

# Chinese visions of self and Other: the international politics of noses

WILLIAM A. CALLAHAN\*

How does China view the world? In the post-American era, this question has vexed people both inside and outside the People's Republic of China (PRC) who want to know what international relations will look like if and when China becomes the world's most powerful country.

Over the past two decades, it has become popular among officials and scholars to answer this question by presenting China's traditional world order as an alternative to the current world order's Westphalian system. This trend is based on a reading of Chinese history and culture that argues that in order to understand the PRC in the twenty-first century, we need to understand China as an enduring civilization-state that is governed by the traditional ideals of harmony, all-under-heaven (*tianxia*), the tributary system, and so on.<sup>1</sup> Rather than 'democratic peace theory', we now have 'Confucian peace theory', which argues that in the early modern period (1300–1800) east Asia enjoyed five centuries of peace, while Europe suffered five centuries of war.<sup>2</sup> While European thought violently separates insiders from outsiders, some argue that in Chinese civilization 'nobody can be excluded or pushed aside, since no one is essentially incompatible with the others. Nothing is considered as being "foreign" or "pagan"'.<sup>3</sup> China's world order thus is not simply different from the western world order; it is better, we are told. Xi Jinping's new 'Global Civilization Initiative', which complements his Global Development Initiative and Global Security Initiative, resonates with this by

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see: Zhao Tingyang, *All under heaven: the Tianxia system for a possible world order* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2021); Martin Jacques, *When China rules the world: the end of the western world and the birth of a new global order* (New York: Penguin, 2009); David C. Kang, *East Asia before the West: five centuries of trade and tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> See Robert E. Kelly, 'A "Confucian long peace" in pre-western east Asia?', *European Journal of International Relations* 18: 3, 2012, pp. 407–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066111409771>; Kang, *East Asia before the West*; Zhao, *All under heaven*.

<sup>3</sup> Zhao Tingyang, 'A political world philosophy in terms of all-under-heaven (Tian-xia)', *Diogenes* 56: 1, 2009, p. 10, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192109102149>.

presenting China's model of modernization as 'a new form of human civilization' for the world.<sup>4</sup> In this way, elites in China—as well as in India, Russia and Turkey, and even in the US—increasingly use the concept of 'civilization-state' to understand themselves, and their relations with other countries, in terms of history, culture and identity.<sup>5</sup>

To engage in this debate at the macro level of competing world orders, this article considers how identity, culture and even civilization-states themselves all take shape through the interplay of social relations and international relations. As David Campbell argues, US foreign policy in its most basic sense is engaging with the Other, and, in so doing, is constructing the self. Campbell argues that there are two senses of 'foreign policy'. On the one hand, it refers to all practices of differentiation between self and Other. This practice of foreign policy takes place alongside the state, emerging from encounters with difference in ethnicity, race, class, gender, region, sexuality and so on. On the other hand, the second sense of foreign policy (which Campbell capitalizes as Foreign Policy) is a performance by the state that serves to reproduce the identity constructed by the first mode of foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> Foreign Policy's job, then, is to guard the territorial borders inscribed by the social relations of foreign policy. Foreign policy, in both senses, is about how frontiers of identity and territory shape each other. Indeed, in recent years much has been written about the role of race, slavery, empire and civilization in creating the current international system, and how the ideas and practices of white supremacy and racial hierarchy reproduce each other through a dynamic that joins personal experiences with global structures.<sup>7</sup> The Westphalian world order and non-western alternatives to it emerge through the interplay of official and non-official foreign policy performances at the interface of popular culture and world politics.<sup>8</sup>

Certainly, realists like John Mearsheimer would dismiss appeals to culture in world politics, because they see this as merely propaganda that seeks to obscure the real material politics of the security dilemma in the international

<sup>4</sup> See Ryan Ho Kilpatrick, 'China's "Xivilizing" mission', China Media Project, 4 May 2023, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2023/05/04/chinas-xivilizing-mission/>. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 30 June 2023.)

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Coker, *The rise of the civilizational state* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2019); Emma Mawdsley, 'Introduction: India as a "civilizational state"', *International Affairs* 99: 2, 2023, pp. 427–32 at p. 427, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia053>; Jayati Srivastava, 'The narratives and aesthetics of the civilizational state in the "new" India', *International Affairs* 99: 2, 2023, pp. 457–74, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia031>.

<sup>6</sup> David Campbell, *Writing security: United States foreign policy and the politics of identity*, revised edn (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 68–70.

<sup>7</sup> Jasmine K. Gani and Jenna Marshall, 'The impact of colonialism on policy and knowledge production in International Relations', *International Affairs* 98: 1, 2022, pp. 5–22, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia026>; Amitav Acharya, 'Race and racism in the founding of the modern world order', *International Affairs* 98: 1, 2022, pp. 23–43, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia019>; Robbie Shilliam, 'Race and racism in International Relations: retrieving a scholarly inheritance', *International Politics Reviews* vol. 8, 2020, pp. 152–95, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41312-020-00084-9>.

