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FUTURE

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CIVILIZATIONAL NARRATIVE IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF INDIA AND CHINA: THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

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The articulation of both the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China as civilizational states shapes their foreign policy goals and modes of behaviour. This article identifies civilizational narratives in the foreign policy of both states, focusing in particular on the Indian concepts of 'Vishvaguru' and 'Vishvamitra,' and the 'Chinese Dream' as an adaptation of the concept of Tianxia. The impact of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war on these narratives is examined, and the influence of these narratives on the dynamics of international relations is presented.

The Age of the 'Civilization-State'

G. Rahman, in an article for the *Financial Times* in 2019 argued that «the 21st century could be the century of the 'civilization state'», as this idea is reflected in various countries such as Türkiye, India, Russia, China, and even the United States of America. The article, referring to the term 'civilization state', emphasises the illiberal connotation of the concept by its undermining of the universality of the values of liberal democracy.¹ Thus, there is a logical inconsistency in the authors' biased use of the concept of 'civilisation state' referring to a combination of two factors: drawing on historical heritage and filling these articulations with anti-liberal connotations.

The concept of a 'civilization state' was developed for the first time by Martin Jacques, in relation to China, in his work 'When China Rules the World' in 2009. In defining the concept, he used two determinants. The first is exceptional durability, enabled by the appeal to a continuous civilizational heritage. This aspect is often misunderstood as imperialist nostalgia or even overlooked entirely. The second determinant is the appropriate geographical and demographic scale, rooted within a single, yet diversifying, space.² These factors can be described as objective in defining a civilization state, while the subjective factor is perceptual: the state's perceiving and defining of itself as a civilizational state. This implies

1 G. Rachman, *China, India and the rise of the 'civilisation state'*, *Financial Times*, 4.03.2019, [<https://www.ft.com/content/b6bc9ac2-3e5b-11e9-9bee-efab61506f44>].

2 M. Jacques, *When China Rules the World*, Penguin Books: London 2009, pp. 196-203.

the construction of national identity in terms of «civilizational law and colonial subjugation».³

This is particularly true for countries such as China and India, where civilizational heritage is a part of national identity, shaping both domestic and foreign policy. One of the key differences between a civilization state and a nation-state is that: ... *civilization-state generates ... a very different kind of politics from that of a conventional nation-state, with unity, rooted in the idea of civilization rather than nation, the overriding priority.*⁴


Determination by civilizational heritage and prioritisation of civilization over nation shapes an atypical pattern of behaviour in politics, including foreign policy. Ravi Bajpai suggests a set of criteria for assessing the behaviour of a civilization state, based on six assumptions: a subjective appeal to the civilizational past to create a utopian dream, the construction of contemporary discourses based on civilization narratives, the embedding of civilizational heritage in national identity, the revision of the concept of the 'nation-state', a tendency towards majoritarianism in domestic politics, and the making of unconventional decisions in international relations outside the usual frameworks.⁵

Both China and India meet all the criteria of civilization states: they possess a civilizational heritage, align with the right scale of diversity, and perceive themselves as successors to great civilizations. The Russian-Ukrainian war has created additional space for the deployment of civilizational narratives for both states. As

a result, existing civilizational narratives in their foreign policy are being updated and transformed.

'Vishwaguru' and/or 'Vishwamitra'

The Indian government under Narendra Modi, postulating a pragmatic approach to foreign policy based on the priority of hard power, had no alternative for the deployment of the normative dimension except for continued participation in the Non-Aligned Movement and the G77. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine intensified the transformation, creating an additional dimension to the deployment of the Indian normative project.



Determination by civilizational heritage and prioritisation of civilization over nation shapes an atypical pattern of behaviour in politics, including foreign policy

The Western world's framing of the war in Ukraine, whether consciously or not, is shaped in terms of the confrontation between democracy and authoritarianism. According to Michito Tsuruoka, this approach is erroneous and unproductive for two reasons: first, it is misleading about the reasons for the unacceptability of the war; and second, it potentially narrows the range of support, as states need to be democracies to oppose Russian aggression.⁶ Mustafa Kutlay and Ziya Onis note that among the countries of the so-called Global South, there

3 R. Bajpai, *Civilizational Perspectives in International Relations and Contemporary China-India Relations*, Deakin University: Victoria 2021, p. 70.

