

Introduction

We are often told “Colonialism is dead.” Let us not be deceived or even soothed by that. I say to you, colonialism is not yet dead. How can we say it is dead, so long as vast areas of Asia and Africa are unfree?

And, I beg of you do not think of colonialism only in the classic form which we of Indonesia, and our brothers in different parts of Asia and Africa, knew. Colonialism has also its modern dress, in the form of economic control, intellectual control, actual physical control by a small but alien community within a nation. It is a skillful and determined enemy, and it appears in many guises. It does not give up its loot easily. Wherever, whenever and however it appears colonialism is an evil thing, and one which must be eradicated from the earth. . . .

President Sukarno, Speech at the Opening of the Bandung Conference, April 18, 1955

The phenomenon of colonial empires encompassing far-flung territorial possessions ended more than half a century ago with the decolonization of large numbers of states, and the carving out of entirely new countries. But the legacy of colonialism endures in cultural, economic, and political ways. Extractive colonialism cut a deep and bloody path through the history of the erstwhile colonies, leaving behind disputed borders, territorial conflicts, and lasting economic inequities.¹

If the practice of colonialism altered the political, economic, cultural and historical trajectory of the colonized countries, then its dissolution arguably created an ideational shift in the international system.² Owning colonies had been an unquestionable “right” that over a few decades became an indisputable “wrong.”³ The end of colonialism was not just a mere redistribution of power in the international system. Colonizers became unable to hold on to their colonies because the *very idea of colonies became morally unacceptable*.⁴ As a result, countries that had experienced colonialism burst on the international scene in a new avatar, with leaders who had strong anti-colonial nationalist credentials, contested and often blood-soaked, political boundaries, a desire to create a new international order, and a very strong sense of personal and collective *suffering* under colonial domination.

The transformative historical event of colonialism was, to these nations, a very negative one. By this I mean it was treated and responded to as collective trauma. These states, despite the wide variation in colonial experience, believed themselves to be *victims* of colonial domination. The political narrative they wove emphasized the wrongs they had suffered and the quest for restitution.

Consequently, two new arguments form the basis of this book. First, I argue that the study of international relations is radically incomplete if it fails to account systematically for colonialism and its legacy. Drawing on literature from the field of psychology, I show that colonialism was a transformative historical event that ex-colonies regarded and responded to as collective historical trauma.

Second, I show that this large category of actors—states that have undergone the traumatic transformative historical event of extractive colonialism—maintain an emphasis on victimhood and entitlement that dominates their decision calculus even today. I argue that they have a “post-imperial ideology,” or PII, that drives their international behavior. PII comprises a sense of victimization that brings with it a dominant goal to be recognized and empathized with as a victim by others in the international system. I refer to this as the goal of victimhood, which is simultaneously a desire to be recognized as a victim and also to ensure that one will not be victimized again in the future. This dominant goal drives two subordinate goals: maximizing territorial sovereignty and maximizing status. These three goals are inherent in PII, and their pursuit shapes foreign policy in states that hold such beliefs. This analysis is a dramatic departure from conventional international relations explanations of state behavior. Specifically, I focus on India and China, states that are usually analyzed as rising powers, and show that despite very different colonial experiences, they share a similar emphasis on victimhood that drives their foreign policy decisions.

Dominant theories of state behavior in the international system, such as realism and neo-realism, are drawn largely from nineteenth-century world power politics in Europe and America and focus on power and security as the main motivators of behavior. The emphasis is on security calculations in response to military threats. Liberal theories usually focus on the domestic competition between, and influence of, different actors within society. The theoretical assumption is that the logic of political survival dictates domestic politics and, therefore, political survival is the primary incentive driving governments. World systems theories, many with explicitly Marxist influences, have focused broadly on extractive imperialism and colonialism, but have done so in terms of its systemic effects, particularly economic dependency and exploitation, and as a consequence have focused on the motivations of the colonizing states.⁵

These theoretical stances do not and can not systematically treat colonialism as a variable influencing the behavior of states. Neither do they give weight to ideology or beliefs drawn from transformative historical events that could influence state behavior. This, despite ample work in the psychology literature detailing the importance of individual memory, collective memory and inter-generational transmission, and the connection between the individual, the collective and the development of societal institutions.

Moreover, theories of offensive and defensive realism with predictions of state behavior such as balancing, bandwagoning, or bargaining refer primarily to states with material capabilities significant enough to matter, while norm-based theories focus on states with the ability to impose or break norms—obviously, norms held by states that are perceived as “successful” (usually Western states) are more likely to be adopted.⁶ The behavior of non-Western nations tends to be given short shrift in traditional studies of international relations, and when they do receive attention, the assumption is that disparities in economic structures and material capabilities are the sole basis of distinguishing them from the more developed nations.⁷

This oversight becomes particularly acute when looking at non-Western states, such as India and China, that seek to alter the international status quo. These two countries, home to 37 percent of the world’s population, have enormous and growing economic power, military capability, and international clout. Analysts agree that their foreign policy choices are a critical determinant of regional and global security in the twenty-first century. But comparisons of India and China, or analyses of their behavior, often rest on their material capabilities and economic prowess. There is little, if any, credence given to the fact that modern India and China rose from the ashes of their colonial experience and that both countries place enormous importance on their colonial past.

