H-Diplo | Robert Jervis International Security Studies Forum

Roundtable Review 15-3

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Introduction by Victoria Tin-bor Hui, University of Notre Dame

I have the honor to introduce this roundtable on Ayşe Zarakol's *Before the West: The Rise and Fall of Eastern World Orders*, a book that challenges International Relation's (IR) Eurocentric focus on Westphalia as the beginning of International Relations by foregrounding the "Chinggisid sovereignty model." According to Zarakol, the Mongol leader Genghis Khan's world conquest (1206-1259) made "Asia" whole for the first time, putting people in modern-day Iran and China under the same sovereign (53, 56, 57, 177). She argues that the Chinggisid Empire created "Asia as a political space" through overland and naval routes and the "epistemic exchange" of "people, goods, arts, technology and ideas" (28, 53, 57, 217). The empire's presence and expansion were "transformative" (56) for even other parts of the continent that did not come under Chinggisid rule (e.g. Japan, the Indian subcontinent, North Africa and Europe). After the end of the Great Khan, Chinggisid dynasties (the Golden Horde/Jochid, the Yuan, the Ilkhanate and the Chagatai) continued to rule for another century. The Chinggisid legacy further shaped the "post-Chinggisid world orders" of the Timurid and the Ming in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and then the "post-Timurid world orders" of the Ottomans, the Safavids and the Mughals in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Zarakol notes that the "Chinggisid sovereignty model" has the following constitutive elements:

> Chinggisid sovereignty was highly centralised around the person of the Great Khan, who was understood to be the lawgiver (and thus also above even religious authority). As the lawgiver, the Great Khan was also expected to be a world conqueror, which proved to his would-be aristocratic challengers (and, less importantly, subjects) that he had heaven's mandate to claim such awesome power. This meant that the Chinggisid sovereignty model relied greatly on "external" dynamics for legitimation, and Chinggisid rulers were thus particularly invested in claiming universal sovereignty… The Chinggisid sovereignty model also came with a number of secondary institutions: tanistry as a succession norm, sponsorship of astronomy/astrology, facilitation of trade etc. (217-8).

Reviewers Ali Balcı, Filippo Costa Buranelli, Ryan D. Griffiths, and Jelena Subotic offer high praise for the book, but they also criticize certain aspect of its argument and approach.

"The West" and "the East"

The reviewers suggest that book's title, *Before the West*, does not seem to do justice to Zarakol's theoretical and empirical contributions. Costa Buranelli celebrates "the Eurasian turn" in Global Historical Sociology, but finds that the title "counterintuitively recentres the West." Griffiths puzzles over the "east in contrast to the west" frame. "The East" and "the West" are Eurocentric terms: Asia is in the East only if Europe is deemed as "the West." In her response Zarakol explains that "the East" is often seen to lag behind "the West" and thus it is necessary to highlight that "the East" was in fact ahead of "the West." It is noteworthy that scholars have railed against Eurocentrism for decades. Historical works have for many years pointed out that European states were the "historical laggards"[1] and that Asia was once "two thousand years ahead" of Europe in terms of the centralized bureaucracy and the art of war.[2] Zarakol is concerned that "Asia" or

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[1] Tuong Vu, "Studying The State Through State Formation," *World Politics* 62:1 (January 2010): 148-175.

[2] Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5, 6, 7, 148, 223, 237. See also Eastern superiority in Andrew Phillips, *How the East Was Won: Barbarian Conquerors, Universal Conquest and The Making of Modern Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

"Eurasia" have their own baggage. A more accurate title like "The Rise and Fall of the Chinggisid World Orders" may have been more appropriate.

Houses

Among the constitutive elements of the Chinggisid model, the reviewers find the use of "Great Houses" as equivalents of "Great Powers" somewhat controversial. Costa Buranelli suggests that narratives about specific historical figures may take away the book's claim for a macro-history. Zarakol contends in the book that world conquerors of the likes of Genghis Khan are world-orderers who created empires and world orders. (22) Griffiths finds that the term "houses" is too "fleeting" and suggests the use of "empires" so that it is possible to shift our gaze to more lasting political institutions. In Zarakol's account, empires are headed by houses. My take is that, irrespective of "empires" or "houses" or "states," institutions were dependent on rulers for most of history. The Weberian ideal-type bureaucracy became "a full-fledged reality" only "when the possibility of arbitrary intervention on the part of the ruler [was] eliminated by the introduction of a set of standard operating procedures subject to the strictures of a formalized, impersonal administrative law" in the post-Napoleonic era.[3] Today's world seems to be returning to history. Zarakol notes in the book that "'strongmen' have tended to be contemptuous of existing international agreements, treaties and institutions; as a result, international organisations and regimes thought to be well-established are now threatened, and their continued existence can no longer be taken for granted." (238)

System

Costa Buranelli asks if the "Chinggisid ecumene" gave the Great Houses a sense that they were part of a broader whole and if there existed equivalent of "international law" in Eurasia. Costa Buranelli sees deep fractures but not a *raison de système* in English School terms. My own take is that universal sovereignty is a zero-sum concept. There can only be one world conqueror. Zarakol uses "Chinggisid sovereignty norms" and "Chinggisid sovereignty model" interchangeably. This may be the source of the confusion. We should distinguish between a "system of states [or empires or houses]," in which various units chase after universal domination, and a "society of states [or empires or houses]" in which units "have some recognition of common interests in maintaining the system."[4] A "Chinggisid sovereignty model" in which every Great House chases after universal domination cannot share "sovereignty norms" (which are also erroneously presumed for the Westphalian model).[5] On this point, Zarakol cites in her response the Cold War: "The US and the USSR were deadly rivals with their own spheres of influence, but they reinforced the Cold War order together because they had similar understandings of what it meant to be a great power with its attendant symbolic and material manifestations." The rivals in this case did not have the capabilities to knock off each other. Genghis Khan could conquer the world and he did with untold brutality (more below); his successors could not subjugate one another and had to tolerate coexistence. Costa Buranelli points out that Eurasia could nonetheless be interconnected because these empires were nomadic – their high mobility and circularity fostered the shared ecumene, with or without shared norms.

Rise and Fall

Given the above, Griffiths more or less provides the answer to the question "why world orders rise and fall": "They rise when an order coalesces around a successful great house that follows the Chinggisid model; they

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[3] Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9; cited in Hui, *War and State Formation*, 183.

[4] Hui, *War and State Formation*, 18.

[5] Hui, *War and State Formation*, 154.

fall when that house loses power." I am not sure if it is possible to identify "a more worked-out explanation" for eras when "strongmen" made or broke history.

Methods

Costa Buranelli and Griffiths would like to see more discussion of research methods. This is certainly a fair comment. Yet, I find myself not just agreeing with Buranelli that Zarakol's frankness is refreshing and captivating, but also liberating—"Oh, this is the kind of book that we can write once we are senior enough!"

Every piece of work faces questions about missing independent variables or cases. Ali Balcı identifies the missing Uzbek Khanate and Buranelli the missing Kazakh Khanate. I believe that so long as the missing khanates behave like those that are not missing in the book, the author should get a pass. Balcı contends that the Ottoman Empire should count as its own world order rather than a part of the post-Timurid world order. Samuel Huntington argued that Turkey is a "torn country."[6] Iver Neuman and Eugen Wigen agree that Russia and Turkey are situated between the steppe and Europe.[7] It may be that the arguments of both Zarakol and Balcı are correct then. (More on this below.)

Lessons from History

Jelena Subotic highlights that the book "ends with a certain sense of foreboding – that things are about to change, and that the change will unlikely be for the better." I share Balcı's take that Zarakol's lessons from history still seem too optimistic. She hopes that the shared Chinggisid legacy of "ideational and artistic connections" can provide common historical ground for "a more pluralist vision of the region." (272). Balcı does contest "[t]he charge that coercive world-ordering is a feature of only Western political projects" (242). Yet, in trying to turn the focus from the Mongol's "savagery in battle" (74) to their centralization and organization, the book's history becomes rather sanitized. Balcı reminds us of "the bloody and devastating legacy of the Genghis Khan experience." R.J. Rummel's study of pre-twentieth-century "massacres, infanticide, executions, genocides, sacrifices, burnings, deaths by mistreatment" shows that the Mongols' estimated killing toll of about 29,927,000 puts it in second place in world history.[8] Their leaders followed a strategy to terrorise Persians, Arabs, Hindus, Russians, Europeans and Chinese alike into surrender. The most notorious outcomes of this approach is the genocide of the Tanguts of the Xixia kingdom (in modern-day Gansu) in 1226–33. Zarakol's discussion of the kingdom makes no mention of mass killing (62). Among the Mongols' victims, some 18,470,000 were Chinese killed under Khan Kublai's rule in 1279–94.[9] (China's own historical killing toll of 33.5 million puts it in the top position among a worldwide total estimate of 133,147,000. Zünghar Mongols, in turn, became victims of the Qing's 'genocide' in 1755–8.)[10] Russian President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine follows the Mongols' practice of 'Surrender or be slaughtered!'[11] Costa Buranelli observes that Putin has also "denied contemporary Kazakhstan its history and statehood."

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[6] Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72:3 (1993): 22-49.

[7] Iver Neumann and Einar Wigen, *The Steppe Tradition in International Relations: Russians, Turks and European State Building 4000 BCE–2017 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), chapter 5.

[8] R. J. Rummel, *Death by Government* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 51.

[9] Rummel, *Death by Government*, pp. 54, 69, 70; see Victoria Tin-bor Hui, "Genocide, Extermination and Mass Killing in Chinese History," in Ben Kiernan, Tristan Taylor, and Tracy Lemos, eds., *Cambridge World History of Genocide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 376-400, at 377, 379.

[10] Peter Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 155, 285.

[11] On the steppe tradition in Putin's Russia, see Neumann and Wigen, *The Steppe Tradition*, 243.

If we are allowed to judge by today's developments (even if we surely should not project from "the rise of the West"), Zarakol is right to put Turkey and Russia in the Post-Timurid world order, but then is wrong to argue that the "Chinggisid sovereignty model (not norms)" was uprooted by the Westphalian alternative. The book begins with a fascinating parallel universe that Subotic and Griffiths strongly applaud. Perhaps the Chinggisid model has always coexisted side by side with the Westphalian one in two parallel universes. The coexistence of two opposite 'ecumenes' makes the future unpredictable.