4 M. Jacques, *When China Rules the World*, Penguin Books: London 2009, p. 201.

5 R. Bajpai, *Civilizational Perspectives in International Relations and Contemporary China-India Relations*, Deakin University: Victoria 2021, p. 70.

6 M. Tsuruoka, *Why the War in Ukraine is not about Democracy versus Authoritarianism*, RUSI, 27.06.2022, [<http://sur.li/fqzngo> access: 16 February 2024].

is a widespread perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war as a 'European war' that does not directly affect their interests, which is why a neutral position was considered the best strategy.⁷



Both China and India meet all the criteria of civilization states: they possess a civilizational heritage, align with the right scale of diversity, and perceive themselves as successors to great civilizations

Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar claims that Western countries believe that Europe's problems are the problems of the whole world, while the problems of the world are not Europe's problems. He made this statement in response to accusations of insufficient support for Ukraine from the Global South, as the refusal to impose economic sanctions on Russia creates workarounds, or ways to circumvent the problem, and protects the Russian economy from the anticipated crisis.⁸ The Indian foreign minister's position is not an isolated one, but rather reflects a stance of the entire Global South. It is worth noting that the Indian government is articulating its own discourse: the Russian-Ukrainian crisis is an example of numerous crises in the world today, rooted in the post-

Soviet politics of NATO enlargement; and belonging to the broader context of relations between Russia and Europe.⁹

Therefore, the Russian-Ukrainian war has actually created a normative niche for the Republic of India – the voice of the so-called Global South – becoming part of a broader civilizational narrative: as the teacher/friend of the universe (*vishvaguru/vishvamitra*).

The closeness of the Indian discourse to the positioning of the states of the so-called Global South in relation to the Russian-Ukrainian war is evident. First of all, neutrality is associated with the protection of national interests: Muhammad Abrar, Alfin Basundoro, and Trystanto Trystanto argue that the countries of the so-called Global South will normally prefer their selfish interests to preserving the values they share (respect for sovereignty).¹⁰ Thus, the Indian government prioritises the interests of the Global South in the respective regions, narrowing the Russian-Ukrainian war to the realm of problems in Europe for which others should not be responsible.

Such articulation ensures both the protection of national interests, and the preservation of a formal commitment to the traditional values of the Non-Aligned Movement, in particular respect for sovereignty and non-interference, even under conditions of neutrality. The argument goes that, although Ukraine's sovereignty has been

7 M. Kutlay, Z. Öniş, *A Critical Juncture: Russia, Ukraine and the Global South*. Survival, 2024, p. 21.

8 Ю. Шулюкас, «Проблеми Європи – це не проблеми світу» – чому Глобальний Південь не приєднується до санкцій проти Росії?, («The problems of Europe are not the problems of the world» – why the Global South does not join sanctions against Russia). LRT, 27.09.2023 [<https://www.lrt.lt/ua/novini/1263/2086502/problemi-evropi-tse-ne-problemi-svitu-chomu-global-nii-pivden-ne-priednuiet-sia-do-sanktsii-proti-rosiyi>].

9 *Ukraine crisis has its roots in post-Soviet politics: Jaishankar*, The Indian Express, 23.02.2022, [<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/ukraine-crisis-has-its-roots-in-post-soviet-politics-jaishankar-7786688/>].

10 M. Abrar, A. Basundoro, T. Trystanto, *Assessing the Response of the Global South to Russo-Ukrainian War: Case Study of India*, *Global South Review*, 2022. p. 10.

violated, NATO's expansion has put Russia's national security and sovereignty at risk¹¹, and this leads to the picturing of neutrality as an impartial and objective approach to resolving the conflict, avoiding the situation of impasse.



