

Lecture No (3

Subject/ Historical Systems

Examples of past systems give us a stock of evidence to think about our questions of what does, can, and cannot go on in international relations.[4] I will provide brief illustrative examples here to cement the idea of an international system, with different kinds of structural forms, and a number of kinds of units. Most of human history, when the majority of humankind was organized as bands and clans, is prehistory, unrecorded. Its record is mostly one of the vast migrations in remote human history. The recorded history of the ancient and classical world has many international systems. The general trend, ever since the invention of the wheel and the sail, has been towards larger more expansive systems, where technology enables regular relations amongst units at ever-greater distances.

The Mesopotamian system connected, later, with ancient Egypt, altogether forming the basis of the Amarna System, stretching from Egypt and its western and southern frontiers, into relations with the Babylon, Hatti, and Assyria.[5] This system was neither entirely hierarchical nor anarchical, and was more of a “secondary” system of systems, where each empire dominated their realm but formed relations amongst one another as well. In their diplomatic correspondence, Egyptian Pharaohs, for instance, were referred to as ‘brother’, by their imperial counterparts, but the Pharaohs recognized no equal, referring to everyone else as ‘sons’. The structure of the system was not clearly settled amongst all parties.

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Periods of the tributary system of China illustrate a

contrasting case. China itself formed an international system, particularly in its Warring States Period of history. Yet, its unification, especially in the Han Dynasty, began the development of a hierarchical system in the region. China, as an imperially unified unit, came to occupy the top/center of the hierarchical order, in a larger Confucian civilization that tributary states were members of. The Mayan city-states system is a fascinating example, because so little is known of it. The Mayan city-states appear to have been independent and recognizing no superior, although some were more militarily and economically powerful, with evidence of hegemonic powers. These city-states engaged in trade, diplomacy, and warfare. An interesting practice of this system is that when an alliance was made between two city-states, it is said that a road was built between them, likely of symbolic and practical

military and economic importance. The early modern system of European empires was the first worldwide system, eventually connecting all the rest. Its structure was hierarchical. Amongst the European states no superior was recognized, but they mutually recognized their superiority over the rest. Attempts to dominate Europe by the Hapsburgs, Napoleon, and Germany were unsuccessful. Chairman Mao is said to have called World War I and II, the 'European civil wars'. This is not entirely inaccurate if we recognize the imperial pact of the Europeans against the world. The decline of European empire, and process of decolonization in the 20th century, globalized this society of sovereign nation-states

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