All of this is to say that Zarakol's book has generated infinite questions and conversations. Equally important, it inspired this reader to think of a new path for research and a new way to write my next book.

Contributors:

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Ayşe Zarakol is Professor of International Relations at the University of Cambridge and a Politics Fellow at Emmanuel College. She is currently an Associate Editor at *International Organization* as well. *Before the West: the Rise and Fall of Eastern World Orders* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) is the co-winner of 2023 Guicciardini Best Book Prize from the International Studies Association HIST section and is the recipient of an Honourable Mention from the book prize committee of the THEORY section.

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European Politics and Society Book Prize and the 2020 Robert L. Jervis and Paul W. Schroeder Prize for the Best Book in International History and Politics (American Political Science Association). She is also the co-editor (with Jeffrey Kopstein and Susan Welch) of *Politics, Violence, Memory: The New Social Science of the Holocaust* (Cornell University Press, 2023).

Review by Ali Balcı, Sakarya University

With an extraordinary effort, Zarakol has produced a work that is a candidate to be essential reading in non-Western International Relations (IR) studies. The book displaces our stereotypical understandings of sovereignty and international order, the most important concepts of traditional IR. Taking IR students on a journey in a world they may not have known, Zarakol masterfully shows us that there were different forms of sovereignty and international orders before the West. The book invites students who understand International Relations through Western and Western-related historical practices to explore an unknown world and revise the world they know. While doing this, Zarakol escapes the trap of constructing the history of others through Islam (orientalism), and she clearly shows us what alternative understandings of IR concepts are/were, as well as the impoverishing effect of being stuck in Western-centered readings. Zarakol does not authenticate these alternative understandings of sovereignty and order-making practices, but rather explicates them to draw attention to the much more complex and global origins of the concepts we know today. For her, "sovereignty and order-making developments which until now have only been studied in the European context are in fact an offshoot of longer trends that originate from Asia… and those need to be understood within a global historical sociology of world orders" (219-220).

The historical excursion outside the West, where Zarakol takes us, is not a tour like Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Using her competence in IR theories, Zarakol also reveals in detail how this new world can offer conceptual and intellectual insights to IR students trained in Western-oriented literature. Accordingly, Chapter 6 shows us how the basic concepts and ideas in the IR literature can be rethought with this newly introduced historical period, and how this period may contribute new insights shedding light on some of the main IR problems today. For example, the concept of "ecumenical decline" can potentially enrich our understanding of the Westphalian international order and its future. Like the Westphalian order in our age, the Chinggisid order at its time was ecumenical. As long as it existed, it appeared "natural, unchanging, with alternatives unthinkable" (229). Today, we feel the same with Westphalian sovereignty. The most popular current debates in the IR community are the decline of the Western liberal international order and the rise of China. The idea of "ecumenical decline" has the potential to free us from theoretical impoverishment stemming from being stuck in the rise and fall of great powers.

In this review, I will focus on and debate three of Zarakol's empirical choices, which I believe can inspire further studies: the omitting of the Abbasid legacy, the Ottoman Empire in the post-Timurid order, and the exclusion of the Uzbek Khanate. To start with the last, Zarakol accepts that the Uzbeks might be studied as part of post-Timurid sovereignty because "they were very much part of the ecumene" (193). Without much discussion of her reasoning, she excludes the Uzbeks from post-Timurid world orders, and describes them as "yet another Chinggisid link in the sixteenth-century chain of millennial sovereigns with world-ordering ambitions" (193). The Shibanids, the ruling dynasty of the Uzbek Khanate in the sixteenth century, were a Turco-Mongol Muslim dynasty of Chinggisid origin. They were direct descendants of Juchi, Chinggis Khan's eldest son, and replaced the non-Chingissid Timurid rulers in Central Asia.[1] Moreover, the Shibanids met all distinct characteristics of the Chinggisid sovereignty model identified by Zarakol (217-218). As Melvin-Koushki, one of the most-cited scholars in Zarakol's book, points out, "the most potent symbol of Timur's imperial universalism… was the title *sahib-qiran*…, purely astrological in origin… became a central and permanent component of all subsequent political platforms developed in the Turko-Mongol, Perso-Islamic

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[1] Nurten Kilic-Schubel, "Shibanid Empire", *The Encyclopedia of Empire* (2016), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118455074.wbeoe337

world, including those of the Ottomans, the Uzbeks, the Safavids, and the Mughals."[2] As Zarakol clearly highlights, the Uzbek Khanate had strong trade connections with the Safavids and the Mughals, and their two cities, Samarkand and Buhara, which were "trade centers for good going from east to west" (193). Due to the criteria of military competition, there had been much more contact between the Shibanids, the Safavids, and the Mughals, than between the Ottomans and Mughals (145-146).

The pre-Mongol world order in West Asia, the Middle East and North Africa surely had a lasting legacy even after the Mongol invasion. For example, the idea of justice toward the subject and the ruler's "outright brutality against other members of the political elite" had an old history in Islamic thought before the Mongols ruled Eurasia.[3] This may explain why three of the successors of Chinggis Khan (the Ilkhanate, the Golden Horde and the Chagatai Khanate) converted to Islam. Zarakol explains this conversion by the inability of these three empires "to maintain legitimacy within the Chinggisid normative ecumene" (82). In addition to the "universalizing strain within Islam" (82), norms that had been baked into Abbasid and post-Abbasid (the Mamluk Empire, etc.) world orders made the conversion of these three Chinggisid empires into Islam possible. Unlike the common Turko-Mongol practice of dividing territories among the members of the ruling family, the Ottomans and other empires embraced "outright brutality" leading to the reign of only one member of the family.[4] Thus, without the idea of justice (*'adalet* or *'adl*), we fall short of understanding the world orders that were established in the post-Timur empires, especially in the Ottoman Empire. At least for the Ottomans, the way to bring together the political, economic, religious and social elements without having them conflict with each other was to establish a justice-based *nizâm-ı 'âlem*.[5] As a key institution of the Ottoman *nizâm*, justice provided the necessary legitimacy, and thus prevented the institutionalized inequality (the absolute power of the ruler) from being the source of oppression/transgression (*zulm/ta'addi*) and noncompliance.[6] The origins of this understanding, which found their clearest formulation in Kınalızâde Ali Çelebi, the most important thinker of the *Kanuni* period, go back to the Seljukid Vizier Nizam al-Mulk and Islamic thought.

This brings us to the third debate. Did three Islamic empires compose a single post-Timurid world order? If they did, why do we exclude the Uzbek Khanate from it? If they did not, which one of them constituted a world order? My claim is that the Ottoman Empire was neither part of Westphalian/Western order nor part of any Asian order, and that it is better to study the Ottoman experience as a world order in itself; at least from the sixteenth century to the early eighteenth century.[7] In putting forth this claim, I also debate the key concern of Zarakol's book, which is the abuse of historical narratives by present-day states. She justifies her alternative historical account of an Asia that was built on the Chinggised norms on the basis that such a narrative provides "an account of Asian history that is not owned by any one 'nation', 'civilisation', 'race' or

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[2] Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamicate Empire: New Forms of Religiopolitical Legitimacy," in Armando Salvatore, Roberto Tottoli, and Babak Rahimi, eds., *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Islam and Islamic Civilization* (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2018): 353–375, 357. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118527719.

[3] R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020 [1988]), 139.

[4] Kaya Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: Narrating the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 136-138

[5] Abdullah Metin, "Osmanli Siyasi Düşüncesinin Kökenleri ve Ana Hatlari." *Muhafazakar Düşünce Dergisi* 15:54 (2018): 229-244, 237; Hüseyin Yılmaz. *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 183

[6] Bogac Ergene "On Ottoman justice: interpretations in conflict (1600-1800)." *Islamic Law and Society* 8:1 (2001): 52-87.

[7] Ali Balcı, "Bringing the Ottoman Order Back into International Relations: A Distinct International Order or Part of an Islamic International Society?" *International Studies Review* 23:4 (2021): 2090-2107.

'religion'" (271). In this telling, "'local' scholars wore their 'nationalism' on their sleeve" (267) because they narrated local histories to legitimize nationalist currents in non-Western states. Since "there is no present-day state strong enough to push ['Chinggisid' legacy] in a jingoistic manner similar to neo-Ottomanism or the Chinese tributary model" (271), emphasizing the shared Chinggisid legacy has a potential to "build a more pluralist vision of the region" (272). Zarakol normatively suggests that "the narrative of that shared legacy, and one that emphasized the ideational and artistic connections facilitated by the experience, could be used to build interfaith and international bridges across Eurasia" (271-272).

Even if we leave aside the bloody and devastating legacy of the Genghis Khan experience which was "not organised by religion or ethnicity" (271), is our normative expectation of the construction of a new pluralistic future a sufficient reason to omit the study of the Ottoman Empire as a distinct world order? I do not think so. Moreover, studying the Ottoman experience is not destined to give current political desires (neo-Ottomanism etc.) a legitimacy toolkit. On the contrary, such studies not only enable a very strong critique of current restrictive and oppressive political desires, but also prevent history from being used in the service of these desires.[8] Cemal Kafadar's works are good examples in this regard. For him, the Ottomans "had their own peculiar ways that distinguished them from both the rest of the Muslim world and from other Turks."[9] This kind of reading of the Ottomans prevents those who have oppressive political desires from abusing studies on the Ottoman Empire. Putting aside the fear that Ottoman studies might be an instrument of existing political passions, we can realize that the Ottoman Empire created a world order of its own. Accordingly, I have some objections to Zarakol's positioning of the Ottoman Empire in the post-Chinggisid (and post-Timurid) world order context that comprised of the Ottomans, the Safavids and the Mughals.

