokusai-teki keiki – Chōkō bōeki shisutemu to kindai Ajia* [The international moment of early modern China – the tribute trade system and early modern Asia] is frequently quoted by those Chinese authors advocating the conceptualization, importance and uniqueness of the tributary system:

[The tributary system] was a historical system only existing in Asia. It is necessary to set out from this perspective and think it over and over again, only then is it possible to decipher the internal relations of Asian history.¹⁰⁹

Further relevant discourses include macro-historical discourses combining economic, social and political history. A major trend in recent global historiography is the conceptualization of an Afro-Eurasian space of shared ecology, immunity and technology, as well as the further spatialization of Afro-Eurasia into zones of interaction such as the Indo-Pacific maritime space and the Central Eurasian steppe zone. The importance of millennia-old interaction within these zones is increasingly emphasized in global historiography today.¹¹⁰ The question why certain things (such as animals, plants, bacteria, consumer goods and technological inventions) traveled faster or became more evenly distributed than others (e.g. accurate cultural and geographical knowledge) is already discussed but apparently needs further clarification.¹¹¹ The establishment of the trans-Pacific connection and the emergence of a truly 'global' economy in the 16th century, especially the influx of Spanish American silver into the Indo-Pacific network of trade has also received an increasing amount of attention in recent decades. The temporal depths of regular, long-distance interaction in the Central Eurasian steppe zone, the Indo-Pacific and the trans-Pacific maritime spaces are estimated at ca. 5000, 2000 and 500 years respectively.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Hamashita, *China, East Asia and the Global Economy*.

¹⁰⁹ Hamashita Takeshi 滨下武志, *Jindai Zhongguo de guoji qiji: Chaogong maoyi tixi yu jindai Yazhou jingji quan* 近代中国的国际契机: 朝贡贸易体系与近代亚洲经济圈 [Early modern China's international moment: The tribute trade system and the early modern Asian economic sphere], trans. Zhu Menggui 朱荫贵 and Ouyang Fei 欧阳菲, 1st ed. (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe [China Social Sciences Press], 1999), 30. (English translation based on the Chinese translation).

¹¹⁰ On the Central Eurasian steppe zone see Christian, "Silk Roads or Steppe Roads?"; Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road*; Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World*, 01 edition (London Oxford New York New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury UK, 2016); on the Indo-Pacific maritime space see Rothermund and Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, *Der indische Ozean*; Schottenhammer, "The 'China Seas' in World History."

¹¹¹ Christian, "Silk Roads or Steppe Roads?"; for a discussion on the discrepancy between the spread of consumer goods and cultural/scientific knowledge between China and the Middle East see George Saliba, "China and Islamic Civilization: Exchange of Techniques and Scientific Ideas," *The Silk Road* 6, no. 1 (2008): 9–17.

¹¹² Christian, "Silk Roads or Steppe Roads?"; Schottenhammer, "The 'China Seas' in World History"; Hamashita, *China, East Asia and the Global Economy*; Frank, *ReORIENT*.

Although the tributary system was a constituent part of all these historical processes of interaction, interdiscursivity with these macro-historical discourses is hardly detectable in the Chinese discourse on the early modern tributary system. Discussions of pacifism, non-interference and economic isolationism in early modern Chinese foreign policy, comparisons with the West and speculation about the relevance of the tributary system for China's present and future receive most of the attention instead. For this reason, the discourse on the early modern tributary system is primarily interlinked with discourses on Western-originated political and socio-economic concepts and contemplates their relevance to understand the role of the tributary system in the Chinese past and the possible usefulness of its research for China's present and future.

4. State of the Art

While there is a number of academic works analyzing the tributary system as a political and economic order or debating whether it can be conceptualized as a *system*, academic works analyzing the discourse around the tributary system are limited in their numbers and usually only focus on certain issues within the discourse.

In "Rethinking the 'Tribute System': Broadening the Conceptual Horizon of Historical East Asian Politics" (2009), while arguing against the analytical usefulness of the term 'tributary system', Zhang Feng summarizes the various approaches of those advocating its usefulness. He identifies three common views on which advocates of the concept base their claims. The first one among them is based on the interpretive model of Fairbank and is primarily concerned with the relationship between the tributary system and traditional Chinese culture. The second one, according to Zhang most prevalent among Chinese historians sees the tributary system as pre-modern China's bureaucratic management of foreign affairs. The third one is based primarily on the international relations theory of the English School and sees the tributary system as an interstate institution of pre-modern East Asia.¹¹³

In *East Asia Before the West* (2010), while advocating the analytical usefulness of the term 'tributary system', David C. Kang also identifies the main approaches on which its critics base their claims. These include the functionalist approach which considers the tributary system a 'cloak for trade' (a phrase already used by Fairbank), seeing tributary rites as the necessary procedure to realize the economic interests of the participating actors. The second one is the symbolic view of the tributary system which sees it as a "substance-free set of acts that masked

¹¹³ Zhang Feng, "Rethinking the 'Tribute System,'" 549–54.

the underlying “real” international politics based on military power and commerce”.¹¹⁴ A further group of scholars points out that the diversity of tributary exchanges makes it impossible to conceptualize them as a *system* and also criticizes the concept for projecting modernist models of behavior and institutions (such as states) onto the past, noting that not even the concept of ‘China’ or ‘Korea’ existed in the present sense in pre-modern times.¹¹⁵

In “Huayu, shijiao yu fangfa: Jin nian lai Ming-Qing chaogong tizhi yanjiu de ji ge wenti” [Discourse, perspectives and methodology: Issues in recent research on the Ming-Qing tributary system] (2014) Li Yunquan argues that the current academic discourse on the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing-era (1644-1912) tributary system is primarily based on the debate of its illusive vs. real nature. Regarding perspectives and methodology, Li Yunquan notes that a shift from the Sinocentric perspective towards “seeing China from the surrounding regions (*zhoubian* 周边)” and focusing on the interaction between the center (China) and the surrounding areas is occurring and points to the increased number of works investigating the tributary system in the Korean and Southeast Asian context.¹¹⁶

In “The Tenacious Tributary System” (2015) Perdue describes the current discourse on the tributary system as a mythmaking process whereby contemporary authors attempt to disguise national domination as cultural universalism. As he points out, the supposed pacifism and the permanence of China’s borders in the Chinese discourse on the tributary system are primarily based on present-day political aspirations instead of historical reality. Furthermore, Perdue points out that the “current myth” of a pacifist pre-modern China conducting its foreign relations primarily via tributary exchanges was not present even in the writings of mid-20th century Chinese historians, such as the authors of the *Yugong* 禹贡 journal Gu Jiegang 顾颉刚 (1893-1980), Tan Qixiang 谭其骧 (1911-1990) and their disciples. According to Perdue, these authors did not try to ignore the fact that Chinese expansion was realized through military force and colonization. Instead, they tried to create narratives based on China’s supposed geographical and climatic unity, as well as a supposed cultural unity created by its major dynasties such as the Han (206 BCE -220 CE) and Tang (618-907 CE). According to Perdue,

in a number of respects, the writers of the 1930s were more honest about China’s imperial history than the writers of today. In the 1930s, they unapologetically used terms like ‘expansion’ (*kuozhang* 扩张) or ‘colonization’ (*kenzhi* 垦殖) to describe their approval of the aggressive developmentalism of imperial and modern China. [...] For them, development

¹¹⁴ Kang, *East Asia Before the West*, 12.

¹¹⁵ Kang, 11–14.

¹¹⁶ Li Yunquan 李云泉, “Huayu, shijiao yu fangfa.”

required Han immigration to the periphery under military protection. The geographers invoked strong parallels between Han dynasty military colonies, Tang dynasty protectorates and European colonial expansion. They openly endorsed Sinicization as the key process tying border peoples and tributary states to the imperial center.¹¹⁷

Comparing the myth of pacifism in modern scholarship to the speeches of Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) – long-time Kuomintang (National Party) leader and authoritarian president of the Republic of China (in office 1928-75, 1949-75 in Taiwan) – Perdue notes that

Unlike Chiang Kai-shek or David Kang, they [the above-mentioned authors of the 1930s] recognized that Chinese empires conquered territory by force, but they still preferred to focus on eternal forces of climate and culture rather than the contingencies of battle.¹¹⁸

Perdue also quotes some passages from the translated version of *Zhongguo zhi mingyun* (*China's Destiny*), a collection of Chiang's lectures given during the 1940s, according to Perdue written by his ghostwriter Tao Xisheng 陶希圣 (1899-1988), to demonstrate Chiang's views on Chinese history:

According to its historic development, our Chinese nation was formed by the blending of numerous clans. These clans were originally branches of the same race, spreading to the East of the Pamir plateau, along the valleys of the Yellow, the Huai, the Yangtze, the Heilungkiang, and the Pearl rivers. [...] During the past five thousand years, with increasing contacts and migrations, they have been continuously blended into a nation. But the motive power of that blending was by assimilation rather than conquest.¹¹⁹

Perdue summarizes his suggestions for the future direction of research into China's tributary system as follows:

Apologetics for imperial expansion have their own contexts: sometimes they help to fortify a community to resist foreign invasion; sometimes they simply fall in conveniently with the reigning ideology of an assertive nation-state. History loses its critical edge when it simply reaffirms official ideology. We can do better.¹²⁰

Moreover, according to Perdue, the conceptualization of China's tributary exchanges by foreign scholars as a unique, "mystical" and "ineffable" phenomenon essentially different from

¹¹⁷ Perdue, "The Tenacious Tributary System," 1013.

¹¹⁸ Perdue, 1013.

¹¹⁹ Kai-shek Chiang, *China's Destiny & Chinese Economic Theory* (Roy Publishers, 1947), 30; quoted in Perdue, "The Tenacious Tributary System," 1011.

¹²⁰ Perdue, "The Tenacious Tributary System," 1014.

anything else in world history, fits precisely into Edward Said's definition of Orientalist discourse.¹²¹ As Perdue concludes,

Our views of Chinese history, like all historical interpretation, respond to the contemporary world. Sometimes, we simply cherry-pick the events from the past that confirm our current prejudices, but history can also be a critical discipline, providing some distance from present concerns. [...] In a global age, China needs a history that puts it in the world and makes its imperial past comparable to that of other long-lasting empires.¹²²

While these are examples of academic works to various extents focusing on the discourse on the tributary system, most of them merely provide a categorization of various approaches in the debate on the conceptualization of the tributary system. Apart from Perdue's short article, no attempts at uncovering the underlying ideology and power relations in the discourse can be detected. The present thesis will in this regard be similar to Perdue's critical approach in order to uncover ideology and power relations behind historiography on the tributary system. The present thesis will be a more detailed study, focusing on the historiography of the recent two decades, and exploring other aspects of the discourse (intertextuality, interdiscursivity), based on the Discourse-Historical Approach of Critical Discourse Analysis. The present thesis, while identifying certain major trends in the discourse, will also focus on the diversity of scholarly opinions and will attempt at explaining the reasons for this diversity.

5. The discourse on the tributary system

The analysis of the discourse on the tributary system will be divided into three sections based on what appear to be the three most common perspectives on the tributary system in mainland Chinese scholarship. The first of them, summarized in section 5.1, investigates the cultural roots of the tributary system. Frequently occurring topics are how the tributary system was rooted in classical Chinese thought (most notably Confucianism, imperial China's dominant social philosophy), as well as how notions of center and periphery and the traditional view of the 'others' (the 'barbarians', outside of the 'center') shaped the tributary system. A further frequently discussed topic is the alleged pro-agricultural/anti-trade (*zhong nong yi shang* 重农抑商, lit. 'supporting agriculture, repressing trade') attitude of China's pre-modern elites.

¹²¹ Perdue, 1006.

¹²² Perdue, 1014.

According to advocates of this idea, the Chinese elite's insistence on tying trade rights to tributary regulations and hence their curbing of free trade, most notably the so-called 'maritime bans' of the early modern period (when only tributary trade was legal) were rooted in a millennia-long preference for agriculture and disdain for trade rooted in classical Chinese thought.

In section 5.2 the socio-economic perspective on the tributary system will be introduced. As it will be pointed out at the beginning of the section, it has been demonstrated by Hamashita Takeshi and others that the tributary system was closely interlinked with global trade flows throughout early modernity. However, these global interconnections and the complex relationship between tribute and trade receive little attention in the Chinese discourse, most of the authors focusing on the impact of Chinese tributary policy on Chinese economy and society, as well as to some extent on the economies and societies of foreign countries (mostly based on what Chinese sources tell about this).

The most common opinion in Chinese scholarship regarding the economic impacts of the tributary system is that it was characterized by *hou wang bo lai* 厚往薄来 [giving generously, receiving little], in other words by wastefulness from a Chinese perspective. The practice of giving more in return gifts than the value of the tributes presented by foreigners, in turn, led to economic opportunism among foreign tributaries, as many authors argue. The isolationist periods (so-called *haijin* 海禁 or 'maritime bans') of the early Ming (mid-14th to mid-15th century) and early Qing (mid 17th to mid 18th century) when trade was only legal as part of tributary exchanges are frequently discussed as well. This is usually done in a comparative way with parallel developments in the West, namely the Age of Discoveries and the expansion of Western colonial empires, concluding that the tributary system and the maritime bans were responsible for China's falling behind the West by the 19th century. A less frequently discussed topic, covered in 5.2.3, is the connection between the tributary system and migration, especially the role of the overseas Chinese diaspora.

The third perspective, covered in section 5.3, is especially common among Chinese scholars with a background in political science and international relations. These authors see the tributary system as a pre-modern regional order of East Asia and to various extents of adjacent regions as well. The frequently discussed topics here are the supposed pacifism and non-expansionism of China under the tributary order, the long-time interstate stability of early modern East Asia supposedly based on the principles of the tributary order, as well as the comparison of the tributary and the Westphalian-colonial order. The newly-emerging discourse

on a supposedly specific Southeast Asian regional order (the so-called ‘mandala system’) and its comparison with the East Asian tributary order will also be introduced. The chapter will be concluded with the debate on the usefulness of investigating the tributary system for the present and future regional and global order. This question is apparently present in most Chinese academic works on the tributary system either in an explicit or implicit way.

The analysis of the Chinese discourse on the tributary system will proceed along what has already been outlined in section 3.1 (‘Critique’, ‘ideology’ and ‘power’). The chapter will provide evidence on the transitional nature of the historiography on the tributary system from being written from the perspective of a second-class, underdeveloped country and primarily in a comparative manner with the West to being written from the position of a re-emerging global power discovering its past tradition of great power status and contemplating its present and future responsibilities in the global order. The observations at the end of section 3.1 about the inadequacy of state-promoted ‘ideologies’ to interpret and evaluate the tributary system, the resulting diversity in scholarly opinions, as well as the contest for discursive dominance and the possible implications of either scholarly approach winning this contest, will be connected with the discourse at the end of each subsection in 5.1 and at the end of sections 5.2 and 5.3.

The chapter analyzes the academic discourse in mainland China, however, in some cases non-Chinese academic works will be discussed as well. This will either be done because the given publication has been translated into Chinese and has exerted considerable influence on the Chinese discourse (in the case of David Kang’s *East Asia Before the West*) or in order to show that a certain way of argumentation appears independently in non-Chinese publications, hence to enhance the feasibility of the given line of argument.

5.1 The cultural roots of the tributary system

5.1.1 The discussion on Confucianism and the tributary system

The tributary system, as a cultural phenomenon, is generally considered to be an extension of China’s domestic social relations to the outside world. China’s domestic social relations are in turn usually considered to be an extension of Confucian family relations. The so-called *san gang wu chang* 三纲五常 [three principles, five virtues] are usually regarded as the core of Confucian social philosophy. The ‘three principles’ refer to the hierarchic relationships between father and son, husband and wife, as well as ruler and subject. The ‘five virtues’ include benevolence (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 义), propriety (*li* 礼), wisdom (*zhi* 智) and fidelity (*xin* 信). Projecting this to the international scale, it is usually argued that the core of the tributary

system was the pre-modern Chinese view of an ideal world order based on the hierarchic relationship between a righteous and benevolent Chinese emperor and obedient foreign rulers expressing their loyalty through the presentation of tributes.¹²³

According to Xu Bo, the tributary system was primarily based on the importance of ‘rites’ or ‘propriety/etiquette’ (*li*) in Confucianism and the related notion of ‘rule by rites’ (*lizhi* 礼治). By taking part in Confucian rites (or sending envoys to take part in them), foreign rulers were admitted by their Chinese counterparts as legitimate members of the Sinocentric system. Ritual subordination, often without any substantial economic or political dependency was apparently so important that some authors refer to a ‘ritual tributary system’ (*lizhixing de chaogong tixi*) and contrast it with ‘substantial tributary systems’ (*shizhixing de chaogong tixi*).¹²⁴

The discussion on the role of Confucianism in the tributary system often revolves around the supposed pacifism defining pre-modern China’s foreign relations. There are various authors who argue that pacifism is an integral part of Confucianism and hence of traditional Chinese culture, which also has a referential value for China’s present and future foreign policy.¹²⁵ The passage attributed to Confucius in the *Lunyu* [*Analects*],

if people of distant lands are not submissive, culture [*wen*] and virtue [*de*] should be cultivated to attract them to be so.¹²⁶

is frequently quoted in order to argue for the supposed pacifism towards foreigners in classical Chinese thought. Song Xiaoqin 宋晓芹, a fervent advocate of imperial China’s pacifism, argues that

¹²³ Song Xiaoqin 宋晓芹, “Shilun Zhongguo zai Dongya chaogong tixi zhong de diwei he zuoyong 试论中国在东亚朝贡体系中的地位和作用[Analyzing China’s position and function in the East Asian tributary system],” *Dalian Daxue Xuebao* [*Journal of Dalian University*] 38, no. 04 (2017): 9–10; Yu Changsen 喻常森, “Shilun chaogong zhidu.”

¹²⁴ Xu Bo 徐波, “Dui gudai Dongya chaogong tixi,” 2017, 90; referring to Li Yunquan 李云泉, *Wan bang lai chao*, 59.; See also Fairbank 10.

¹²⁵ Ren Nianwen 任念文, “Mingchu Nanhai chaogong zhidu yu fengjian guojia haiyang zhanlue shulun 明初南海朝贡制度与封建国家海洋战略述论 [On the Early Ming South China Sea tributary system and maritime strategy of feudal states],” *Taipingyang Xuebao* [*Pacific Journal*] 22, no. 8 (2014): 94–105; Song Xiaoqin 宋晓芹, “Shilun Zhongguo zai Dongya”; Huang Chunyan 黄纯艳, “Chaogong tixi yu Songchao guojia anquan 朝贡体系与宋朝国家安全 [Tributary system and national security during the Song dynasty],” *Jinan Xuebao Zhexue Shehuikexue Xueban* 暨南学报(哲学社会科学版) 2018, no. 02 (2018): 120–132; Chen Zhiping 陈支平, “Mingdai ‘Haishang Sichou zhi Lu’ fazhan moshi de lishi fansi 明代‘海上丝绸之路’发展模式的历史反思 [Reflections on the development model of Ming era ‘Maritime Silk Routes’],” *Zhongguo Shiyianjiu* [*Journal of Chinese Historical Studies*] 2019, no. 01 (2019): 191–198.

¹²⁶ “远人不服，则修文德以来之。” *Analects* Jishi 季氏 1. <https://ctext.org/analects/ji-shi> (Accessed on 2019-07-29); quoted in Huang 121 and Song 11.

Confucian culture is the core and spirit of Chinese culture, it values simplicity instead of seeking fame and wealth, focuses on reality, opposes despotism, loves peace, advocates being people-oriented. It has actively promoted and fulfilled the spirit of plain pacifism and humanism.¹²⁷

Meanwhile, in a detailed analysis of the discourse on ‘pacifism’ vs. ‘realism’ in the interpretations of pre-modern China’s foreign policy, Wang Qing 王青 points out that arguing for any of them as a general characteristic of pre-modern China involves a one-sided selection of historical sources.¹²⁸ Wang Qing also notes that Confucianism was only one of the various philosophical schools of pre-Han-era China and became the dominant state ideology and social philosophy only under the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE). Therefore, in his view, making assumptions of pre-modern Chinese thought based only on Confucianism ignores the ideological diversity of pre-modern China. Xu Bo and Wang Qing both argue against conceptualizing the overall pacifism of the tributary system¹²⁹ (see more on this in section 5.3.1).

In summary, the discussion on the relation between Confucianism and the tributary system is interlinked with the debate the supposed pacifism of China under the tributary order (see 5.3.1), on the investigation of the relation between Confucian notions of harmony through hierarchy and the interstate stability of early modern East Asia (see 5.3.2), as well as the investigation of the potential usefulness of the tributary system for the present and future regional order (see 5.3.5). The position of those advocating the idea that the tributary system was based on an intrinsically pacifist Confucian tradition defining pre-modern Chinese culture also implies that the tributary system is a useful framework for advancing China’s ‘peaceful development’ (‘peaceful rise’) foreign policy model (see ‘ideology’ in 3.1).