The closeness of the Indian discourse to the positioning of the states of the so-called Global South in relation to the Russian-Ukrainian war is evident

In December 2022, after India assumed the presidency of the G20, Jaishankar stated that the country would be the voice of the Global South, which was underrepresented in such forums.¹² As a guiding principle, the concept 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' was articulated, which is a part of the broader slogan used by Prime Minister Modi: «Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas Aur Sabka Vishwas», meaning «With all, development for all, and trust of all», meaning that when all cooperate, progress is achieved by all, which is possible when there is overall trust.

During the G20 presidency, India managed to accumulate the potential of the 'voice of the Global South' project, tipping the scales in its

favour due to three main factors. First, the agenda was framed in terms of the interests of the Global South: financial stability, economic growth, and development needs.¹³ Secondly, while the G20 leaders adopted a declaration condemning Russian aggression against Ukraine at the Bali summit in 2022, which was a reflection of the dominance of the Western narrative, in 2023, the Modi administration managed to shape the agenda in line with the Indian discourse. This can be viewed as a victory for Indian diplomacy. A joint declaration, despite the existing differences in the views of the G20 leaders, has given additional weight to the mantra 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas', not just as a nice slogan, but an inclusive and ambitious idea which India can put into practice to ensure global peace by overcoming the existing trust deficit.¹⁴ The emphasis on bridging the trust deficit and promoting stability also reinforces the re-emergence of India's discourse as a friend of the universe.

The last factor in strengthening the position of the Republic of India as the 'voice of the Global South' is the implementation of the Indian initiative to grant full membership to the African Union in the G20, which represents the spirit of 'Sabka Saath'¹⁵; since, according to Modi, India embraces a vision based on inclusivity.¹⁶ As the 'voice of the Global South,' India can offer inclusion/inclusiveness in the existing international

11 This Russian assertion, that NATO's eastward expansion to near Russia's borders poses a threat to its national security and sovereignty, is accepted, and utilised by India and China as one of their arguments for refusing to place responsibility on and recognise Russia as an aggressor state.

12 R. Singh, *Govt says India to be 'voice of Global South': What the term means*, The Indian Express, 7.12.2022, [https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/govt-says-india-to-be-voice-of-global-south-what-the-term-means-8309807/].

13 H. Tran, *Will the G20 Summit help India become the voice of the Global South?*, Atlantic Council, 7.09.2023, [https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/will-the-g20-summit-help-india-become-the-voice-of-the-global-south/].

14 T. Brajesh, *PM Modi backs up 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas' mantra with action*, The Sunday Guardian, 17.09.2023, [https://sundayguardianlive.com/news/pm-modi-backs-up-sabka-saath-sabka-vikas-mantra-with-action].

15 *English translation of Prime Minister's opening remarks at the G20 Summit*, Ministry of External Affairs of India, 09.09.2023 [https://bit.ly/4a98z4t].

16 Cited in: *Indian PM Modi proposes full G20 membership for African Union*, Al Jazeera, 27.08.2023 [https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/27/indian-pm-modi-proposes-full-g20-membership-for-african-union].

order through its established relations with both Western countries and Russia or China, as emphasised by both the Indian government and the countries of the so-called Global South.



***As the ‘voice of the Global South,’
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In addition to activities within existing organisations, India is also creating new initiatives. In January 2023, the first virtual summit, ‘Voice of the Global South,’ was held on the topic ‘Unity of Voice, Unity of Purpose,’ to coordinate/unify the positions of countries on pressing issues.¹⁷ The second summit was held in November 2023, with key outcomes and challenges within the G20 being discussed.¹⁸ Interestingly, the initiative was also claimed to be inspired by the expanded principle of ‘Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas aur Sabka Vishwas’ to ‘*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas aur Sabka Prayas*’ [Together with all, development for all, trust of all, and efforts of all], drawing on the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.¹⁹ Before the start of Russia’s

full-scale aggression against Ukraine, this concept had already been voiced in public and had acquired a certain accumulative capacity, given India’s positioning during the Covid-19 pandemic, but its potential remained limited.