First, the key problem of nationalist historiography in Turkey and traditional IR history is that it overemphasizes the Ottoman Empire's connection with the West. As Zarakol cogently puts it, such reading erroneously renders the Ottoman Empire a political entity "interacting in meaningful ways *only* with Europeans, learning from *only* Europeans" (125). Revisionist historiography and new generation IR history shed light on the interaction between Eastern empires of the sixteenth century. While some exaggerate the role of Islam in explaining similarities and interactions among those empires,[10] Zarakol's narrative overstates the legacy of the concept of Chinggised sovereignty. Zarakol argues that putting Islam at the center of explanation prevents understanding "their differences from each other or from previous polities of the early period of Islam" (p. 126). Therefore, the book isolates three 'Islamicate' empires of the sixteenth century; the Ottomans, the Safavids and the Mughals, from both the Islamic past and the West. Zarakol treats them as the last representatives of the Chinggisid world order, writing that "the Chinggised sovereign legacy…found yet another life (via the legacy of the Timurids) in the world-order-making ambitions of" these three empires (126). While such a reading corrects a very important problem in our understanding of the Ottoman Empire, it may also open the door to another problem: underestimating the Ottoman–European interactions and their contribution to the construction of shared norms in the wider Mediterranean.

Zarakol argues that "the three empires were connected to each other via military competition…and trade networks" (165). Between the Ottomans and the Mughals, there was not much military competition. The Ottomans were in the Indian Ocean as part of their rivalry with the Portuguese. The Mongols and Safavids were more at war with the Uzbeks than against each other. If military rivalry is an indication of

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[8] See for example, Senem Aydın-Düzgit, Bahar Rumelili, and Alp Eren Topal, "Challenging anti-Western Historical Myths in Populist Discourse: Re-visiting Ottoman Empire–Europe Interaction during the 19th Century." *European Journal of International Relations* (2022): 13540661221095945.

[9] Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*.

[10] Hendrik Spruyt, *The World Imagined: Collective Beliefs and Political Order in the Sinocentric, Islamic and Southeast Asian International Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

interconnectedness, then the Ottomans were part of an order in West Asia, Europe, and North Africa, while the Mongols were part of an order in the Indian Subcontinent and Central Asia. As for the connecting effect of trade, it assumed a function that connected the Mughals and Europe via the Ottomans, and did not link the Ottomans and the Mughals per se. Zarakol agrees, writing that "the Ottomans acted as a two-way conduit between the smaller European regional order and the much larger post-Timurid world order in (south-) west Asia" (175). If trade and military connections are what connect world orders, it seems empirically more correct to speak of a sixteenth-century world order with the Ottoman Empire at its center.

Another objection concerns the legitimating sources of Ottoman sovereignty. In Zarakol's interpretation, conquests played a key role "in legitimising Chinggisid sovereignty" (20). Although the Chinggisid sovereignty model had to be modified because external conquest, the primary source of its legitimation, could not be infinitely sustained (36-37), the legitimacy of Ottoman sovereignty rested on conquests (134-135, 139-140, and 149). However, Ottoman conquests were significantly different from those of Chingis and Timur. Unlike their predecessors who were famous with swift conquests, the Ottomans took their time in constructing a coalition of forces prior to conquest.[11] Before qualifying for an imperial stage, the Ottomans spent more than a century and a half building local alliances, and only thereafter expanded their territories. These two extremely different methods of conquest provided different legitimacies, which explains why the Ottoman world order was so much more durable.[12] It is certain that the military power of the center played a crucial role in the construction and persistence of the Ottoman *nizâm*. For example, the sixteenth century poet İshâk Çelebi wrote that the sword that the sultan carried ensures "the order of the worldly property."[13] However, the production of consent both before the conquest (constructing a coalition of forces) and after the conquest (the idea of justice toward the subject) were other facets of Ottoman sovereignty. This clearly separates the Ottoman sovereignty from the Chinggisid one.

Finally, in stuffing three Islamic empires and other empires of the sixteenth century into the Chinggisid sovereignty, the book grants universalistic or messianic ideologies a central role. This may be due to importance of ideational dynamics in Zarakol's reading of world orders. However, we cannot ignore that material requirements forced Selim I, the Grim, his son Süleyman I, the lawgiver, to this messianic ideology.[14] Unlike his father Bayezid II, Selim I perceived the messianic cult of Shah Ismail and his devoted followers as existential threats against the survival of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans responded to the ideological challenge of Shiism in two ways: the outright Sunnification of Muslims in Ottoman lands and conflating dynastic ideology with apocalyptic/messianic speculations. However, it is important to note that Selim I and his son, unlike Safavid rulers, used those speculations as one of many titles. For example, Süleyman I, the lawgiver, introduced himself as "the Shah of Baghdad, the emperor [*kayser*] of the lands of Byzantium and the Sultan of Egypt" in his declamation at the Castle of Bender in 1538. Zarakol is absolutely right that it was Chinggisid/Timurid legacy that such messianic claims represented the source of legitimacy not only for the Ottomans but also for other empires of the time, including the Habsburgs. However, while it became a much more ontological necessity for the Safavids, messianic claims were an imposition of material conditions for the Ottomans.[15] After consecutive victories against the Safavids, Süleyman I distanced himself from those narratives (154).

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[11] Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 9.

[12] Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 9.

[13] Quoted in Ali Fuat Bilkan, *Osmanlı İmparatorluk İdeolojisi: Klasik Dönemde Din, Toplum ve Kültür (1451-1603)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2021), 227.

[14] For the Abbasid origins of messianic imageries, See Hayrettin Yücesoy. *Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam: The 'Abbāsid Caliphate in the Early Ninth Century.* University of South Carolina Press, 2009.

[15] Şahin, *Empire and Power,* 27-28.

To conclude, Ayşe Zarakol has done an outstanding job in introducing a new world to international relations students and in this way rethinking the world we know. In this review, I have tried to introduce a humble discussion on how different questions can be asked to better comprehend this new world. I am sure that *Before the West* will trigger many more questions and will continue to be discussed for a long time.

A statue of Uzbek poet Alisher Navoi has been recently erected in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan) and Almaty (Kazakhstan) and will be soon erected in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), too. A statue of Manas, the Kyrgyz epic hero, will be erected in Nur-Sultan (Kazakhstan).[1] In September 2018, monuments to the classics of Tajik and Uzbek literature, Abdurahmon Jomi and Alisher Navoi, were exchanged in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) and Dushanbe (Tajikistan). In May 2022, a statue of Kazakh poet and philosopher Abai Kunanbay-uly was unveiled in Bishkek. Moving from statues to architecture, when travelling across Central Asia one can notice the similarity of *registans* in different squares of cities and villages, and the family resemblances of the blue domes of madrassas and mausoleums in Turkistan, Bukhara, Koqand, Samarkand, Khiva among others, which bear strong familiarity to those in Iran, Afghanistan, and other parts of Eurasia. *Plov* (or *pilaf*, or *palaw*, or many other names from the same Sanskrit root) is eaten widely across the whole territory of Eurasia, and so too *Nowruz*, the Mithraic and Zoroastrian festivity to celebrate the new year and the arrival of spring, is celebrated. These cultural connections rest on a deep substratum of commonality, familiarity, and shared histories and cosmologies that have resisted the sway of empires that crossed Eurasia over the centuries, including the Tsarist one and, later, the Soviet Union.

Before the West theorises and analyses such deep substratum, and does so in a way that cogently centres, or rather re-centres, Eurasian order-making principles and practices in International Relations (IR). This book is a welcome, necessary, and long-awaited opus. Part of what can be perhaps called by now "the Eurasian turn" in Global Historical Sociology, (historical) IR and humanities writ large,[2] the book makes a much-needed contribution by investigating the development of historical political orders in Asia "in its own right" (12) and showing that far from being a chaotic, anarchic, and fragmented area where a "chaotic tribal system" lived (26), Eurasia was home to empires, polities and "houses" that were very much connected for centuries.

This argument is a novel contribution for the discipline of IR, which is still too often prisoner of its own comfortable myths, timelines, concepts, and truths of Eurocentric origins, which are indeed discussed and again dismantled in the book. For those who work in history or in Area Studies, the rule-based connectivity, synergies, relations, and interactions between these peoples, houses, and polities analysed and theorised in the book are perhaps less surprising.[3] Yet, it must be clear from the very beginning that this is not a limit or a

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[1] At the time of writing, the Kazakh government has agreed to revert the name of the capital to its former designation, Astana, in a move backed by the current President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Yet, given that it is not clear when the change will officially take place, in this review the current name Nur-Sultan is used.

[2] For example, see: Iver B. Neumann and Einar Wigen, *The Steppe Tradition in International Relations: Russians, Turks and European State Building 4000 BCE–2017 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Hendrik Spruyt, *The World Imagined: Collective Beliefs and Political Order in the Sinocentric, Islamic and Southeast Asian International Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Adeeb Khalid, *Central Asia: A New History from the Imperial Conquests to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021); Marie Favereau, *The Horde: How the Mongols Changed the World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021).

[3] For an overview, see: Nurlan Kenzheakhmet, *The Tūqmāq (Golden Horde), the Qazaq Khanate, the Shībānid Dynasty, Rūm (Ottoman Empire), and Moghūlistan in the XIV-XVI Centuries from Original Sources* (Almaty: Eurasian Research Institute, 2019); Dughlát Muhammad Haidar, N. Elias, and Edward Denison Ross, *The Tarikh-i-Rashidi: A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia* (Norderstedt: Hansebooks, 2017); Svat Soucek, *A History of Inner Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003); Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, eds., *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Edward A. Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks: From the 14th Century to the Present : A Cultural History: From the Fourteenth Century to the Present: A Cultural History* (Stanford: Hoover Institute Press, 1990); Ron Sela, *The Legendary Biographies of Tamerlane: Islam and Heroic Apocrypha in Central Asia*, Illustrated edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Scott C. Levi and Gurcharan Das, *Caravans: Punjabi Khatri Merchants On the Silk Road* (Gurgaon, Haryana, India:

shortcoming of *Before the West*. It is, rather, a sign of how IR as a discipline is still to free itself from deep-seated conventions and artificial benchmarks, which in other disciplines have long ago been demystified. Seen in this way, the book is not simply a fresh light shed on a (theoretically as much as empirically) underexplored area of historical international relations, but is also, and especially, a crucial call to expand our conceptual, theoretical and geographical toolkit, and to venture with curiosity and without preconceptions into areas that have long been deemed as "not worthy" studying.