<sup>8</sup> See Rhys Crilley, 'Where we at? New directions for research on popular culture and world politics', *International Studies Review* 23: 1, 2021, pp. 164–80, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ist/viaa027>; Tim Aistrophe and Stefanie Fishel, 'Horror, apocalypse and world politics', *International Affairs* 96: 3, 2020, pp. 631–48, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia008>.

system.<sup>9</sup> But as the prominent scholar-official Qin Yaqing argues, the heart of Chinese foreign policy is not a realist security dilemma but an interpretivist ‘identity dilemma’: who is China, and how does it view the world?<sup>10</sup> Regardless of whether realists (and others) take it seriously, when influential officials and scholars in the PRC think of China’s future in terms of identity and culture it behoves analysts to understand how ideas and images shape the way Chinese people frame foreign policy problems, and thus foreign policy solutions.

The article thus uses interpretive theory and methods to probe how the Chinese self is constructed with and against the outsider, the foreigner, the Other. While much has been written about how China’s international relations are best seen as intercultural relations that do not exclude the Other, this article examines how self/Other relations are visualized in terms of the human face, in particular through iconic images that construct the Chinese self with and against foreigners with large noses.

While it may seem to be an odd intervention, visualizing foreigners in terms of large noses was so popular in imperial China that it produced its own concept, ‘deep-set eyes and high-bridged nose’ (*shenmu gaobi*), that endures up to the present day.<sup>11</sup> Such nose-focused experiences suggest that it is profitable to take a closer look at the ways that ‘external appearance’ and ‘external relations’ are entangled in China.

The goal of this article is to chart how key Chinese sources engage in international relations through an examination of how they understand self/Other relations. It thus analyses how China’s ideological world-view is shaped by its view of the world, and especially through its visualization of ‘foreigners’. It critically juxtaposes images of central Asians in the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE, see figure 1), Euro-Americans during the Korean War (see figure 2) and Taiwanese in the twenty-first century (see figure 3) to explore how Chinese elites have engaged with the Other in complex ways. It first examines how the stereotypical view of the foreigner as ‘large-nosed’ was popularized in the Tang dynasty. But rather than the Chinese self just excluding difference, the article explores Maoist posters and aesthetic rhinoplasty to chart how this template worked to include large-nosed foreigners in a social hierarchy in positive as well as negative ways. The article thus considers how China’s ideological ‘world-view’ is shaped by how its artists, scholars and officials aesthetically ‘view the world’. This is a concern for International Relations (IR) scholars, because world-views shape how foreign policy-makers frame foreign policy problems—and thus foreign policy solutions.

<sup>9</sup> John Mearsheimer, *The tragedy of great power politics*, updated edn (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Qin Yaqing, ‘Guoji guanxi lilun Zhongguo xuepai shengcheng de keneng he biran’ [The Chinese school of International Relations theory: possibility and necessity], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi*, no. 3, 2006, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Marc S. Abramson, *Ethnic identity in Tang China* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 83.

**Figure 1: Tang dynasty *huren* figurine**



Source: Courtesy of Tong Ying. Reproduced with permission.

**Figure 2: ‘Germ warfare’ (Chinese Korean War propaganda poster, ca. 1952)**



Source: Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine (US), <http://resource.nlm.nih.gov/101559695>.

Figure 3: Aesthetic surgery in Taiwan



Source: Courtesy of Teng Shou-hsin, ed., *Dangdai Zhongwen kecheng keben 3* [A course in contemporary Chinese, Textbook vol. 3] (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe, 2016), p. 236. Reproduced with permission.

### Noses, self/Other relations and visual international politics

Chinese IR theorists often tell us that ‘face’, in the symbolic and social sense of status in human relations, is paramount in Chinese society and diplomacy. Here, cultivating social relations is presented as even more important than pursuing material interests.<sup>12</sup> Face is also used in China to distinguish insiders from outsiders in the foreign policy of social relations, where Euro-Americans are visualized as people with large noses in popular publications such as *Westerners through Chinese eyes*.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, such views of face, and in particular of noses, as marking essential difference emerged in 2023 when China’s top diplomat Wang Yi told his Japanese and South Korean colleagues, ‘No matter how much we dye our hair yellow or how sharp we make our noses, we can’t become Westerners. We should know where our roots are’.<sup>14</sup> Ren Zhengfei, the founder of Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei, similarly sees Euro-Americans in terms of their facial features: in an internal speech to Huawei personnel in 2021 he explains, ‘We need to focus

<sup>12</sup> For example, see Chih-yu Shih, *China and international theory: the balance of relationships* (London: Routledge, 2019); Qin Yaqing, *A relational theory of world politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Benjamin Tze Ern Ho, ‘About face—the relational dimension in Chinese IR discourse’, *Journal of Contemporary China* 25: 98, 2016, pp. 307–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2015.1075715>.

<sup>13</sup> Wang Jianming, ed., *Westerners through Chinese eyes* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1990).

