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French, H. W. Everything Under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China's Push for Global Power. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017.

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Setting his historical inquiry into ancient and modern China in the sea of smaller nations around it, Howard French creates a sense of a center starfish, with appendages being Vietnam, Laos, and Burma. It is only in the context of a center kingpin among appendages that China can be understood, especially in terms of the concept of "tribute."

It is the role of the smaller nations to worship the center and, without their homage, the center cannot hold—so says French, a journalist with ties to that region, in his book *Everything Under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China's Push for Global Power*—and even the Vietnam War can only be interpreted through the prism of this center-perimeter orientation. Thus, he sets out to tell readers the history of China, but also Vietnam, Cambodia and the host of "tribute nations" that make her who she is.

China can only shine if others are lesser, and so the resentment in that region is greater than one thinks and is even reported, French says**.** The Vietnam War had only just ended when China shifted its allegiance to Cambodia and the murderous Pol Pot regime, mildly congratulating Vietnam on its victory but with the real goal of preventing a strong Vietnam at its borders. It is French's view that one has to understand the historical and philosophical notions of Chinese hierarchy over serf nations and how it will translate into relationships with world powers to know the direction the civilized world is going. For it is inescapable, he maintains, that an entrenched system will replicate itself if left unchecked and U.S. foreign policy doomed if not reflective of this fact**.**

Understanding how China has dealt with local serf nations makes it clearer that her strategy with the rest of the world is to shine and force others to pay "tribute" with no exceptions. The other nations orbit the sun, but China must be at the center to be in line with age-old thinking.

The various imperial dynasties impressed these philosophies on a populace that was educated for the purpose of serving the emperor. China viewed itself as the Central Kingdom that had to fend off invaders from the north and west, including Mongols, Manchus, and Japanese at times in the east. Its satellites and allies were Southeast Asian countries, those that later became viewed as French Indo-China. Japan and Korea were to be kept at bay, but there was little knowledge of groupings such as the Roman Empire, although some in ancient China knew of its existence.

While several Vietnamese rulers called themselves "emperor," they told their people to call them "king" when the real Chinese emperor was around, else they would face destruction. There was only one "emperor" and he came from the Han Chinese dynasty.

Japan was always seen as a threat to China by not paying enough nominal "tribute" to the sole, imperial status of the Chinese emperor. Hence, Japan is allying with smaller Asian nations such as the Philippines to prevent a future Chinese assertion into its territories. The U.S. has its strong relationship with South Korea as a counter-balance.

French concludes, as all historians know, that China is a power to be watched and studied in this decade and impending ones. He cautions that to think of China as an opposing force receptive to conceptions of shared power, however, he says is not realistic. History implodes with the "China as the sun" metaphor that is not conducive to power-sharing. The "tribute" system is so entrenched in national philosophy, culture, and art that it permeates politics, inadvertently or not. It does not lend itself to world partition or systems of world governance

similar to the East-West détente. While working together is always crucial and collaboration key, a more subtle, layered view emerges that requires a different strategy.

In terms of U.S.-China relations, this more nuanced approach must drift into State Department parlance when formulating a China policy. The strength of the United States is a younger, working population, while China, with the one-child policy, now has one of the oldest median population age, with elders far outnumbering working-age people. Morally and politically, it will need to spend more money on social services and health care than defense. The U.S., France and Germany, while facing the same challenges, have larger projected working populations when the examining statistics for the years 2016 to 2050.

This will influence the outlook of that Asian nation and act as a softener, pushing toward civilizing rather than militarizing approaches. It will also act as a counterfoil toward over-production and over-dominance in world trade, creating a tension that cannot be over-explained by philosophy. It serves as an economic protector and binding force against future militarization and aggression. Therefore, the balance will come from within due to internal tension rather than from without, French concludes.

The book is very thorough and tries to be objective from the standpoint of universalism, as journalist French has spent much of his working life abroad working for various news services. The need for a deeper, clearer understanding shaping U.S. foreign policy is still the jumping-off point for this academic exploration. The author tries to balance the global and U.S. perspective but the home base is now New York and the American journalism world.

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