5.1.2 Tianxia-worldview and Sino-‘barbarian’ division (*hua-yi zhi bian*) in pre-modern Chinese thought

It is frequently argued that the ideological basis of the tributary system was China’s pre-modern worldview, the so-called *Tianxia*-worldview (*Tianxiaguan* 天下观) and the distinction between China and the ‘barbarians’ (*hua-yi zhi bian* 华夷之辨; also called *hua-yi zhixu* 华夷秩序 ‘Sino-‘barbarian’ order’). In pre-modern Chinese thought *Tianxia* [lit. ‘(all) under heaven’, the entire world] was to be ruled by the *Tianzi* 天子 [lit. ‘the Son of Heaven’, the Chinese

¹²⁷ “儒家文化作为中华文化的核心与灵魂，淡泊神学，关注现实，反对暴政，热爱和平，主张以人为本，积极进取，充满了朴素的和平主义情怀和人文主义精神。” Song, 12.

¹²⁸ Wang Qing 王青, “Zhongguo chuantong duiwai guanxi,” 2–24.

¹²⁹ Xu Bo 徐波, “Dui gudai Dongya chaogong tixi,” 2017, 96; Wang Qing 王青, “Zhongguo chuantong duiwai guanxi,” 2–24.

emperor] whose rhetoric of legitimacy was based on receiving the *Tianming* 天命 [‘Mandate of Heaven’]. As it is often argued, the tributary system, in the eyes of pre-modern Chinese, was the way of acknowledging the nominal authority of the ‘Son of Heaven’ by foreign rulers, hence a manifestation of the *Tianxia*-worldview in interstate/interethnic affairs.¹³⁰

It is noted by many authors that since China was a relatively isolated major agricultural and urbanized civilization, pre-modern Chinese had a strong sense of cultural superiority (*youyuegan* 优越感) towards all outsiders, framing the world as divided between the center of civilization or *wen*¹³¹ (China) and the peripheries inhabited by ‘barbarians’. The so-called Sino-‘barbarian’ division (*hua-yi zhi bian*) was the basis of the tributary system, in that it was seen as the acknowledgment of the superior position of the center vis-à-vis the periphery.¹³²

According to Xu Bo, center (*zhongxin* 中心, first the *Zhongyuan* 中原 / Central Plains of the Middle and Lower Yellow River Valley, later China in general) and periphery (*bian* 边) have been separated in classical Chinese literature since the *Zhouli* 周礼 [Rites of the Zhou Dynasty, composed during the ‘Warring States’ period of the 5th-2nd century BCE). Xu quotes from several Han-era documents such as the *Hanshu* 汉书 [Book of Han] and *Shiji* 史记 [Records of the Great Historian (Sima Qian)] showing that center-periphery notions already existed during that period, especially in references to the conflicts with the Xiongnu nomadic ethnic group, the northern neighbors of Han-era China.¹³³ Xu also notes that derogatory terms for foreigners such as *fanguai* 番鬼 [foreign demons] were persistent in Chinese documents until the 19th century. Names for Westerners such as *xiyang gui* 西洋鬼 [demons from the western seas] and for the Dutch *hongmao gui* 红毛鬼 [red-haired demons] had been used in official documents until they were ordered to be abandoned during the signing of the Treaty of Tianjin (1858) between China and France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Li Yunquan 李云泉, “Huayu, shijiao yu fangfa”; Song Xiaoqin 宋晓芹, “Shilun Zhongguo zai Dongya,” 11; Xu Bo 徐波, “Dui gudai Dongya chaogong tixi,” 2017, 91–95.

¹³¹ *Wen* 文, meaning both script (Chinese characters) and culture/civilization.

¹³² Li Baojun 李宝俊 and Liu Bo 刘波, “‘Chaogong - cefeng’ zhixu lunxi ‘朝贡——册封’秩序论析 [Analysis of the ‘tributary-feudal’ order],” *Waijiao Pinglun* [Foreign Affairs Review] 2011, no. 2 (2011): 109–121; Huang Chunyan 黄纯艳, “Chaogong tixi yu Songchao”; Chen Zhiping 陈支平, “Mingdai ‘Haishang Sichou zhi Lu.’”

¹³³ Xu Bo 徐波, “Dui gudai Dongya chaogong tixi,” 2017, 93–94.

¹³⁴ Xu 95, referring to Liu He 刘禾, *Diguo de Huayu Zhengzhi: Cong Jindai Zhong-Xi Chongtu Kan Xiandai Shijie Zhixu de Xingcheng* 帝国的话语政治: 从近代中西冲突看现代世界秩序的形成 [Imperial Discourse Politics: The Emergence of the Modern World Order from the Perspective of the Sino-Western Clash] (Beijing: Shenghuo-Dushu-Xinzhishi Sanlian Shudian, 2009); and He Xinhua 何新华 and Wang Xiaohong 王小红, *Tianxia Tixi: Yizhong Jiangou Shijie Zhixu de Zhongguo Jingyan* 天下体系: 一种建构世界秩序的中国经验 [The Tianxia System: The Chinese Experience of Constructing a World Order], 1st ed. (Beijing: Guangming Ribao Chubanshe [Guangming Daily Press], 2014).

According to Xu Bo, the Sino-‘barbarian’ division was especially emphasized by the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the first Han Chinese dynasty recovering the entirety of China proper since the fall of the Tang in the early 10th century CE. Contrary to the frequent selective quotation of the egalitarian passages from the *Huang Ming Zuxun* by various authors (see section 5.3.1), Xu Bo presents various passages from Ming-era imperial edicts displaying a clear sense of cultural superiority and paternalism from the Ming side towards foreigners. In 1397, in an edict to the Siamese king, Emperor Taizu of Ming stated that

Since Heaven and Earth have existed, ruler and subject, superior and inferior have been separated, and the rite of China and the barbarians of all four directions has been observed. Since ancient times it has always been like this.¹³⁵

In a writing titled *Yu yi pian* 驭夷篇 [On how to control the barbarians] dated to 1428, Emperor Xuanzong of Ming (r. 1425-35) argues that

The barbarians cannot be discussed as China [...] They are not taught on poetry and books [*shishu* 诗书, also referring to Confucian classics], nor on the habits of rituals and righteousness [*liyi* 礼义, also a Confucian term], when they are kind they are like humans, when they are furious they are like beasts, their temperament and behavior is primitive. [...] Hence, they are not like our people, their mind is rebellious and inconstant.¹³⁶

Most authors present the Sino-‘barbarian’ division as a rather negative part of pre-modern Chinese culture, pointing out that it had a negative impact on interethnic relations (within China’s present-day borders) and on China’s relations with other countries. As Li Baojun 李宝俊 and Liu Bo 刘波 argue,

Traditional Chinese culture emphasized the “Sino-barbarian division”, saw China as the center of the world, and called neighboring countries and ethnicities “barbarians” [*manyi* 蛮夷]. This sort of self-centered ideology created obstacles in the national psyche.¹³⁷

According to Xu Bo, the persistent belief in China’s own superiority vis-à-vis outsiders was an obstacle to deep engagement with foreign countries and ethnicities throughout Chinese history and ultimately led to China’s failure to keep pace with the outwardly open West. The

¹³⁵“自有天地以来，即有君臣上下之分，且有中国四夷之礼，自古皆然。” *Ming Taizu Shilu* Vol. 254:42. 太祖高皇帝实录卷之二百五十四 <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=730932&remap=gb#p43> (Accessed on 2019-07-29); quoted in Xu 92-93.

¹³⁶“四夷非可以中国概论……夷狄非有诗书之教、礼义之习，好则人，怒则兽，其气习素然……然非我族类，故其心叛服不常” *Ming Xuanzong Shilu* Vol. 38:1 明宣宗章皇帝实录卷之三十八 <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=133891&remap=gb#p2> (Accessed on 2019-07-29); quoted in Xu 93.

¹³⁷ Li Baojun 李宝俊 and Liu Bo 刘波, “Chaogong - cefeng,” 118.

tributary system, according to Xu, was the manifestation of this hierarchic and inward-looking pre-modern worldview of China in its foreign policy.¹³⁸

There are also some authors who are less negative while discussing the Sino-‘barbarian’ division and instead focus on praising pre-modern China’s wealth, technology and culture, as well as the historical necessity for others to learn from it. In some cases, this attitude finds sources of reference in earlier Western scholarship on China, published prior to the widespread influence of Edward Said’s Orientalism theory. Song Xiaoqin, quoting John K. Fairbank, apparently justifies China’s ‘mission civilisatrice’ towards other countries/ethnic groups:

First of all, the advanced nature of Chinese culture decided China’s function and position as a disseminator of culture. Pre-modern China’s superior position “was not one of mere material power but of culture”.¹³⁹ [...]

Under the tributary system, China’s political, economic, cultural and religious interaction with the neighboring countries and ethnicities brought East Asia into the age of civilization, the value system based on Confucian thought finally became the core of East Asian civilization. This was inseparable from China’s function as a disseminator of culture.¹⁴⁰

While it is generally accepted that the Sino-‘barbarian’ division was a defining element of pre-modern China’s worldview, the flexibility of the boundaries between ‘Chinese’ and ‘barbarian/non-Chinese’ is also frequently pointed out. As Zhuang argues, in pre-modern China no ethnic and national boundaries existed in the modern sense, in the north and west there were frequent changes in political borders and migrations of northern and western nomads into China proper occurred frequently. According to Zhuang, the distinction between Chinese and ‘barbarian’ or non-Chinese had cultural, not ethnolinguistic roots and was primarily based on who followed Confucian rites (*li* 礼).¹⁴¹

It is also noteworthy that during two of China’s major dynasties, the Mongol Yuan (1271-1368) and the Manchu Qing (1644-1912), the entire country was ruled by an ethnic minority political elite, making these periods especially relevant while discussing the Sino-‘barbarian’ division. According to Sun Hongmei, based on the *Yuanshi* [History of the Yuan], the Yuan dynasty put a special emphasis on the ideas of *Tianxia yi jia* 天下一家 [‘the whole world is one family’] and *hua-yi yi jia* 华夷一家 [‘Chinese and barbarians/non-Chinese

¹³⁸ Xu Bo 徐波, “Dui gudai Dongya chaogong tixi,” 2017, 87–95.

¹³⁹ Song Xiaoqin 宋晓芹, “Shilun Zhongguo zai Dongya,” 12; quoting J. K. Fairbank, “Tributary Trade and China’s Relations with the West,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 1, no. 2 (February 1942): 130, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2049617>.

¹⁴⁰ Huang Chunyan 黄纯艳, “Chaogong tixi yu Songchao,” 13.

¹⁴¹ Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, “Lüelun chaogong zhidu de xuhuan,” 2.

are one family'] in its rhetoric for legitimacy.¹⁴² According to Wang Hui, the Qing dynasty managed to uphold its legitimacy in the eyes of both the Han Chinese majority and ethnic minorities in the outer regions because it managed to create an empire that integrated various cultural and legal traditions. The Qing rulers maintained what Wang Hui calls 'Confucian orthodoxy' by presenting the Confucian rites in the capital and by relying on the Chinese administrative system inherited from the Ming in the governance of China proper. In the ethnic minority regions (Manchuria, Mongolia, Tibet, Xinjiang, as well as parts of Southwest China) they granted autonomy to local leaders to practice customary law. Tributary exchanges within the Qing realm, between the Qing court and local elites of the outer regions, existed simultaneously with Qing-foreign tributary exchanges.¹⁴³

The concepts of the *Tianxia*-worldview and the Sino-'barbarian' division play a central role in the discourse on the tributary system. While discussing the socio-economic and political aspects of the tributary system and comparing it with the modern-era Westphalian order, Chinese authors frequently make references to these concepts as the cultural roots of the system. As it is usually concluded, pre-modern China's foreign policy was based on the tributary system and thus was characterized by a self-centered view of the world, a sense of cultural superiority and of the (at least nominally) universal authority of the Chinese emperor, but also by an absence of the modern concepts of 'ethnicity' and 'nationality'. The drastic changes of the second half of the 19th century shook this millennia-old worldview in its foundations.¹⁴⁴

In summary, regarding 'ideology' (see 3.1), the interpretation and evaluation of the *Tianxia*-worldview is one of the most divisive issues in current mainland Chinese historiography. There is a school of thought in Chinese historiography and international relations theory known as '(Neo-)Tianxiaism' (see 5.3.5) which advocates that the core values of China's pre-modern *Tianxia*-worldview were the belief in universal norms of morality and appreciation of harmony/stability, and this served as the guarantee for long periods of interstate peace and stability in East Asia. Hence, in their opinion, the Sinocentric tributary system and

¹⁴² Sun Hongmei 孙红梅, "Yuanchao de 'Tianxia yi jia' sixiang ji qi zhengzhi wenhua yitong 元朝的"天下一家"思想及其政治文化一统 [The 'All under Heaven is one family' ideology of the Yuan dynasty and political-cultural unification]," *Heilongjiang Minzu Congkan [Heilongjiang Nationalities Series]* 2009, no. 3 (2009): 91–95.

¹⁴³ Wang, *China from Empire to Nation-State*, 114–24; Yi Qiaorui 尹巧蕊, "Qingdai Menggu chaogong."; on Ming-era tributary relations between the central court and the hereditary chiefs (*tusi* 土司) of ethnic minority groups in Southwest China see Wu Wei 武巍, "Mingdai Xinan tusi chaogong chutan 明代西南土司朝贡初探 [Introduction to the Ming-era tributary exchange with ethnic minority hereditary leaders in Southwest China]," *Heilongjiang Shizhi 黑龙江史志 [Heilongjiang Chronicles]* 2015, no. 13 (2015): 19–20.

¹⁴⁴ Wang, *China from Empire to Nation-State*, 101–45. "Chapter 4 'China's Modern Identity and the Transformation of Empire'"

the *Tianxia*-worldview on which it was based are not outdated concepts but relevant tools for present and future international relations theory and policy-making in a region where China is reemerging as its dominant, centrally located state. The idea that Western-style nationalism and the treaty-based order brought instability and destruction to the region in the 19th and 20th centuries is also related to this approach. Meanwhile, there are others who dismiss the tributary system and the *Tianxia*-worldview as incompatible with the principles of state sovereignty and non-interference and unsuitable to the globally interconnected, multipolar world of the present day.¹⁴⁵ The question how much discursive power will be gained by advocates of the *Tianxia*-worldview (and its manifestation in foreign policy, the tributary system) as useful concepts for contemporary international relations theory is arguably highly relevant for the future regional and global order.

5.1.3 The debate on the alleged pro-agricultural/anti-trade attitude of pre-modern Chinese elites (*zhong nong yi shang*)

One further topic frequently discussed when it comes to the cultural roots of the tributary system is the alleged pro-agriculture/anti-trade (*zhong nong yi shang* 重农抑商, lit. ‘supporting agriculture, repressing trade’) attitude of pre-modern Chinese elites which in turn was allegedly rooted in classical Chinese thought. Regarding the Ming-Qing period, it is usually discussed in contrast with the pro-trade attitudes of Western elites at the same time and as the reason for China’s falling behind the West in terms of economic and political power.¹⁴⁶

According to Xu Bo, the tributary system was deeply influenced by the inward-looking, pro-agriculture/anti-trade mentality of pre-modern Chinese elites. Xu argues that the tributary system, especially during the Ming and Qing eras, was an inward-looking constellation whose principal aim was to secure the legitimacy and authority of the ruling dynasties in the eyes of the Chinese population. Tributary exchanges with foreigners were used primarily as a tool to showcase the power of the ruling dynasty towards the domestic population. Economic benefit was secondary to the purpose of securing the ‘filial respect’ (*xiaojing* 孝敬)¹⁴⁷ of foreigners,

¹⁴⁵ On this debate see Wang, *Renewal*.

¹⁴⁶ He Aiguo 何爱国, “Lüelun shiliu-shiqi shiji Zhongguo yu Ouzhou lieqiang guanyu Dongnanya shiwu de chongtu 略论十六-十七中国与欧洲列强关于东南亚事务的冲突 [Brief discussion of the conflicts between China and European powers on Southeast Asian affairs during the 16th and 17th centuries],” *Kunming Ligong Daxue Xuebao (She Ke Ban) [Journal of the Kunming University of Science and Technology (Social Sciences and Humanities)]* 1, no. 4 (2001): 42; Ren Nianwen 任念文, “Mingchu Nanhai chaogong zhidu,” 102; Xu Bo 徐波, “Dui gudai Dongya chaogong tixi,” 2017.

¹⁴⁷ Confucian concept by extension also meaning the submission and loyalty of the subject to the ruler.

and accordingly, wastefulness (*hou wang bo lai*, see section 5.2.1) characterized the tributary system from a Chinese perspective.¹⁴⁸

Wang Qing analyzes the history of the tributary system from the perspective of ‘interest cognition’ (*liyi renzhi* 利益认知) and supports the notion that pre-modern Chinese elites were characterized by a pro-agriculture/anti-trade attitude. According to Wang Qing, in pre-modern China the idea that agriculture was the foundation (*ben* 本) of prosperity and stability, whereas trade was only incidental/non-essential (*mo* 末) had its origins in the Warring States period (475-221 BCE). Based on evidence from the *Shangjun Shu* 商君书 [Book of Lord Shang], Wang Qing notes that the legalist scholar and statesman Shang Yang 商鞅 (c. 390-338 BCE) saw agriculture as the foundation of a strong military and during his reforms of the Qin state (which eventually conquered and unified all of China in 221 BCE) he initialized a number of pro-agricultural/anti-trade reforms.¹⁴⁹

During the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), Confucianism replaced legalism (*fajia* 法家) as the dominant state ideology of China, but according to Wang Qing the pro-agricultural/anti-trade attitude of Chinese elites did not change considerably, apart from the shift from emphasizing its foundational character for military strength towards seeing it as the foundation of prosperity and social stability. According to Wang Qing, the contrast between agriculture and trade came to be linked to the distinction between ‘righteousness’ and ‘profit’ (*yi-li zhi fen* 义利之分) and the Confucian ideal of the ‘noble man’ (*junzi* 君子) seeking the former instead of the latter.¹⁵⁰

Meanwhile, Wang Qing also argues that the pro-agricultural/anti-trade discourse in pre-modern China was more a result of Chinese elites’ interest cognition than the reason per se for isolationism in the Ming-Qing period. In a comparative discussion of historical Western and Chinese thought on trade and economic profit, Wang Qing argues that the rhetoric of anti-materialism is just as prevalent in the Bible and Western theological works as it is in the Confucian classics. Therefore, in his view, seeing Confucianism as the reason for China’s isolationism and falling behind the West lacks argumentative strength. Wang Qing argues that the pro-agricultural/anti-trade attitude was the result of the genuine belief among China’s elites that foreign trade and maritime expansion had no significant benefits for China, being ultimately based on China’s position as a relatively isolated major agricultural civilization. As

¹⁴⁸ Xu Bo 徐波, “Dui gudai Dongya chaogong tixi,” 2017, 98–100.

¹⁴⁹ Wang Qing 王青, “Zhongguo chuantong duiwai guanxi,” 83–85.

¹⁵⁰ Wang Qing 王青, 86–87.

evidence in the early modern (Ming-Qing) period, Wang Qing mentions the refrainment from establishing regular trade links and from lifting the maritime ban during the Zheng He missions of the early Ming, as well as the hesitation of the Qing rulers to keep Taiwan after defeating the Ming loyalists based there.¹⁵¹

In summary, present-day Chinese elites' insistence on openness for trade, especially since the inauguration of the Belt and Road Initiative by Xi Jinping in 2013, makes it a relevant question whether this sort of state-promoted outward economic openness had precedents under the early modern (Ming-Qing) tributary order and hence for the interpretation and evaluation of the tributary system as a whole. The commonly held opinion also shared by some non-Chinese scholars¹⁵² that China's elites were characterized by a pro-agricultural/anti-trade attitude and that this attitude had its roots in Confucianism has been criticized by some scholars as introduced throughout the section, but it remains a frequently mentioned reason by those arguing against the relevance of the tributary system for China's present and future foreign policy.

5.2 The socio-economic aspects of the tributary system

It has been demonstrated by various non-Chinese authors that the tributary system was interconnected with the global flow of silver in the early modern period and that it existed in combination with various forms of legal trade.¹⁵³ Some authors have framed the tributary system as a 'cloak for trade' (Fairbank)¹⁵⁴ or conceptualized a 'tribute trade system' (Hamashita).¹⁵⁵ According to David Kang, four types of foreign trade existed in early modern East Asia, namely tributary trade (the ceremonial exchange of goods, combined with rituals expressing mutual diplomatic recognition), official trade (conducted by members of tributary missions outside the tributary ceremonies), commercial trade (regulated by tributary agreements, accounting for by far the largest volume of trade) and illegal trade (smuggling and piracy, especially rampant during restrictions on commercial trade).¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Wang Qing 王青, 90–111.

¹⁵² Thomas J. Barfield, "Steppe Empires, China, and the Silk Route: Nomads as a Force in International Trade and Politics," *Nomads in the Sedentary World. Curzon, 2001 (Curzon-IIAS Asian Studies Series)*, no. Volume 25 (2001): 234–49.

¹⁵³ Regarding the connection between the tributary system and the global flow of silver, see Hamashita, *China, East Asia and the Global Economy*.