<sup>14</sup> Wang Yi as quoted by *Global Times* (@globaltimesnews) via Twitter, 4 July 2023. The Tweet also includes a video of Wang speaking with Chinese subtitles.

on bringing in talent with “high-bridged noses” who have “western firepower”, i.e. Euro-Americans with advanced technical knowledge.<sup>15</sup> The 2023 Academy Award-winning film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* was criticized as anti-Semitic because it has a character named ‘Big Nose’ who is played by Jewish-American actress Jenny Slate. The film’s co-director Daniel Kwan was reported to have responded that the film was not anti-Semitic because “‘Big Nose’ is used in Chinese culture to refer to white people generally”.<sup>16</sup> While Wang, Ren and Kwan all insist that they are not criticizing foreigners here, these episodes each suggest that seeing Euro-Americans as ‘large-nosed foreigners’ is a common stereotype in contemporary Chinese culture.

Edward Said’s *Orientalism* is useful for making sense of such international self/Other relations because it critically analyses how European images of the Middle East creatively visualize non-Europeans in hierarchical ways.<sup>17</sup> As Said explains, the West creates and describes the Orient as part of imperial self/Other relations: the West becomes strong, masculine, rational and scientific only when it is contrasted with the East as weak, feminine, mysterious and exotic. Empire thus works not just through military coercion or economic exploitation; it is also an intellectual and artistic practice, where the West creates and governs the East through ideas and images. Such relations persist beyond formal empire through Euro-American hegemony in cultural, media and academic discourse, including the Eurocentrism of the concepts employed and the topics analysed in the discipline of IR.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, the cultural imperialism of Eurocentric concepts is not limited to hegemonic understandings of the Middle East. Many scholars have explored how western media produce ‘China’ as the Other in order to buttress the identity of the Euro-American self.<sup>19</sup> Yet few have analysed China’s representations of its foreign Others.<sup>20</sup> Even fewer have considered how visual images and international relations inform each other for China, both historically with images from the Chinese empire and in the present with visuals from the PRC as an emerging superpower.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Feng Chenchen, ‘Ren Zhengfei fahua: yao xiyin “gao bizi” lai Zhongguo, canjia women “sha zhu” de zhandou’ [Ren Zhengfei’s message: We must attract “high noses” to China to join us in our difficult work], *Phoenix TV*, 28 Sept. 2021, <https://tech.ifeng.com/c/89u5UgZG2wk>. Also see Josh Ye, ‘Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei wants to hire more foreign talent to boost firm’s research initiatives’, *South China Morning Post*, 29 Sept. 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/tech/big-tech/article/3150578/huawei-founder-ren-zhengfei-wants-hire-more-foreign-talent-boost>.

<sup>16</sup> Louise Chilton and Annabel Nugent, ‘Jenny Slate says *Everything Everywhere All at Once* directors emailed her over ‘big nose’ controversy’, *Independent*, 22 Feb. 2023, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/jenny-slate-big-nose-everything-everywhere-oscars-b2287116.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 2004; first published in 1978).

<sup>18</sup> See John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric conception of world politics: western international theory, 1760–2010* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Amitav Acharya, ‘Global International Relations (IR) and regional worlds: a new agenda for international studies’, *International Studies Quarterly* 58: 4, 2014, pp. 647–59, <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12171>.

<sup>19</sup> See George Karavas, ‘How images frame China’s role in African development’, *International Affairs* 96: 3, 2020, pp. 667–90, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaao060>; Chengxin Pan, *Knowledge, desire and power in global politics: western representations of China’s rise* (Sydney: Edward Elgar, 2012); Oliver Turner, *American images of China: identity, power, policy* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> See David Shambaugh, *Beautiful imperialist: China perceives America, 1972–1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Alan S. Whiting, *China eyes Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> See Abramson, *Ethnic identity in Tang China*, pp. 83–107; Shu-fang Cheng, ‘Huashi tuxing bei yuan bin:

This article aims to fill this gap by examining how the self/Other relations of Chinese foreign affairs are visualized in terms of different types of noses. The argument is that one way in which Chinese identity is produced is by defining the self with and against Others who have large noses. The goal is not to find the orthodox version of the Chinese nose. Rather, as Marc S. Abramson explains, during the Tang dynasty, the Chinese self was constructed as the ‘non-non-Chinese’, that is, the opposite of the Other in a strict binary formulation.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, in 2023 China’s top diplomat Wang Yi could only assert an east Asian identity by distinguishing it from a ‘western’ identity creatively defined in terms of yellow hair and sharp noses.

