# The Coming of the Leviathan

His Thesis:

How state-level societies differ from tribal ones; "pristine'' versus competitive state formation; different theories of state formation, including some dead ends like irrigation, leading to an explanation of why states emerged early on in some parts of the world and not in others

## Part 1: Start

State-level societies differ from tribal ones in several important respects. 1 First, they possess a centralized source of authority, whether in the form

of a king, president, or prime minister. This source of authority deputizes a hierarchy of subordinates who are capable, at least in principle, of enforcing rules on the whole of the society. The source of authority trumps all others with.in its territory, which means that it is sovereign. All administrative levels, such as lesser chiefs, prefects, or administrators, derive their decision­making authority from their formal association with the sovereign.

Second, that source of authority is backed by a monopoly of the legitimate means of coercion, in the form of an army and/or police. The power of the state is sufficient to prevent segments, tribes, or regions from seceding or otherwise separating themselves. (This is what distinguishes a state from a chiefdom.)

Third, the authority of the state is territorial rather than kin based. Thus France was not really a state in Merovingian times when it was led by a king of the Franks rather than the king of France. Since membership in a state does not depend on kinship, it can grow much larger than a tribe.

Fourth, states are far more stratified and unequal than tribal societies, with the ruler and his administrative staff often separating themselves off from the rest of the society. In some cases they become a hereditary elite. Slavery and serfdom, while not unknown in tribal societies, expand enormously under the aegis of states.

Finally, states are legitimated by much more elaborate forms of religious belief, with a separate priestly class as its guardian. Sometimes that priestly class takes power directly, in which case the state is a theocracy; sometimes It is controlled by the secular ruler, in which case it is labeled caesaropapist; and sometimes it coexists with secular rule under some form of power sharing.

With the advent ofd1e state, we exit out of kinship and into the realm of political development proper. The next few chapters will look closely at how China, India, the Muslim world, and Europe made the transition out of kinship and tribalism and into more impersonal state institutions. Once states come into being, kinship becomes an obstacle to political development, since it threatens to return political relationships to the small-scale, personalities of tribal societies. It is therefore not enough merely to develop a state; the state must avoid retribalization or what I label repatrimonialization.

Not all societies around the world made this transition to statehood on their own. Most of Melanesia consisted of acephalous tribal societies (that is, lacking centralized authority) prior to the arrival of European colonial powers in the nineteenth century, as did roughly half of sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of South and Southeast Asia.2 The fact that these regions had no long history of statehood very much affected their development prospects after they achieved independence in the second half of the twentieth century, especially when compared to colonized parts of East Asia where state traditions were deeply embedded. Why China developed n state at a very early point in its history, while Papua New Guinea did not, despite the latter having been settled by human beings for a longer period of time, is one of the questions I hope to answer.

### THEORIES OF STATE FORMATION

Anthropologists and archaeologists distinguish between what they call "pristine" and "competitive" state formation. Pristine state formation is the initial emergence of a state (or chiefdom) out of a tribal-level society. Competitive formation occurs only after the first state gets going. States are usually so much better organized and powerful than the surrounding tribal-level societies that they either conquer and absorb them, or else are emulated by tribal neighbors who wish not to be conquered. While there are many historical examples of competitive state formation, no one has ever observed the pristine version, so political philosophers, anthropologists. and archaeologists can only speculate as to how the first state or states arose. There are several categories of explanation, including social contract, irrigation, population pressure, war and violence, and circumscription.

## Part 1 End, Part 2 "State as Voluntary"

### The State as a Voluntary Social Contract

Social contract theorists like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau were not in the first instance trying to give empirical accounts of how the state arose. They were attempting, rather, to understand a government's basis of legitimacy. But it is still worth thinking through whether the first states could have arisen through some form of explicit agreement among tribesmen to establish centralized authority.

Thomas Hobbes lays out the basic "deal" underlying the state: in return for giving up the right to do whatever one pleases, the state (or Leviathan) through its monopoly of force guarantees each citizen basic security. The state can provide other kinds of public goods as well, like property rights, roads, currency, uniform weights and measures, and external defense, which citizens cannot obtain on their own. In return, citizens give the state the right to tax, conscript, and otherwise demand things of them. Tribal societies can provide some degree of security, but can provide only limited public goods because of their lack of centralized authority. So if the state arose by social contract, we would have to posit that at some point in his­ tory, a tribal group decided voluntarily to delegate dictatorial powers to one individual to rule over them. The delegation would not be temporary, as in the election of a tribal chief, but permanent, to the king and all his descendants. And it would have to be on the basis of consensus on the part of all of the tribal segments, each of which had the option of simply wandering off if it didn't like the deal.