Kate Estrada postulates that the Indian concept of *vishwaguru* is framed through a ‘sense of mission’ in terms of ‘normative power’, taking into account historical heritage and civilizational beliefs, in order to achieve not just recognition of India’s status as an equal by other global actors, but also to achieve an inversion of the global hierarchy.²⁰ The concept is based on civilizational beliefs that originate in the Hindu worldview. Indian claims to the status of the teacher of the universe, as Bhanu Dhamija notes, are based on Kutumbakam’s idea that the world is one family. The primacy of this understanding, which is defended by Hindus, and adherence to the main principles of the philosophy, determines the vision behind the reasons for granting the status of guru to India.²¹

Philosopher Swami Vivekananda articulated that India, in order to become *vishwaguru*, must adopt an active approach of ‘karma yoga’ or ‘yoga of action’ – practical activity in the world to correct mistakes, alleviate social problems, and impart spiritual knowledge to others in India and beyond.²² Swaminathan Anklesaria Aiyar criticises the notion that India holds the status of the teacher of the

17 *1st Voice of Global South Summit 2023*, Ministry of External Affairs of India, 12-13.01.2023, [<https://www.mea.gov.in/voice-of-global-summit.htm>].

18 *2nd Voice of Global South Summit 2023*, Ministry of External Affairs of India, 17.11.2023, [<https://www.mea.gov.in/second-vgss.htm>].

19 The philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam represents the concept «The Earth is One Family,» whereby all people bear a collective responsibility towards one another and a shared future, prioritising the common good over individual or familial interests, with significant emphasis on global solidarity and responsibility.

20 K. Estrada, What is a *vishwaguru*? Indian civilizational pedagogy as a transformative global imperative, *International Affairs*, 2023, pp.435-443.

21 B. Dhamija, *How to be Vishwa Guru: India must stop squandering its strengths and help solve today’s global problems*, The Times of India, 23.11.2017, [<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-edit-page/how-to-be-vishwa-guru-india-must-stop-squandering-its-strengths-and-help-solve-todays-global-problems/>].

22 Cited in: I. Hall, Narendra Modi and India’s normative power, *International Affairs*, 2017, pp.126-127.

universe, because a guru is nothing without disciples, and India has none. In his opinion, the guru narrative is supported solely by the increased attention paid to India by its Western partners, in the context of the need to counter Chinese expansionism.²³

The Russian-Ukrainian war has influenced India's embodiment of karma yoga in two ways: it has given impetus to the creation of a framework for the concept of vishwaguru through the Global South Voice project and has prompted the creation of a new narrative, *vishwamitra*. In Modi's words: «The world looks at India as an important pillar of stability. A friend who can be trusted, a partner who believes in people-centric development, a voice that believes in global good, a voice of the global south ...»²⁴ Apart from the idea of *vishwamitra*, the idea of «*Vishwa ka atut saathi*» (India as a reliable global partner) is also gaining new traction in this context.

The 'Chinese Dream' and the Concept of Tianxia

The strengthening of China's civilizational narratives is associated with Xi Jinping's rise to power and the articulation of the 'Chinese Dream'. The rule of Hu Jintao (2003-2013) was characterised by the absence of both a consistent soft power strategy and strategic narratives.²⁵ It was the 'Chinese Dream' that marked the beginning of China's emergence as a 'normative power.'



The Russian-Ukrainian war has influenced India's embodiment of karma yoga in two ways: it has given impetus to the creation of a framework for the concept of vishwaguru through the Global South Voice project and has prompted the creation of a new narrative, vishwamitra

The 'Chinese Dream' is an idea first expressed by Xi in 2012, which is about taking action to achieve «... Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation».²⁶ In addition to referring to China's 'great past', the narrative pays much attention to specification markers. In particular, the emphasis on 'Chineseness' in the context of the spirit and the way points to certain features inherent in a particular civilization. In fact, the idea of specifications of civilizations formed the basis of the 'garden of civilizations' narrative: that is, the world is presented as a field of civilizations whose cultural heritage influences both domestic and foreign policy.