As with Euro-American racism, skin colour is an issue in Chinese identity politics.<sup>23</sup> However, for a number of reasons facial features are even more important. On the one hand, in Chinese culture the nose defines the self: the Chinese character for nose (*bi*) includes the character for self (*zi*).<sup>24</sup> Hence, when Chinese refer to themselves, they characteristically point to their nose, rather than their heart. The nose here has normative value as ‘the seat of righteousness (*yi*)’.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, Otherness is defined according to the popular Chinese concept—‘deep-set eyes and high-bridged nose’—that visualizes difference as a foreign policy activity both historically and today.<sup>26</sup>

Even as the ‘deep-set eyes and high-bridged nose’ concept has endured for 1,500 years, it does not refer to any unchanging essence of Chinese culture. Rather, the concept is modular in the sense of providing a template that takes on different meanings in different times: in the pre-modern period it visualized central Asians, and since the eighteenth century it generally visualizes Euro-Americans.<sup>27</sup> Rather than follow the racial logic to search for biological links between central Asians and Euro-Americans, it is more interesting to explore how the same phrase, ‘high-bridged nose’, works conceptually to take on new forms to define self and Other differently in different historical periods. Hence, the goal is not just to analyse the content of these images—and to categorize them as either central Asians or Euro-Americans—but also to see how the images work to create the self with and

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Zhigongtu de fengge xingzhi yu shewaiyishi’ [Visual representation of guests from afar: the style and materialized ideology concerning foreigners and foreign affairs in paintings of tribute-bearing envoys and official missions to China], *The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art*, no. 443, 2020, pp. 4–21; Laura Hostetler, *Qing colonial enterprise: ethnography and cartography in early modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Laura Hostetler and Xuemei Wu, trans. and eds, *Qing imperial illustrations of tributary peoples: a cultural cartography of empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

<sup>22</sup> Abramson, *Ethnic identity in Tang China*, p. 51.

<sup>23</sup> See Don Wyatt, *The blacks of premodern China* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Frank Dikötter, *The discourse of race in modern China* (London: Hurst, 1992).

<sup>24</sup> W. A. Callahan, ‘Discourse and perspective in Daoism: a linguistic interpretation of *ziran*’, *Philosophy East and West* 39: 2, 1989, pp. 171–89.

<sup>25</sup> Marc Samuel Abramson, ‘Deep eyes and high noses: physiognomy and the depiction of barbarians in Tang China’, in Nicola Di Cosmo and Don J. Wyatt, eds, *Political frontiers, ethnic boundaries and human geographies in Chinese history* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 119–59 at p. 130.

<sup>26</sup> See Abramson, *Ethnic identity in Tang China*, 83; Wen Hua, *Buying beauty: cosmetic surgery in China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> See Hostetler and Wu, *Qing imperial illustrations of tributary peoples*, p. 57; William R. Sargent, ed., *Treasures of Chinese export ceramics from the Peabody Essex Museum* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 217, 444, 446–7; Prathum Chumphengphan, *Chinese stone figurines at Wat Pho* (Bangkok: Amarin Printing and Publishing, 2005), pp. 17, 328–31.

against the Other. As we will see, although the cultural and ideological context of the Tang dynasty and Maoist China are radically different, noses functioned in similar ways to distinguish between Chinese and non-Chinese groups in a hierarchical system. Hence while China is certainly not unique in employing external appearance to visualize self/Other relations, these nose images provide examples of a more complex inclusion/exclusion dynamic for foreign affairs. Chinese images here do not just exclude the Other; at times, they also include difference in a hierarchical system. In other words, rather than describing an essential and unchanging 'Chinese culture', as do many assertions of Chinese-style IR theory, this analysis examines both continuities and changes: continuities in the focus on noses, and changes in their meaning and influence.

There is much textual evidence for Chinese understandings of foreign peoples, so what can visual IR add? Many analysts have noted that, while textual arguments about the distinction between Chinese and foreigners tend to reproduce sharp binary stereotypes with little room for alternative interpretations, visual images can be more complex and multifaceted.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, over the past decade in disciplinary IR there has been a greater appreciation of how analysis of visuals provides a number of advantages for understanding international violence, development and foreign policy.<sup>29</sup>

First, visuals, especially when they become icons circulated transnationally in social media, have the power to put issues on the international agenda.<sup>30</sup> As Rune Saugmann Andersen argues, in the twenty-first century, to transform local political violence into a global political event you need a visual (a video, a photograph, a cartoon, etc.).<sup>31</sup> Visuals thus do not just report IR issues, but can actively shape the way people, including foreign policy-makers, view the world and its problems.

Second, paying attention to visuals highlights the politics of representation where meaning is multiple and thus in need of active interpretation by analysts. As part of the 'aesthetic turn' in international politics, visual IR 'assumes that there is always a gap between a form of representation and what is represented', and appreciates how the 'difference between the represented and its representation is the very location of politics'.<sup>32</sup> The goal is to appreciate how meaning is intersubjectively constructed by the 'who, when, where and how' issues of the visual's production, distribution and viewership.<sup>33</sup> Visuals here do more than

<sup>28</sup> Abramson, 'Deep eyes and high noses', p. 119; Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: from history to myth* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 24, 32.

<sup>29</sup> For example, see Helen Berents and Constance Duncombe, 'Introduction: violence, visuality and world politics', *International Affairs* 96: 3, 2020, pp. 567–71, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaa058>; Aistrophe and Fishel, 'Horror, apocalypse and world politics'; Roland Bleiker, ed., *Visual global politics* (London: Routledge, 2018); Karavas, 'How images frame China's role'; William A. Callahan, *Sensible politics: visualizing International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>30</sup> Lene Hansen, 'How images make world politics: international icons and the case of Abu Ghraib', *Review of International Studies* 41: 2, 2015, pp. 263–88, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210514000199>.