¹⁵⁴ Fairbank and Têng, "On The Ch'ing Tributary System."

¹⁵⁵ Hamashita, *China, East Asia and the Global Economy*.

¹⁵⁶ Kang, *East Asia Before the West*, 109.

Regarding the Ming period, Nakajima conceptualizes a ‘tribute and trade system’ (*gongshi tizhi* 贡市体制) and divides Ming-era tributary exchanges into six zones (‘Eastern Zone’: East Asia, ‘Southern Zone’: Southeast Asia, ‘Indian Ocean Zone’, ‘Northern Zone’: Manchuria and Mongolia, ‘Western Zone’: Xinjiang, Central Asia, continental West Asia, ‘Southwestern Zone’: Tibet and indigenous territories of Southwest China) and seven periods. The last period (after 1570), what Nakajima frames as the ‘1570 system’ emerged as a result of various important turning points in Eastern Asian economic and political history, including:

- the relaxation of the Ming maritime prohibition since the 1560s and as a result the re-emergence of Chinese dominance in maritime trade (accompanied by a drop in the influence of Ryukyu as an intermediary in Sino-Foreign trade¹⁵⁷)
- the establishment of Manila by the Spanish in 1571 and the start of the influx of Spanish American silver via Manila into Eastern Asia
- the establishment of the Portuguese trading post in Nagasaki and the Macau-Nagasaki connection, contributing to the influx of Japanese silver into China
- the Longqing 隆庆 peace treaty (1570) establishing tributary relations with the Mongol Altan Khan, the opening of ‘horse markets’ along the Great Wall (markets where commercial exchange of Mongolian horses and Chinese products was legally allowed)
- the establishment of ‘mutual markets’ (*hushichang* 互市场) and ‘wood markets’ in the Liaodong peninsula in the 1570s to enhance legal trade with the Jurchens and the Uriyangqa Mongols¹⁵⁸

What Hamashita, Nakajima and others intend to demonstrate is that tributary exchange and trade relations were interrelated and diverse phenomena in early modern China/Eastern Asia, with a significant extent of diversity by region and periods, shaped by larger global and regional economic processes, as well as by the decisions of China’s foreign policy makers. Tributary exchanges and the resulting mutual diplomatic recognition played an important role in facilitating the opening of ‘mutual markets’ (*hushi* 互市) along China’s continental borders and in coastal cities as well. Their insights can also be related to quantitative evidence on China being the center of the global economy (“the sink of the world’s silver”, as A. G. Frank puts it)

¹⁵⁷ On the importance of Ryukyu as an intermediary during the maritime ban of the early to middle Ming, see also Chapter 5 ‘The Ryukyu maritime network from the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries: China, Korea, Japan and Southeast Asia’ in Hamashita, *China, East Asia and the Global Economy*, 57–84; Schottenhammer, “The ‘China Seas’ in World History.”

¹⁵⁸ Gakusho Nakajima, “The Structure and Transformation of the Ming Tribute Trade System,” in *Global History and New Polycentric Approaches: Europe, Asia and the Americas in a World Network System*, ed. Manuel Perez Garcia and Lucio De Sousa, Palgrave Studies in Comparative Global History (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2018), 151–54, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-4053-5_7.

throughout the early modern period¹⁵⁹ and the domination of the Eastern Asian seas by Chinese merchants well until the 19th century (see Appendix 4).¹⁶⁰

Despite evidence of this diversity in the functions of the tributary system and of the opportunities of commercial trade facilitated by tributary exchanges, the Chinese discourse, in most cases based on a narrow understanding of what the tributary system meant, seems to be fixated on its alleged wastefulness (*hou wang bo lai*) and the isolationism (*zhong nong yi shang*, see sub-section 5.1.3) of the Ming-Qing elites. The Chinese discourse on the economic aspects of the tributary system in East and Southeast Asia is primarily concerned with the harmfulness of tributary regulations for China's economic interests, notes the economic opportunism of foreign elites, includes frequent comparisons with Western economic progress of the same period and usually blames the tributary policy and maritime bans of the Ming-Qing dynasties for China's failure to keep pace with the West. The early Ming-era Zheng He missions, however, are still usually praised as an act of opening-up and the last period before China's supposed long-time isolation. Academic publications on the tributary system in Inner Asia usually emphasize its wastefulness and the economic opportunism of tributary elites as well, but they also often point out its importance in deepening relations between ethnicities (of present-day China) and thus in the progress towards a unified multiethnic nation-state. It also has to be pointed out that while writing on the socio-economic aspects of the tributary system, most authors base their claims entirely on evidence from Chinese primary sources and only a few of them consult non-Chinese sources.

5.2.1 The debate on the economic wastefulness of the tributary system (*hou wang bo lai*)

There is probably no phrase in Chinese academic works on the tributary system that appears more frequently than *hou wang bo lai* 厚往薄来. Its literal meaning is 'giving generously, receiving little' and it refers to the practice of the Chinese court to pay more in gifts for foreign tributaries than the value of their tributes. Most authors argue that *hou wang bo lai* characterized China's tributary relations throughout the Ming-Qing period.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Frank, *ReORIENT*; Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence*.

¹⁶⁰ See also Deng, "The Foreign Staple Trade of China in the Pre-Modern Era."

¹⁶¹ Yu Changsen 喻常森, "Shilun chaogong zhidu"; He Aiguo 何爱国, "Lüelun shiliu-shiqi shiji Zhongguo yu Ouzhou"; Wang Qing 王青, "Zhongguo chuantong duiwai guanxi"; Zhang Xiangyao 张向耀, "Cong chaogong kan Mingchao Han-Zang jiaoliu 从朝贡看明朝汉藏交流 [Ming-era Han-Tibetan interaction from the perspective of tributary exchange]," *Neijiang Shifan Xueyuan Xuebao [Journal of Neijiang Normal University]* 26, no. 3 (2011): 54–57; Ren Nianwen 任念文, "Mingchu Nanhai chaogong zhidu"; Yang Linkun 杨林坤, "Lun Mingchao Xiyu chaogong maoyi zhengce de deshi 论明朝西域朝贡贸易政策的得失 [On the gains and losses of Ming-era

In his article focusing on China's maritime tributary interaction, Chen Zhiping 陈支平 quotes various passages from the *Ming Shilu* and *Mingshi* to emphasize the importance of *hou wang bo lai* in the tributary system. These include the one attributed to the Ming dynasty's founder Zhu Yuanzhang (Taizu of Ming) from the *Mingshi*:

The various countries of the Western Ocean are commonly known as the 'distant foreigners' [yuan fan 远藩]. They cross the sea to come here, the length of their journey being difficult to count. No matter if the amount of their tribute is small, giving generously and receiving little [*hou wang bo lai*] is acceptable.¹⁶²

Connecting his article to the discourse on a supposed proto-capitalist economy in early modern China, Chen Zhiping points out the wastefulness of Ming China's tributary policy as evidence for the fictitiousness of the 'sprouts of capitalism' theory. He argues that if the principles of capitalism would have been endorsed in China to any extent, China would not have followed the principle of *hou wang bo lai* in its economic foreign policy but would have engaged in expansionist, profit-oriented foreign policy as Western countries did at the same time. Chen accuses Chinese supporters of the 'sprouts of capitalism' theory of being interested in making China as much similar to the West as possible instead of considering historical facts. Chen also argues that *hou wang bo lai* was part of the pacifism of the tributary system and was in stark contrast with later Western colonialism, being part of the 'primitive accumulation' phase of capitalism.¹⁶³

According to some authors, the wastefulness of the tributary system did not always originate from Chinese rulers' sense of superiority (see section 5.1.2) or the intention to demonstrate power but was also a necessity in order to prevent military aggression from powerful nomad tribes in the northern borders. This view has been advocated by non-Chinese authors as well, such as anthropologist Thomas Barfield in his article primarily focusing on the relations between the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) and the Xiongnu nomads to its north:

tributary trade in the western regions],” *Zhongnan Minzu Daxue Xuebao (Renwen Shehui Kexue Ban)* [Journal of South-Central University for Nationalities (Humanities and Social Sciences)] 34, no. 2 (2014): 72–76; Song Xiaoqin 宋晓芹, “Shilun Zhongguo zai Dongya”; Chen Zhiping 陈支平, “Mingdai ‘Haishang Sichou zhi Lu.’”

¹⁶² “西洋诸国素称远蕃，涉海而来，难计岁月。其朝贡无论疏数，厚往薄来可也” *Mingshi Liezhuan* 213 – *Waiguo* 6 明史列传第二百十三——外国六 43. <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=751744&remap=gb#p44> (Accessed on 2019-07-29); quoted in Chen Zhiping p. 193.

¹⁶³ Chen Zhiping 陈支平, “Mingdai ‘Haishang Sichou zhi Lu,’” 191–94.

China first disguised the true nature of its appeasement policy by devising an elaborate ‘tributary system’ in which large payments to the nomads were described as gifts given to loyal subordinates who were in theory coming to pay homage to the emperor.¹⁶⁴

In an analysis of Ming-Mongol tributary relations mostly based on the *Ming Shilu* and *Ming Shi*, Cheng Nina 程尼娜 that during the latter half of the Ming dynasty, the extortion of resources from Ming China under the guise of the tributary system became part of the Mongolian economic policy. According to Cheng, the Ming dynasty gradually lost the upper hand in its diplomatic relations with the Mongol Northern Yuan (1368-1634, successor of the Yuan dynasty of China, 1279-1368), especially after the annexation of the so-far Ming-administered Uriyangqa Three Commanderies (*Wuliangha San Wei* 兀良哈三卫) during the reign of Shizong of Ming (r. 1521-1567). The commanderies included the southern rim of the Mongolian-populated areas and served as a buffer zone between the Ming and the Northern Yuan. Following their loss, tributary exchanges increasingly served the purpose of payment for peace in feudal gifts.¹⁶⁵

In an analysis of Ming-Jurchen tributary relations primarily based on the *Ming Shilu* and *Mingshi*, Cheng Nina argues that based on their increasing military power, the Jurchens extorted an increasing amount of feudal gifts from weakening Ming China to their south. According to Cheng, this primarily benefitted their elites participating in the tributary missions, including former tributary mission member Nurhaci (1559-1626), head of the Aisin Gioro clan later unifying the Jurchens and related ethnic groups to form the Manchu confederation and defeated the Ming to become China’s Qing dynasty.¹⁶⁶

In an analysis of the Ming-era tributary system in the ‘Western Regions’ (mainly today’s Xinjiang), Yang Linkun 杨林坤 argues that the *hou wang bo lai* policy of the Chinese elites and the economic opportunism, including the dispatch of oversized missions and the trading of low-quality or counterfeit goods were its main characteristics. Apart from the *Ming Shilu*, Yang quotes from the Chinese translations of Middle Eastern travelers to support his claims, including the accounts of Ghiyāth al-dīn Naqqāsh¹⁶⁷ (fl. 1419-21, tributary envoy of the Timurid Persian

¹⁶⁴ Barfield, “« Steppe Empires, China, and the Silk Route,” 237.

¹⁶⁵ Cheng Nina 程尼娜, “Mingdai Wuliangha Sanwei chaogong zhidu 明代兀良哈蒙古三卫朝贡制度 [The tributary system of the Mongolian Uriyangqa Three Commanderies during the Ming dynasty],” *Shixue Jikan [Collected Papers of Historical Studies]* 2016, no. 2 (2016): 4–17.

¹⁶⁶ Cheng Nina 程尼娜, “Mingdai nüzhèn chaogong zhidu yanjiu 明代女真朝贡制度研究 [Research on the Ming-Jurchen tributary system],” *Wen Shi Zhe 文史哲 [Journal of Humanities]* 2015, no. 2 (2015): 90–109.

¹⁶⁷ Ghiyāth al-dīn Naqqāsh / Huozhe Gaiyesuding 火者·盖耶速丁, *Shahalu qianshi Zhonguo ji 沙哈鲁遣使中国记 [Records on the envoy of Shahrukh Mirza to China]*, trans. He Gaoji 何高济 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju [Zhonghua Book Company], 2002).

ruler Shahrukh Mirza to the Ming court) and ‘Ali Akbar Khata’i¹⁶⁸ (fl. ca. 1500-16). Khata’i’s account of China, published in Istanbul, originally written in Persian and titled *Keṭāy-nāma* [Book of Cathay/China] and later translated into Turkish, became an important source of information on China in the early modern Middle East. According to the Chinese translation of Khata’i’s account,

One lion can earn the reward of thirty boxes of goods. In the boxes, there are a thousand pieces of dress fabric, satin, shoes, socks, stirrup, iron saddle, shear, needle, etc, one from all of them. A panther or a lynx can earn the reward of fifteen boxes. A horse can only earn a tenth of the reward for a lion. As for the personal rewards [based on participating in the missions]: everyone receives eight suites of silk and satin fabric, three pieces of dress fabric of other colors, all pieces of dress fabric enough to make two dresses for a man.¹⁶⁹

Apart from providing evidence that the regrettable practice of trading exotic animals was already present in early modern Chinese-Middle Eastern trade relations, the passage also shows that seeing the tributary system as *hou wang bo lai*, or from a non-Chinese perspective, as an opportunity for easy economic gain is not only attested in Chinese sources. Yang Linkun is notable for being one of the few authors including non-Chinese sources while arguing for the wastefulness of the tributary system from a Chinese perspective.

In an article on Ming-Tibetan tributary relations based on the *Ming Shilu*, *Ming Shi* and other Chinese sources, Zhang Xiangyao 张向耀 mainly emphasizes their economic wastefulness (*hou wang bo lai*) from a Chinese perspective and the economic opportunism of Tibetan members of the missions. The article is permeated with rhetoric based on the questionable assumption that Tibet was an integral part of China in the Ming era and a teleology centered on the progress towards a unified multiethnic Chinese nation-state including Tibet. In the conclusion of the article, Zhang argues that

The religious and secular leaders of Tibet were eager to present tribute [“乐此不疲地奔波于朝贡”]. This, objectively speaking, contributed to the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in the central regions [of China] and to Han-Tibetan cultural interaction. At the same time, the vital roads of communication between the central regions and Tibet went through improvement. This way, the contributions of tribute to the maintenance of a unified country and to

¹⁶⁸ ‘Ali Akbar Khata’i / Ali Akeba’er 阿里·阿克巴尔, *Zhongguo jixing 中国纪行 [Travel notes on China]*, trans. Zhang Zhishan 张至善 (Beijing: Shenghuo-Dushu-Xinzhi Sanlian Shudian 生活·读书·新知三联书店, 1988).

¹⁶⁹ Yang Linkun 杨林坤, “Lun Mingchao Xiyu chaogong,” 74; quoting ‘Ali Akbar Khata’i / Ali Akeba’er 阿里·阿克巴尔, *Zhongguo jixing 中国纪行 [Travel notes on China]*, 213.

preserving national unity cannot go unnoticed. It played an extremely important role in Chinese history and in the advancement of inter-ethnic relations.¹⁷⁰

Meanwhile, Li Yunquan argues that based on tributary documents between China and the three ‘model tributary countries’ (Korea, Ryukyu, Vietnam), *hou wang bo lai* was not the case in the early Qing’s tributary relations with them. In order to make sure that their legitimacy was acknowledged, the newly emerging Qing dynasty demanded tributes from these countries which were equal or even larger in their value than the gifts conferred upon them.¹⁷¹

5.2.2 The debate on the impacts of Ming-Qing maritime bans (*haijin*)

The early Ming carried out two significant acts as part of its tributary policy, still generating a number of questions and intense debate in scholarship. One of them was the implementation of the first ‘maritime ban’ (*haijin* 海禁) by the founding emperor Taizu in 1371, prohibiting all sorts of trade outside the official tributary exchanges and tributary trade. The maritime ban also included the destruction of coastal trade facilities, the forced resettlement of coastal populations into the hinterland, the prohibition of emigration and the demand of overseas Chinese emigrants to return to China. The ban on private trade, to various extents, remained in effect until the 1560s.¹⁷²

The second one was a series of seven major diplomatic missions between 1405 and 1433, involving ca. 260 armed ships and 27,000 crew members¹⁷³, led by the Muslim court eunuch and admiral Zheng He 郑和 (c. 1371 – 1433). During the seven missions, Zheng He visited various ports in Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and East Africa and conducted tributary exchanges with rulers of those places. According to official Chinese reports, the missions included at least three instances of armed conflicts, two against local elites refusing to

¹⁷⁰ Zhang Xiangyao 张向耀, “Cong chaogong kan Mingchao Han-Zang jiaoliu,” 57.

¹⁷¹ Li Yunquan 李云泉, “Zailun Qingdai chaogong tizhi,” 96 quoting Ming Shilu and Qing Shilu; referring to Jeon Hae-jong 全海宗, “Qingdai Han-Zhong chaogong guanxi kao 清代韩中朝贡关系考 [Analysis of Qing-era Korean-Chinese tributary relations],” in *Zhong-Han guanxi shi ji 中韩关系史论集 [Collection of papers on the history of Sino-Korean relations]*, trans. Jin Jishan 金姬善 (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe [China Social Sciences Press], 1997); Niu Junkai 牛军凯, “Chaogong yu bangjiao: Mingmo Qingchu Zhong-Yue guanxi yanjiu (1593-1702) 朝贡与邦交: 明末清初中越关系研究 (1593—1702) [Tribute and diplomacy: Research on Sino-Vietnamese relations during the late Ming and early Qing (1593-1702)]” (PhD, Sun Yat-sen University, 2003).

¹⁷² Nakajima, “The Structure and Transformation of the Ming Tribute Trade System,” 151–54.

¹⁷³ Wang Qing p. 98., based on Luo Rongqu 罗荣渠, “Shiwu shiji Zhong-Xi hanghai fazhan quxiang de duibi yu sisuo 15 世纪中西航海发展取向的对比与思索 [Comparing and analyzing the development tendencies of 15th century Chinese and Western navigation],” in *Zheng He yanjiu bainian lunwenxuan 郑和研究百年论文选 [Selection of articles from one hundred years of research on Zheng He]*, ed. Wang Tianyou 王天有 and Wan Ming 万明 (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe [Beijing University Press], 2004), 235.

obey China's tributary order (in Sri Lanka and Sumatra) and one against an overseas Chinese pirate leader based on Sumatra. Following the death of Zheng He, the large-scale missions came to a sudden end and no similar endeavor is recorded in subsequent Chinese history.

The reasons, impacts and evaluation of the maritime bans and the Zheng He missions, remain debated among scholars. One common explanation for the maritime bans is that they were necessary for the security of China due to endemic piracy (the so-called *wokou* 倭寇 raids¹⁷⁴) along its coasts. There are some Chinese authors who argue that the early Ming maritime policy was based on security considerations due to the *wokou* raids and provided stability needed for the flourishing of trade and the emergence of the 'maritime silk roads' in the region.¹⁷⁵ Meanwhile, there are foreign and Chinese authors arguing that it was exactly the early Ming maritime ban which facilitated smuggling and piracy by shutting down the legal ways of trading for most coastal residents.¹⁷⁶

The Zheng He missions are still praised by many Chinese authors as the apex of the Sinocentric tributary order and the last period when China was open to the outside world. The common narrative is that after the Zheng He missions the Ming and Qing chose the policy of self-isolation and this caused China's gradual falling behind the West in economic development and political influence. China's refrainment from further large-scale missions after the 1430s and the emergence of the Western Age of Discoveries and colonialism at the same period are often contrasted with each other and it is frequently contemplated why China did not go the same way.¹⁷⁷

Meanwhile, this comparison between the Zheng He missions and the Western Age of Discoveries disregards the fact that the 15th century Indo-Pacific maritime space had nothing in common with the Atlantic region of the same period. The Indo-Pacific littoral had already been an interconnected network of urban centers for more than a millennium when Zheng He embarked on his missions. By the preceding Song and Yuan periods, China already had extensive trade relations, major migrant communities and relatively advanced geographical knowledge connecting it with other parts of the Indo-Pacific littoral. This was in stark contrast

¹⁷⁴ *Wokou* (Jap. *wakō*) literally means 'Japanese bandits', the word has been used for pirate groups active in pre-modern East Asian waters. According to most modern researchers, despite their traditional name they comprised a mixture of Chinese, Japanese and Korean members. (Schottenhammer, "The 'China Seas' in World History.")

¹⁷⁵ Ren Nianwen 任念文, "Mingchu Nanhai chaogong zhidu"; Chen Zhiping 陈支平, "Mingdai 'Haishang Sichou zhi Lu.'"

¹⁷⁶ Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, "Lun Zheng He xia Xiyang," 73; Schottenhammer, "The 'China Seas' in World History," 82.