One of the most striking illustrations of the 'garden of civilizations' narrative is the concept of 'democracy with Chinese characteristics'. The white paper *'China: Democracy That Works'* in 2021 emphasises not only the peculiarity of the Chinese vision

23 Aiyar, A. S. *India's Modi is not the world's guru*, Nikkei Asia, 8.09.2023, [<https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/India-s-Modi-is-not-the-world-s-guru>].

24 P.A. Dabhi, *World looks at India as an important pillar of stability: PM Modi at Vibrant Gujarat summit*, The Indian Express, 11.01.2024, [<https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/world-looks-at-india-as-an-important-pillar-of-stability-pm-modi-at-vibrant-gujarat-summit-9104182/>].

25 D. Vogl, China's Strategic Narratives, in Frank Vogl (ed.), *China's Footprint in Strategic Spaces of the European Union. New Challenges for a Multi-dimensional EU-China Strategy*, Schriftenreihe der Landesverteidigungsakademie 2021, p. 20.

26 *What does Xi Jinping's China Dream mean?*, BBC, 6.06.2013, [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22726375>].

of democracy, but also the broader thesis of the lack of universality due to dependence on the civilizational past: *There is no single road to democracy. The true barrier to democracy lies not in different models of democracy, but in arrogance, prejudice and hostility towards other countries' attempts to explore their own paths to democracy, and in assumed superiority and the determination to impose one's own model of democracy on others.*²⁷



The strengthening of China's civilizational narratives is associated with Xi Jinping's rise to power and the articulation of the 'Chinese Dream'

This opposes the Western narrative of the universality of the values of liberal democracy. The Chinese narrative has gained additional relevance against the backdrop of the Russian-Ukrainian war. However, unlike India's, China's approach to war is difficult to define as a fully separate discourse: the manifestation of the idea of provoking Russian aggression by the Western states through NATO expansion finds similarities with the Russian narratives. Bjorn Duben believes that, from China's perspective, the Russian-Ukrainian war looks like a conflict between democracies and authoritarian

regimes, which actually shifts the Chinese discourse closer to the Western one.²⁸ The democracies-authoritarian regimes cliché actualises the narrative of the specifications of civilizational paths, as it does not encourage violent change but rather postulates acceptability without transformation.

This creates a foundation for inclusiveness: the Chinese narrative, unlike the Indian one, does not seek inclusion in existing international mechanisms like the UN or the G20. Instead, it offers an alternative to the established norms. The Chinese model aims at balancing the international economic order by creating new institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank, and by introducing global initiatives like the One Belt, One Road, and the Global Development Initiative. Notably, the One Belt, One Road initiative is seen as the first tangible manifestation of the Chinese Dream,²⁹ intended to re-establish the historic Silk Road, while the Global Civilization Initiative, launched in 2023, adds another layer to China's growing global influence.

The OBOR (further BRI)³⁰ initiative was announced by Xi in 2013, during visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia, drawing on the historical context of the Silk Road. Scholars view this not only as an attempt to legitimise a unilateral initiative, but also as placing an emphasis on symbolism through historical


27 The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China: Democracy That Works*, 2021, p. 50.

28 Н. Чурикова, Китай підтримує Росію у протистоянні із Заходом, але не з ідеологічних причин – експерти (*China supports Russia in its confrontation with the West, but not for ideological reasons, experts say*), *Voice of America*, 3.11.2022, [https://www.holosameryky.com/a/kytaj-pidtrymuje-rosiju-ne-z-ideologichykh-mirkuvan/6817997.html].

29 Y.-Y. Chang, Understanding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): An Initiative to Make China Great Again?, *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, 2019, p. 12.