<sup>31</sup> Rune Saugmann Andersen, 'Videos', in Mark B. Salter, ed., *Making things international 1: circuits and motion* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), pp. 255–64 at p. 260.

<sup>32</sup> Roland Bleiker, 'The aesthetic turn in international political theory', *Millennium* 30: 3, 2001, p. 510.

<sup>33</sup> See Gillian Rose, *Visual methodologies*, fourth edn (London: Sage, 2016); Bleiker, *Visual global politics*.



describe reality, because they also look to other images in a process of ‘intervisuality’ where an ‘image never stands alone. It belongs to a system of visibility’.<sup>34</sup> As Lene Hansen explains, the photographs of emaciated people in concentration camps in the Bosnian war in the 1990s were compelling, in part, because they intervisually evoked iconic images of people liberated from Nazi death camps in the Second World War.<sup>35</sup>

Third, while interpreting visuals certainly works through rational methods to find ‘meaning’, it also appreciates how visuals can viscerally move and connect people in ways that mobilize ‘affective communities’.<sup>36</sup> Such an affective politics works more through intervisual assemblages than through linear arguments.<sup>37</sup> As we will see, the visuals analysed in this article do more than the ideological work of promoting Confucianism or communism in China. One of their main purposes is the emotional affect-work of forming communities by mobilizing specific emotions that resonate: love, hate, fear and anxiety.

The three images presented in figures 1, 2 and 3 are not chosen because they are unique individual artefacts. Rather, as we will see in the analysis below, each image is important because it is iconic, illustrating the specificities of broad social, political and cultural trends from its historical context, as well as suggesting intervisual resonances with the other two images that come from different historical periods. The article thus critically juxtaposes these three nose images in order to provoke us to think about resonances between everyday social life and elite global politics.<sup>38</sup> While I actively interpret these images, I do so with reference to historical and contemporary understandings of their meaning and affect-work. In this way, these visual images allow us to explore both continuities in Chinese views of the Other, and the possibilities for complicating and resisting such orthodox foreign policy views.

## Tang huren figurines

The Tang dynasty is commonly seen in China as the apex of its civilization, and as the most cosmopolitan time in Chinese history that was even a model for east Asian governance.<sup>39</sup> At the beginning of the seventh century CE, the empire expanded both territorially, to include what was called the ‘western regions’ (*xiyu*, present-day Xinjiang and central Asia), and demographically, to include various central

<sup>34</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The emancipated spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 99.

<sup>35</sup> Lene Hansen, ‘Theorizing the image for security studies: visual securitization and the Muhammad cartoon crisis’, *European Journal of International Relations* 17: 1 2011, p. 53, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066110388593>.

<sup>36</sup> Emma Hutchison, *Affective communities in world politics: collective emotions after trauma* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Berents and Duncombe, ‘Introduction: violence, visibility and world politics’, pp. 567–68; Callahan, *Sensible politics*, pp. 2–3, 32–45.

<sup>37</sup> Bleiker, *Visual global politics*, pp. 1–29; Karavas, ‘How images frame China’s role’, p. 678.

<sup>38</sup> See Vivienne Shue, ‘Regimes of resonance: cosmos, empire, and changing technologies of CCP rule’, *Modern China* 48: 4, 2022, pp. 679–720, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00977004211068055>.

<sup>39</sup> Abramson, *Ethnic identity in Tang China*, p. vii; Chin-Hao Huang and David C. Kang, ‘State formation in Korea and Japan, 400–800 CE: emulation and learning, not Bellicist competition’, *International Organization* 76: 1, 2022, pp. 1–31, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818321000254>.

Asian peoples from along the transcontinental Silk Road.<sup>40</sup> In 647 CE, Emperor Taizong celebrated this inter-ethnic harmony with an official declaration: ‘Since antiquity every ruler has honoured the Chinese and denigrated the barbarians. I alone love them as one.’<sup>41</sup> Many Chinese and non-Chinese people mixed in the Tang capital of Chang’an (today’s Xi’an), where more than 150,000 foreigners from central Asia—generally called *huren*—worked as entertainers, traders and warriors.<sup>42</sup> The Tang dynasty is figured as China’s ‘golden age’ because it combined strong military power, a rich cultural life and a tolerant cosmopolitan society.

How did this cosmopolitan Tang dynasty order the world through visualizing other peoples? Tang images of foreigners as *huren* typically had ‘deep-set eyes and a high-bridged nose’, a concept which, as mentioned above, was so popular that it has become an enduring template used to distinguish insiders from outsiders up to the present day.<sup>43</sup> People in the Tang dynasty were fascinated by these foreigners, and artisans made thousands of ‘*huren* figurines’ (*huren yong*) for the Chinese elite. Hence these figurines are more than high art that represents the official view. Because of their mass production, distribution and consumption, they also show how artists can shape views of the Other through popular culture.