¹⁷⁷ Yu Changsen 喻常森, "Shilun chaogong zhidu"; Song Xiaoqin 宋晓芹, "Shilun Zhongguo zai Dongya"; Chen Zhiping 陈支平, "Mingdai 'Haishang Sichou zhi Lu.'"

with the relationship between European states and the Atlantic maritime space. Furthermore, as demonstrated by Andre G. Frank in *ReORIENT*, the ‘discoveries’ of European states were more the unexpected outcomes of their attempts to find alternative routes to the rich Indo-Pacific trade network than their original intention.¹⁷⁸

Little attention is given as well to the fact that at the same time while the Ming rulers commissioned Zheng He to conduct his large-scale missions to foreign countries, they maintained the maritime ban in coastal China outlawing trade outside of the tributary system. In his critical analysis of the early Ming tributary system mostly based on the *Ming Shilu* and *Mingshi*, Xu Bo argues that the tributary system

was a tool for the imperial government to advertise its legitimacy and authority. The occasion of *wan bang lai chao* [万邦来朝 ‘all nations come to the court (to present tribute)’, a Classical Chinese phrase frequently used in pre-modern texts] was primarily intended to showcase its power, to exaggerate peace and stability and to satisfy its vanity. Meanwhile, it strictly controlled maritime trade, enforced its maritime bans and destroyed the achievements of Chinese maritime trade.¹⁷⁹

Xu Bo argues that the tributary system was especially wasteful during the Zheng He missions and the parallel maritime ban of the early Ming dynasty. Furthermore, Xu also notes that the Zheng He missions were not pacifist in their nature but were mainly intended to showcase the military capabilities of the Ming rulers towards both the Chinese and foreign audiences and included military confrontations as well. Xu argues that the missions emptied out the imperial budget and only benefitted a small elite in China allowed to take part in tributary trade but by no means the average people. Xu contrasts Ming-era maritime policy with that of the preceding Song and Yuan periods and concludes that under the earlier dynasties China was far more open to the outside world, its coastal populations enjoying the financial benefits of legal private trade with the outside world.¹⁸⁰

Xu Bo also argues that the importance of the Zheng He missions in the development of Chinese maritime geographical knowledge should not be overemphasized as well. During the Song and Yuan eras, several travelogues written by private merchant-travelers were published, such as the *Zhu fan zhi* 诸蕃志 [Treatise on foreign peoples] by Zhao Rukuo 赵如适 (1170-1231) and the *Daoyi zhilüe* 岛夷志略 [A brief account of the island barbarians] by Wang Dayuan 王大渊 (14th century), considerably improving knowledge on the Indo-Pacific

¹⁷⁸ Frank, *ReORIENT*, 57–58.

¹⁷⁹ Xu Bo 徐波, “Dui gudai Dongya chaogong tixi,” 2017, 85.

¹⁸⁰ Xu Bo 徐波, 96–101.

maritime space in China. According to Xu, the travelogues written by Zheng He's companions did not considerably add to geographical knowledge already present in the Song-Yuan-era works and in fact often used them as references. More importantly, as Xu argues, following the Zheng He missions, and roughly at the same time when the West entered its Age of Discoveries, the development of Chinese maritime geographical knowledge virtually came to a standstill, and this situation did not change considerably until the early 19th century. According to Xu, while in the Song and Yuan periods by the standards of the era China was an advanced civilization regarding maritime geographical knowledge, by the 19th century China's backwardness was obvious compared to the West, having only vague information about the expanding European colonial empires until eventually being invaded by them in the First Opium War (1839-41).¹⁸¹

In another critical article on the disruptive impacts of the Zheng He missions on Chinese maritime trade, Zhuang Guotu discusses the mainstream modern-era narratives of the Zheng He missions. He quotes from the writings of late 19th/early 20th century reformist intellectual Liang Qichao (1873-1929) and former Communist Party leader and initiator of the 'Reform and Opening-up' policy of post-Mao China, Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997). As Zhuang notes, these authors, representative of the general modern-era notions of the Zheng He missions, in their arguments for the economic opening-up of China towards the outside world invoked the Zheng He missions as the last example of China's outward openness after which the erroneous isolationism of the Ming and Qing rulers led to China's failure to keep pace with the West. Zhuang quotes Liang Qichao's words,

After Columbus, there were countless other Columbuses. After Vasco da Gama, there were countless other Vasco da Gamas. But after Zheng He, we did not have a second Zheng He. Alas, [rhetorically asking] could this be the fault of Lord Zheng? [“噫嘻，是岂郑君之罪也？”]¹⁸²

As well as Deng Xiaoping,

Perhaps under the reign of Chengzu of the Ming dynasty [1402-1424], during the voyages of Zheng He, China could still be considered open. After the death of Chengzu, the Ming dynasty gradually declined. After that, the Kangxi [1662-1722] and Qianlong [1736-1795] eras of the Qing dynasty cannot be regarded as open. If we count it from the middle Ming

¹⁸¹ Xu Bo 徐波, 101-2.

¹⁸² Liang Qichao 梁启超, “Zuguo da hanghaijia Zheng He zhuan 祖国大航海家郑和传 [The biography of Zheng He, great navigator of the motherland],” *Xin Min Congbao* 新民丛报, 1904; quoted in Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, “Lun Zheng He xia Xiyang,” 70.

period, until the Opium War [1839-1842], it was more than three hundred years of self-isolation. If we count it from the Kangxi period, it was almost two hundred. This long-time self-isolation made China poor, backward and ignorant.¹⁸³

Zhuang Guotu notes that the popular image of the Zheng He missions as an act of opening-up to the outside world is erroneous since they coincided with one of the strictest maritime bans in Chinese history. According to Zhuang, they were part of the early Ming economic policy intended at disrupting private trade by bringing all sort of trade under the tributary regulations, thereby profiting only a small circle of Chinese and foreign elites and being the main reason behind the emergence of smuggling and piracy along the Chinese coasts. Similarly to Xu Bo, Zhuang also notes that the Zheng He missions did not considerably add to the already advanced maritime geographical knowledge of the Indo-Pacific maritime space gathered by private merchants during the Song and Yuan eras and published in works such as the *Zhufan Zhi*, *Daoyi Zhilüe* and *Dade Nanhai Zhi* 大德南海志 [Dade Era Treatise on the Southern Sea, by Chen Dazhen 陈大震 (1228-1307)]. As Zhuang points out the latest of them, the *Daoyi zhilüe* mentions ca. 200 geographical locations of which its author Wang Dayuan claims to have visited more than 90. Zhuang contrasts this with the altogether ca. 30 locations mentioned in the three accounts written by the companions of Zheng He (*Xingcha Shenglan* 星槎胜览, *Xiyang Fanguo Zhi* 西洋番国志, *Yingya Shenglan* 瀛涯胜览). Zhuang bases his observations on the *Ming Shilu*, the above-mentioned travelogues and other writings from the Song, Yuan and Ming periods such as the *Dong-Xiyang Kao* 东西洋考 [Inspection of the Eastern and Western Oceans] by Zhang Xie 张燮 (1574-1640).¹⁸⁴

5.2.3 The tributary system and the overseas Chinese diaspora

The connection between the tributary system and migration and more specifically the role of the large overseas Chinese diaspora of Southeast Asia is a less frequently discussed topic than the economic, political and cultural aspects of the tributary system. As Zhuang points out the restrictions on maritime trade were followed by the ordering of overseas Chinese to return to China and violent threats against those refusing to do so. Upon ascending to the throne, Emperor Chengzu of Ming ordered that

¹⁸³ Deng Xiaoping 邓小平, *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* 邓小平文选 [Selected works of Deng Xiaoping], vol. 3. (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe [People's Press], 1993); quoted in Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, "Lun Zheng He xia Xiyang," 70.

¹⁸⁴ Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, "Lun Zheng He xia Xiyang," 71.

All those residing in foreign countries have to return to the native land. Those who wish to come to the court will be rewarded before being sent home. Those Chinese people escaping and hiding there should all repent and return to their businesses and remain decent people for all their life. For those who still stay afar and stick to their wrong course, we will send our troops to eliminate all of them and it will be too late for them to regret it.¹⁸⁵

The hostility of Ming and Qing elites towards Chinese emigrants is noted by other Chinese authors as well. He Aiguo 何爱国 examines the background and reactions to the 1603 massacre of Chinese Filipinos (Sangleys) at the hand of the Spanish colonial administration in Manila. He Aiguo concludes that the passivity of the Ming Chinese court despite being aware of the massacre was due to its persistent view on overseas Chinese emigrants as smugglers, pirates and other harmful elements for social stability. Apart from the *Ming Shilu* and *Mingshi*, in his article He Aiguo uses several non-official historical treatises from the Ming and Qing periods, such as the *Dong-Xiyang Kao*, the *Minshu* 闽书 [Book of Min/Fujian province] by He Qiaoyuan 何乔远 (1558-1632), the *Tianxia Junguo Libing Shu* 天下郡国利病书 [Book on positive and negative conditions throughout the prefectures of the empire] by Gu Yanwu 顾炎武 (1613-1682), as well as English translations of Spanish primary sources collected in *Travels in the Philippines* by German ethnologist-traveler Andreas Fedor Jagor (1816-1900).¹⁸⁶

Lin Cuiru 林翠茹 argues that during the maritime ban and the ordering of overseas Chinese to return to China, a number of overseas Chinese served in tributary missions as envoys and interpreters and used this as an opportunity to legally visit China. Lin Cuiru lists 45 Chinese names appearing in the *Ming Shilu* between the period of 1368 and 1508 as referring to envoys and interpreters of tributary missions from foreign countries. These foreign countries include Java (24 names), Siam (9), Champa (6), Bengal (2), Sumatra (3) and Malacca (1). Lin Cuiru also argues that the Zheng He missions had a positive impact on establishing links between China and the overseas Chinese in these countries.¹⁸⁷

As Zhuang Guotu argues, contrary to the later Ming and Qing eras, the Song and Yuan eras were characterized by openness towards trade and migration among China's elites. Zhuang

¹⁸⁵ “凡蕃国之人，即各还本土，欲来朝者，当加赐资遣还。中国之人逃匿在彼者，咸赦前过，稔复本业，永为良民，若仍恃险远，执迷不俊，则命将发兵，悉行剿戮，悔将无及。” *Ming Taizong Shilu* Vol. 12/1(22.) 明太宗文皇帝实录卷之十二上 (22.), <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=736589&remap=gb#p23> (Accessed on 2019-07-29); quoted in Zhuang “Lun Zheng He” 73.

¹⁸⁶ He Aiguo 何爱国, “Lüelun shiliu-shiqi shiji Zhongguo yu Ouzhou,” 37-40.

¹⁸⁷ Lin Cuiru 林翠茹, “Zhidu yu tiaoshi - Zheng He xia Xiyang he chaogong tixi xia de Dongnanya huaqiao 制度与调适 - 郑和下西洋和朝贡体系下的东南亚华侨 [System and adaptation - Southeast Asia's overseas Chinese under the Zheng He journeys and the tributary system],” *Nanfang Wenwu* 南方文物 [Cultural Relics from Southern China] 2005, no. 4 (2005): 85-88.

is also a rare example of a Chinese author using the expression ‘colonizing activities’ (*tuozhi shiye* 拓殖事业 / *zhimin shiye* 殖民事业) for the settlement of Chinese emigrants in Southeast Asia. According to Zhuang, the ban on trade and emigration and the enforcement of the tributary system as the only legal way of exchange of goods during the early Ming caused serious damage to the so-far flourishing overseas Chinese trading networks.¹⁸⁸

Summarizing section 5.2, it has to be pointed out that scholarly views on the interpretation and evaluation of the tributary system are considerably diverse when it comes to the discussion of its socio-economic aspects. As pointed out in 3.1 on state-promoted ‘ideologies’ of mainland China, the popularization of the Belt and Road Initiative based on supposedly ‘win-win’ economic cooperation (*hezuo gongying* 合作共赢) involves references to and images from past tributary (and ‘tributary trade’) interactions such as the Zheng He missions. The insistence of many scholars that the tributary system was economically detrimental for China itself makes its referential value for China’s present and future economic strategy questionable. Meanwhile, many of the scholars who dismiss the tributary system as economically wasteful for China also see this as a further evidence of pre-modern China’s pacifism in foreign affairs and (often implicitly) to predict that China’s 21st century ‘peaceful rise’ will look different from the exploitative colonialism of Western powers in the past.

5.3 The tributary system as a regional political order

The tributary system has received a large amount of attention from scholars with a background in political science and international relations both in and outside China. As it will be discussed in the section, the tributary system has been conceptualized by various authors as the pre-modern political order of East Asia and to various extents of neighboring regions as well. Comparisons with the Eurocentric Westphalian-colonial order are still an important factor in the discussion of the tributary system as a regional political order. Meanwhile, the either explicit or implicit speculation about the relevance of the tributary system for the regional order of present and future East/Eastern Asia is increasingly noticeable as well.

According to Li Yunquan, the tributary system was primarily a political order determining hierarchical relations among the various rulers of Eastern Asia. Li Yunquan also notes that rites played a crucial role in tributary relationships. Upon coming to power, the Qing dynasty replaced the Ming-era ceremony of *wu bai san kou* 五拜三叩 [bowing five times,

¹⁸⁸ Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, “Lun Zheng He xia Xiyang,” 72–73.

kowtowing three times] with the already mentioned *san gui jiu kou* 三跪九叩 [kneeling three times, kowtowing nine times] and demanded every tributary to follow the new rite in order to avoid being seen as a challenger of their legitimacy.¹⁸⁹

Yu Changsen 喻常森 conceptualizes the tributary system as a set of evolving institutions and regulations providing a framework for the political order of East Asia and adjacent regions. Yu prefers the term *feng-gong zhidu* 封贡制度 [investiture-tribute system] instead of *chaogong zhidu* [tribute system], emphasizing that Chinese rulers conferred feudal titles on their foreign counterparts in return for their tributes. Yu describes the history of the system as a progress through an increasing degree of institutionalization. During the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), the *Honglu Si* 鸿胪寺 [Honglu Temple], parts of the *Li Bu* 礼部 [Ministry of Rites] and of the *Bing Bu* 兵部 [Ministry of War] were responsible for conducting tributary relations with foreigners. As China's economic center shifted towards the south and maritime trade became increasingly important, the Song dynasty (960-1279) established the *laiyuan yi* 来远驿 ['stations for (guests) coming from afar'] in the southern seaports of the country. According to Yu, it was also during the Song dynasty that the first regulations regarding the tributary system appeared (such as regarding the intervals between the tributary missions of a given country). During the Yuan era, the so-called *huitongguan* 会同馆 [assembly houses] were established in Beijing for the accommodation of the tributary missions.¹⁹⁰

Yu Changsen also subscribes to the idea that the Ming era was the apex of the tributary system. As Yu points out, during the Ming, the timetable, routes and number of participants in the tributary system were regulated. Commercial trade in frontier markets (*hushi* 互市) was officially only allowed with foreign countries participating in the tributary system, and credentials for legal commercial trade (*kanhe* 勘合) were issued by the Ming government. However, according to Yu, the end of the Zheng He missions and the Portuguese capture of Malacca in 1511 initiated the decline of the tributary system and its gradual replacement by Western capitalism and colonialism.¹⁹¹

Some authors argue that the tributary system was more than just a set of institutions and regulations and provided a set of norms upholding the regional order. Li and Liu criticize the Eurocentric, (nation-)state-focused way of writing world history and argue that the tributary

¹⁸⁹ Li Yunquan 李云泉, "Zailun Qingdai chaogong tizhi," 98.

¹⁹⁰ Yu Changsen 喻常森, "Shilun chaogong zhidu," 55–60.

¹⁹¹ Yu Changsen 喻常森, 63.

system was a unique East Asian political order, the understanding of which has benefits for present and future regional stability. According to Li and Liu,

The tributary system was a foreign policy philosophy with Chinese characteristics, it was an institutionalized arrangement of the East Asian regional order with a clear moral philosophical quality.¹⁹²

According to Li and Liu, too much attention is paid to the Chinese view of tributary exchanges while the perspectives of other participants are neglected. Similarly to Yu, they also support the usage of the term ‘tribute – investiture order’ (*gong-feng zhixu* 贡封秩序) instead of ‘tributary system’. Thereby, they wish to emphasize that the tributary system had an important political function by granting diplomatic recognition through the conferment of feudal titles (investiture) to foreign rulers, and this way it contributed to regional stability.¹⁹³ Throughout the article, they exclusively rely on Chinese primary sources and use mostly Chinese secondary sources, as well as some Western secondary sources and one of Hamashita Takeshi’s works translated into Chinese.¹⁹⁴

According to Ren Nianwen 任念文, the tributary system was the feudal imperial procedure of conducting foreign relations, realized in the form of Confucian social ‘rites’ (*li*), based mainly on non-expansionism but with the occasional use of military intimidation. Ren argues that ‘tribute’ constituted the regional order while ‘tribute trade’ served the purpose of deepening the relations (“respect” [*zunzhong* 尊重] and “trust” [*xinren* 信任]) between China and its tributaries. Ren’s insistence on ‘tribute trade’ being an “appendage” (*fushu* 附属) of tributary politics is the opposite of what many authors argue:

In summary, the Ming tribute trade was the appendage of tribute politics, this was decided by the economic pattern and centralized political structure of the Eastern feudal empire.¹⁹⁵

‘Eastern feudal empire’ (*dongfang fengjian diguo* 东方封建帝国) is a phrase of questionable analytical usefulness, regularly used by Ren Nianwen throughout her article to refer to the socio-economic and political structure of pre-modern China. The self-orientalizing term ‘the East’/‘Eastern’ (*dongfang* 东方) is still frequently used in China to refer to

¹⁹² Li Baojun 李宝俊 and Liu Bo 刘波, “Chaogong - cefeng,” 110.

¹⁹³ Li Baojun 李宝俊 and Liu Bo 刘波, 113.

¹⁹⁴ Hamashita Takeshi 滨下武志, *Jindai Zhongguo de guoji qiji*.

¹⁹⁵ Ren Nianwen 任念文, “Mingchu Nanhai chaogong zhidu,” 103.

anything 'non-Western' between Morocco and Japan. It appears in several other articles analyzed for the thesis.¹⁹⁶

Zhuang Guotu opposes the conceptualization of a tributary *system* (see chapter 2 'Theory') and also argues against using the terms 'tributary' or 'vassalage relations' (*zong-fan guanxi* 宗藩关系) for the early modern interaction between China and other countries. According to Zhuang, these interactions in fact had nothing to do with what the term tributary/vassalage relations meant in other regions of the world, such as medieval Europe. According to Zhuang, tributary exchanges in early modern East and Southeast Asia were indeed a 'cloak for trade' and China had no real control over the internal affairs of most other countries, the wars with Burma and Vietnam during the Ming and Qing eras being the results of border disputes.¹⁹⁷ According to Zhuang, the only country with which China had a real tributary/vassalage relationship was Korea.¹⁹⁸

As Zhuang Guotu notes, Japan, the countries of Southeast Asia and Europeans saw themselves as nominally equal actors motivated by economic profit. Zhuang provides the example of a Dutch-Chinese correspondence from 1655. The correspondence includes a Dutch request for trading rights (written in Chinese) without ever mentioning the word 'tribute'. The Chinese answer, written in the characteristically paternalistic manner of the Chinese tributary documents, notes that people in the Qing court had never heard of the country *Helan* [Holland] before, but considering the great distance between the two countries, the Qing emperor allows the Dutch to present tribute and engage in legal (tributary) trade every eight years in Beijing. The document also prohibits Dutch traders to conduct private maritime trade. The Chinese answer was translated into Dutch by a Chinese resident of Batavia and based on Zhuang's translation and analysis it was cleaned from any paternalistic rhetoric to make it sound like a trade deal between equal partners. According to Zhuang, tributary exchanges were based on "partly conscious, partly unconscious misunderstandings" (*youyi-wuyi de wujie* 有意无意的误解), satisfying both the "one-sided wishful thinking" (*yixiang qingyuan* 一厢情愿) and "self-consolation" (*ziwo anwei* 自我安慰) of China's rulers and literati, as well as the worldview of

¹⁹⁶ The term also appears 6 times in Chen Zhiping (2019), 5 times in He Aiguo (2001), twice in Yu Changsen (2000: 62, 63) and twice in Xu Bo (2017: 91, 102).

¹⁹⁷ Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, "Lüelun chaogong zhidu de xuhuan," 8.

¹⁹⁸ Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, 7.

foreign countries seeing themselves as nominally equal partners, primarily seeking economic benefits.¹⁹⁹

In the following sub-sections various topics of the Chinese discourse on the tributary system as a regional political order will be introduced. These include the debate around China's supposed pacifism, non-expansionism and non-interference under the tributary order, the debate on the role of the tributary system in the relative interstate stability of early modern East Asia, as well as the debate on the usefulness of understanding the tributary system for the present and future regional order. As it will be demonstrated, among Chinese authors, those converging closely to the mainstream framing of China's past and present international relations (the so-called 'peaceful rise' theory, see section 3.1 'Ideology') often advocate the supposed pacifism, non-expansionism and non-interference of China under the tributary order. These authors consider the tributary system to be the key to long-term regional stability in the early modern period and providing useful lessons for the present and future international order. They mostly do so by focusing only on China's foreign relations with East and Southeast Asia and ignoring Inner Asia. Meanwhile, as it will be introduced, there are also critical authors who dare to challenge the assumptions of the mainstream framing of the history of the tributary system.