One of the fascinating aspects of the book, and one that is not often seen displayed by academics, is the reflexivity and the awareness of the limitations, aporias, and doubts that the author faced during the research process. In this, Zarakol's narrative is inspiring, and its frankness is to be emulated. It is refreshing, and captivating, to have the feeling of actually taking part in a conversation about how a study of Eurasian orders can be conducted, with what difficulties and what analytical trade-offs. In this respect, an interesting aspect of the book is the methodological one. Here is where, perhaps, Zarakol's positioning could have been more outspoken. Instead of telling the reader how the research process was conducted and what criteria were followed for the selection of secondary sources, she offers a detour of the life and work of Arnold J. Toynbee, Karl Wittfogel, and Owen Lattimore (246 and subsequent).[4] One understands the move as a support for the broader argument of the validity of the macro-historical approach (more on this later), but I remain convinced that it would have been more interesting to hear from the author herself on her reflections and choices about the methods of the research and the justification for the selection of sources, as well as her take on periodisation, ontology, and what counts as "data" in this historical-sociological work.

On the defence of the macro-historical approach, I found the discussion offered by Zarakol cogent and well justified, although I personally think that while the aprioristic fetishization of specific methods is wrong (267-268), the critical interrogation of what our methods add to research and of how different methods can be combined should be a hallmark of scholarly enquiry, especially in times where a more pluralistic, interdisciplinary and "global" IR is advocated. The argument advanced against the "fetishisation" and "glorification" of archives in particular is an interesting one. For if the use of only secondary sources is a perfectly legitimate strategy (provided that if fits the research task at hand), it is also true that if all scholars were to do "big histories," arguably there would be very little archival research left, which in fact often constitutes a sizeable component of the secondary literature that is used for macro analyses. Many of the secondary sources used in the book *do include* primary materials—translated, and available. All this to say that while I concur with the need to avoid aprioristic and almost blindly devoted fetishization of a given method for its own sake, a productive and intellectually nourishing way forward would be to rely on interdisciplinarity and more collaboration between IR, History, and Area Studies, incorporating methods such as "triangulation" and "textual ethnography" that are able to bridge secondary and primary sources.[5]

After reading *Before the West*, I am all the more convinced of this. In this respect, I am not even sure that Zarakol's book is fully on the macro side of the analysis. Despite the repeated advocacy for the macro vision of historical Eurasian orders, it features several accounts of personalities, of individuals, of order-makers and of actors who were vital in the sustainment and reproduction of these very orders across the centuries. In turn, these zoom-ins on personalities and specific historical figures are supported and correlated with

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Penguin/Portfolio, 2016); Favereau, *The Horde*; Shoshana Keller, *Russia and Central Asia: Coexistence, Conquest, Convergence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019); Khalid, *Central Asia*.

[4] Owen Lattimore, "Spengler and Toynbee," *Atlantic Monthly* 181:4 (1948): 104-5; Arnold J. Toynbee, *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey: A Study in the Contact of Civilisations* (London: Constable and Company, 1922); Karl A. Wittfogel, "Russia and Asia: Problems of Contemporary Area Studies and International Relations," *World Politics* 2:4 (1950): 445-62.

[5] Tobias Lemke et al., "Forum: Doing Historical International Relations," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (11 March 2022): 1–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2022.2044754.

biographies, anecdotes, and micro-events that enrich the narrative and provide more context and meaningfulness. They are true thick descriptions of multiple subjectivities which shed light on "the contexts and interpretations of agents contesting political orders."[6] If, in other words, the preference is for the forest and not for the trees, then I still believe that in the book there are several discernible trees. One therefore wonders where the author locates herself on the macro-micro spectrum. My impression from the book is that there is more "meso" than one may think, what Dan Green has recently termed "meso-scale historical narratives" which are neither nomothetic nor idiographic,[7] but I may be wrong.

Another point I would like to raise is one about the title. Here, the necessary caveat is that I am not familiar with the publishing process behind the book, and hence I am not aware of any suggestions by, or discussions with the publishers, with respect to what title should be given to the book. The point I want to raise is that if the story told is about Eurasian actors and orders in their own right, and about the fact that despite the interknitted character of the different "houses" populating Eurasia there was still a high level of connectivity between the East and the West, then going for *Before the West* presents us with two issues. The first one is that this title somehow counterintuitively recentres the West, as it becomes the *terminus ante quem* "before which" something happened. The second one is that the title creates a sense of a strict temporal break, an arbitrary "before" and "after" which in the book itself is (rightly) problematised, given how much the notion (and the presence) of connectivity is stressed. What is the "Before" referring to, exactly? Is it before Westphalia? But we know, from the book itself and other bodies of work, that "Westphalia" has been largely a myth. Is it before "the West" understood as a unified category in international relations? But the lack of awareness of "the East" as a unified ensemble of polities could be mentioned, too. Is it "before the West" in the sense that we forgot much of what was going on in the East due to the in-built Eurocentrism and Westerncentrism in the discipline of IR? This seems to be the most plausible understanding, although then the problem becomes the fact that "before" and "after" create a sense of dichotomic temporality which does not correspond to the history offered in the book. This is all the more evident if one considers the fact that the period covered in the book is indeed before Westphalia, and therefore its IR and specific sovereignty model had yet to be found in the West, too.[8]

Books cannot cover everything. It is part of the writing process, let alone of that of research, that some areas remain underexplored or postponed to further studies. With respect to *Before the West*, one of these areas is the impact that the processes and the legacies of the ecumenes studied in the book have had on modern and present-day times, particularly with respect to Central Asia. As a matter of fact, there is ample space to study the long-lasting effects that the politics of empires, khanates, and *ulus* are having *on* and *in* contemporary Eurasian politics. I can provide two examples. The first one is the routine, periodic attempt of Russian President Vladimir Putin to deny contemporary Kazakhstan its history and statehood, reminding Kazakhstani elites with jokes and remarks that Kazakhstan was created by the Tsarist Empire in the nineteenth century, something that has was indeed used as part of the "Europeanisation" process of the empire.[9] In fact, the Kazakh Khanate (which is surprisingly absent in the book) was one of the strongest polities in Eurasia,

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[6] Lemke et al., *Forum*, 4.

[7] Lemke et al., *Forum*.

[8] This of course does not mean at all that international relations were absent. See for example Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press [for] the London School of Economics and Political Science, 1977); Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1992); Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, *The Expansion of International Society* (London: Clarendon Press, 1984); Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems In World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, U.S.A., 2000); Benjamin de Carvalho, Julia Costa Lopez, and Halvard Leira, *Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2021).

[9] Filippo Costa Buranelli, "Knockin" on Heaven's Door: Russia, Central Asia and the Mediated Expansion of International Society," *Millennium* 42:3 (1 June 2014): 817–36, https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829814540356.

created in the second half of the fifteenth century and was as big as the size of continental Europe. Arranged along Chinggisid (more specifically Jochidi) lines and based on the suzerainty extended over loyal and subjugated houses, this polity was a thriving one, contributing to order-making in Eurasia through trade, perpetuation of the Chinggisid model of sovereignty, war, and especially diplomacy—specifically, although not only, with Tsarist Russia and the Timurid, when Kasym Khan ratified his alliance with Babur on his way to create the Mughal empire after the fall of the Shaybanids in the first half of the XVI century.[10] The second example that one can put forward to stress the importance of these historical and social legacies for Eurasia in today's time is the renewed attempt to use international organisations and multilateral groups to revive Turkic identity and solidarism, for example the Turkic Council. I believe that an incorporation of these dynamics and trends would have had enhanced even more the argument offered about the necessity of studying these orders in light of the present, too. The discussion offered in the "Am I a Eurasianist?" section (244) would have been a nice home for these reflections.

One of the strongest contributions of the book is that of investigating and presenting a conceptualisation and practice of sovereignty that is specifically "Mongol," or "Chinggisid," or "Eurasian." This understanding of sovereignty, called "universal sovereignty," is very much different from the territorially-bounded practice to be found in the West, and presents specific "derivative" institutions: tanistry (which interestingly was used also by Viking houses in Kievan Rus' way before Chinggis Khan), legitimacy through conquest, and syncretism. These institutional bundles are still very much understudied in IR, and therefore their introduction into the discipline's conceptual vocabulary is a ground-breaking contribution, especially to facilitate comparative historical work, something that for example the English School started doing in the 1960s and 1970s.[11] However, I wonder if sometimes the book privileges too much the uniqueness "universal sovereignty," both in its own right and in relation to other institutions. With respect to the first point, universal monarchy and legitimacy through conquest did not happen in a vacuum but were legitimised by the *qurultai*, i.e. the assembly of leaders and elders (crucially women, too) who would always, and not just ceremonially, elect officials and khans whenever needed through negotiations and consensus. Given the deeply intertwined system of alliances and marriages (it is not by chance that from the same root of kurultai comes the Mongol word for "wedding") which worked as the social fabric of Mongol empires, it was the *qurultai* who ultimately had the keys to legitimacy, at least until more institutional and normative syncretism ensued. Crucially, the *qurultai* was in itself a resulting institution deriving from a complex web of fundamental, almost cosmological practices within the Chinggisid polity: *anda* (sworn brotherhood); *kuda onda* (marriage); *dooq* (family); *sulde* (vital force) and *uruq* (male lineage) among many others.[12] The *qurultai* is indeed mentioned in the book, but its deep institutional connection with universal sovereignty may be explored more to locate the latter in the broader Mongol social order and its predecessors.