30 «One Belt, One Road» (OBOR), the original slogan of the New Silk Road, was renamed the «Belt and Road Initiative» (BRI) in 2016 to emphasise its broader, more inclusive, and multi-dimensional scope beyond just a single belt or road.

parallels.³¹ A deep strategic and political significance of the BRI is highlighted as a continuation of the idea of the Middle Kingdom, prioritising the non-violent spread of ‘inspiring virtue.’³²


 ***the Chinese narrative, unlike the Indian one, does not seek inclusion in existing international mechanisms like the UN or the G20. Instead, it offers an alternative to the established norms***

Bajpai further substantiates the thesis that the BRI is a manifestation of a civilizational narrative, by launching an ambitious campaign to include cultural sites along the Silk Road on the UNESCO World Heritage List, and thus emphasising that the list is viewed as a marker of civilizational standing. In total, 32 sites were proposed for inclusion, 22 of which are located in China.³³

It is important to emphasise that the proclamation of the key principles of the BRI, such as interpersonal connections, connectivity, openness, harmony, inclusivity, and mutually beneficial situations, repeats the essence of *Tianxia* (天下), which is an ancient Chinese concept that translates as ‘All under heaven’ and essentially refers to the aspiration for harmony and the unification of all under the ‘heavens.’ Y.-Y. Chang, citing the key elements of the *Tianxia*

concept – inclusivity, winning human support, creation of global institutions, and coexistence without formal rules and norms – points to their similarity with the postulates of the BRI, indicating a rethinking of this concept in modern times.³⁴

The concept of Community with a Shared Future for Mankind is another example of the adaptation of *Tianxia* to modernity, promoting the idea of global interdependence and cooperation. Importantly, the narrative retains its civilizational character, as it primarily focuses on the cooperation and coexistence of civilizations as subjects of international relations: *To build a global community of shared future is to pursue openness, inclusiveness, mutual benefit, equity, and justice. The goal is not to replace one system or civilization with another.*³⁵

 ***the proclamation of the key principles of the BRI, such as interpersonal connections, connectivity, openness, harmony, inclusivity, and mutually beneficial situations, repeats the essence of Tianxia***

The launch of the Global Civilization Initiative by the Chinese government in 2023 has gained particular relevance in the context of the deepening divide between democracies

31 Y.-Y. Chang, Understanding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): An Initiative to Make China Great Again?, *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, 2019, p. 25.

32 Y.-Y. Chang, Understanding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): An Initiative to Make China Great Again?, *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, 2019, p. 26.


33 R. Bajpai, *Civilizational Perspectives in International Relations and Contemporary China-India Relations*, Deakin University: Victoria 2021, p. 201.

34 Y.-Y. Chang, Understanding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): An Initiative to Make China Great Again?, *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, 2019, p. 25.

35 *A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions*, BRF, September 2023, [<http://www.beltandroadforum.org/english/n101/2023/1010/c127-916.html>].

and authoritarian regimes, brought about by Russia's war against Ukraine. As part of the broader project alongside the Global Development and Security Initiatives, the Global Civilization Initiative focuses on the issue of the 'common aspirations' (not rights) of humanity, including «peace, development, equity, justice, democracy, and freedom.»³⁶

Notably, the adapted idea of *Tianxia* continues to be relevant, as according to the concept, cooperation should occur without the involvement of formal norms and rules. This positions China favourably, aligning it with the interests of the Global South. The clear pattern this demonstrates can be seen in the example of the Copenhagen Conference in 2008, where developing countries were unwilling to take on official commitments (despite already implementing policies to reduce emissions).³⁷ This reflects the logic of constructing national identity in terms of 'colonial subjugation'.



The ideas expressed in the Global Civilization Initiative are aimed at highlighting an alternative vision of the world in contrast to Western narratives

The ideas expressed in the Global Civilization Initiative are aimed at highlighting an alternative vision of the world in contrast to Western narratives. The articulation of civilizations as subjects of international relations helps the Chinese government strengthen the 'garden of civilization' narrative. Interestingly, while formally advocating the rejection of imposition and hegemony in favour of supporting the

equality and inclusivity of civilizations, it underscores the unique secular nature of Chinese civilization, which, unlike Western or Muslim civilizations, does not seek to transform others. At the same time, this positions China at the centre of international politics, in line with the concept of the Middle Kingdom.