Comparisons of India and China, other than categorizing them as rising powers, often emphasize their numerous economic, political and social differences—their economic trajectory is different; India’s growth is service-led, while China’s growth is manufacturing-driven;⁸ India has had a relatively stable democratic regime for more than fifty years, China is a socialist dictatorship; the bulk of India’s population is uncaring of foreign policy,⁹ and audience costs related to international behavior are often media and elite-driven,¹⁰ while Chinese domestic audiences often care very much about China’s international image and bilateral relationships.¹¹

Their experiences of colonialism were also very different, with two hundred

years of British rule in India, and piecemeal colonial rule by Western powers and Japan in China. Yet surprisingly, as this book details, the different experiences of colonialism gave rise to independence and post-independence movements that similarly emphasized suffering and loss rather than their eventual victory over colonialism.¹² Thus, despite their many differences, including different colonial experiences, the two nations responded to their colonial history in a similar fashion—as collective trauma. They strongly believed that they had been victimized, and this belief and corresponding sense of entitlement continues to influence their behavior today. Therefore, in order to understand their behavior in international relations today, it is absolutely crucial to understand their colonial past.

This book begins by examining the phenomenon of colonialism and its legacy. Chapter 1 uses trauma theory drawn from the psychology literature to show that the transformative historical event of colonialism in India and China can be classified as collective trauma. In it, I lay out the theoretical foundations of PII and show how it is an essential component of both India's and China's national identity and international outlook. Chapter 2 uses statistical analysis to establish the existence of a discourse of victimhood in countries that have experienced colonialism. It uses a new method to analyze speeches from 1993 to 2007 in the United Nations to show with statistical significance that there is a difference in the discourse of states that have been colonized and those that have not, and that difference is due to a strong sense of victimhood.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 then turn to specific foreign policy decisions of India and China, discuss the weaknesses of alternative explanations, and use PII as an independent variable to explain policy choices. Chapter 3 makes use of previously unused archival documents to look at the 1960 border negotiations between India and China, the last of such negotiations between the two countries before they went to war in 1962. The chapter outlines how the interaction of the three goals of PII led to the failure of the negotiations and, consequently, a border war that still affects relations between the two countries five decades later. It also shows that PII had already emerged as a recognizable and coherent belief system in these two countries in the years just after decolonization.

Chapter 4 turns to the contemporary period to show that PII and, specifically, victimhood matter today. It analyzes India's decision to declare nuclear weapons state status in 1998. It uses PII to explain why India decided to conduct further nuclear tests after the first halting tests in 1974, and why it conducted them in 1998. To do so, it utilizes thousands of articles in the Indian print media in 1974 and in the 1990s to demonstrate that a sense of victimization and

entitlement regarding the nuclear issue did not exist in 1974, but had appeared by the 1998 decision.

Chapter 5 continues in the contemporary period and focuses on Sino-Japanese relations. Particularly, it focuses on China's decision to oppose Japan's entry into the UN Security Council as a permanent member in 2005, an opposition that continues today. Again using hundreds of articles in the official and mainstream Chinese media, it shows that the dominant goal of victimhood explains China's hostility to the idea of Japan as a permanent member of the Security Council.

This book makes three important contributions to the field of international relations. First, it offers a way to systematically treat history, specifically colonial history, as an explanatory variable. Colonialism was such a curious and hugely influential phenomenon. While the motivations of colonizers and the brutal effects of colonialism have been widely discussed, less attention has been paid to why and how this past continues to matter to the countries that have undergone it as they negotiate international society.

Second, it offers a new method of categorizing states that have very different power structures and regimes. International relations usually focuses on states that "matter" (based on their significant material capabilities), or are "successful" (based on their ability to impose or break norms).¹³ These are usually Western states. The behavior of developing nations is often overlooked. Even when they are taken into account, they are analyzed in contrast to developed nations on the basis of their disparities in economic or military power.¹⁴ But a large category of states claim that their past matters very much to them and have an ideology of victimhood, and this leads them to behave in ways that liberals or realists do not necessarily predict. Thus the transformative historical event of colonialism can be used as a tool to categorize these states and explain key variations in their foreign policy.

Third, it uses a new lens to look at two important examples from this category of states—India and China. Because these are rising powers, the dominant lens used to analyze and contrast their behavior has been state security. But as this book shows, not only does this exclude a recognition of the past that the states themselves emphasize is so important, but also it does not allow for the simple fact that in very important cases, their foreign policy behavior is not consistent with security explanations. When these countries feel that their sovereignty is threatened, non-negotiable borders are at stake, or their prestige might suffer, PII better explains their behavior than traditional approaches that emphasize security only.

In India and China, the colonial history of each is deeply rooted in their culture, in their education and in their politics. Children, growing up, hear stories or study in school anecdotes and “facts” about their colonial history¹⁵—the Bengal famine in India that killed millions was caused by British policies,¹⁶ the British chopped off the thumbs of weavers in India so they would be unable to produce textiles that were higher quality than British manufactured goods,¹⁷ Indian and Chinese historical artifacts were looted and sent out of the country, “no dogs or Chinese” and “no dogs or Indians” signs were posted in the parks and clubs,¹⁸ the Japanese massacred, pillaged and raped in Nanjing, and many others. This emphasis on their colonial past means that any discourse of “engaging” or “managing” these two powers needs to move beyond simple security explanations of their behavior and include their sense of victimhood and its corollary, a sense of entitlement and recovery in international relations.

Whether one believes the brutality of colonialism and the suffering of these countries is exaggerated or not, and certainly at times it is, what is important is that these countries believe it and respond accordingly. That is the fundamental basis of this book.