With respect to the second point, the book portrays an "ecumene," which is understood as something deeper than order denoting "a deep-settled way of seeing and inhabiting the world" (224), on the basis of sovereignty norms, war, diplomacy, religion, and trade and arts. Yet, there is room to analyse more in depth the way in which this ecumene was sustained. For example, how was diplomacy performed? On page 204, for example, one reads of "Chinggisid practices in diplomacy," but what they consisted of is not explained. What sort of equivalent of "international law" was operating in Eurasia? For instance, the Peace of Amasya (1555) is arguably a pivotal episode in the history of the system of houses that developed in Eurasia, but the way in which it was achieved, conducted, and upheld is not illustrated. For however despicable this is, slavery was

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[10] See, for example, Jin Noda, *The Kazakh Khanates between the Russian and Qing Empires* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Kenzheakhmet, *The Tūqmāq (Golden Horde); Dughlát, Elias, and Ross, The Tarikh-i-Rashidi.*

[11] Wight, *Systems of States*. In that period, Adam Watson also wrote a number of draft papers (for example on the Ancient Indian and Macedonian state systems) which would then be published as part of his *Expansion of International Society* (edited with Hedley Bull, 1984) and *The Evolution of International Society* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[12] Favereau, *The Horde.*

one of the pivotal institutions of the Eurasian landmass and part of the circular economy existing between nomads and settled people, and involved Shias, Hindus, and Christian orthodox among others. All this to say that *Before the West* presents a compelling argument for considering Eurasia as an interconnected system, but also leaves space for further studies on how specific order-making relational practices were performed and legitimised. This would constitute an authentic move toward decolonising historical IR and a solid contribution to the Global IR programme, and in my opinion would rely on the interdisciplinary synergies identified above.

Related to this, and to the point on primary/secondary sources discussed above, is the distinction between emic and etic, which is dear to anthropologists. Was there a sense of ecumene in Eurasia? Were these houses feeling part of a broader whole? Was there, in English School terms, a *raison de système*? This is a methodological as much as an epistemological question. Perhaps this is the trade-off when a macro-approach is adopted through methodological analyticism, as opposed to interpretivism based on primary sources. Empirically, the book shows that there was an interconnected system of houses and empires which ultimately gave birth to "the East." But was it there for the people involved? After all, the Zhungars never became Islamic, several Mongol houses embraced Christendom and lamaic Buddhism, the Kyrgyz did not claim Chinggisid leadership and did not have khans (like the Turkmens), there were deep fractures within the ecumene, such as the Sunni-Shia divide (which, as noted above, fuelled the odious institutionalisation of slavery), across the steppe the customary nomadic law of *adat* continued to develop in parallel with Sharia, and Turan, far from being only a synonym for "Inner Asia," was a toponym to indicate "the land of threatening nomads."

The book does an excellent job in showing how the Mongol hordes and their epigones were not bands of marauders prone to looting and devastations, but were sophisticate forms of order in themselves, with their own principles of legitimacy, practices, and institutions. One thing that I believe is an area of necessary further engagement is an analysis of the role that specifically mobility and circularity played in establishing these empires. These were not just empires,[13] but *nomadic* empires. Now, this does not mean that territoriality was entirely absent, but rather than the constituent units of these polities were mobile, with huge implications for the sovereignty-suzerainty dynamics within *ulus*, the flexibility of political rule, the way in which war was fought (one can only think of the rapidity with which alliances formed and dissolve, and of development of archery and the importance of the horse, an asset in both warfare and trade), and the way in which a sense of ecumene was created. With this mobility came a specific *circularity* of the economy, within which sedentary and nomadic groups exchanged and traded finished goods and raw materials in a complementary fashion. From what I see, these empires were not necessarily unilateral expansions on the metropole-periphery line, nor were they extractive in kind (even if levies and taxes were exacted).

Mobility and circularity were underpinned, and at the same time encouraged, syncretism and synthesis of religions, cults, traditions, and "best practices"—all factors that substantiated the connectivity and relationism that is so much at the centre of Zarakol's analysis. The reader has the sense that mobility and circularity played a pivotal role in advancing these imperial logics, which were vital, adaptive, flexible, and ingenuous, but perhaps more theorisation of them would open up fascinating spaces to study the heterogeneity of empires and their core characteristics, especially since the nomadic understanding of territoriality ended up being a fundamental aspect of the nineteenth century's standard of civilisation.[14] Furthermore, current research makes the argument that the period 1856–1955 was not marked by international relations, but rather

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[14] Filippo Costa Buranelli, "Standard of Civilization, Nomadism and Territoriality in Nineteenth-Century International Society," in Jamie Levin, ed., *Nomad-State Relationships in International Relations: Before and After Borders* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020): 77–99.

by inter-empires relations.[15] *Before the West* aptly shows how this argument was relevant in Asia many centuries ago and much earlier than in Europe, and theorising on mobility and circularity would surely enhance its contribution to a diachronic comparative study of empires.

To conclude, *Before the West* is poised to become a reference in the field of Historical IR and Global Historical Sociology. The argument is original and craftily theorised and adds to current calls to challenge Western/Eurocentrism in the IR field. As noted, its originality may resonate more within (Historical) IR circles as opposed to Area Studies, for many of the arguments described in the book as "usually assumed" pertain more to the incorrect, Eurocentric, and myopic axioms of IR than the research done in other disciplines. Nonetheless, this may be said to be a plus. By showing how much work IR has still to do to achieve a deep comprehension and knowledge of historical inter-polity orders, *Before the West* will become a necessary starting point for all those who are interested not simply in Eurasian world orders, but also and especially in making IR more interdisciplinary, multi-method, and more imaginative.

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[15] Dan Green and Thomas Müller, *Workshop: "Making the State-System Unfamiliar: The Dynamics of the Global Empire-System, 1856–1955,"* Call for Papers, EWIS 2020, Brussels, 1-4 July 2020.

Review by Ryan D. Griffiths, Syracuse University

Before the West: The Rise and Fall of Eastern World Orders, opens with a thought experiment. Ayşe Zarakol asks you to imagine that you step through a portal into a parallel universe, as you often see in a fantasy/science fiction story. This universe looks and feels eerily like our own, but here, it was not the West that jumped ahead of the rest of the world in the nineteenth century. It was the East. Here, key historical moments had turned out differently, and the great levers of history had been flipped the other way. In this bizarro universe, it was the East that industrialized first and not the West. Not surprisingly, scholars concluded from those outcomes that the West had been too fragmented, warlike, and religiously intolerant. It was too backward, and by some accounts, inferior. Scholars had only the one history to work with, and from it developed a field of International Relations (IR) that systematically diminished and obscured the past and potential of the West, while over-focusing on and even glorifying the historical trajectory of the East. This thought experiment is a great start to a terrific book, one that should appeal to IR scholars, many of whom read or aspire to write science fiction novels, and one that nicely communicates Zarakol's purpose.

This book is a welcome contribution to an important literature, mostly centered in IR, that aims to move beyond the West and study other historical locales that have hitherto been ignored or just under-examined.[1] One starting point in this literature is the recognition that while IR aims to study the interactions of states and nations, and, ideally, identify general patterns across history, the field is nevertheless quite provincial. Theories on, for example, the rise and fall of great powers, the balance of power, or hegemony, to name a few, are largely based on the Western/European experience. These theories are often generalized to draw universal conclusions. The concern is that scholars have been blinded to the true diversity of international relations because they have mostly looked at only one case. Zarakol looks at a different case to tell a different story, and, in doing so, call attention to the potential blind spots in doing macro history in IR.

There is a lot going on in the book, but the core argument focuses on what Zarakol terms the Chinggisid sovereignty model. This was the model developed by Genghis Khan, one that united much of the Eurasian ecumene. It endured after his death when his empire divided into four khanates: the Golden Horde/Jochid, the Ilkhanate, the Chagatai, and the Yuan. The model continued with the Timurids and Ming Dynasty, and had a sustained downstream influence on the Ottomans, Safavids, and the Mughals. In broad terms, the point is that Genghis Khan successfully connected a vast region across Eurasia in the early twelfth century using a specific form of rule, one that was perpetuated and emulated by successors down through the centuries until the 1800s. Zarakol calls this sovereignty model an "ideal-type" (74). It fostered trade, supported diversity, and

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[1] Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Victoria Tin-Bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); David Kang, *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Andrew Phillips, *War, Religion, and Empire: The Transformation of International Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Shogo Suzuki, Yongjin Zhang, and Joel Quirk, eds., *International Orders in the Early Modern World: Before the Rise of the West* (London: Routledge, 2014); Amitav Acharya, "Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies," *International Studies Quarterly* 58:4 (2014): 647-659; Charles Butcher and Ryan D. Griffiths, "Alternative International Systems? System Structure and Violent Conflict in 19th Century West Africa, Southeast Asia, and South Asia," *Review of International Studies* 41:4 (2015): 715-737; Andrew Phillips and Jason C. Sharman, *International Order in Diversity: War, Trade and Rule in the Indian Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Tim Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit, eds., *The Globalization of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Ayşe Zarakol, "A Non-Eurocentric Approach to Sovereignty," *International Studies Review* 20:3 (2018): 506-509; Jens Bartelson, Martin Hall, and Jan Teorell, eds., *De-Centering State Making: Comparative and International Perspectives* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2018); Andrews Phillips and Christian Reus-Smit, eds., *Culture and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Hendrick Spruyt, *The World Imagined: Collective Beliefs and Political Order* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

shaped international relations for much of the Earth for 600 years. Yet, for the most part, it has been neglected in mainstream IR.

The Chinggisid sovereignty model has a set of core characteristics. It rests on two pillars: (1) "Extreme political centralization around the supreme authority of the ruler;" (2) "World conquest and universal empire" as a source of legitimization (171). It combines the sources of authority in one person, but does not aim to assimilate subject populations. It is favorable toward science and the arts. Key units in this model are not states, as you typically see in mainstream IR, but great houses that are associated with a key individual and their descendants. Succession is worked out through the process of *tanisty*, in which family members compete for the throne, often violently. This gives rise to a particular form of world order.

There is much to like in this book. It is well-written and highly engaging. The core story involving the Chinggisid sovereignty model is fascinating, and Zarakol does a great job of describing and tracing that history through time and space. Her critique of IR and its neglect of non-western history is highly convincing, and there are various other gems in the book. I particularly liked the epilogue, where she discusses the uses and abuses of doing macro history in IR and zooms in to analyze the background and ideas of six scholars/thinkers writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Three of the scholars, Suematsu Kencho, Ziya Gopalp, and George Vernadsky, wrote from a perspective that, in many ways, challenged Western notions of cultural superiority. Each suffered from blind spots specific to their time and place when developing their ideas, ideologies, and macro histories. The other three scholars, Arnold Toynbee, Karl Wittfogel, and Owen Lattimore, are more well-known in the scholarship and to the common reader. But, they, like the others, suffered their own blind spots. More an epilogue than a conclusion, this chapter is an instructive and thought-provoking way to end the book.