Importantly, the figurines provoke very different interpretations. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Chinese continue to be fascinated by *huren* figurines, which are displayed as historical evidence of China’s enduring inter-ethnic harmony that is based on the cultural assimilation of the Other. One figurine, which is prominently displayed in Beijing’s National Museum of China, as well as in the PRC’s civic education textbooks, speaks to a literal harmony of Chinese/*huren* relations: it shows two central Asians and two Chinese playing music together for a dancing *huren*.<sup>44</sup> These five figures are all placed on top of a very large camel, which is another symbol of exotic foreignness. Tang dynasty figurines thus are important both because they represent the high point of Chinese cosmopolitan civilization, and because they are presented as evidence of the success of China’s current harmonious inter-ethnic policy.

Yet such figurines can also provoke other interpretations. Rather than just promoting assimilation policies, the *huren* figurines also popularized the concept of ‘deep-set eyes and high-bridged noses’ as a key template of self/Other relations. As part of a broader re-evaluation of the cosmopolitan assessment of the Tang dynasty,<sup>45</sup> Abramson argues that these figurines are interesting because they show how the Chinese visualized social difference based on external appearance. The

<sup>40</sup> Abramson, *Ethnic identity in Tang China*, p. 87.

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Abramson, *Ethnic identity in Tang China*, p. 145. (Modified translation—in Abramson, the phrase is translated as ‘honoured the Han (*zhonghua*) and denigrated the non-Han (*yirong*).’)

<sup>42</sup> Ge Zhaoguang, *What is China? Territory, ethnicity, culture, and history* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), pp. 140–1.

<sup>43</sup> Abramson, *Ethnic identity in Tang China*, p. 83; Hostetler and Wu, *Qing imperial illustrations of tributary peoples*, p. 57; Wen, *Buying beauty*.

<sup>44</sup> Ningxia Museum, ed., *Sichou zhi lu: da xibei yi zhen* [Silk Road: the surviving treasures from north-west China] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2017), pp. 76, 197; *Pinde yu shehui* [Morality and society, 5th grade, semester 2] (Beijing: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 2012).

<sup>45</sup> Shao-yun Yang, *Early Tang China and the world, 618–750 CE* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

figurines' purpose is not to accurately represent how central Asians looked; rather, they exaggerate various features to create and circulate a stereotype of the Other: high-bridged nose, deep-set eyes, thick beard and so on. Hence, these figurines can also suggest interpretations that argue that central Asians were not assimilated into Tang Chinese life. Rather than acting as evidence for popular narratives of harmonious inter-ethnic relations, Abramson explains how the Tang empire's multi-ethnic society actually produced *anxiety* among the ruling elite. In this way Emperor Taizong's famous dictum does not just describe the joy of everyone getting along together; rather, it highlights a novel situation where the empire's fractious ethnic groups could only be brought together under his benevolent rule. The figurines thus show how Tang society employed sharp distinctions, where *huren* were valued for their difference. They were both 'despised and admired' for their exotic physical appearance: deep-set eyes and high-bridged noses showed them to be, for example, ferocious warriors, which is useful for people recruited as imperial bodyguards.<sup>46</sup> These figurines thus show how *huren* were included in Tang society, but not as equals; they were part of a hierarchy of ethnicities, where they were limited to particular roles, such as warriors. Rather than simply being excluded as most discussions of self/Other relations would suggest, here *huren* are both included and excluded in a social hierarchy that values their *difference*.

Such images of the foreign Other with a high-bridged nose are not limited to the Tang dynasty. They set the template for visualizing the Other and reappear at regular intervals in China's early-modern and modern history, albeit with a general shift away from representing central Asians to representing Euro-Americans.<sup>47</sup> And, as we will see below, in the late twentieth century high-bridged noses come back with a vengeance among Chinese, Taiwanese and South Koreans, through aesthetic surgery.

## Korean War propaganda posters in the People's Republic of China

Deep-set eyes and large noses are also prominent in propaganda posters produced by the Communist Party of China (CCP) in the Korean War era (1950–53).<sup>48</sup> During the Maoist period (1949–1976), propaganda posters were a key mode used by the CCP to explain policy to a largely illiterate population. Generally speaking, these mass-produced, mass-distributed and mass-consumed posters used vibrant images to visualize abstract ideas, such as revolution, solidarity and enemy.<sup>49</sup> As with the Tang figurines, many posters were produced, distributed and displayed in a decentralized process where individual artists had considerable independence to shape the visual message, albeit within the bounds of each particular ideological

<sup>46</sup> Abramson, 'Deep eyes and high noses', pp. 145–6.

<sup>47</sup> See Hostetler and Wu, *Qing imperial illustrations of tributary peoples*, p. 57; Sargent, *Treasures of Chinese export ceramics*, pp. 217, 444, 446–7; Prathum, *Chinese stone figurines at Wat Pho*, pp. 17, 328–31.

<sup>48</sup> See Stefan R. Landsberger, *Chinese propaganda posters* (Berlin: TASCHEN, 2019); Yang Pei Ming, *Chinese propaganda poster collection: catalogue 2013* (Shanghai: Shanghai Propaganda Poster Art Centre, 2013); Natascha Gentz and Yang Pei Ming, *Poster art of modern China: 1913–1997: exhibition catalogue* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2014).