5.3.1 The debate on China's supposed pacifism, non-expansionism and non-interference under the tributary order

The following lines attributed to the founding emperor of the Ming dynasty Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (Taizu 太祖, r. 1368-1396), appearing in a writing known as the *Huang Ming Zuxun* 皇明祖训 [Instructions of the August Ming] are quoted by various authors in order to argue for a supposed general pacifism of pre-modern Chinese foreign policy:

The barbarians of the four directions are out of our way, they are all separated by mountains and seas, [...] if they do not trouble China and we send armies against them, it will be inauspicious. I am afraid that the generations after me, relying on China's wealth and power and coveting temporary military fame, will without reason start military expeditions and waste human lives. It must always be remembered that this should not happen.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, 5–6; referring to Johannes Nieuhof, Leonard Blussé, and R. Falkenburg, *Johan Nieuhofs beelden van een chinareis, 1655-1657* [*Johan Nieuhof's images of a journey to China, 1655-1657*] (Stichting VOC publicaties, 1987).

²⁰⁰ “四方诸夷，僻在一隅，皆限山隔海，得其地不足以供给，得其民不足以使令。若其自不揣量，来扰我边，则彼为不祥。彼既不为中国患，而我兴兵轻伐，亦不祥也。吾恐后世子孙，倚中国富强，贪一时战功，无故兴兵，致伤人命，切记不可。” ”Huang Ming Zuxun” 皇明祖训 [Instructions of the Ancestor of the August Ming] <https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E7%9A%87%E6%98%8E%E7%A5%96%E8%A8%93> (Accessed on 2019-07-29); quoted in Ren Nianwen 99., Chen Zhiping 192.

According to Chen Zhiping,

The Ming-era tributary system was established with the principal aim of maintaining peaceful co-existence between countries and between regions. This becomes obvious by looking at the edicts of the founder of the dynasty Zhu Yuanzhang and his son Zhu Di, Emperor Chengzu of Ming.²⁰¹

To argue for the pacifism of the Ming-era tributary system, apart from the above-quoted passage of Zhu Yuanzhang (Taizu of Ming) from the *Huang Ming Zuxun*, Chen Zhiping also quotes from one of his edicts included in the *Ming Taizu Shilu*, issued to Annam (Vietnam) in the founding year of the Ming dynasty (1368),

When the old emperors ruled the world, everywhere where the sun and moon were shining, there was no difference between far and near, everyone being treated as companions. China honored peace and the [foreigners of the] four directions were content with it. [...] No trouble was made with distant and close lands, but all enjoyed the shared fortune of peace and tranquility.²⁰²

While following the quotation Chen Zhiping moves on discussing the generosity (*hou wang bo lai*) of the Ming rulers towards foreign tributaries, it is worth mentioning that less than forty years later (between 1406 and 1407), Ming China invaded Vietnam and incorporated it as its Jiaozhi 交趾 province for 20 years (1407-27).

Song Xiaoqin argues especially assertively for a supposed peaceful nature of the Chinese people as a whole. The second section of her article ‘Maintainers of peace’ (*heping de weihuzhe* 和平的维护者) starts as follows:

The Chinese nation is a peace-loving nation which has always advocated the maintenance of good relations with neighbors and the harmonization of relations among all peoples. Chinese rulers developed their relations with neighboring countries and ethnicities through the tributary system, whose purpose was clearly not conquest and expansion. Therefore, while the East Asian tributary system might look like an unequal, hierarchical system, its essential purpose was to establish peace and order between China and its neighboring countries and ethnicities.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Chen Zhiping 陈支平, “Mingdai ‘Haishang Sichou zhi Lu,’” 192.

²⁰² “昔帝王之治天下，凡日月所照，无有远近，一视同仁，故中国尊安，四方得所 [...] 与远迩相安于无事，以共享太平之福” 39, *Ming Taizu Shilu* Vol. 35. 三十九，太祖高皇帝实录卷之三十五 (149.) <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=680790&remap=gb#p150> (Accessed on 2019-07-29); quoted in Chen Zhiping 192.

²⁰³ Song Xiaoqin 宋晓芹, “Shilun Zhongguo zai Dongya,” 10.

Following this, in the same section, Song argues that during the Ming dynasty, China never conquered or colonized any territory and the Zheng He missions were intended to pursue the idea of the “shared fortune of peace and tranquillity” (*gongxiang taiping zhi fu* 共享太平之福, a reference to the *Huang Ming Zuxun*). According to Song, after Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141-87 BCE, known for his military campaigns against the Xiongnu nomads to the north of Han-era China), China refrained from armed expansion, followed the ideal of ‘ruling without governing’ (*yi bu zhi zhi zhi* 以不治治之)²⁰⁴, did not interfere in other states’ affairs and only sent armies if an internal rebellion had to be put down or if it was requested by another country to counter invaders, in both cases for the interest of regional stability. For helping other countries against invaders, Song gives China’s military assistance to Korea’s resistance against the Japanese invasions led by shogun Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598) during the Imjin War (1592-98) as an example.²⁰⁵ In a similar manner, Ren Nianwen argues that the military conflicts only served the purpose of maintaining regional stability, mentioning the three military conflicts during the Zheng He missions.²⁰⁶

Xu Bo argues that while the ‘appreciation of peace/harmony’ (*guihe* 贵和) is arguably part of traditional Chinese culture, contrary to common narratives China did not only use peaceful means during its interaction with the outside world under the tributary order, but was ready to militarily intimidate or attack those who posed a challenge to its authority. Xu provides the Zheng He missions of the early 15th century as an example. As he points out, while in present-day historical narratives Zheng He is usually celebrated as an envoy of peace and a founder of equal trade relations, based on evidence from the *Mingshi* and *Ming Chengzu Shilu* 明成祖实录 [Veritable Records of Emperor Chengzu of Ming], determent by force of anyone intending to subvert the tributary order was a stated aim of the imperial court while ordering Zheng He to embark on his missions.²⁰⁷

Prior to his seven diplomatic missions, Zheng He was trained as a military officer, took part in military campaigns and his missions, according to Xu Bo, were more “a major military

²⁰⁴ Song Xiaoqin, 11. This phrase is from Song-era poet and statesman Su Shi 苏轼 a.k.a Su Dongpo’s 苏东坡 (1037-1101 CE) treatise *Wang zhe bu zhi yidi lun* 王者不治夷狄论 [On why the monarch should not govern the barbarians]: “The barbarians cannot be governed by China. They are like birds and beasts, if one attempts to govern [control] them, it will lead to chaos. The former rulers knew that, so they ruled them without governing them.” (夷狄不可以中国之治治也。譬若禽兽然，求其大治，必至于大乱。先王知其然，是故以不治治之。) <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=604888> (Accessed on 2019-07-29) .

²⁰⁵ Song Xiaoqin 宋晓芹, “Shilun Zhongguo zai Dongya,” 10–11.

²⁰⁶ Ren Nianwen 任念文, “Mingchu Nanhai chaogong zhidu,” 99.

²⁰⁷ Xu Bo 徐波, “Dui gudai Dongya chaogong tixi,” 2017, 96–97.

intimidation strategy” than a model of peaceful foreign policy. While based on primary sources, Zheng He’s seven missions were mostly free from military conflicts, records in the *Mingshi* indicate three instances of forceful detention of certain local leaders opposed to China’s tributary order. These were King Vira Alakeshvara of Sri Lanka, allegedly refusing to submit to the Ming emperor and plotting to kill his envoys, a certain member of the Sumatran royal family named as Sukanla 苏干剌 in the *Mingshi* who allegedly attacked Zheng He’s fleet for not taking his side in an internal conflict of the Sumatran ruling dynasty, as well as Chen Zuyi 陈祖义, a pirate leader from Guangdong based in Palembang (Sumatra). Meanwhile, as Xu Bo notes, only the narratives of the Chinese side are recorded in these official Chinese documents, therefore this information has to be treated with criticism.²⁰⁸

As Xu Bo points out, during the Zheng He missions, Chinese emperors not only ordered the Zheng He fleet to interfere militarily in foreign countries’ affairs at least three times but also celebrated these as acts of justice with highly paternalistic and militaristic rhetoric. Regarding the capture of the Sri Lankan monarch Alakeshvara, Xu quotes the *Ming Chengzu Shilu* [Veritable Records of Emperor Chengzu of Ming], stating that

He dared to violate the Heavenly Law [*Tiandao* 天道] and haughtily refused to pay tribute.

He planned to carry out his evil plot by murdering the envoy of the court.²⁰⁹

After the installment of the new monarch in his stead,

The overseas foreigners obeyed the powerful and virtuous rule of the Son of Heaven and presented tribute in the proper way.²¹⁰

Regarding the conflict with Sukanla, Xu quotes the *Mingshi* stating that

Sukanla did not receive the feudal gifts, therefore in his anger he commanded tens of thousands of men to intercept [the Zheng He fleet], [but following his defeat by Zheng He] the barbarians heard it and shivered with fear.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Xu Bo 徐波, 97–98.

²⁰⁹ “敢违天道，傲慢弗恭，逞其凶逆，谋杀朝使” *Ming Taizong Shilu* Vol. 131 (17.) 大明太宗孝文皇帝实录卷一百三十(17.) <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=296599&remap=gb#p18> (Accessed on 2019-07-29); quoted in Xu Bo, p. 97.

²¹⁰ “自是海外诸蕃益服天子威德，贡使载道” *Mingshi Liezhuan* Vol. 214 Waiguo 7 (18.) 明史列传第二百十四——外国七 (18.) <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=156432&remap=gb#p19> (Accessed on 2019-07-29); quoted in Xu Bo, p. 97.

²¹¹ “苏干剌以颁赐不及己，怒，统数万人邀击”；“番夷闻之震栗” *Mingshi Liezhuan* Vol. 213 – Waiguo 6 (30.) 明史列传第二百十三——外国六 (30.) <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=751744&remap=gb#p31> (Accessed on 2019-07-29); quoted in Xu Bo, p. 98.

In a comparative analysis of the tributary system in Korea and Southeast Asia based on Chinese official sources (*Liaoshi* 辽史, *Yuanshi* 元史, *Mingshi* etc.) as well as the 12th century Korean chronicle *Samguk Sagi* 三國史記 [History of the Three Kingdoms], Liu Xinjun 刘信君 argues that Southeast Asian countries (except for Vietnam) were only ‘ceremonial’ (*liyixing de* 礼仪性的) tributaries of China, whereas Korea and Vietnam were ‘model’ (*dianxing de* 典型的) tributary countries. Liu Xinjun agrees with most other authors that China rarely interfered in the domestic affairs of Southeast Asian countries (mentioning the exceptions of the Yuan attack on Java and the Qing-Burmese war of 1765-69). Meanwhile, contrary to many authors Liu Xinjun also argues that China intervened regularly in Korean domestic affairs under the tributary order. The Tang, Yuan and Qing dynasties all invaded Korea, significantly reshaped its internal political order by assigning loyal officials to various important posts and decided on the frequency, routes, etc. of Korean tributary missions to China. Liu Xinjun also points out that based on tributary records, the early Qing demanded high tributes from Korea to secure its loyalty and the situation was not *hou wang bo lai* from a Chinese perspective. At the same time, Korea was granted a much higher number of tributary missions than any other country in the Qing period (see Appendix 3, Figure 5). The Qing interference into Korean domestic affairs lasted until the second half of the 19th century. According to Liu Xinjun,

During the late Qing, the most obvious characteristic of the Sino-Korean tributary relation was that following the changing situation in East Asia, the Qing intensified its interference into Korean domestic politics. First of all, it interfered in Korea’s sending of diplomatic envoys. Secondly, it controlled Korean customs. Thirdly, it prevented Korea from taking loans from Western countries. Fourthly, it recommended Americans to take up posts in Korea. Fifthly, it helped Korea to train its troops, etc.²¹²

According to Liu Xinjun, Korea also sought Qing China’s support against Japanese expansionism, leading to a decades-long Sino-Japanese rivalry over Korea in the second half of the 19th century.²¹³ In this period, while Korea remained a regular tributary of China, it was also forced by Japan to sign the Ganghwa Treaty 江華島條約 of 1876, based on the model of the so-called ‘unequal treaties’ signed between Western powers and East Asian states since the First Opium War (1839-41). Following China’s defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), under Japanese pressure, Korea (the last regular tributary of China) terminated its tributary

²¹² Liu Xinjun 刘信君, “Zhong-Chao yu Zhongguo he Dongnanya,” 125; see also Larsen, “The Qing Empire (China), Imperialism, and the Modern World,” 503.

²¹³ Liu Xinjun 刘信君, “Zhong-Chao yu Zhongguo he Dongnanya,” 125.

relationships with the Qing court and its gradual incorporation into the Japanese Empire (completed by 1910) began (see Appendix 3, Figure 5).

According to Wang Qing, while military conflicts occurred during the Zheng He missions twice (in Sri Lanka and Sumatra), the missions were in general characterized by pacifism and non-expansionism. As Wang Qing points out, the military power of the Zheng He missions far outweighed that of the Portuguese and Spanish colonizing missions arriving to Africa, the Americas and Southeast Asia during the late 15th and early 16th centuries.²¹⁴ According to Wang Qing, China had the capability to establish colonial possessions around the Indo-Pacific maritime space but refrained from doing so. This, according to Wang Qing, was a result of the interest cognition of early modern Chinese elites who dismissed maritime trade and expansion as not having significant benefit for China (see also sub-section 5.1.3 on *zhong nong yi shang*). At the same time, Wang Qing notes that in the western and northern continental borders China engaged in a realist foreign policy including tributary exchanges as well as warfare.²¹⁵

5.3.2 The debate on regional stability under the Ming-Qing tributary order

As it has been noted in chapter 2, various non-Chinese authors such as U.S. American political scientist David Kang argue that the tributary system was the guarantee of interstate stability (the low number of interstate military conflicts) throughout the early modern period. This point of view is also shared by several Chinese authors, frequently quoting David Kang's *East Asia Before the West* (which has been translated into Chinese²¹⁶). Among them, Ren Nianwen argues that the tributary system was

a handling mechanism of international relations centered on China, it was crucial for maintaining social stability and economic prosperity in the vast region surrounding the South China Sea.²¹⁷

According to Huang Chunyan,

²¹⁴ Wang Qing 王青, "Zhongguo chuantong duiwai guanxi," 98; referring to Luo Rongqu 罗荣渠, "Shiwu shiji Zhong-Xi hanghai fazhan quxiang de duibi yu sisuo 15 世纪中西航海发展取向的对比与思索 [Comparing and analyzing the development tendencies of 15th century Chinese and Western navigation]."

²¹⁵ Wang Qing 王青, "Zhongguo chuantong duiwai guanxi," 96–100.

²¹⁶ Kang, David C. (Kang Canxiong 康灿雄), *Xifang zhi qian de Dongya: Chaogong maoyi wubai nian 西方之前的东亚: 朝贡贸易五百年 [East Asia Before the West: Five Hundred Years of Tribute and Trade]*, trans. Chen Changxu 陈昌煦, 1st ed. (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe [Social Sciences Academic Press], 2016).

²¹⁷ Ren Nianwen 任念文, "Mingchu Nanhai chaogong zhidu," 99.

The pre-modern tributary system did not only satisfy the vanity of major powers. It served as an international order, it was an important factor in the maintenance of national security and an international security mechanism as well.²¹⁸

Li and Liu argue that

The long-term stability of the East Asian international order facilitated by the “tribute and investiture” system was, on the one hand, a result of China’s actual power, on the other hand of the active participation of surrounding countries in this order, the internalization and absorption of the advanced cultural system of the time.²¹⁹

To demonstrate that the ethnic majorities of the East Asian nation-states shared relatively long periods of peace and stability in the past can obviously be seen as a constructive aim for the present and future regional order. In the present-day East Asian context, where the trauma of World War II still has an immense influence on historical memory, to a considerable extent because it is continuously reinvigorated for domestic political purposes²²⁰, this part of the region’s history arguably deserves emphasis by academicians. Meanwhile, the critical point about this supposed early modern stability is that this notion relies on the histories of ethnic majorities exclusively.

As discussed in chapter 4, Perdue compares the writings of David Kang and other authors who advocate the peacefulness and stability of the early modern East Asian tributary system to Chiang Kai-shek’s *China’s Destiny*.²²¹ However, Perdue disregards the fact that Kang does not deny that armed conflicts regularly occurred between the East Asian states and nomads, semi-nomads and other non-state actors on their borders. Kang, a political scientist with a primarily constructivist approach to international relations, investigates the reason why contrary to Europe in the same period, there was a high degree of interstate stability in early modern East Asia and argues that the interstate order constituted by the tributary system was responsible for this.

However, the analytical usefulness of Kang’s approach is questionable. Early modern East Asia was not comparable to early modern Europe in its interstate power relations since East Asia was dominated by a centrally located, powerful state (Ming-Qing China) while Europe was divided among a number of smaller, competing powers without the enduring

²¹⁸ Huang Chunyan 黄纯艳, “Chaogong tixi yu Songchao,” 131.

²¹⁹ Li Baojun 李宝俊 and Liu Bo 刘波, “Chaogong - cefeng,” 114.

²²⁰ See e.g. Joe Renouard, “Japan, China, and the Strains of Historical Memory - 80 Years after the Nanjing Massacre, Historical Issues Continue to Haunt China-Japan Relations,” *The Diplomat*, December 26, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/japan-china-and-the-strains-of-historical-memory/>. (Accessed on 2019-07-29).

²²¹ Perdue, “The Tenacious Tributary System,” 1013.

domination of any of them. There is evidence that during the earlier Song period (960-1279), when East Asia was not relatively unipolar, large-scale confrontations regularly occurred among its states.²²² China's 'frontier experience' cannot be compared to that of early modern Western Europe as well, since it shared an extensive frontier with nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples of different cultural backgrounds to its north and west. China's 'frontier experience' can be compared to that of Russia and the United States, and in fact, is compared by some researchers²²³, but not to Western Europe. While it is arguable that early modern East Asian states had fewer conflicts among each other than early modern European states, due to the frequent conflicts with the surrounding nomads and semi-nomads, the region as a whole was far from being peaceful, making the analytical usefulness of David Kang's approach doubtful. Moreover, it contributes to writing East Asian history only through the experiences of ethnic majorities of the contemporary nation-states, hence to the exclusion of ethnic minority voices.

5.3.3 Comparison of the tributary order with the Westphalian-colonial order

As has been demonstrated so far, comparisons with the West and its Westphalian-colonial order are a major component and underlying motive of the Chinese discourse on the tributary system as a whole. This sub-section will first focus on explicit comparisons and judgments of the tributary and Westphalian-colonial orders. This will be followed by an analysis of accounts of early modern Sino-Western tributary interaction to show that many authors use these historical instances as demonstrative examples of the first encounters or 'clashes' of the two orders. As it will be argued, these supposed early modern 'clashes' gain significance primarily as a result of the retro-projection of present-day historical narratives and it is questionable how much importance was attributed to them in their own time.

Polarization of regional/global history into a pacifist/non-expansionist Sinocentric tributary order and a violent/expansionist Eurocentric colonial order, and the resulting self-victimization are frequently used discursive strategies by many of the Chinese authors writing on the topic. The symbolic nature and wastefulness (*hou wang bo lai*) of China's tributary policy, its lack of real economic and political control over its tributaries to serve China's interests is frequently contrasted with the profit-oriented/exploitative/plundering behavior of

²²² Wang, "Explaining the Tribute System"; Huang Chunyan 黄纯艳, "Chaogong tixi yu Songchao."

²²³ For a discussion of the similarities between the westward expansion of the Chinese and U.S. American continental frontiers see Hugh R. Clark, "Frontier Discourse and China's Maritime Frontier: China's Frontiers and the Encounter with the Sea through Early Imperial History," *Journal of World History* 20, no. 1 (2009): 1–33.

Western countries and their direct control over their colonies. This is, in turn, a common explanation for China's falling behind the West by the end of the early modern era.²²⁴

According to Li and Liu,

In its essential sense, this order [the tributary order] was completely different from the hegemonic model of expansion by military force, followed by the Western powers. The relations it maintained were in fact based on stability and friendship between different countries. The regional order constituted by the tribute and investiture was necessitated for the realization of the *Tianxia* ideal [“天下主义理想”] in pre-modern China's maintenance of its authority.²²⁵

Similarly to other authors making claims on the pacifism and stability under the tributary order, Li and Liu focus on China's maritime interactions instead of its continental borders. It is briefly mentioned that Song China (960-1279 CE) had military conflicts with 'northern ethnic minority regimes', referring to indigenous ethnic groups of the northern steppes (Mongols, Jurchens, etc.) who were 'minorities' only through the projection of China's present-day borders (established mostly in the 18th century) back into the distant past. In a statement which seems to disregard the large amount of literature on the Western 'mission civilisatrice' during the colonial era, they also argue that

Under the 'tribute and investiture' order, the 'center-periphery' power structure model [of loose central control, according to Li and Liu] was completely different from the Western imperialist model of domination from the center. While the Western model was based on military expansion, China was characterized by a missionary sense of spreading Chinese civilization [“中国则带有一种传播中华文明的使命感”].²²⁶

In the conclusion of the article Li and Liu point out that the *Tianxia* ideology, based on Chinese notions of superiority and Sino-'barbarian' division (*hua-yi zhi bian*) prevented China from focusing on its national interests as Western countries did. Li and Liu's article is a fine example of writings on the tributary system which claim to contribute to a non-Eurocentric regional history but in fact form most of their arguments in a comparative way to Western historical models. It is also an example of polarization primarily through the treatment of China's present-day borders as a constant throughout history and the ignorance or mitigation of China's forced expansion into the territories of the northern and western indigenous ethnic groups.