Naturally, a book of this scope will raise questions and potential criticism. I will focus my review on three areas. The first has to do with the theoretical foundations of the Chinggisid sovereignty model. Constructing a model or framework requires the specification of key concepts. Doing so is a challenge in a literature that aims to bring in and understand previously neglected historical locales, particularly if the scholar wants to engage in comparative analysis with other regions.[2] What terms can we use, and do they travel across different cultures? Zarakol is alert to this problem and rightly notes that scholars often apply concepts uncritically, or, alternatively, conclude that the essential features of historical orders are too unique for comparison. She argues for a middle path, but emphasizes that scholars must take care with the terms they use. For example, she contends that the notions of centralization and hierarchy do travel (221). She also deploys the concept of sovereignty, provided that it is abstracted from its more specific European use. Although I agree with her, scholars do debate the portability of sovereignty as a concept.[3]

Zarakol's most intriguing choice in concepts is the great house. In an attempt to get away from more Eurocentric notions of core actors (e.g. great powers, states), she focuses on houses and great houses as key units binding world order. As I read this, and in keeping with the book's science fiction opener, I was reminded of the great houses of the Landsraad in *Dune*, or the conquests of House Targaryen in *Game of Thrones*. But on this concept I wanted more theoretical development. If a great house is established by an

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[2] Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Charles R. Butcher and Ryan D. Griffiths, "Between Eurocentrism and Babel: A Framework for the Analysis of States, State Systems, and International Orders," *International Studies Quarterly* 61:2 (2017): 328-336.
[3] Julia Costa Lopez, Benjamin De Carvalho, Andrew A. Latham, Ayşe Zarakol, Jens Bartelson, and Minda Holm, "Forum: In the Beginning There Was No Word (For It): Terms, Concepts, and Early Sovereignty," *International Studies Review* 20:3 (2018): 1-31.

individual (e.g. Genghis Khan), does that mean that sovereignty is pinned to individuals and not political institutions like states? Is part of the point with great houses that they can literally uproot and move (like the Targaryens) when modern political institutions like states cannot? Houses seem like a fleeting concept to me. If we consider the long history of the Ming or Ottoman empires, at what point do we move beyond the focus on a specific family and their descendants, and shift our gaze to the complex political institution they created, particularly since it will likely, with time, outlive the house that created it? What mileage do we get from using great houses instead of other concepts such as empire?

One reason that these choices matter is that the Chinggisid sovereignty model is proffered as an ideal type that is different from more traditional concepts in IR. But I struggled to gauge the breadth of this claim. Are these models fundamentally and qualitatively different, or different in a lesser, more quantitative way? After all, absolute monarchies and other forms of the state were also extremely centralized. Perhaps it was the basis on which these great houses claimed legitimacy that set them apart from other units across time. In sum, I wanted more theoretical development on the model and its boundaries. This matters not only because we want to understand how different the model was from other models, but also because the degree of difference affects their comparability. Are we dealing with apples and oranges, or just different kinds of apples?

The second issue area pertains to how Zarakol conceptualizes the East. As discussed, the book is about more than just the Chinggisid sovereignty model. It is also a critique of the Eurocentrism in IR scholarship. As a result, the 'East in contrast to the West' frame is nearly always present—indeed, it is in the title. However, I wonder if this frame generates too much of a binary distinction, and over-grouping and potential homogenization of what the East includes. Zarakol admits that the book "has not been able to escape its [western-centric] terminology and thus has reproduced many of its assumptions and binaries (241)." If the East is meant to be the Eurasian landmass east of Europe, or if it is synonymous with Asia, then it includes numerous orders that are not covered here, such as the vibrant system in early modern Southeast Asia. It would cover a vast and remarkably diverse set of regions that are each as big as the region at the western end of the landmass that came to be known as Europe. Putting them into one category of comparison with the West raises, perhaps unnecessarily, the status and prestige of the West. Moreover, I do not think that the Chinggisid sovereignty model was the only model across the continent. It may have been dominated by great houses, but does that mean, as Zarakol writes, that all of pre-modern Asia was (77)?

A slightly different frame would be to say that the Chinggisid sovereignty model characterized a set of different orders across the Eurasian land mass over a 600-year period. It began with Genghis Khan, coalesced in the heart of the continent, and was subsequently adopted and emulated by other great houses from southwest Asia to east Asia. Although other regions to the west, south, and east may not have adopted the same model, they were all connected to it and influenced by it. That is basically the same story, but shorn of the East-West binary.

The third issue area centers on the rise and fall dynamics of the book. That is, as the title suggests, what explains why these world orders rise and fall? In my view, the heart of the book is the tracing of the influence of the Chinggisid model. Although it is easy to follow the trail, I did not get a strong sense for why these orders rise and fall. It does not appear that Zarakol was aiming for some sort of clocklike cycle theory. Rather, her answer is somewhat speculative. They rise when an order coalesces around a successful great house that follows the Chinggisid model; they fall when that house loses power. However, I was looking for a more worked-out explanation, particularly on why they fall. I wondered if the legitimacy-by-conquest feature of the model effectively encoded the DNA of the orders with short life spans because continual conquest is difficult. But of course, some of the great houses were able to endure for centuries as more institutionalized empires. Zarakol does discuss why the Chinggisid model as a whole eventually fell out of fashion by the end

of the nineteenth century, partly for reasons having to do with the rise of the west. But that does not tell us why each order fell.

In conclusion, this is a great book and a welcome addition to a fascinating and much needed literature. Zarakol knows the subject, and I learned a great deal from the telling. A book of this scope is bound to open up questions and criticism, and the questions I posed are a sign of my appreciation for it. I have no doubt that this will become a classic that opens up new paths for inquiry.

Review by Jelena Subotic, Georgia State University

Ayşe Zarakol begins her brilliant new book, *Before the West*, by taking the reader through a parallel universe portal. We find ourselves in a bookstore (Do those still exist in this alternate universe? Are they independently owned or incorporated into massive global chains? Is there a coffeeshop? So many questions remain). Browsing the history section, we discover, to our confusion, that it is Asia, and not Europe, that is 'Great.' In these history books, it is Asia that is the center of this parallel universe. It is Asia that the world revolves around. It is Asia that is the most sophisticated, cultured, cosmopolitan, diverse, innovative, and technologically advanced. Europe is largely dismissed as an also-ran, Europeans are perceived and written about through overt or more subtle racist tropes, and there is a general sense that they are simply incapable (culturally, civilizationally, racially) of catching up to the advanced Asian international supremacy.

If this bookshop sounds like fun—and it surely does—it is not surprising that *Before the West* is also a remarkably fun read. This is an alternative history of international relations, written looking westward from the East. It takes us through a parallel universe portal, yes, but it also reads like an upside down map of the world, or rather a map turned at a ninety degree angle. North is East, West is South, at the center of it all is…Mongolia? Well, not quite.

What Zarakol has done in this truly remarkable ("path-breaking" sounds too trite) book, is to join the ever more robust scholarship in historical International Relations[1] (IR) and international historical sociology— two fields that often overlap but also challenge each other— and offer a major revisionist account of the creation, maintenance, and decline of international orders.[2] She provides a breathtaking narrative of the construction of what can be understood as 'the Asian international order' by piecing together a history that spans five centuries. This history begins with the Mongols (the Chinggisid orders of Genghis Khan and its successors) in the thirteenth century, continues with the post-Chinggisid orders led by the Timurid and the Ming, takes us to the Ottomans, the Safavids and the Mughals, and then further through the sixteenth century to Muscovy (Ivan the Terrible makes an impressive appearance, as do the Habsburgs).[3] We end in the seventeenth century with the fragmentation of Asia into various regional orders, and this imaginary of Asia as a loose sum of its parts and not a possibly coherent cultural, political, and historical whole, has remained mostly unchanged until today. This understanding of a disaggregated and regionalized Asia, then, has quite contemporary intellectual as well as policy implications, as Zarakol clearly demonstrates.

Weaving an intricate tapestry of the absolutely fascinating cast of historical characters (and the characters here are not only individual leaders, but cultures, societies, religions, and intellectual ideas) is just one of the many

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[1] That Historical International Relations as a field has grown so much as to become its own coherent research agenda is evident, among other things, by the existence of encyclopedic volumes on the field, such as, for example, Benjamin de Carvalho, Julia Costa Lopez, and Halvard Leira, *Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2021).

[2] For some of the major works in this tradition, see: Julian Go and George Lawson, eds., *Global Historical Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); J.C. Sharman, *Empires of the Weak* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019); Andrew Phillips and J.C. Sharman, *Outsourcing Empire: How Company-States Made the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020). For a more specific exploration of culture and international order, see the rich contributions in Andrew Phillips and Christian Reus-Smit, eds., *Culture and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[3] For another attempt at a historical incorporation of Eurasia into international society, see Iver B. Neumann and Einar Wigen, *The Steppe Tradition in International Relations: Russians, Turks and European State Building 4000 BCE–2017 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

ambitions of *Before the West*.[4] What Zarakol does next is where the real political and scholarly purpose of the book begins to break through. She shows that decentering Europe and, more broadly, the West, from the focus of IR is only one step in the thorough reimagination of our discipline. Decentering Europe and the West with what? Oftentimes, IR simply replaces Europe or "the West" with another player, as in the increasingly frequent but often vapid claims about the "rise of China."[5]

But the replacement of Eurocentrism with Sinocentrism—or Afrocentrism for that matter—doesn't do much good, claims Zarakol. The point is not to reimagine the international system with Asia at the center. Zarakol, in other words, is not trying to Make Asia Great Again. Instead, she wants to offer an alternative rendering of the past that dislodges some of the most prevalent assumptions and myths that permeate contemporary International Relations as a scholarly field.[6] Origins and models of such core IR concepts as sovereignty, authority, hierarchy, order, recognition, or legitimacy all look quite different if we view the international system from a non-Western vantage point. This is important for a number of reasons. Obviously, getting rid of the reflex that everything revolves around the West—good and bad—is one of the core missions of not only Zarakol's book but of a larger field of Global IR.[7] But a serious reckoning with Eurocentrism and Western narratives also needs to dispense with the reflex that places the West at the center of all non-Western misfortunes, mistakes, and catastrophes.