It seems highly unlikely that the first state arose out of an explicit social contract if the chief issue motivating it were simply economic, like the protection of property rights or the provision of public goods. Tribal societies are egalitarian and, within the context of close-knit kinship groups, very free. States, by contrast, are coercive, domineering, and hierarchical, which is why Friedrich Nietzsche called the state the "coldest of all cold monsters:' We could imagine a free tribal society delegating authority to a single dictator only under the most extreme duress, such as the imminent danger of invasion and extermination by an outside invader, or to a religious figure if an epidemic appeared ready to wipe out the community. Roman dictators were in fact elected in this fashion during the Republic, such as when the city was threatened by Hannibal after the Battle of Cannae in 216 B.C. But this means that the real driver of state formation is violence or the threat of violence, making the social contract an efficient rather than a final cause.

### The State as a Hydraulic-Engineering Project

A variant of the social contract theory, over which a lot of unnecessary ink has been spilled, is Karl Wittfogel's "hydraulic" theory of the state. Wittfogel, a former Marxist turned anticommunist, expanded on Marx's theory of the Asiatic mode of production, providing an economic explanation for the emergence of dictatorships outside the West. He argued that the rise of the state in Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, and Mexico was driven by the need for large-scale irrigation, which could be managed only by a centralized bureaucratic state.3

There are many problems with the hydraulic hypothesis. Most early irrigation projects in regions with nascent states were small and locally managed. Large engineering efforts like the Grand Canal in China were undertaken only after a strong state had already been constructed and thus were effects rather than causes of state formation.4 For Wittfogel's hypothesis to be true, we would have to imagine a group of tribesmen getting together one day and saying to each other, "We could become a lot richer if we turned over our cherished freedom to a dictator, who would be responsible for managing a huge hydraulic-engineering project, the likes of which the world has never seen before. And we will give up that freedom not just for the duration of the project, but for all time, because future generations will need a good project manager as well:' If this scenario were plausible, the European Union would have turned into a state long ago.

## Part 3 "Population Density"

### Population Density

The demographer Ester Boserup has argued that population increase and high population densities have been important drivers of technological innovation. The dense populations around river systems in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China spawned intensive systems of agriculture involving large-scale irrigation, new higher-yielding crops, and other tools. Population density promotes state formation by permitting specialization and a division of labor between elites and nonelite groups. Low-density band­ or tribal-level societies can mitigate conflict simply by moving away from one another, hiving off segments when they find they can't coexist. Dense populations in newly created urban centers do not have this option. Scarcity of land or access to certain key public resources are much more likely to trigger conflicts, which then might require more centralized forms of political authority to control.

But even if higher population density is a necessary condition for state formation, we are still left with two unanswered questions: What causes population density to increase in the first place? And what is the mechanism connecting dense populations with states?

The first question might seem to have a simple Malthusian answer: population increase is brought about by technological innovation such as the agricultural revolution, which greatly increases the carrying capacity of a given piece of land, which then leads parents to have more children. The problem is that a number of hunter-gatherer societies operate well below their local environment's long-term productive capacity. The New Guinea highlanders and the Amazonian Indians have developed agriculture, but they do not produce the food surpluses of which they are technically capable. So the mere technological possibility of increased productivity and increased output, and therefore increased population, does not necessarily explain why it actually came about.5 Some anthropologists have suggested that in certain hunter-gatherer societies, increases in food supply are met with decreasing amounts of work because their members value leisure over work. Inhabitants of agricultural societies may be richer on average, but they also have to work much harder, and the trade-off may not seem appealing. Alternatively, it may simply be the case that hunter­ gatherers are stuck in what economists call a low-level equilibrium trap. That is, they have the technology to plant seeds and shift to agriculture, but the social expectations for sharing surpluses quickly quash private incentives to move to higher levels ofproductivity.6

It could be that the causality here is reversed: people in early societies would not produce a surplus on their own until compelled to do so by rulers who could hold a whip hand over them. The masters, in turn, might not want to work harder themselves but were perfectly happy to compel others to do so. The emergence of hierarchy would then be the result not of economic factors but rather of political factors like military conquest or compulsion. The building of the pyramids in Egypt comes to mind.