<sup>49</sup> Landsberger, *Chinese propaganda posters*, pp. 14–19.

project.<sup>50</sup> Also as in the Tang dynasty, the PRC's Korean War images of friends and enemies are iconic because they set the tone for images of difference and the Other in the Maoist period, in ways that resonate with images from both earlier and later times.

**Figure 4: 'Long live the friendship between the peoples and the militaries of China and the Soviet Union' (early 1950s)**



Source: Courtesy of the Landsberger collection, Chinese posters.net, BG E15/542.

For Korean War-era posters, these vibrant images were used to visualize friends and enemies, both domestically and internationally. Here, 'the West' shifts from central Asians on the Tang dynasty's north-west frontier to refer to Euro-Americans in east Asia. Still, the CCP's images of large Euro-American noses resonate with the large noses on Tang *huren* figurines. Importantly, these noses do not simply work to exclude the Other. As figure 4 shows, Russian allies, like Tang dynasty *huren*, are valued as strong warriors, which can be seen in their high-bridged nose. American enemies, on the other hand, do not have high-bridged noses, but big noses (*dabizi*) (see figure 2),<sup>51</sup> in images that were reproduced numerous times in Chinese propaganda posters.<sup>52</sup>

The CCP faced a difficult situation in late 1950 when it joined the Korean War, not just in terms of material capabilities, but also in terms of propaganda

<sup>50</sup> See Sei Jeong Chin, 'The Korean War, anti-US propaganda, and the marginalization of dissent in China, 1950–1953', *Twentieth-century China* 48: 1, 2023, pp. 23–47 at p. 24, <http://doi.org/10.1353/tcc.2023.0002>.

<sup>51</sup> Figure 2 is from a Chinese propaganda campaign that accused the US of using biological warfare in the Korean War. For a discussion of the evidence for and against this claim see Frank Dikötter, *The tragedy of liberation: a history of the Chinese Revolution, 1945–57* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 144ff.

<sup>52</sup> See Yang, *Chinese propaganda poster collection*, pp. 27–36; Landsberger, *Chinese propaganda posters*, pp. 128–9.

strategy. It needed to craft a persuasive story to mobilize the Chinese people, who were already exhausted from nearly two decades of war. Following the PRC's official name for the conflict—the War to Resist America and Aid Korea—Beijing worked not just to support North Korea, but also to demonize the US. An article in the CCP's flagship newspaper *People's Daily* thus explained 'How to understand America' in wholly negative terms: 'every patriotic Chinese should hate America, despise America, and look down upon America'.<sup>53</sup> This was a hard sell, in part because the US had been China's ally in fighting against Japan in the Second World War. Interestingly, the CCP's new propaganda strategy was to mobilize pre-existing anti-Japanese sentiment in order to present the US as yet another evil demon invading China. Indeed, if we look closely at figure 2, we can see that one of the rats is wearing an Imperial Japanese Army hat.<sup>54</sup>

Hence, while written and spoken propaganda 'engineered emotions' by mobilizing pre-existing anti-Japanese sentiment,<sup>55</sup> the posters 'engineered emotions' by mobilizing pre-existing notions of good and bad noses. Indeed, as the CCP's own documents from the period attest, using words and images to provoke the 'correct emotions'—to hate, despise and look down upon Americans—was the propaganda campaign's main method and measure of success.<sup>56</sup>



**Figure 5: 'Down with the Yankee!' (1965)**

Source: Courtesy of 'Private collection', Chinese posters.net, PC-1965-011.

<sup>53</sup> Cited in Chin, 'The Korean War', p. 32. Modified translation.

<sup>54</sup> Liping Bu, 'Anti-germ warfare campaign posters (ca. 1952)', National Institutes of Health, <https://circulating-now.nlm.nih.gov/2017/05/04/anti-germ-warfare-campaign-posters-ca-1952/> (2017).

<sup>55</sup> Chin, 'The Korean War', pp. 25, 35.

<sup>56</sup> Chin, 'The Korean War', p. 31.

As with the Tang-era *huren* figurines, these poster images are not meant to accurately represent ‘Americans’. The deliberately constructed nature of the big-nosed foreign enemy is clear in propaganda posters where Chinese children dress up as heroes and villains to ‘play war’. To be ‘American’, wearing an Uncle Sam-styled hat is not enough; the boy also has to wear a very large bloody nose cone (see figure 5).<sup>57</sup> Likewise, Chinese actors who played US soldiers in the PRC’s Korean War films characteristically ‘were adorned with comically enlarged prosthetic noses’.<sup>58</sup> Hence these ‘American noses’ are creative visualizations of the Other that are designed not just to give information to help people to distinguish between allies and enemies. They also work to visually provoke a new anti-American ‘affective community’ by mobilizing collective feelings of anger, fear and threat.