Taking non-West seriously—and I understand Zarakol's book to do just that—also means giving non-West the agency to make their own bad choices, mistakes, and catastrophes. It bears repeating that not every contemporary international crisis or disaster is the result of United States hegemony, for example, but we would be hard pressed to understand that from the tonnage of commentary—as well as scholarly production—that, again, centers the West, Europe or the US, as the only actors with agency, intentionality, brutishness, cruelty, or violence.

Zarakol's book and her treatment of historical Russia and its challengers, for example, sets us up quite nicely to understand contemporary Russian foreign policy, President Vladimir Putin's view of the world, and his motivation for the invasion of Ukraine, but also the foreign policies of smaller states in Russia's orbit, Ukraine certainly, as well as the Baltics or Poland. So much of the contemporary analysis of Russia's horrific war places the blame, again, on the West, this time on supposedly aggressive NATO enlargement to the East.[8] But if we take Zarakol's call to look at the world from the Eastern vantage point, even the Russian war against Ukraine begins to look different. Small and weak states on Russia's periphery are not just passive

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[4] For other excavationary accounts along similar lines regarding China's Silk Road, see Lina Benabdallah, "Spanning Thousands of Miles and Years: Political Nostalgia and China's Revival of the Silk Road," *International Studies Quarterly* 65:2 (2021): 294-305; Alan Chong, "The Cosmopolitan Silk Road Worldview: Developing an Interfaith Ethic of Hospitality in Ancient Buddhist and Christian Writings," *Global Studies Quarterly* 2:1 (2022): 1-11.

[5] For example, G. John Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West-Can the Liberal System Survive," *Foreign Affairs* 87 (2008): 23-37.

[6] Historical IR has already done a good share of mythbusting. See for example Benjamin De Carvalho, Halvard Leira, and John M. Hobson, "The Big Bangs of IR: The Myths That Your Teachers Still Tell You About 1648 and 1919," *Millennium* 39:3 (2011): 735-58.

[7] Andrew Hurrell, "Beyond Critique: How to Study Global IR?," *International Studies Review* 18:1 (2016): 149-51; Amitav Acharya, "Advancing Global IR: Challenges, Contentions, and Contributions," *International Studies Review* 18:1 (2016): 4-15; Andrew Phillips, "Global IR Meets Global History: Sovereignty, Modernity, and the International System's Expansion in the Indian Ocean Region," *International Studies Review* 18:1 (2016): 62-77.

[8] For an astute takedown of a particular type of "Westsplaining" IR scholars and their misunderstanding of both Russia and Ukraine, see Jan Smoleński and Jan Dutkiewicz, "The American Pundits Who Can't Resist 'Westsplaining' Ukraine," 4 March 2022, *The New Republic*, https://newrepublic.com/article/165603/carlson-russia-ukraine-imperialism-nato.

subjects onto which NATO has projected its immense power. They are agents in their own right. They make choices and they make decisions and they make mistakes. They have their own international relations.

Before the West may be about small and great powers from five hundred years ago, but Zarakol's clear and loud call to unshackle ourselves from the intellectually lazy and politically myopic centering of our gaze on the West has direct and incredibly relevant contemporary implications. This fantastic book speaks to the fragility of international orders and warns us of taking our own order, hierarchy, and system for granted. The book ends with a certain sense of foreboding—that things are about to change, and that the change will unlikely be for the better. There may not be much we can do about this, but we can read this book and learn from the past.

Response by Ayşe Zarakol, University of Cambridge

I am grateful to Andrew Szarejko for organising this forum on *Before the West: the Rise and Fall of Eastern World Orders* and to Victoria Tin-bor Hui, Ali Balcı, Filippo Costa Buranelli, Ryan Griffiths, and Jelena Subotic for their thoughtful engagement with the book. It was my sincere hope that *Before the West* would be a conversation starter, rather than the final word on its subject matter, and I am happy to see that it has accomplished this goal. For space reasons I will not be able to reply to every point, but I would like to continue the conversation by picking up some of the recurring themes in these reviews.

As the contributors to this forum note, one of my primary goals in writing *Before the West* was to provide an alternative history for International Relations (IR). At this point, it is well-recognised in our field that the histories we theorise with in IR—not the least the textbook Westphalian narrative—are Eurocentric. The rest of the world does not even come into view until the nineteenth century. *Before the West* moves beyond that criticism by offering a connected history of international relations that starts not in Europe, but in Asia, and by arguing that world-ordering projects are not unique to Europeans, for better or worse.

I start that connected history with the Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century because it represents a moment of convergence of fates for the people who lived on the landmass we call Asia today. I argue that this empire disseminated a particular type of sovereignty model—which I label Chinggisid sovereignty after Genghis Khan (1162–1227, the founder of the empire)—and its various secondary institutions throughout Eurasia. This sovereignty model was characterised by extreme political centralisation in the person of the ruler (in that the ruler was not accountable any other authority and became *the* lawgiver). Extreme political centralisation was legitimated by world conquest: the Great Khan could have unlimited authority because he was a world conqueror. This meant that those who subscribed to this sovereignty model also had to chase universal empire, and in so doing ordered the world even beyond realms that were under the dominion of the sovereign, in ways that I detail in depth in the book. This was also a world before nation-states and nations: the main actors in this world were houses; they were the ones with world ordering projects and universal sovereignty claims.

The book describes three successive world orders in an ecumene in which this particular understanding of sovereignty was the deep undercurrent (as nation-state sovereignty is in ours): Chinggisid (as ordered by the house of Genghis and its branches in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), post-Chinggisid (as ordered by the Timurid and the early Ming in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries) and post-Timurid (as ordered by the Ottomans, the Safavids and the Mughals). There was continuity between these orders because deep Chinggisid sovereignty norms remained recognisable in the operation of primary actors, but there was also change between them because the legitimating logic hybridised as Chinggisid norms intersected with other normative wells, again for reasons explained in the book. *Before the West* also argues that these world-ordering projects directly influenced the European trajectory[53] as well via the Habsburgs, who, as a result of their intense competition with the Ottomans in the sixteenth century, came to act in ways that resembled Chinggisid sovereignty expectations, setting off reactions in the European continent that ended in the Westphalian peace, which IR until now has erroneously taken to be the origin point of international order.

There is much more in the book, but this may be a good place to turn to Filippo Costa Buranelli's objection about why the book is called *Before the West* in that the title both recentres the West and creates an artificial temporal break. Similarly, Ryan Griffiths wonders if I am creating too much of a binary with an "east in contrast to west" frame. I think these are valid questions raise, and I agree with their thrust. Those who are

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[53] The book also has much to say about Muscovy/Russia as well as many other European actors besides the Habsburgs (see Chapter 5).

familiar with my first book, *After Defeat*,[54] will know that I am quite aware that this binary (implying also a social hierarchy in favour of the West) is not transhistorical and is in fact of relatively recent vintage from a world-historical perspective. I am also aware (and discuss in the book) that even the terms "Asia" or "Eurasia" have their own baggage. Furthermore, my book does not even cover all parts of these regions as currently conceived, which are certainly home to many more historically significant experiences and experiments than the ones I focus on.

If so, why do I use these labels, including in the title? Simply because my goal was to reach as broad an audience as possible. I did not want to write a book just for specialists. I want the book to be picked up by people who have no interest in these places or histories at all, so that they also can displace/broaden the generic Westphalian narrative of our field. There is an unavoidable trade-off between using nuanced terminology and grabbing the interest of general readers. I made the considered decision to go for intelligibility supported with footnoted caveats, which readers may or may not see. Unfortunately, there are no perfect solutions in scholarship. Every choice we make opens us up to a different criticism. In fact, in my book talks I sometimes get the opposite criticism than the one I got here: i.e., that by focusing on aspects of the East that resemble the modern international order (sovereignty and world ordering) I have reproduced the biases of the field, e.g., its preoccupation with top-down order creation, great powers, centralisation etc. The real way to combat Eurocentrism, such critics say, would be to study very different parts of the world, decentralised political arrangements, or the bottom-up experiences in orders. No doubt they too are right in a way. I can only respond that there are too many books waiting to be written for our field to overcome its blind spots, and I could write only one.

To answer the question directly, I do not think there is a stark binary between the East and the West. I would say that areas we have now slotted into these categories are often similar in ways we have not realised and yet also different in ways we have not realised. For the longest time, the working assumption was that the East was just like the West except for the fact that it was lagging behind. The difference was one of temporality: the West was ahead, more "evolved". My book rejects this view. The historical reality before the nineteenth century is complicated. There were some parallel developments across these settings, but they often had different results. Before it became the other way around, certain dynamics developed in the East first and spread from the East to the West. World orders emanated from Asia before they did from Europe. Political centralisation was much more the historical norm in Asia, long before it made a comeback in Europe. That is partly because the example of Genghis Khan was present in the repertoire from the thirteenth century onwards for would-be centralisers to point to and emulate and partly because the continuous presence of successfully centralisers means that there were fewer secondary houses and other bases of authority that could resist centralisation. European centralisation both came later and was achieved on much smaller spatial scales. For a long time, cultural pluralism was much more a fact of daily life in much of Asia than it was in Europe.