²²⁴ See e.g. Wang Qing 王青, “Zhongguo chuantong duiwai guanxi,” 77–80.

²²⁵ Li Baojun 李宝俊 and Liu Bo 刘波, “Chaogong - cefeng,” 110.

²²⁶ Li Baojun 李宝俊 and Liu Bo 刘波, 115.

Focusing on how China gradually lost its tributaries in Southeast Asia during the early modern period, He Aiguo describes the “clash” (*chongtu* 冲突) between the Sinocentric tributary system and the Eurocentric colonial system as a result of the West undergoing the ‘primitive accumulation’ phase of capitalism. He Aiguo describes China’s tributary system as managed by an inward-looking and corrupt feudal elite, based on pre-capitalist social relations, as well as on non-interference, pacifism and lack of real political and economic control over the foreign tributary countries. According to He Aiguo, the ‘sprouts of capitalism’ were present in early modern China, but an urban capitalist class could not emerge independently from the landed aristocracy, as it did in the West. According to his assessment, these were the factors which ultimately made China incapable of keeping pace with the outwardly open, profit-oriented and expansionist West undergoing its early capitalist phase, not refraining from military invasion and complete economic and political control of Southeast Asian countries to serve its economic needs. He Aiguo is not the only author making references to Marxist historical theory and using the term ‘primitive accumulation’ for early modern Western colonialism in Asia²²⁷. In general, however, Marxist theory seems to have little impact on the current academic discourse on the tributary system.²²⁸

Meanwhile, Wang Hui is critical about the binary of ‘empire’ and ‘nation-state’, as well as about simplistic and generalizing comparisons between the “tribute system” and the “treaty system”. As Wang Hui points out, these binaries are primarily rooted in the modern-era tradition of Eurocentric ‘world history’ and have to be treated with caution while applying them to Chinese history. As Wang Hui argues, because the concept of ‘tribute’ implies hierarchy,

people frequently placed the tribute system in opposition to the treaty system. However, if we look briefly at a number of bilateral treaties from before 1840, we will see that the tribute system not only addressed issues related to trade, but also worked in ways that were parallel (and not opposed) to the treaty system.²²⁹

As Wang Hui points out, prior to the second half of the 19th century when China was gradually forced to abandon its tributary system and its rhetoric of nominal superiority vis-à-vis other states, in fact it already had a long history of conducting its foreign affairs through treaties as a parallel institution to the tributary system. Wang Hui cites the examples of the

²²⁷ See also Xu Bo 徐波, “Dui gudai Dongya chaogong tixi,” 2017, 102.

²²⁸ He Aiguo 何爱国, “Lüelun shiliu-shiqi shiji Zhongguo yu Ouzhou,” 41–42.

²²⁹ Wang, *China from Empire to Nation-State*, 129.

border agreements and trade deals with Russia, and treaties on trade liberalization with Siam and the Netherlands in the late 17th century.²³⁰

The tributary and Westphalian systems are also often compared in a more tangible way through the tributary interactions of European countries and China in the early modern period. It is commonly assumed that the Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689) between China and Russia was China's first experience of the Westphalian treaty-based order. The treaty was originally written in Latin by European Jesuit missionaries from the Qing court and was subsequently translated into Manchu and Russian. It was based on the equal status of the Chinese and Russian emperors and delineated the border between the two empires. Meanwhile, it has been argued by various Chinese and non-Chinese authors that China had already conducted nominally equal relations with other countries prior to this treaty.²³¹

Since the Ming period, the presence of the Portuguese and Dutch on the Eastern Asian seas was apparently noted in China, although knowledge of the geographical locations of their native countries was rather inaccurate. According to the *Mingshi*,

Folangji [佛郎机, here: Portugal²³²] is close to Malacca [a Portuguese colony between 1511-1641]. During the Zhengde 正德 era [1506-1521] they occupied Malacca and expelled its king. In the thirteenth year [of the Zhengde era, 1518], they sent an envoy which presented cinnabar powder [*bidanmo* 必丹末] and other local products, requested feudal title, so their name became known.²³³

Their native country is in the Western Ocean, very far from China. [...] [They are also known as] *Helan* 和兰 [Holland] or the red-haired foreigners. Their land is close to *Folangji*. In the Yongle 永乐 [1402-1424] and Xuande 宣德 [1425-1435] periods when Zheng He sailed the Western Ocean, he recorded many of the foreign countries but there was none of them called *Helan*.²³⁴

²³⁰ Wang, 129–30.

²³¹ On nominal equality between Song China and the northern Liao and Jin dynasties see Wang, “Explaining the Tribute System”; Huang Chunyan 黄纯艳, “Chaogong tixi yu Songchao”; on nominal equality in Ming-Timurid relations see Perdue, “The Tenacious Tributary System”; quoting J. Fletcher “China and Central Asia, 1368-1884” in Fairbank, *The Chinese World Order*, 206-225. quotation from p. 213.

²³² A vague term originating from the word ‘Frank’ via Persian *Farangi*, often used as a generic reference for Europeans in pre-modern Chinese texts.

²³³ 佛郎机，近满刺加。正德中，据满刺加地，逐其王。十三年遣使臣加必丹末等贡方物，请封，始知其名。 *Mingshi Liezhuan* Vol. 213. - *Waiguo* 6 (59.) 明史列传第二百十三——外国六 (59.) <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=751744&remap=gb#p60> (Accessed on 2019-07-29); quoted in Xu Bo 89.

²³⁴ 和兰，又名红毛番，地近佛郎机。永乐、宣德时，郑和七下西洋，历诸番数十国，无所谓和兰者。 *Mingshi Liezhuan* Vol. 152 (68). 明史列传第一百五十二 (68.) <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=751744&remap=gb#p60> (Accessed on 2019-07-29); quoted in Xu Bo 89.

Based on primary sources, it is highly unlikely that early modern Chinese paid as much attention to the interaction with Westerners as has been paid since the modern era, or that they saw Westerners considerably different from other foreigners (Indians, Arabs, etc.) of the ‘Western Seas’ (*Xiyang* 西洋²³⁵). The Portuguese capture of Malacca in 1511 appears in several publications as a trope symbolizing the turning point in Asian history whereby China entered its decline and gave way to the incursion of European colonialism. About one century earlier, during the Zheng He missions (1405-1433) Chinese garrisons and trading entrepôts were established in Malacca and its rulers became regular tributaries of China, described by some observers as “Chinese maritime proto-colonialism”.²³⁶ The Portuguese capture of the city did provoke some Chinese resentment and calls on the Portuguese to release the city but not a new wave of armed maritime expeditions to retake it.²³⁷ The statement of He Aiguo that “since the early 16th century the friendly neighborly relationship [between China and Southeast Asia] was destroyed by the Western colonialists”²³⁸ is apparently more a retro-projection of simplistic present-day historical perspectives into the past than how the event was evaluated in its own time.

During the Qing period, the British, Dutch and Portuguese sent tributary missions to the Chinese court 4 times each, followed by Russia (2 times) and the Papacy (once) (see Appendix 3, Figure 5). The Dutch and Portuguese tributary missions underwent the official rites of the Qing court, based on contemporary correspondences mainly for gaining the right to trade at Chinese ports.²³⁹ In 1653, the first Dutch embassy arrived from Batavia (modern Jakarta) to Guangzhou to establish trade agreements with China but was denied audience to the court in Beijing since it did not present tributary goods. In the years 1655-57, the embassy of Peter de Goyer and Jacob de Keyzer presented tribute to the Qing court and the Netherlands was accepted among the tributary states of the Qing dynasty, allowing it to send tributes once in eight years. In 1684, the Dutch were allowed to trade in the port cities of Guangdong and Fujian provinces. At the same time, the book written on the journey of de Goyer and de Keyzer titled *Het Gezantschap der Neêrlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, aan den grooten Tartarischen*

²³⁵ A vague geographic term used in pre-modern Chinese documents, referring to the Indian Ocean or to the west in general.

²³⁶ On this and the discussion on Chinese maritime proto-colonialism, see Wade, “The Zheng He Voyages.”.

²³⁷ He Aiguo 何爱国, “Lüelun shiliu-shiqi shiji Zhongguo yu Ouzhou,” 36–37.

²³⁸ He Aiguo 何爱国, 36.

²³⁹ Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, “Lüelun chaogong zhidu de xuhuan”; Lü Zhengang 吕振纲, “Cong chaogong wenshu kan.”

Cham [The embassy of the Dutch East Indian Company to the Great Tartar Khan]²⁴⁰ was published in Amsterdam in 1665, was translated into other European languages in the following years and became popular throughout Europe, being one of the first detailed and illustrated accounts of China.²⁴¹

The submission of Western embassies to the Qing tributary rules was traditionally seen as evidence for Europeans accepting the Sinocentric worldview of Qing China. However, there are several scholars who, based on analyses of tributary documents in European languages argue that early modern Europeans were most of all interested in gaining access to Chinese markets and framed the interaction as agreements between equal partners, for the purpose of mutual economic benefit.²⁴²

The so-called Macartney Mission of 1793 sent by British monarch George III (r. 1760-1820) to the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735-1796), whereby the British envoy George Macartney refused to follow the official tributary procedure (kneeling three times, kowtowing nine times), kneeled only once and the Qing side refused the British request for free trade in Chinese ports has received a large amount of academic attention. The event has usually been framed as a clash of Chinese and Western worldviews and this supposed clash, including its tangible manifestation in the ‘controversy of rites’ has been commonly assumed as the reason for the failure to reach an agreement.²⁴³ According to Lü Zhengang, a comparative analysis of the original English and translated Chinese versions of King George III’s letter to the Qianlong emperor makes it clear that the British saw themselves as equal partners of the Chinese but their message was translated by court translators in the hierarchic style of tributary letters suiting the worldview of Chinese elites, in this way trying to improve the chances of the request to be accepted.²⁴⁴ According to Li Yunquan, the Macartney Mission has been over-fantasized by

²⁴⁰ (Note that ‘Tartars’ was a vague, generic term for all nomadic inhabitants of the Eurasian steppes from the Black Sea to Manchuria in early modern European sources. The ‘Great Tartar Khan’ in the title apparently refers to the Manchu Qing emperor.) Johan Nieuhof. *Het gezantschap der Neêrlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen keizer van China : waar in de gedenkwaardigste geschiedenissen, die onder het reizen door de Sineesche landtschappen, Quantung, Kiangsi, Nanking, Xantung en Peking, en aan het keizerlyke hof te Peking, zedert den jaare 1655 tot 1657 zyn voorgevallen, op het bondigste verhandelt worden : beneffens een naauwkeurige beschryvinge der Sineesche steden, dorpen, regeering, wetenschappen, handwerken, zeden, godsdiensten, gebouwen, drachten, scheepen, bergen, gewaffen, dieren, &c. en oorlogen tegen de Tartars : verciert met over de 150 afbeeldtsels, na 't leven in Sina* [The embassy from the East India Company to the Great Tartar Khan ...]. Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1665., https://archive.org/details/gri_33125011156425 (Accessed on 2019-07-30).

²⁴¹ Li Yunquan 李云泉, “Zailun Qingdai chaogong tizhi.”

²⁴² Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, “Lüelun chaogong zhidu de xuhuan”; Lü Zhengang 吕振纲, “Cong chaogong wenshu kan.”

²⁴³ Li Yunquan 李云泉, “Zailun Qingdai chaogong tizhi,” 98.

²⁴⁴ Lü Zhengang 吕振纲, “Cong chaogong wenshu kan,” 145; referring to He Xinhua 何新华, *Qingdai chaogong wenshu*, 631–36.

some authors as the clash between China's *Tianxia*-worldview and the Western worldview. Li Yunquan notes that the correspondence between the English and Chinese side went through the medium of Latin (which the court translators of the Qing dynasty used) and recent comparative analyses of its English and Chinese versions of the correspondence and of relevant accounts have challenged the assumption that a supposed clash of worldviews was the main factor behind the failure of the Sino-British trade agreement.²⁴⁵

Li Yunquan also notes that despite the large amount of attention paid to the British-Chinese 'controversy of rites' during the Macartney Mission, throughout the 18th century there were much more controversies of rites between the two Confucian states of China and Vietnam. The reason for this was that the traditional Vietnamese tributary rite was the same as that of the Ming dynasty (bowing five times, kowtowing three times) and hence performing it was seen as a challenge to their own legitimacy by the Qing rulers. The Vietnamese finally agreed to follow the Qing rites (kneeling three times, kowtowing nine times) in their exchanges with China in 1768.²⁴⁶

5.3.4 Comparison of the tributary order with Southeast Asia's mandala system

In Chinese academic works on the early modern Sinocentric tributary system, early modern Southeast Asia is usually seen as an in-between peripheral region characterized by the encounter or "clash" (*chongtu* 冲突, see He Aiguo) of the tributary system and the Western colonial system. According to He Aiguo,

Southeast Asia has always been a "peripheral zone" (*bianyuan didai* 边缘地带). First, it was a "peripheral zone" of the Eastern Confucian civilizational system and the Indian civilizational system, as well as of the traditional Eastern system of international relations (the tributary system led by China). In 1511, when the Western colonists invaded it [a reference to the Portuguese capture of Malacca], it became a "peripheral zone" of the Western colonial system.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Li Yunquan 李云泉, "Zailun Qingdai chaogong tizhi," 98; referring to Huang Yinong 黄一农, "Yinxiang yu zhenxiang - Qingchao Zhong-Ying liangguo de liyi zhi zheng 印象与真相——清朝中英两国的礼仪之争 [Impression and reality - The Qing-era Chinese-British controversy of rites] 台北: 中央研究院历史语言研究所集刊第七十八本," *Taipei Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Lishi Yuyan Yanjiusuo Jikan [Collected Papers of the Academia Sinica Research Institute of History and Linguistics, Taipei]* 78 (2007); Wang Hongzhi 王宏志, "Majia'erni shihua de fanyi wenti 马戛尔尼使华的翻译问题 [Translation issues regarding the Macartney mission to China] 台北: 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊第 63 期, 2 009. ," *Taipei Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Jindaishi Yanjiusuo Jikan [Collected Papers of the Academia Sinica Research Center of Early Modern History, Taipei]* 63 (2009).

²⁴⁶ Li Yunquan 李云泉, "Zailun Qingdai chaogong tizhi," 98–99.

²⁴⁷ He Aiguo 何爱国, "Luelun shiliu-shiqi shiji Zhongguo yu Ouzhou," 36.

Some authors note that Southeast Asian countries also had their own tributary/vassalage systems. Ren Nianwen notes that in the 15th century when China's tributary system was at its apex (see Zheng He missions), while being a tributary of China, Java (the Majapahit Empire) also reached the peak of its influence and had its own vassalage system covering most of the Indonesian archipelago.²⁴⁸

Meanwhile, the discourse on the so-called 'mandala system' tries to conceptualize a uniquely Southeast Asian regional order instead of seeing the region as a periphery or sub-system of other regional and global orders. The discourse on Southeast Asia's mandala system is unique in a way that Chinese authors try to go beyond common China/East Asia vs. the West (tributary order vs. Westphalian-colonial order) binaries and analyze the tributary system in comparison with another non-Western cultural sphere and its supposedly distinct regional order. It is generally assumed that despite tributary exchanges, Southeast Asians had little understanding of the Confucian worldview (obviously, with the exception of Vietnam which will be treated as part of East Asia here) and were primarily motivated by economic profits to undergo the tributary procedure and pledge loyalty to the Chinese emperor. It is also commonly argued that China did not have considerable influence on the domestic affairs of Southeast Asian polities, at least not comparable to the case of Korea, Ryukyu and Vietnam. Therefore, in recent years several Chinese authors started to investigate the so-called 'mandala system' (Ch. *mantuoluo tixi* 曼陀罗体系) as a concept suitable to describe the internal dynamics of Southeast Asia and the way Southeast Asians framed their relationship with China and its tributary system.

The discourse on the mandala system is not only unique due to the fact that it tries to explore another non-Western cultural sphere, but also because it emerges primarily in response to the discourse on the Sinocentric tributary system and not to the discourses on the Westphalian order, empires, nations, etc. originating primarily from Western historical experiences. Authors who write on the mandala system usually base their analysis on concepts used to describe the tributary system, such as 'center(s) of radiance' and peripheries, claims for universal rule and tribute as an expression of hierarchy within the system. Descriptions of the mandala system usually start with investigating its cultural roots, such as notions of center and periphery in Indian religions and philosophy, as well as the claims for universal rule by rulers of the Indian cultural sphere. This is followed by investigating what center, periphery and tributary exchanges meant in the political and economic sense.

²⁴⁸ Ren Nianwen 任念文, "Mingchu Nanhai chaogong zhidu," 100.

The word *maṇḍala* means ‘circle’ in Sanskrit. In Indian-originated religious traditions, a mandala is a circular ritual object representing the universe, centered around a deity or an abstract symbol of a deity (in Buddhist mandalas usually around a buddha or bodhisattva). As pointed out by Lü Zhengang, in Indian cosmology, the Mount Sumeru or Meru, a mythical mountain located to the north of the human world *Jambudvīpa* (hence apparently based on the Himalayas) has been venerated as the ultimate mandala center of the world since antiquity. While the cult of the Mount Sumeru (in Chinese *Xumi Shan* 须弥山) also spread to East Asia via Buddhism, it had an even bigger impact on the Indianized states of Southeast Asia. The iconography of the Mount Sumeru was widely used in the royal palaces of Angkor and other pre-modern centers of power to support the legitimacy of their rulers. Based on stone inscriptions from the region, Southeast Asian monarchs made their claims for divine status and universal rule based on the Hindu concept of *devarāja* [God King] and the Buddhist concepts of *dharmarāja* [King of the (Buddhist) Law, in Chinese *fawang* 法王] and *cakravartin* [Turner of the Wheel (of Buddhist teaching), in Chinese *zhuanlunwang* 转轮王].²⁴⁹

Apart from this religiously based rhetoric for political legitimacy and authority comparable to Chinese notions of ‘Heavenly Mandate’ and ‘Son of Heaven’, as several authors point out, the classical Indian political, military and economic treatise *Arthashastra* provided the main source of realist political philosophy in Southeast Asia. The *Arthashastra* is attributed to a court advisor of the Maurya dynasty (4th to 2nd century BCE) named Kautilya, but was most likely written by various authors up until the 2nd century CE. Its usage of the word mandala in a sense for political and military theory provided the basis for the modern-era coining of the term ‘mandala system’. The word mandala is used in the *Arthashastra* while dividing geographical space focused on one’s own country (the ‘conqueror’) into circular zones of the ‘enemy’ (to be conquered), ‘rear enemy’, ‘ally’ etc. including 12 circular zones altogether.²⁵⁰

It has been argued by various authors that unlike their European and East Asian counterparts, pre-modern Southeast Asian polities were not states in the modern sense since they lacked centralized bureaucracies and defined borders. The various centers of pre-modern Southeast Asia, such as Angkor (modern Cambodia), Ayutthaya (Thailand), Bagan (Myanmar), Champa (Central and Southern Vietnam), Majapahit (Java) and Srivijaya (Sumatra) were surrounded by a large number of smaller peripheral polities often having multiple tributary

²⁴⁹ Lü Zhengang 吕振纲, “Mantuoluo tixi: Gudai Dongnanya de diqu zhixu yanjiu 曼陀罗体系: 古代东南亚的地区秩序研究 [The Mandala System: Research on pre-modern Southeast Asia’s regional order],” *Taipingyang Xuebao [Pacific Journal]* 25, no. 8 (2017): 30–32.

²⁵⁰ Lü Zhengang 吕振纲, 32–34.

allegiances to several centers. The actual power of the central rulers was often limited and local chiefs of the smaller polities had wide-ranging autonomy within their domains, as noted by certain non-Chinese authors. According to David Kang,

The *mandalas* of Southeast Asia were constellations of power, whose extent varied in relation to the attraction of the center. They were not states whose administrative control reached to defined frontiers.²⁵¹ Victor Lieberman writes that “Champa depended on royal personality and the most rudimentary administrative apparatus to coordinate autonomous, often mutually hostile principalities.”²⁵²

According to Mi Cui 密翠, the worldview of the *Arthashastra* and of pre-modern Southeast Asians was considerably different from that of pre-modern China. In classical India and pre-modern Southeast Asia, no enduring political center and enduring ideology of unified central rule developed as it did during the Qin-Han period (221 BCE – 220 CE) of China.²⁵³ As Lü notes, Southeast Asian rulers’ worldview was characterized by an awareness of constant change in regional power relations, and accordingly, there was a constant urge to secure enough resources to maintain one’s authority. Tributary relations existing within Southeast Asia were characterized by the profit-oriented and risk-aware extortion of resources from weaker polities by the stronger ones, often under the threat of military violence. This was in stark contrast with the self-confident *hou wang bo lai* [giving generously, receiving little] attitude of Chinese rulers.²⁵⁴

According to Lü Zhengang, the tributary system and the mandala system were two independent systems but in a symbiotic relationship (*gongsheng guanxi* 共生关系) with each other. In Southeast Asia, China was not seen as a celestial, superior state, but as a powerful external mandala center of vast economic wealth and being capable of mediation in local conflicts. He provides the example of China’s support for Malacca against Siamese aggression during the Zheng He missions, noting that China played a constructive role in pre-modern Southeast Asia’s regional politics.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ Kang, *East Asia Before the West*, 51; referring to Martin Stuart-Fox, *A Short History of China and Southeast Asia: Tribute, Trade and Influence* (Crowns Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 29.