Hence, population density may not be a final cause of state formation' but rather an intervening variable that is the product of some other as yet unidentified factor.

## Part 4, "States as the Product of Violence"

### States as the Product of Violence and Compulsion

The weaknesses and gaps in all of the explanations that are primarily eco­ nomic in focus point to violence as an obvious source of state formation. That is, the transition from tribe to state involves huge losses in freedom and equality. It is hard to imagine societies giving all this up even for the potentially large gains of irrigation. 'foe stakes have to be much higher and can be much more readily explained by the threat to life itself posed by organized violence.

We know that virtually all human societies have engaged in violence, particularly at the tribal level. Hierarchy and the state could have emerged when one tribal segment conquered another one and took control of its territory. The requirements of maintaining political control over the conquered tribe led the conquerors to establish centralized repressive institutions, which evolved into an administrative bureaucracy of a primitive state. Especially if the tribal groups differ linguistically or ethnically, it is likely that the victor would establish a relationship of dominance over the vanquished, and that class stratification would become entrenched. Even the threat of this kind of conquest by a foreign tribe would encourage tribal groups to establish more permanent, centralized forms of command and control, as happened with the Cheyenne and Pueblo Indians.7

This scenario of a tribe conquering a settled society has unfolded countless times in recorded history, with waves of Tanguts, Khitai, Huns, Rurzhen, Aryans, Mongols, Vikings, and Germans founding states on this basis. The only question, then, is whether this was how the very first states got their start. Centuries of tribal warfare in places Uke Papua New Guinea and southern Sudan have not produced state-level societies. Anthropologists have argued that tribal societies have leveling mechanisms to redistribute power after conflict; the Nuer simply absorb their enemies rather than rule them. So it appears that still other causal factors are needed to explain the rise of states. It was only when violent tribal groups spilled out of the steppes of inner Asia or the Arabian desert or the mountains of Afghanistan that more centralized political units formed.

## Part 5 "Circumscription"

### Circumscription and Other Geographical-Environmental Factors

The anthropologist Robert Carneiro has noted that although warfare may be a universal and necessary condition for state formation, it is not a sufficient one. He argues that it is only when increases in productivity take place within a geographically circumscribed area like a river valley, or when other hostile tribes effectively circumscribe another tribe's territory, that it is possible to explain the emergence of hierarchical states. In uncircumscribed, low-population-density situations, weaker tribes or individuals can simply run away. But in places like the Nile valley, bounded by deserts and the ocean, or in the mountain valleys of Peru, that were bounded by deserts, jungles, and high mountains, this option didn't exist.8 Circumscription would also explain why higher productivity led to greater population density, since people didn't have the option of moving away.

The tribes of the New Guinea highlands have agriculture and live in circumscribed valleys, so those factors alone cannot explain the rise of states. Absolute scale might also be important. Mesopotamia, the Nile valley, and the Valley of Mexico were all relatively large agricultural areas that were nonetheless circumscribed by mountains, deserts, and oceans. Larger and more concentrated military formations can be raised, and can project their power over larger areas, particularly if they have domesticated horses or camels. So it was not just circumscription, but also the size and accessibility of the area being circumscribed, that determined whether a state would form. Circumscription would help early state builders in another way as well, by protecting them from external enemies outside the river valley or island while ever-larger forces were being marshaled. Across Oceania, chiefdoms and protostates were formed only on the larger islands like Fiji, Tonga, and Hawaii, not on the smaller ones like the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, or the Trobriands. New Guinea is a large island, but it is extremely mountainous and cut up into a myriad of tiny microenvironments.

### The State as the Product of Charismatic Authority

Archaeologists who speculate about the origins of politics tend to be biased in favor of materialistic explanations like environment and level of technology, rather than cultural factors like religion, simply because we know more about the material environment of early societies.9 But it seems extremely likely that religious ideas were critical to early state formation, since they could effectively legitimate the transition to hierarchy and loss of freedom enjoyed by tribal societies. Max Weber distinguished what he called charismatic authority from either its traditional or modern-rational variants.10 The Greek word charisma means "touched by God"; a charismatic leader asserts authority not because he is elected by his fellow tribesmen for leadership ability but because he is believed to be a designee of God.