Thus, the enhancing of Chinese civilizational narratives in foreign policy began with Xi's rise to power and the introduction of initiatives such as the 'Chinese Dream', the 'Belt and Road Initiative', and the Global Civilization Initiative. Through these, China put forward the creation of an alternative to Western universalism by respecting civilizational specifications. The appeal to the inclusivity and equality of all civilizations as subjects of international relations is an example of the adaptability of the *Tianxia* concept and its embodiment in modernity, seeking to recreate a modernised version of the tributary system and the concept of the Middle Kingdom. The onset of the full-scale war in Ukraine and the resulting divide between democracies and authoritarian regimes has further heightened the relevance of opposing Western narratives, so providing a normative space for Chinese and Indian narratives, which resonates within the countries of the so-called Global South.

Consequences for International Relations

The civilizational narratives of both states, – China and India, – are used in their foreign policies primarily to redefine their global roles. Notably, both states postulate an alternative vision of the global order, advocating for a move towards a multipolar world. At the same time, their visions of

36 R. Evan Ellis, *The Trouble With China's Global Civilization Initiative*, *The Diplomat*, 1.06.2023, [<https://thediplomat.com/2023/06/the-trouble-with-chinas-global-civilization-initiative/>].


37 T. Houser, *Copenhagen, the Accord, and the Way Forward*, Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2010, p. 7.

transformation towards multipolarity differ, although both articulate a narrative of peaceful coexistence and cooperation between states/civilisations, as well as the need for inclusivity. The Chinese approach involves creating alternatives to existing institutions, with the actual goal focused on the implementation of the adaptive idea of *Tianxia* in modernity. The Indian idea, on the other hand, is about reforming existing structures and infusing them with the civilizational experience of the teacher/friend of the universe.

The Chinese civilizational narrative, based on the concept of *Tianxia*, does not seek to forcibly transform others, but instead creates a path of cooperation and inclusivity through initiatives such as the 'Belt and Road Initiative' and the Global Civilization Initiative. The additional relevance of inclusivity, as acceptance without demands, as opposed to the West, is created by the exacerbation of the divide between the so-called Global South and Global North due to the Russia-Ukraine war, and the introduction of the divide between democracies and authoritarian regimes.

The Indian government has also gained the opportunity to expand its normative project in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, as it has created a conceptual space for the 'Voice of the Global South' project, which is used to emphasise the complementarity of the Indian discourse with a wide range of states, due to its strategic neutrality regarding the war. This facilitates the articulation of adherence to the principle of '*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas aur Sabka Prayas*', which is part of the broader philosophy of V. Kutumbakam, viewing the world as one family. The enhancement of the narrative of India's role as vishwaguru and vishwamitra is also linked to the 'Voice of the Global South' project, which is an example of the practical implementation of civilizational exclusivity through 'karma yoga'.

Thus, the strengthening of civilizational narratives has three significant consequences for international relations. First, the perception by states of themselves in civilizational terms evokes concerns, primarily in the regional neighbours of these states, as their vision of spreading civilizational heritage often goes beyond national borders. This also creates a problem of expanding the zone of state interests: for example, the Indian government has postulated that regional security should be considered within the framework of national security.



The civilizational narratives of both states, – China and India, – are used in their foreign policies primarily to redefine their global roles

Secondly, civilizational narratives are tools for building normative spaces. As early as 2009, it was noted that China lacked a consistent and comprehensive 'soft power', but now there is not only the strengthening of its 'soft power', but also an attempt to create new norms in international relations, which are based on the idea of civilizational particularities defining the path of state development and not to be altered by external rules. The rejection of the universality of values serves as a means of rejecting Western norms and implementing a new value system.

Thirdly, despite statements regarding equality and the aspirations for multipolarity, civilizational states place their own civilization at the centre of the transformation of the international system. The Chinese version of adaptive *Tianxia* demonstrates the predominance of a Chinese civilization based on its secular nature, which minimises intervention in

the affairs of others. This points to the central position of civilization as per the concept of the Middle Kingdom. The Indian civilizational narrative also highlights the ability to balance and guide in international relations, where cooperation can also be envisioned under certain supervision and advice.

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