²⁵² Kang, *East Asia Before the West*, 51; referring to Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c.800-1830* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 393.

²⁵³ Mi Cui 密翠, “Gudai Dongnanya guojia dui Zhongguo chaogong yuanyin tansuo 古代东南亚国家对中国朝贡原因探索 [On the reasons of pre-modern Southeast Asian states’ tributary missions to China],” *Dongnanya Nanya Yanjiu [Southeast and South Asian Studies]* 2014, no. 1 (2014): 76.

²⁵⁴ Lü Zhengang 吕振纲, “Mantuoluo tixi,” 35.

²⁵⁵ Lü Zhengang 吕振纲, 37–38.

Mi Cui investigates the question why Southeast Asian rulers sent tributary missions to China and how they framed their tributary relationship with China. According to her, the motivation for Southeast Asians to participate in the tributary system was primarily economic benefit and secondly, political protection from China in the frequently changing political environment of the region. According to Mi Cui, the Chinese rulers' notions of universal authority ('Heavenly Mandate' and 'Son of Heaven') were not shared by Southeast Asians and what was seen as due subordination to this supposedly universal authority in the eyes of the Chinese elites was an act of realpolitik from a Southeast Asian perspective. According to Mi Cui, while it was mostly China mediating in Southeast Asian conflicts, there were examples of offerings of support from Southeast Asian rulers towards China as well. She contrasts the example of Champa's frequent tributary missions to China and quest for help against the Vietnamese with the Ayutthayan offer to help the Ming rulers against the *wokou* pirates. The Ming refused the offer out of prestige reasons since it came from one of its tributaries.²⁵⁶ Mi Cui concludes that

for pre-modern Chinese, tribute represented the submission to the Son of Heaven. For Southeast Asian rulers, it was a prerequisite for establishing contact, a polite acknowledgment of the comparatively high position of the other, and in certain times even strategic alliance and partnership.²⁵⁷

Mi Cui agrees with Zhuang Guotu that the pre-modern conceptualization of tribute in China was a 'one-sided wishful thinking' (*yixiang qingyuan* 一厢情愿) of Chinese rulers and literati.²⁵⁸

While the attempts of these Chinese authors certainly deserve appreciation for trying to explore another cultural sphere and its regional order apart from East Asia/the tributary order and the West/the Westphalian order, as well as for trying to examine China's tributary system from a non-Chinese perspective, some critical remarks of these articles also have to be included. While they attempt to describe a Southeast Asian worldview, they still mostly rely on Western secondary literature on the region. Primary sources (such as stone inscriptions) in this secondary literature, the *Arthashastra*, the *Nagarakretagama*²⁵⁹ and a certain Burmese source named in

²⁵⁶ Mi Cui 密翠, "Gudai Dongnanya guojia," 76; referring to Stuart-Fox, *A Short History of China and Southeast Asia*, 34.

²⁵⁷ Mi Cui 密翠, "Gudai Dongnanya guojia," 77–78.

²⁵⁸ Mi Cui 密翠, 78; referring to Zhuang Guotu 庄国土, "Lüelun chaogong zhidu de xuhuan," 94–110.

²⁵⁹ Classical Javanese epic poem written by Mpu Prapanca as a eulogy to the Majapahit ruler Hayam Wuruk (14th century), includes detailed description of the Majapahit Empire at its height.

Chinese as *Huaren li Mian ji* 华人莅缅记 [Record of the Chinese arriving in Burma]²⁶⁰ are cited in Mi Cui's and Lü Zhengang's works. Generalizing statements on Indian/Southeast Asian culture and political thought are regularly made without reflecting on the expected diversity in the manifestations of these ideas around Southeast Asia. Furthermore, it should also be noted that the concept 'mandala system' has to be treated with criticism for being a neologism that did not exist in the era it refers to, in a similar manner to the 'tributary system' (see Chapter 2 'Theory').

Nevertheless, the authors definitely make a valuable contribution to generate academic discourse on Southeast Asia's history and its relation to China and to move beyond the exclusive 'China/East Asia vis-à-vis the West' perspective of global history prevalent in China. Scholars in and outside China investigating the mandala system are contributing to a global history that gives Southeast Asia its due place. As Andre G. Frank argues in *ReORIENT*, "Southeast Asia has been far too neglected by historians" (p. 92), its history being written from the Indian, Chinese, Arab and later especially European perspectives, giving little attention to its importance in the global economy (especially through spice production) and its highly developed civilizations which combined outside influences with local traditions.²⁶¹

5.3.5 The debate on the relevance of the tributary system for the present and future regional order

While writing history in a comparative manner with the West remains a defining factor in the historiography on the tributary system, China's increasing self-confidence as a global power obviously has its impact on the discourse on the tributary system as well. Apart from the question what role the tributary system played in China's failure to keep pace with the West during early modernity, the question what relevance the tributary system has for the present and future regional and global order receives an increasing amount of attention. The reemergence of China as a global power and the reestablishment of a Sinocentric East Asian order since the early 21st century provokes the question of how this can be connected to the past historical experiences of the region. The importance of studying the tributary system in order to maintain present and future regional stability is explicitly stated by several authors, especially those

²⁶⁰ Written during the reign of the Yongli 永历 emperor (1646-1662) of the Southern Ming (a Ming loyalist rump state during the early Qing in Southern China), Mi Cui 密翠, "Gudai Dongnanya guojia," 76.

²⁶¹ Frank, *ReORIENT*, 92–104.

adhering closely to the mainstream framing of China's past and present interaction with foreign countries (see section 3.1 "'Critique', 'ideology' and 'power'"). According to Li and Liu,

the expansion of the "tribute and investiture" order laid the foundation of the solidification of Confucian culture in the East Asian region and provided suitable guidance for the emergence of present-day East Asian regional consciousness and regional community.²⁶²

Li and Liu argue that China should view its history from both national and global perspectives, while regional frameworks for East Asia (such as the 'tribute and investiture' order) should be applied to analyze regional history instead of only relying on Western frameworks.²⁶³

Chen Zhiping advocates the usefulness of investigating the tributary system for the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative:

the developmental model of the Ming-era "maritime silk roads" [facilitated by the tributary system according to Chen] clearly has referential value ["借鉴意义"] for the construction of the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative.²⁶⁴

In her article, Ren Nianwen defends the Ming invasion and occupation of Vietnam (1406-1427), and several military missions during the Zheng He missions (in Sri Lanka and Sumatra) as "serving the purpose of maintaining regional stability". Notwithstanding, and in the context of China's controversial advances in the South China Sea recently, in her article Ren states that the early Ming tributary system and maritime strategy should serve as an example for present-day Chinese maritime policy:

the Ming dynasty accomplished its strategic aims in the South China Sea and even in the Indian Ocean and as a pre-modern feudal empire played an active and leading role in maintaining international order around the South China Sea, setting an example ["有示范意义"] for present-day Chinese maritime strategy.²⁶⁵

According to Xu Bo, the early modern expansion of Western powers resulted in the spread of two parallel international orders, the Westphalian system based on principles of equality, sovereignty and treaty-based diplomacy, not even fully realized in the West, and the "brutality" of the colonial system in "the East". As he notes, the rise of East Asia as an economically and politically influential region in the modern era has led to a resurgent interest

²⁶² Li Baojun 李宝俊 and Liu Bo 刘波, "Chaogong - cefeng," 109.

²⁶³ Li Baojun 李宝俊 and Liu Bo 刘波, 120-21.

²⁶⁴ Chen Zhiping 陈支平, "Mingdai 'Haishang Sichou zhi Lu,'" 191.

²⁶⁵ Ren Nianwen 任念文, "Mingchu Nanhai chaogong zhidu," 94.

towards the pre-modern regional order among a number of East Asian scholars. According to advocates of the ‘*Tianxiaism*’ (*Tianxia zhuyi* 天下主义), solidarity, harmony and peace were part of the pre-modern notion of *Tianxia* (‘All Under Heaven’) and therefore the ‘*Tianxia* worldview’ of pre-modern China/East Asia has a didactic function for future international relations in the region. Nevertheless, Xu Bo argues that although the Westphalian principles were misused by foreign powers during the era of colonialism, equality and sovereignty are the shared aims of humankind, hence a future regional order can only be imagined based on these principles and not on the deeply hierarchical *Tianxia* worldview of the past.²⁶⁶ According to Xu,

Pre-modern ideals of conducting foreign policy, permeated with Confucian thought, are not suitable for practical operationalization. Therefore, the referential value [“借鉴意义”] of the pre-modern tributary system for the present-day practice and theory of foreign policy should not be exaggerated.²⁶⁷

As can be seen, authors are divided on the question whether studying the early modern (Ming-Qing) tributary system has benefits for the present and future regional order. Those advocating its usefulness emphasize pacifism and stability in interstate relations during the early modern period. Those arguing against its usefulness point out its hierarchic nature and lack of notions of state sovereignty. At the core of this debate is apparently the fact that the official framing of international relations in contemporary China (see section 3.1 about ‘ideology’) emphasizes both pacifism/non-intervention and national sovereignty, therefore much ambiguity remains regarding the evaluation of the tributary system. Under the pre-modern tributary order, a rhetoric of nominal superiority and universal authority, hence the lack of explicit ideas of state sovereignty were prevalent. At the same time, regulated interstate borders and interstate stability characterized a large part of the early modern period. The emphasis put on nations, nation-states and national sovereignty in the official Chinese framing of world history and international relations is just as vigorous today as it has always been since the early 20th century. Meanwhile, it is also argued by an increasing number of scholars that it was the emergence of modern nationalisms and notions of national sovereignty which led to the breakdown of early modern East Asia’s interstate stability, culminating in the trauma of World War II, still of utmost influence on regional historical memory. These contradictions show that it is difficult to evaluate the tributary system based on the guidelines of China’s official framing of world history and international relations, and a diversity of opinions regarding its usefulness for the

²⁶⁶ Xu Bo 徐波, “Dui gudai Dongya chaogong tixi,” 2017, 91.

²⁶⁷ Xu Bo 徐波, 102.

present and future regional order can be detected, based on which of its aspects the respective author intends to emphasize.

6. Conclusion

For more than two millennia, Chinese historiography was unquestionably Sinocentric, ‘official histories’ (*zhengshi* 正史) focusing on the rise and fall of Chinese dynasties and moral explanations of their fates based on Confucian ethics.²⁶⁸ While China was several times conquered partly or entirely by nomadic ethnic groups from the north, the rulers of these non-Han-Chinese ethnicities established Chinese-style dynasties, relied on the Chinese administrative system within China proper and conducted foreign diplomacy within the framework of the tributary system.²⁶⁹

China’s perception of its position in the world went through drastic changes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries due to the expansion of the Westphalian-colonial order into East Asia. As many observers cited in the thesis argue, the framing of world or global history as based on the competition between nation-states and re-conceptualizing the long-established didactic function of historiography as to serve China’s quest for achieving great power status shaped its modern traditions of world/global historiography. These modern-era traditions exert a powerful influence on Chinese historiography until the present day.

Meanwhile, in the early 21st century China’s position in the world and its self-perception is in quick transformation. The re-emergence of China as a global power is resulting in the rediscovery and re-evaluation of its pre-modern, imperial traditions, long dismissed by most of its historians as obstacles for the development of the modern nation-state. The tributary system, although its interpretation and usefulness as a term of historical analysis is debated, is a crucial part of this evolving discourse on the evaluation of China’s imperial traditions and their relevance for the present and future regional and global order.

The main observation of the present thesis is that recent academic works on the tributary system are still characterized by being written in a comparative way vis-à-vis the West. The early Ming dynasty (mid-14th to mid-15th century), especially the Zheng He missions ordered to uphold and expand China’s tributary order, are generally seen as the apex of imperial China’s global influence. The West entering its Age of Discoveries at roughly the same time and its gradual rise to global domination in the following centuries is usually contrasted with an

²⁶⁸ Puett, “Classical Chinese Historical Thought.”

²⁶⁹ Wang, *China from Empire to Nation-State*, 114–24 (4.3. ‘Confucianism and Chinese identity in minority-rule dynasties’).

increasingly isolationist China, ultimately failing to keep pace with the West and becoming a semi-colony of foreign powers by the second half of the 19th century. The main question regarding the tributary system is therefore how and why it was responsible for China's falling behind the West, therefore the answers are usually sought through comparisons between the Sinocentric tributary order and the Eurocentric Westphalian-colonial order.

Meanwhile, what is also noticeable in the present-day discourse on the tributary system is that due to the ongoing change in China's global status, it is increasingly written from a position of power. While most Chinese global historiography of the 20th century was produced in a country seeing itself as a secondary member of the global community, as a semi-colony of other powers or an underdeveloped Third World country in need of foreign expertise and investment, China today is increasingly a trendsetter in international relations. Chinese leaders at the present day are increasingly interested in assuring their foreign partners that China's reemergence as a global power will not hurt the interests and security of others, to promote the ideology of 'peaceful rise' in order to counter notions of a 'China threat'. Apparently, as a result of this, the tributary system is not anymore only investigated to find out whether and how it prevented China from keeping pace with the West during early modernity but is also evaluated in light of its possible usefulness for the present and future regional and global order. The emphasis of many Chinese authors on its supposed pacifism and on the regional stability it supposedly facilitated in the early modern era has to be understood in this context.

It also has to be pointed out that the tributary system will remain a contested topic in Chinese public discourse since the official, state-promoted 'ideologies' (in this context the state-promoted framing of world or global history and of international relations) are ambiguous regarding its interpretation and evaluation. Marxism-Leninism and the 'Mao Zedong thought' does not address the tributary system directly, and the tributary system also remains open to debate when checked against the most commonly repeated principles of China's state-promoted 'peaceful development' model (such as national sovereignty, non-interference, pacifism, 'win-win' economic cooperation). The diversity of scholarly opinions stems from the varying emphasis put on the various aspects of the tributary system, such as the early modern interstate stability, the lack of notions of state sovereignty and the lack of a 'win-win' situation in state-controlled trade relations and their implicit or explicit comparison to the above mentioned state-promoted 'principles'. Meanwhile, as emphasized by advocates of the Critical Discourse Analysis methodology, social actors (in this context scholars) are not only influenced by the dominant ideologies of their societies but through participating in discourses can also become social influencers. In this regard, studying the Chinese academic discourse on the tributary

system is relevant in the way that the possible discursive dominance achieved by a certain interpretation and evaluation of the tributary system is likely to have an impact on the evolving framing of world/global history and international relations theory, possible even on foreign policy-making in the People's Republic of China.

The present thesis is intended to be a contribution to both the fields of Sinology and global history. Global history is a field which requires a global perspective since it is in fact made up from various 'global histories' written in diverse cultural, linguistic and political environments. To gain insights into how global history is written in China, whether for the sheer size of its population or its importance in the past, present and future global order is highly relevant for global historians all over the world. Global history is also a critical field challenging the modern-era tradition of nation-states-based 'world history', the retro-projection of present-day nationalistic discourses onto the past and is committed to supporting an inclusive and sustainable future for the entire global community. While there are reasons for criticism of some general trends in mainland Chinese global historiography today, it has also been demonstrated throughout the thesis that despite cultural and political pressures, there is also a number of critical authors who are able to introduce new perspectives into the discourse. Based on these considerations, the present thesis is intended to facilitate further interaction between global historians in China and other countries and to contribute to both the understanding of China's global historiography abroad and to the diversity of perspectives on global history in China.

7. Appendices

7.1 List of Chinese dynasties and political regimes

Figure 1. List of Chinese dynasties and political regimes

Dynasty/political regime	Ruling period
ROYAL DYNASTIES	
Shang 商	1600-1046 BCE
Zhou 周	1046-256 BCE
- <i>Spring and Autumn</i> period	770-476 BCE
- <i>Warring States</i> period	476-221 BCE
IMPERIAL DYNASTIES	
Qin 秦	221-206 BCE
Han 汉	206 BCE – 220 CE
<i>Three Kingdoms</i> period	220-280
Jin 晋	265-420
<i>Northern and Southern Dynasties</i>	420-589
Sui 隋	581-618
Tang 唐	618-907
<i>Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms</i> period	907-979
Liao 辽 (Khitans)	916-1125 (Northern China)
Song 宋	960-1279
- Northern Song (960-1127)	
- Southern Song (1127-1279)	
Xi Xia 西夏 (Tanguts)	1038-1227 (N.W. China)
Jin 金 (Jurchens)	1115-1234 (N. and Central China)
Yuan 元 (Mongols)	1271-1368
Ming 明	1368-1644
Qing 清 (Manchus)	1644-1912
MODERN CHINA	
Republic	1912-1949 (mainland China) 1945-present (Taiwan)
People's Republic	1949-present (mainland China)

7.2 List of Ming and Qing emperors

The following list of Ming and Qing-era emperors starts with their so-called reign or era name (*nianhao* 年号). In pre-Ming times, many Chinese emperors had several era names (*nianhao*) during their reign. However, with the exception of Yingzong of Ming, all Ming and Qing emperors had only one era name. For this reason, it became common in both Chinese and foreign language works to refer to them using their era names (e.g. “the Hongwu emperor” or “the Qianlong emperor”). Another common way of referring to Chinese emperors is using their honorific ‘temple name’ (*miaohao* 庙号), adding the dynasty to which they belonged (in Chinese e.g. *Ming Taizu* 明太祖, lit. meaning ‘Great Ancestor of Ming’, in English Taizu of Ming). Their so-called ‘posthumous name’ (*shihao* 谥号, e.g. Gaohuangdi 高皇帝 lit. ‘The High Emperor’ for Taizu of Ming), conferred on them following their death, was another

honorific way of referring to Chinese emperors in pre-modern texts. It is less frequently used in modern texts, therefore it is not included in this table. In pre-modern times, the personal names of emperors were not used in public contexts, however, it is used by some modern authors while referring to them.

Figure 2. List of Ming emperors

Reign name and meaning (<i>nianhao</i> 年号)	Temple name (<i>miaohao</i> 庙号)	Personal name	Reigning years
Hongwu 洪武 (Vast Marshall)	Taizu 太祖	Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋	1368-1398
Jianwen 建文 (Establishing Civility)	Huizong 惠宗	Zhu Yunwen 朱允炆	1398-1402
Yongle 永乐 (Perpetual Happiness)	Taizong 太宗, Chengzu 成祖	Zhu Di 朱棣	1402-1424
Hongxi 洪熙 (Vastly Bright)	Renzong 仁宗	Zhu Gaochi 朱高炽	1424-1425
Xuande 宣德 (Proclamation of Virtue)	Xuanzong 宣宗	Zhu Zhanji 朱瞻基	1425-1435
Zhengtong 正统 (Right Governance); Tianshun 天顺 (Obedience to Heaven)	Yingzong 英宗	Zhu Qizhen 朱祁镇	Zhengtong: 1435-1449; Tianshun: 1457-1464
Jingtai 景泰 (Exalted View)	Daizong 代宗	Zhu Qiyu 朱祁钰	1449-1457
Chenghua 成化 (Accomplished Change)	Xianzong 宪宗	Zhu Jianshen 朱见深	1464-1487
Hongzhi 弘治 (Great Governance)	Xiaozong 孝宗	Zhu Youcheng 朱祐樞	1487-1505
Zhengde 正德 (Rectification of Virtue)	Wuzong 武宗	Zhu Houzhao 朱厚照	1505-1521
Jiajing 嘉靖 (Admirable Tranquility)	Shizong 世宗	Zhu Houcong 朱厚熜	1521-1567
Longqing 隆庆 (Great Celebration)	Muzong 穆宗	Zhu Zaiji 朱载堉	1567-1572
Wanli 万历 (Ten Thousand Calendars)	Shenzong 神宗	Zhu Yijun 朱翊钧	1572-1620
Taichang 泰昌 (Great Prosperity)	Guangzong 光宗	Zhu Changluo 朱常洛	1620
Tianqi 天启 (Heavenly Opening)	Xizong 熹宗	Zhu Youjiao 朱由校	1620-1627
Chongzhen 崇祯 (Honorable and Auspicious)	Sizong 思宗	Zhu Youjian 朱由检	1627-1644

Figure 3. List of Qing emperors

Reign name and meaning (<i>nianhao</i> 年号)	Temple name (<i>miaohao</i> 庙号)	Personal name	Reigning years
Shunzhi 顺治 (Obedient Governance)	Shizu 世祖	Fulin 福临	1644-1661
Kangxi 康熙 (Health and Prosperity)	Shengzu 圣祖	Xuanye 玄烨	1662-1722
Yongzheng 雍正 (Harmony and Rectification)	Shizong 世宗	Yinzhen 胤禛	1723-1735
Qianlong 乾隆 (Strong Prosperity)	Gaozong 高宗	Hongli 弘历	1736-1796
Jiaqing 嘉庆 (Admirable Celebration)	Renzong 仁宗	Yongyan 颙琰	1796-1820
Daoguang 道光 (Brightness of the Way)	Xuanzong 宣宗	Minning 旻宁	1821-1850
Xianfeng 咸丰 (Universal Prosperity)	Wenzong 文宗	Yizhu 奕訢	1851-1861
Tongzhi 同治 (Restoring Order)	Muzong 穆宗	Zaichun 载淳	1862-1875
Guangxu 光绪 (Bright Cause)	Dezong 德宗	Zaitian 载湉	1875-1908
Xuantong 宣统 (Proclamation of Unity)	-	Puyi 溥仪	1909-1912

7.3 List of Ming and Qing-era tributaries

Figure 4. List of Ming-era tributaries between 1368 and 1587²⁷⁰

The following tables are based on Fairbank and Teng (1941), itself based on the Wanli 万历 edition (1587) of the *Da Ming Huidian* 大明会典 [Collected Statutes of the Great Ming]. The tables below follow the order of the *Da Ming Huidian*. The tributaries of the Ming dynasty are included in four tables, the first of them dealing with East Asia, Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, the second one with the present-day Gansu province and Xinjiang autonomous region of China and two further tables dealing with overland contacts with Inner Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East. In general, the tables advance from the more important tributaries towards the less important ones. Also note that during the Zheng He missions (1405-1433) of the early Ming period, China established tributary relations with a large number of political entities throughout the Indo-Pacific maritime region. Following these missions, the number of tributaries dropped significantly.