Religious authority and military prowess go hand in hand. Religious authority allows a particular tribal leader to solve the large-scale collective action problem of uniting a group of autonomous tribes. To a much larger degree than economic benefit, religious authority can explain why a free tribal people would be willing to make a permanent delegation of authority to a single individual and that individual's kin group. The leader can then use that authority to create a centralized military machine that can conquer recalcitrant tribes as well as ensure domestic peace and security, which then reinforces the leader's religious authority in a positive-feedback loop. The only problem, however, is that you need a new form of religion, one that can overcome the inherent scale limitations of ancestor worship and other kinds of particularistic forms of worship.

There is a concrete historical case of this process unfolding, which was the rise of the first Arab state under the Patriarchal and Umayyad caliphates. Tribal peoples inhabited the Arabian peninsula for many centuries, living on the borders of state-level societies like Egypt, Persia, and Rome/Byzantium. The harshness of their environment and its unsuitability for agriculture explained why they were never conquered, and thus why they never felt military pressure to form themselves into a centralized state. They operated as merchants and intermediaries between nearby settled societies but were incapable of producing a substantial surplus on their own.

Things changed dramatically, however, with the birth of the Prophet Muhammad in A.O. 570 in the Arabian town of Mecca. According to Muslim tradition, Muhammad received his first revelation from God in his fortieth year and began preaching to the Meccan tribes. He and his followers were persecuted in Mecca, so they moved to Medina in 622. He was asked to mediate among the squabbling Medinan tribes, and did so by drafting the so-called Constitution of Medina that defined a universal umma, or community of believers, that transcended tribal loyalties. Muhammad's polity did not yet have all the characteristics of a true state, but it made a break with kinship-based systems not on the basis of conquest but through the writing of a social contract underpinned by the prophet's charismatic authority. After several years of fighting, the new Muslim polity gained adherents and conquered Mecca, uniting central Arabia into a single state-level society.

Normally in conquest states the lineage of the founding tribal leader evolves into the ruling dynasty. This didn't happen in Muhammad's case because he had only a daughter, Fatima, and no sons. Leadership of the new state thus passed to one of Muhammad's companions in the Umayyad clan, a parallel segment in Muhammad's Quraysh tribe. The Umayyads did evolve into a dynasty, and the Umayyad state under Uthman and Mu'awiya quickly went on to conquer Syria, Egypt, and Iraq, imposing Arab rule over these preexisting state-level societies.11

There is no clearer illustration of the importance of ideas to politics than the emergence of an Arab state under the Prophet Muhammad. The Arab tribes played an utterly marginal role in world history until that point; it was only Muhammad's charismatic authority that allowed them to unify and project their power throughout the Middle East and North Africa. The tribes had no economic base to speak of; they gained economic power through the interaction of religious ideas and military organization, and then were able to take over agricultural societies that did produce sur­ pluses. 12 This was not a pure example of pristine state formation, since the Arab tribes had the examples of established states such as Persia and Byzantium all around them that they could emulate and eventually take over. Moreover, the power of tribalism remained so strong that subsequent Arab states were never able to overcome it fully or to create state bureaucracies not heavily influenced by tribal politics (see chapter 13). This forced later Arab and Turkish dynasties to resort to extraordinary measures to free themselves from the influence of kinship and tribal ties, in the form of slave armies and administrators recruited entirely from foreigners.

While the founding of the first Arab state is a particularly striking illustration of the political power of religious ideas, virtually every other state has relied on religion to legitimate itself. The founding myths of the Greek, Roman, Hindu, and Chinese states all trace the regime's ancestry back to a divinity, or at least to a semidivine hero. Political power in early states cannot be understood apart from the religious rituals that the ruler controlled and used to legitimate his power. Consider, for example, the following ode to the founder of China's Shang Dynasty, from the *Book of Odes:*

*Heaven commissioned the swallow*

*To descend and give birth to the [father of our] Shang*

*[His descendants] dwelt in the land of Yin and became great.*

*{Then] long ago Ti appointed the martial T'ang*

*To regulate the boundaries through the four quarters . . .*

Another poem asserts:

*Profoundly wise were {the lords of] Shang*

*And long had there appeared the omens [of the dynasty};*

*When the water of the deluge spread vast abroad,*

*Yu arranged and divided the regions of the land. 13*

## Part 6, Conclusion

We seem to be getting closer to a fuller explanation for pristine state formation. We need the confluence of several factors. First, there needs to be a sufficient abundance of resources to permit the creation of surpluses above what is necessary for subsistence. This abundance can be natural: the Pacific Northwest was so full of game and fish that the hunter-gatherer­ level societies there were able to generate chiefdoms, if not states. But more often abundance is made possible through technological advances like agriculture. Second, the absolute scale of the society has to be sufficiently large to permit the emergence of a rudimentary division of labor and a ruling elite. Third, that population needs to be physically constrained so that it increases in density when technological opportunities present themselves, and in order to make sure that subjects cannot run away when coerced. And finally, tribal groups have to be motivated to give up their freedom to the authority of a state. This can come about through the threat of physical extinction by other, increasingly well-organized groups. Or it can result from the charismatic authority of a religious leader. Taken together, these appear to be plausible factors leading to the emergence of a state in places like the Nile valley. 14

Thomas Hobbes argued that the state or Leviathan came about as a result of a rational social contract among individuals who wanted to solve the problem of endemic violence and end the state of war. At the beginning of chapter 2 I suggested that there was a fundamental fallacy in this, and all liberal social contract theories, insofar as it presupposed a presocial state of nature in which human beings lived as isolated individuals. Such a state of primordial individualism never existed; human beings are social by nature and do not have to make a self-interested decision to organize themselves into groups. The particular form that social organization takes is frequently the result of rational deliberation at higher levels of development. But at lower ones, it evolves spontaneously out of the building blocks created by human biology.

But there is a flip side to the Hobbesean fallacy. Just as there was never a clean transition from an anomic state of nature to an orderly civil society, so there was never a complete solution to the problem of human violence. Human beings cooperate to compete, and they compete to cooperate. The birth of the Leviathan did not permanently solve the problem of violence; it simply moved it to a higher level. Instead of tribal segments fighting one another, it was now states that were the primary protagonists in increasingly large-scale wars. The first state to emerge could create a victor's peace but over time faced rivals as new states borrowing the same political techniques rose to challenge its predominance.

## Part 6 conclusion end

### WHY WEREN'T STATES UNIVERSAL?

We are now in a position to understand why states failed to emerge in certain parts of the world like Africa and Oceania, and why tribal societies persist in regions like Afghanistan, lndia, and the uplands of Southeast Asia. The political scientist Jeffrey Herbst has argued that the absence of indigenous states in many parts of Africa flows from the confluence of several familiar factors: "The fundamental problem facing state-builders in Africa—be they colonial kings, colonial governors, or presidents in the independent era—has been to project authority over inhospitable territories that contain relatively low densities of people." 15 He points out that, contrary to popular imagination, only 8 percent of the continent's land has a tropical climate, and that 50 percent receives inadequate rainfall to support regular agriculture. Though the human species got its start in Africa, human beings have thrived better in other parts of the world. Population densities had always been low throughout the continent until the arrival of modern agriculture and medicine; it was not until 1975 that Africa reached the population density that Europe enjoyed in the year 1500. Parts of Africa that are exceptions to this generalization, like the fertile Great Lakes region and the Great Rift Valley, have supported much higher population densities and indeed saw the early emergence of centralized states.

The physical geography of Africa has also made the projection of power difficult. The continent has few rivers that are navigable over long stretches (again, exceptions to th.is rule like the lower Nile support this point, since it was home to one of the world's first states). The great deserts of the Sahel are a huge barrier to both trade and conquest, in contrast to the less arid steppe lands of Eurasia. Those mounted Muslim warriors who did manage to cross this obstacle soon found their horses dying of encephalitis from the tsetse fly, which explains why the Muslim parts of West Africa are limited to the northern parts of Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, and the like. 16 In the parts of Africa that are covered by tropical forests, the difficulty of building and maintaining roads was an important obstacle to state building. The hard-surfaced roads the Romans built in Britain were still being used more than a millennium after the collapse of Roman power there; few roads can last more than a few seasons in the tropics.

There are relatively few regions in Africa that are clearly circumscribed by physical geography. This has made it extraordinarily difficult for territorial rulers to push their administration into the hinterland and to control populations. Low population density has meant that new land was usually available; people could respond to the threat of conquest simply by retreating farther into the bush. State consolidation based on wars of conquest never took place in Africa to the extent it did in Europe simply because the motives and possibilities for conquest were much more limited. 17 This meant, according to Herbst, that the transition from a tribal to a territorial conception of power with clearly conceived administrative boundaries of the sort that existed in Europe did not take place. 18 The emergence of states in parts of the continent that were circumscribed, like the Nile valley, is an exception fully consistent with the underlying rule.