Let's now turn to the issue of whether I am making too much of the import of universal empire in the time period I am investigating (as raised by Costa Buranelli) or the (great) houses in the world orders I study (as raised by Griffith). By characterising these world orders as being organised by aristocratic houses,[55] great and small, I am not claiming that this pattern was unique to the East. The comparisons to the fictional worlds of *Dune* and *Game of Thrones* are apt and telling. Certainly Europe before the nation-state was also organised by such houses, and this is one of the commonalities across Eurasia, at least in the era I am looking at. When we

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[54] Ayşe Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[55] I am borrowing this idea from anthropology. See David Sneath, *The Headless State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). For IR/Europe, cf. Edward Keene, "The Naming of Powers," *Cooperation and Conflict* 48.2 (2013): 268-82.

think of pre-modern world, we tend to project back into time nation-ness: we don't think much of speaking of "France" or "China" many centuries ago. What I point out in the book is that there were no such things in the world before modernity, at least in the sense that we understand these labels. What mattered for the ruling houses we have retrospectively projected national belonging onto was their own survival and greatness. What they ruled was their realm, not their people or nation. Of course, given enough time a sense of groupness develops around ruling houses everywhere, as secondary houses in the network get absorbed, the first step towards proto-nations. The homogenising effects of sustained rule and institutionalisation were present everywhere, not just in Europe.

Why then nation-ness presented earlier in Europe compared to Asia is an interesting question. We can hypothesise that the higher degree of political fragmentation of Europe may have had something to do with it. More houses closer in power to each other (there was hardly that much of a power difference between a king and a lord in many European settings) in relatively small realms to begin with may have meant that the homogenisation around the centre was easier to achieve at the elite level, with fewer nonpersons to absorb later. This process was no doubt aided in Europe also by the rise of the densely urban mercantile class with increasingly comparable degrees of agency to aristocratic houses. In Asia, by contrast, the centre was too powerful, the empires too vast, the merchants too dispersed, and the general population symbolically and practically too inferior to the centre to be easily absorbed into the emerging groupness around the centre. And let's not forget that Asian empires were more syncretic to begin with—much harder to homogenise. The peripatetic nature of many Asian houses may also have hindered the process of circle expansion around the centre, because we do see more evidence of evolution toward something resembling nation-ness earlier in more settled or geographically contained parts of Asia such as China and Japan. In any case, this is too big of a question to be properly answered in the context of this forum. My main point here is that, yes, houses are very important everywhere before modernity, not just in Asia. European houses were not good at centralisation or expansion earlier on, but that weakness turned into an advantage for Europe in a later period. On the flip side, some Asian houses were great at centralisation and ruling over vast diverse populations, but that turned out to be a disadvantage for Eastern nation-state formation in a later period.[56]

Turning to universal sovereignty, the book does not claim that Genghis Khan invented it. The tendency towards political centralisation is indeed ever-present in human history, and universal empire is one of the primary ways such a demand can be legitimised. I do not get into this in the book, but it is important realise that most historical experiments of universal sovereignty predate the Axial Age (in antiquity) and advent of transcendental world religions.[57] Wherever they spread, transcendental religions (especially monotheistic religions) bestowed on regular people a degree of agency vis-à-vis sovereign power by promising them salvation on a transcendental sphere (the afterlife, nirvana etc.) if they followed the rules that had been laid down in holy books or teachings. A person who can be saved is not nothing. No king has full power over him as long as the hope for salvation exists outside of the political plane. At the same time, such religions insist that that the sovereign too is subject to the same rules as regular people, no matter how politically powerful he may be. These two factors make extreme political centralisation and universal sovereignty much harder to attain for rulers after antiquity. Once canonised scriptures—of whatever form of transcendentalism—come into existence, it becomes difficult for kings to claim *all* the authority; they must now contend—even as lip service—with those tasked with keeping and interpreting religious texts which contain the real 'truth,' texts that cannot be changed or at best are very difficult to modify. Whereas before

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[56] I develop aspects of this argument in Ayşe Zarakol, "The Ottomans and Diversity", in Andrew Phillips and Chris Reus-Smit, eds., *Culture and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[57] For more on this point, and also for a more detailed explanation of Axial transformations, see Alan Strathern, *Unearthly Powers: Religious and Political Change in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); A. Azfar Moin and Alan Strathern, eds., *Sacred Kingship in World History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022).

kings could claim to be gods and get rid of pesky religious figures who dared challenge them, after transcendentalism (especially the monotheism) they had to at least pretend that they acknowledge a higher authority. The real sovereign then is not the king. Thus authority after axial transformations is invariably divided (and it remains that way for centuries, until early modernity).[58] Political rulers in that world could make some laws (sometimes not even that) but they are not *the* lawgiver; there are even higher laws that they have not made, which were conveyed by prophets and are contained in sacred books. There are also alternative centres of religious authority in charge of interpreting, teaching and perhaps even enforcing God's laws.

This is the situation we find much of Eurasia in at the eve of Mongol conquests in the thirteenth century. In most places, kings were much smaller than they had been in antiquity - they might claim divine sanction, but they could not claim divinity themselves. They had to share their authority with the church, the pope, ulema, the caliph, and/or the moral philosophers. Lo and behold, extreme political centralisation made a comeback (and universal empire with it) from the one place in Eurasia that remained relatively untouched by that point by transcendental thinking and religions: Inner Asia, where the belief systems were still immanentist, empirical, this-worldly. Genghis Khan was challenged by his shaman in early days; he just got rid of the shaman and did not bother to replace him. The shaman was just a person. His role to be a conduit with the heavens could easily be reabsorbed into the ruler. There was no book or jurisprudence that his critics could point to in order to say what Genghis Khan was doing wrong. And once Genghis Khan became *the* lawgiver and created his world empire, success of centralisation begat more success. Would-be centralisers in Asia now had a new and recent model to emulate, and the conquests of each centraliser made it easier for the ones who came after for practical and symbolic reasons. We could say that the empire of Genghis Khan rejuvenated an older model of sovereignty and reinjected it into the ecumene of the East, inspiring some rulers to overcome the centuries long status quo with its fragmented nature of authority.

It is *this* particular change in the understanding of sovereignty (and its effect of world ordering) across Asia from the thirteenth century onwards that my book emphasises, and of course that emphasis comes at the expense of other things. Ali Balcı, for instance, takes issue with the fact that I do not characterise the Ottoman Empire as a distinct world order on its own and that I do not discuss very much the Abbasid/Islamic influence on the Ottomans. A different book on the Ottomans may very well have emphasised their distinctiveness and the influence of Islam on the way they ruled; these claims already dominate the contemporary understanding of the empire in Turkey and perhaps together with views that emphasise Byzantine/European influences they help us make some sense of the empire. But something is lost when we study the Ottoman Empire only as a self-contained entity, given how much circulation there was between the Ottomans, the Safavids and the Mughals[59] in the time period I discuss, and how influenced all of these houses were by the Chinggisids by way of the Timurids. Perhaps I overemphasised that vein, but if I did so it should be taken as a corrective to a prevailing mindset that has thus far mostly overlooked it.

I do stand by my claim these three houses saw each other as primary rivals in their quest for millennial sovereignty (with the possible addition of the Habsburgs in the case of the Ottomans) and thus their empires constituted one world order, just as the Timurids and the Ming. As readers of the book know, I do not conceive of world orders as being constituted just by trade, diplomacy, or cooperative relations but also as being reproduced by rivalry, especially symbolic rivalry. And that cannot but happen if one is drawing from a shared ecumenical well about what it means to be sovereign and if one is chasing universal empire for similar

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[58] For more on this see also Ayşe Zarakol, "States and Ontological Security: A Historical Rethinking", *Cooperation & Conflict* 52.1 (2017): 48-68.

[59] Balcı is right to criticise me for downplaying the role of the (Shaybanid) Uzbeks in the sixteenth century, which I did simply because historiographical material I could work from was limited in comparison to the other three.

justifications with others. Think of it this way: all of us constitute an IR community even though we are dispersed around the world and spend most of our time not interacting with each other. But when you assess your standing in the field, who do you take as your primary referent? Not the mathematician at your university with whom you may have to interact and get along with on a weekly basis on an administrative committee, or your spouse and children that you see every day. Your primary status referents (sometimes rivals, sometimes allies) rather are those people who share your understanding of the field, have similar goals and think with the same concepts about the world. Those people matter more for your understanding of the world and your self-definition even if you do not see them for years. World orders function in a similar way. The US and the USSR were deadly rivals with their own spheres of influence, but they reinforced the Cold War order together because they had similar understandings of what it meant to be a great power with its attendant symbolic and material manifestations.

Similarly, the book's epilogue contains a very strong defence of macro-history as a corrective, but not because I think other ways of approaching history misguided. We need all approaches, and very few people have been defending macro-history. We need better macro-histories, and Costa Buranelli is right that I believe that the ideal macro-history combines meso and macro dimensions. You might also call it "macro-history with a historicist sensibility," one that looks for concepts that travel and comparability where possible but also is sensitive to change and varied manifestation across time. In the epilogue, I grapple with the politics of doing such a macro-history not only from a disciplinary perspective but also for its present-day implications. Balcı takes me to task for ending the book on a note that suggests that people of Asia can learn something positive from the historical period covered by the book; that the shared history of cultural diversity could be used in defence of more pluralism today. If I had made up a non-existent pluralist past in service of a pluralist future, he would be right about this criticism. But in pointing out the presence of a (most of the time) relaxed attitude towards policing cultural and religious practice in these Eastern world orders (especially in contrast to Europe at the time), I am not hiding away the brutality of the conquests or the long tradition of political centralisation in Eurasia, other traditions which could easily be used in service of regimes that I personally find objectionable today.[60] In fact, as Subotic rightly points out, one of the underlying currents in the book is if we recognise that (some) Asian actors had just as much agency as (some) European actors in ordering the world according to their vision, acknowledging that fact has to come with the recognition that non-European actors can also be victimisers. There certainly was coercion and brutality in Asia before European empires. But we do not have to focus only on those aspects of the past. We can also look at that shared history across Eurasia and see various (from my perspective) positive aspects of it that have been obscured by recent developments, aspects that could be used to argue for future projects that can stand in the way of various jingoistic-ethnoreligious-centrisms pushed by contemporary regimes of Asia today. At the end of the day, history is always read for a purpose; why not this one?

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[60] For present day implications of some of the themes discussed in the book, see Ayşe Zarakol, "Remembering the Shared History of (Eur)asia: Is This a Good Idea in the Twenty-first Century?" *Global Studies Quarterly* 2 (2023): 1-4.