²⁷⁰ Based on Fairbank – Teng pp. 151-154; data collected from the Wanli 万历 edition (1587) of the *Da Ming Huidian* 大明会典 [Collected Statutes of the Great Ming], <https://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hans/%E5%A4%A7%E6%98%8E%E6%9C%83%E5%85%B8> (Accessed on 2019-07-30). The list follows the order found in the *Da Ming Huidian*, progressing from the more important tributaries towards the less important ones in general.

TABLE 1. EAST ASIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA, INDIAN OCEAN		
Name of tributary (Name in primary source)	Location	Frequency / years of tribute missions
Korea (Chaoxian 朝鲜)		1372-1403: every 3 years/every 1 year 1403-: annual
Japan (Ribei 日本, Wonu 倭奴)		1374: refused 1381: accepted 1403-1551: occasional
Ryukyu (Liuqiu 琉球)		1368-: every 2 years
Vietnam (Annan 安南)		1369-: every 3 years
Cambodia (Zhenla 真腊)		1371-: indefinite (?)
Siam (Xianluo 暹罗)		1371-: every 3 years
Champa (Zhancheng 占城, Zhanpo 占婆)	Central/Southern Vietnam	1369-: every 3 years
Java (Zhaowa 爪哇)		1372, 1381, 1404, 1407, 1443-: every 3 years, later indefinite (?)
Pahang (Pengheng 彭亨)	Pahang state, Peninsular Malaysia	1378, 1414
Baihua 百花	unidentified	1378
Palembang (Sanfoqi 三佛齐)	Palembang (town), Sumatra, Indonesia	1371, 1405, 1408, 1414, 1425
Samudra (Xuwendana 须文达那)	Sumatra, Indonesia	1383
Samudra (Sumendala 苏门答剌)	Sumatra, Indonesia	1405, 1407, 1431, 1435
Chola (Suoli 琐里)	Coromandel Coast, S.E. India	1370, 1372, 1403
Lampung (Lanbang 览邦)	Lampung province, Sumatra, Indonesia	1376, 1403-24/1426-35: occasionally
Danba 淡巴	probably Dampar in Kalimantan, Indonesia or Kampar in Perak state, Peninsular Malaysia	1377
Sulu (Sulu 苏禄)	Sulu province, Philippines	1417, 1421
Gumala 古麻剌	location in the Philippines	1420
Kozhikode / Calicut (Guli 古里)	Kerala / Malabar Coast, S.W. India	1405, 1407, 1409
Malacca (Manlajia 满刺加)		1405, 1411, 1412, 1414, 1424, 1434, 1445-: frequently, 1459
Borneo (Suolo 娑罗->Boluo 婆罗)		1406
Aru (Alu 阿鲁/ Yalu 亚鲁)	Northeast Sumatra, Indonesia	1407 with Calicut et al.
Kollam / Quilon (Gelan 葛兰)	Kerala / Malabar Coast, S.W. India	1407 with Samudra et al.
Bengal (Banggela 榜葛剌)		1408, 1414, 1438
Sri Lanka (Xilanshan 锡兰山)		1411, 1412, 1445, 1459
Jaunpur (Zhaonapu'er 沼纳扑儿)	Jaunpur (town), Uttar Pradesh, N. India	1420
Fulin 拂菻	(referring to the Byzantine Empire usually, Fairbank – Teng identify it with Syria, or some other place in the Eastern Mediterranean)	1371
Kochi / Cochin (Kechi 柯枝)	Kerala / Malabar Coast, S.W. India	1404, 1412
Malindi (Malin 麻林)	Malindi (town), Kenya	1414
Luzon (Lüsong 吕宋)	Luzon, (often referring to the Philippines in general)	1372, 1405, 1576
Dielu 碟里	Deli regency, Sumatra, Indonesia	1405 with Java et al.

Riluoxiazhi 日罗夏治	(probably Gresik regency), Java, Indonesia	1405 with Java et al.
Hemaoli 合猫里	location in the Philippines	1405 with Java et al.
Gulibanzu 古里班卒	Fansur (historical port) in Barus district, Sumatra, Indonesia	1405
Dahui 打回	unidentified	1405
Hormuz (Hulumosi 忽鲁谟斯, Hulumusi 忽鲁母思)	Hormuz (island, town), Iran	1405
Coimbatore (Kanbayiti 坎巴夷替)	Coimbatore (town), Tamil Nadu, S. India	1414
Jiayile 加异勒	Kayalpatnam (town), Coromandel Coast / Tamil Nadu, S.E. India	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Dhofar (Zufa'er 祖法儿)	Dhofar (region), Oman	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Maldiv Islands (Liushan 溜山)		Yongle era (1403-1425)
Burma (Awa 阿哇)		Yongle era (1403-1425)
Nanboli 南渤李	N.W. Sumatra, Indonesia	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Kelantan (Jilandan 急兰丹)	Kelantan state, Peninsular Malaysia	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Qilani 奇刺泥	north of Kollam, Malabar Coast, S.W. India	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Xialabi 夏刺比	Vallabhi (historical port), Gujarat, W. India	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Kuchani 窟察尼	unidentified	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Wushelati 乌涉刺踢	unidentified	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Aden (Adan 阿丹)	Aden, Yemen	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Lumi 鲁密, 鲁迷	Rum (Asia Minor)	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Bengal (Pengjiana 彭加那)		Yongle era (1403-1425)
Surat (Shelachi 舍刺齐)	Surat (town, port), Gujarat, W. India	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Bakeyi 八可意	unidentified	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Coimbatore (Kanbayiti 坎巴夷替)	Coimbatore (town), Tamil Nadu, S. India	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Qara Qoyunlu (Heigeda 黑葛达)	14-15 th century Turkic dynasty ruling Caucasus region, N.W. Iran, N. Iraq, W. Turkey	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Lasa 刺撒	near Al-Mukalla (town, port), Yemen	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Barawa (Bulawa 不刺哇)	Barawa (town, port), Somalia	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Mogadishu (Mugudushu 木骨都束)	Mogadishu, Somalia	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Nanboli 南渤李	N.W. Sumatra, Indonesia	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Qianlida 千里达	unidentified	Yongle era (1403-1425)
Kannur / Cannanore (Shaliwanni 沙里湾泥 -> Arab. Jurfattan)	Kannur (town), Malabar Coast / Kerala, S.W. India	Yongle era (1403-1425)

TABLE 2. 'WESTERN REGIONS' (GANSU, XINJIANG)

Name of tributary	Location	Frequency / years of tribute missions
Hami 哈密	Hami (town), Xinjiang, China	1404: first tribute, 1465-75: annual, 1475-: every 5 years
Anding 安定	former county (<i>xian</i> 县) in Gansu province, China	1374-
Handong 罕东	former military district (<i>wei</i> 卫) in Gansu province, China	

Chijin 赤斤	former military district (<i>wei</i> 卫) in Gansu province, China	1404, 1563-: every 5 years
Quxian 曲先	former military district (<i>wei</i> 卫) in Gansu province, China	1437

TABLE 3. INNER ASIA, CENTRAL ASIA, MIDDLE EAST (OVERLAND) 1.

Name of tributary	Location	Frequency / years of tribute missions
Herat (Halie 哈烈)	Herat (town), Afghanistan	1402, 1409, 1437
Hasan 哈三	unidentified	
Shadiman 沙的蛮	unidentified	
Kashgar (Hashiha'er 哈失哈儿)	Kashgar (town), Xinjiang, China	
Hadilan 哈的兰	unidentified	
Sayram (Sailan 赛兰)	Sayram (town), S. Kazakhstan	
Saolan 扫兰	probably also Sayram	
Ilibalik (Yilibali 亦力把力), Bashibalik (Bieshibali 别失八里)	referring to the (Eastern) Chagatai Khanate (a.k.a. Moghulistan), 14-17 th century Mongol khanate ruling over parts of modern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Xinjiang (China)	1391, 1406, 1413, 1418(?), 1437, 1457-: continuously
Niekeli 乜克力	Ming-era nomadic tribe residing near Hami, Xinjiang, China	
Badakhshan (Badansha 巴丹沙)	historical state located in the Badakhshan region, modern Afghanistan and Tajikistan	
Balkh (Balihei 把力黑)	Balkh (town), Afghanistan	
Anlima 俺力麻	probably Almaliq (town), Xinjiang, China	
Tuohuma 脱忽麻	probably Tokmak (town), Uzbekistan	
Chalishi 察力失	Karashahr? (Xinjiang, China), also known as Chalish	
Ganshi 干失	?	
Bukhara (Buhala 卜哈刺)	Bukhara (town), Uzbekistan	
Pala 怕刺	?	
Shiraz (Shilasi 失刺思)	Shiraz (town), Iran	
Nishapur (Nishawu'er 你沙兀儿)	Nishapur (town), Iran	
Kashmir (Keshimi'er 克失迷儿)		
Tabriz (Tiebilisi 帖必力思)	Tabriz (town), Iran	
Guosasi 果撒思	?	
Huochan 火占	possibly Khujand (town), Tajikistan	
Huotan 火壇	possibly Khujand (town), Tajikistan	
Shaliuhaiya 沙六海牙	possibly from Shahrokh -> Khujand (town), Tajikistan	
Yaxi 牙西	?	
Yarkand (Ya'ergan 牙儿干)	Yarkand (town), Xinjiang, China	
Rong 戎	? (meaning "western barbarians")	
Bai 白	?	
Wulun 兀伦	?	
Asu 阿速	Alans? (Iranian-speaking steppe people); also name of a Ming-era general residing in the Chijin	

	Mongol Commandery 赤斤蒙古卫	
Aduan 阿端	Khotan (Xinjiang, China)?	
Yesicheng 耶思成	?	
Kunduz (Kuncheng 坤城)	Kunduz (province, town), Afghanistan	
Shehei 捨黑	?	
Baiyin 摆音	?	
Keqie 克乜	?	

TABLE 4. INNER ASIA, CENTRAL ASIA, MIDDLE EAST (OVERLAND) 2.		
Name of tributary	Location	Frequency / years of tribute missions
Turfan (Tulufan 吐鲁番)	Turfan (town), Xinjiang, China	1430, 1497, 1509, 1510, 1523-: every 5 years
Kharakhojo (Huozhou 火州)	historical town near Turfan (Xinjiang, China)	1400 and 1430 together with Turfan et al.
Liuchen 柳陈	near Turfan (Xinjiang, China)	1430 together with Turfan et al.
Samarkand (Sama'erhan 撒马尔罕)	Samarkand, Uzbekistan	1387, 1389, 1391, etc., 1523-: every 5 years
Kingdom of Rum (Lumi 鲁密, 鲁迷)	Asia Minor (Ottomans)	1524-: every 5 years (?)
Arabia (Tianfang 天方)	(<i>Tianfang</i> lit. means 'direction of Heaven/God' -> Mecca, more broadly also ref. to Arabia)	during Xuande period (1426-1435), 1517, during Jiaqing era (1522-1566) fixed every 5 years
Medina (Modena 默德那)	Medina (town), Saudi Arabia	Xuande period (1426-1435)
Khotan (Yutian 于阗)	Khotan (town), Xinjiang, China	1408
Riluo 日落	?	Yongle period (1403-1424)
Badakhshan (Badaheishang 八答黑商)	historical state located in the Badakhshan region, modern Afghanistan and Tajikistan	Yongle period (1403-1424)
Andkhoy (Anduhuai 俺都淮)	Andkhoy (town, district), Afghanistan	Yongle period (1403-1424)
Isfahan (Yisifuhan 亦思弗罕)	Isfahan (town), Iran	Yongle period (1403-1424)
Khorasan (Heilou 黑娄)	historical region in N.E. Iran, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan	1432
Ejiqie 额即乜	?	Jiaqing period (1522-1566)
Haxin 哈辛	?	Jiaqing period (1522-1566)
Tibet (Wusizang 乌斯藏)	(Chinese name from Ü-Tsang [<i>dbus gtsang</i>], the central region of historical Tibet)	list concluded with Tibet and a number of tribes and temples on the Tibetan border (in Southwest Ming China)

Figure 5. List of Qing-era tributaries between 1662 and 1908²⁷¹

Tributary state (Name in primary sources)	Kangxi 康熙 (1662-1722)	Yongzheng 雍正 (1723-1735)	Qianlong 乾隆 (1736-1795)	Jiaqing 嘉庆 (1796-1820)
Korea (Chaoxian 朝鲜)	60/61 annually (except for 1722)	13/13 annually	59/60 annually (except for 1752)	25/25 annually
Ryukyu (Liuqiu 琉球)	32/61 (32 out of 61 years)	6/13 (6 out of 13 years)	29/60 (29 out of 60 years)	16/25 (16 times out of 25 years), annually between 1813-1820
Vietnam (Annan 安南, Yuenan 越南)	13/61	3/13	15/60	5/25
Siam (Xianluo 暹罗)	6/61	1/13	13/60	12/25
Burma (Miandian 缅甸)	0/61	0/13	8/60	1/25
Laos (Nanzhang 南掌)	0/61	1/13	10/60	3/25
Sulu (Sulu 苏禄)	0/61	2/13	5/60	0/25
Nepal (Gurkas)	0/61	0/13	3/60 (1792, 1794, 1795)	0/25
Dzungars	2/61 1681, 1685: Oelots/Western Mongols (Elute 厄鲁特)	1/13 (1735)	7/60 (1738, 1742, 1743, 1745, 1746, 1752, 1753)	0/25
European states Great Britain (Yingjili 英吉利 -> 'England'); Netherlands (Helan 荷兰 -> 'Holland'); Papacy (Yidaliya 意达里亚 -> 'Italy'); Portugal (Folangji 佛郎机 -> 'Franks'); Russia (Eluosi 俄罗斯)	Netherlands: 3/60 (1663, 1667, 1686); Portugal: 2/61 (1670, 1678); Russia: 1/61 (1676)	Papacy: 1/13 (1725); Russia: 1/13 (1727)	Great Britain: 2/60 (1793, 1795); Portugal: 2/60 (1752, 1753); Netherlands: 1/60 (1794)	Great Britain: 2/25 (1805, 1816)
Others	Turfan: 2/61 (1673, 1686)	Babu'erguo 巴布而国 1/13 (probably)	Erdeni regent of Brugba, Tibet (布鲁克巴之额而德尼第巴): 2/60	

²⁷¹ Fairbank and Têng, "On The Ch'ing Tributary System," 193–97. The tables are based on the *Qing Shilu* [Veritable Record of the Qing] <https://zh.m.wikisource.org/zh-hans/%E6%B8%85%E5%AF%A6%E9%8C%84> (Accessed on 2019-07-30), *Qing Shigao* 清史稿 [Draft History of the Qing] <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=98755&remap=gb> (Accessed on 2019-07-30) and *Donghua lu* 东华录 [Records of the Donghua Gate (Forbidden City)] <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=gb&res=91824&remap=gb> (Accessed on 2019-07-30) (*Shi yi chao* 十一朝 [11th court] edition by Pan Yifu 潘颐福 1844-1886 and Wang Xianqian 王先谦, 1842-1917).

		Parbuttiya, Nepal): 1/13 (1732)	(1732, 1759); Hasake 哈萨克: 2/60 (1757, 1758); Ku'erle Beg (库而勒伯克): 1762; Afghanistan (Aiwuhan 爱乌罕): 1762; Kokand (Huohan 霍罕, Uzbekistan): 1792	
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Tributary state (Name in primary sources)	Daoguang 道光 (1821-1850)	Xianfeng 咸丰 (1851-1861)	Tongzhi 同治 (1862-1874)	Guangxu 光绪 (1875-1908)
Korea (Chaoxian 朝鲜)	30/30 annually	11/11 annually	11/13	13/34 (last year: 1894)
Ryukyu (Liuqiu 琉球)	25/30 (annually between 1821 and 1835)	7/11	6/13	1/34 (1875); 1877 mission stopped by Japan; Ryukyu incorporated into Japan in 1879)
Vietnam (Yuenan 越南)	8/30	1/11	2/13	3/34 (last year: 1883)
Siam (Xianluo 暹 罗)	15/30	2/11	0/13	0/34
Burma (Miandian 缅甸)	6/30	0/11	1/13	1/34 (last year: 1875)
Laos (Nanzhang 南掌)	2/30	1/11	0/13	0/34
Nepal (Gurkas)	1/30	2/11	0/13	4/34 (last year: 1908)
Others			Japan: 1871; Pakebala Living Buddha of Qamdo, Tibet (察木多帕克 巴刺胡土克图): 1880	

7.4 Selected data on early modern Chinese trade

Figure 6. Number of Chinese ships trading with Manila, 1570-1644²⁷²

Years	Number of Chinese ships
1570-74	23
1575-79	30
1580-84	97
1585-89	103
1590-94	55
1595-99	73
1600-04	103
1605-09	163
1610-14	108
1615-19	7
1620-24	23
1625-29	-
1630-34	84
1635-39	87
1640-44	26

Figure 7. Chinese and Southeast Asian ships entering Nagasaki, 1647-1692²⁷³

Year	Number of Chinese ships	Number of non-Chinese ships (Taiwan, Vietnam, Siam, Cambodia, other Southeast Asian countries)
1647	23	6
1648	10	7
1649	44	5
1650	59	11
1651	32	13
1652	37	13
1653	37	19
1654	41	13
1655	40	5
1656	40	5
1657	32	19
1658	39	13
1659	47	13
1660	35	20
1661	32	7
1662	35	11
1663	33	13
1664	25	14
1665	10	25
1666	2	31
1667	4	23
1668	18	25
1669	15	23
1670	16	26
1671	7	31

²⁷² Deng, “The Foreign Staple Trade of China in the Pre-Modern Era,” 265; referring to Chen Xuewen 陈学文, “Wanli shiqi de Zhong-Fei maoyi 万历时期的中菲贸易 [Sino-Philippine trade during the Wanli period],” *Zhongguo Shijianjiu [Journal of Chinese Historical Studies]* 1991, no. 1 (1991): 46.

²⁷³ Kang, *East Asia Before the West*, 128–29; based on Gang Zhao, *Shaping the Asian Trade Network: The Conception and Implementation of the Chinese Open Trade Policy, 1684-1840* (UMI, 2007), 59–60.

1672	3	42
1673	6	14
1674	7	14
1675	7	22
1676	7	17
1677	7	22
1678	9	17
1679	13	19
1680	5	25
1681	0	9
1682	5	21
1683	2	25
1684	7	15
1685	77	8
1686	96	15
1687	130	7
1688	173	18
1689	66	13
1690	77	17
1691	76	14
1692	63	10
Total	1549	755
Annual avg.	34.4	16.8

Figure 8. Chinese and Portuguese ships entering Batavia (Jakarta), annual averages, 1681-1793²⁷⁴

Period	Chinese ships	Portuguese ships
1681-1690	9.7	1.8
1691-1700	11.5	1.6
1701-1710	11.0	2.9
1711-1720	13.6	5.9
1721-1730	16.4	9.0
1731-1740	17.7	4.8
1741-1750	10.9	4.1
1751-1760	9.1	1.8
1761-1770	7.4	2.4
1771-1780	5.1	3.0
1781-1790	9.3	3.9
1791-1793	9.5	3.0

²⁷⁴ Kang, *East Asia Before the West*, 136; referring to Johan Leonard Blussé van Oud-Alblas, *Strange Company: Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women and Dutch in VOC Batavia* (Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden, 1986), 123.

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