The reason for the absence of states in aboriginal Australia may be similar to that which pertains to Africa. Australia is for the most part an extremely arid and undifferentiated continent; despite the length of time that human beings have lived there, population density has always been extremely low. The absence of agriculture and of naturally circumscribed regions may explain the failure of political structures above the level of tribe and Lineage to emerge.

The situation in Melanesia is rather different. The region consists entirely of islands, so there is natural circumscription; in addition, agriculture there was invented long ago. Here the problem is one of scale and the difficulties of power projection, given the mountainous nature of most of the islands. The mountain valleys into which the islands are divided are small and capable of supporting only a limited population, and it is extremely difficult to project power over long distances. As noted earlier, the larger islands with more extensive fertile plains, such as Fiji and Hawaii, did see the emergence of chiefdoms and states.

Mountains also explain the persistence of tribal forms of organization in many of the world's upland regions, including Afghanistan; the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria; the highlands of Laos and Vietnam; and Pakistan's tribal agencies. Mountains simply make these regions very difficult for states and their armies to conquer and hold. Turks, Mongols, and Persians, followed by the British, Russians, and now the Ameri­ cans and NATO forces have all tried to subdue and pacify Afghanistan's tribes and to build a centralized state there, with very modest success.

Understanding the conditions under which pristine state formation occurred is interesting because it helps to define some of the material conditions under which states emerge. But in the end, there are too many interacting factors to be able to develop one strong, predictive theory of when and how states formed. Some of the explanations for their presence or absence begin to sound like Kipling Just So stories. For example, in parts of Melanesia the environmental conditions are quite similar to those of Fiji or Tonga—large islands with agriculture supporting potentially dense populations—where no state emerged. Perhaps the reason has to do with religion, or particular accidents of unrecoverable history.

It is not clear how important it is to develop such a theory, however, since the vast majority of states around the world were the products of competitive rather than pristine state formation. Many states were formed, moreover, in historical times for which we have a written record. Chinese state formation, in particular, began extremely early, somewhat after Egypt and Mesopotamia, and contemporaneously with the rise of states around the Mediterranean and in the New World. There are extensive written and archaeological records of early Chinese history, moreover, that give us a far more contextualized sense of Chinese politics. But most important, the state that emerged in China was far more modern in Max Weber's sense than any of its counterparts elsewhere. The Chinese created a uniform, multilevel administrative bureaucracy, something that never happened in Greece or Rome. The Chinese developed an explicit antifamilistic political doctrine, and its early rulers sought to undermine the power of entrenched families and kinship groups in favor of impersonal administration. This state engaged in a nation-building project that created a powerful and uniform culture, a culture powerful enough to withstand two millennia of political breakdown and external invasion. The Chinese political and cultural space extended over a far larger population than that of the Romans. The Romans ruled an empire, limiting citizenship initially to a relatively small number of people on the Italian peninsula. While that empire eventually stretched from Britain to North Africa to Germany to Syria, it consisted of a heterogeneous collection of peoples who were allowed a considerable degree of self-rule. By contrast, even though the Chinese monarch called himself an emperor rather than a king, he ruled over something that looked much more like a kingdom or even a state in its uniformity.

The Chinese state was centralized, bureaucratic, and enormously despotic. Marx and Wittfogel recognized this characteristic of Chinese politics by their use of terms like "the Asiatic mode of production" and “Oriental despotism.” What I argue in succeeding chapters is that so-called Oriental despotism is nothing other than the precocious emergence of a politically modern state. In China, the state was consolidated before other social actors could institutionalize themselves, actors like a hereditary, territorially based aristocracy, an organized peasantry, cities based on a merchant class, churches, or other autonomous groups. Unlike in Rome, the Chinese military remained firmly under the state's control and never posed an independent threat to its political authority. This initial skewing of the balance of power was then locked in for a long period, since the mighty state could act to prevent the emergence of alternative sources of power, both economic and political. No dynamic modern economy emerged until the twentieth century that could upset this distribution of power. Strong foreign enemies periodically conquered parts or the whole of the country, but these tended to be tribal peoples with less-developed cultures, who were quickly absorbed and Sinified by their own subjects. Not until the arrival of the Europeans in the nineteenth century did China really have to contend with foreign models that challenged its own state­ centered path of development.

The Chinese pattern of political development differs from that of the West insofar as the development of a precociously modern state was not