Here, we have to distinguish not just between high-bridged noses and a normative Chinese nose, but also between high-bridged noses and big noses. And this is a particular kind of big nose: a large, hooked nose that resonates with the negative stereotype of the ‘Jewish nose’ that emerged in medieval Europe, became virulent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and culminated in the anti-Semitic images of Nazi propaganda.<sup>59</sup> While Nazi propaganda used big noses to mark Jews as greedy merchants and usurious money-lenders in the 1930s and 1940s, the PRC recycled this visual propaganda trope in the 1950s to stereotype Americans as evil capitalists and imperialists. Certainly, the vectors of ‘Jewish nose’ anti-Semitic images go beyond Nazi Germany. They were common in Euro-America before the Second World War, and after the war the Soviet Union recycled them in the eastern bloc,<sup>60</sup> again linking Jews to international capitalists and imperialists in the West. Indeed, such images persist. In 2018 British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn provoked controversy when he approved of a mural with such depictions,<sup>61</sup> and as seen above, in 2023 the directors of *Everyone Everywhere All at Once* were accused of anti-Semitism because a Jewish woman played their ‘Big Nose’ character.<sup>62</sup>

Still, how did the ‘Jewish nose’ make it onto CCP propaganda posters? There are many ways to interpret this. On the one hand, the artist could be drawing from a globally available visual repertoire of general stereotypes.<sup>63</sup> Yet CCP images of Americans seem to be quite deliberate in recycling Nazi themes. Figure 2’s poster highlights the enemy as ‘fascist’ by mobilizing pre-existing popular sentiments from the Second World War: in addition to the rat on the American’s arm wearing an Imperial Japanese Army cap, the rat on his shoulder has a helmet emblazoned

<sup>57</sup> Also see Landsberger, *Chinese propaganda posters*, pp. 128–9; Yang, *Chinese propaganda poster collection*, p. 46.

<sup>58</sup> Andrew Kuech, *Imagining ‘America’ in communist and nationalist China, 1949–1965*, PhD diss., New School for Social Research, New York, 2019, p. 68.

<sup>59</sup> See Sara Lipton, *Dark mirror: the medieval origins of anti-Jewish iconography* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014).

<sup>60</sup> Kateřina Šimov, ‘The image of the “Jew” as an “enemy” in the propaganda of late Stalinism and its reflection in the Czechoslovak context’, *Holocaust Studies* 23: 1–2, 2017, pp. 112–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2016.1209840>.

<sup>61</sup> Heather Stewart, ‘Corbyn in antisemitism row after backing artist behind “offensive” mural’, *Guardian*, 23 March 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/mar/23/corbyn-criticised-after-backing-artist-behind-antisemitic-mural>.

<sup>62</sup> Chilton and Nugent, ‘Jenny Slate says *Everything Everywhere All at Once* directors emailed her over “big nose” controversy’.

<sup>63</sup> For a discussion of visual repertoires of international violence see Berents and Duncombe, ‘Introduction: violence, visuality and world politics’, p. 568.

with a swastika.<sup>64</sup> Hence one interpretation is that CCP propaganda artists are aware of fascist propaganda images and choose to use them anyway. Like Jews in Nazi propaganda, the American in figure 2 is literally demonized as a blue-skinned big-nosed devil, and as vermin that requires extermination. Such images of Americans as big-nosed demons were common in the 1950s,<sup>65</sup> and continue to appear, for example, in Chinese Korean War comic books from the twenty-first century like *Blizzard on the eastern front*, as well as in China's 2021 blockbuster Korean War film, *The battle at Lake Changjin*.<sup>66</sup>

Through the high-bridged nose/big nose distinction, we can see the PRC's hierarchy of good and evil Euro-Americans. This was confirmed after the onset of the Sino-Soviet split in 1960, when Chinese propaganda posters drew Russians with ugly big noses, rather than handsome high-bridged noses.<sup>67</sup> Importantly, Chinese posters used evil images of the Other to construct the proper communist Chinese self. Although ideologically Maoism was radically egalitarian, these images show how the CCP was 'engineering emotions' to construct a new social hierarchy in foreign affairs. As the images show, the posters first work to include Russians and exclude Americans, and then later work to also exclude Russians after the Sino-Soviet split. The reassertion of close ties between the PRC and Russia over the past decade has seen the reappearance of Chinese images of beautifully high-bridged nosed Russians and ugly big-nosed Americans. This is important, because such images are more than propaganda for the masses: as Campbell argues for the role of self/Other relations in US foreign policy-making, such images shape the realm of possibility for Chinese policy-makers as well.

## Cosmological 'nose jobs' in east Asia

Noses were also important on the other side of the Korean War, where South Koreans began to focus on their external appearance. While Chinese posters painted Americans as big-nosed demons, a US military doctor was working to create a brand-new style of high-bridged nose for South Koreans. As in any conflict, in the Korean War many people suffered severe facial trauma. To treat them, American surgeons developed a new facial reconstruction operation to build Euro-American 'high-bridged noses' on Asian faces, which then was commercially developed for aesthetic rhinoplasty. As US Marine Corps surgeon D. R. Millard explains, this rhinoplasty procedure is called the 'deorientalize' method: 'Since the American Forces have been in the Far East the occidental look has become more and more in vogue. Many Japanese, Chinese, and Korean ladies have been demanding to be deorientalized'.<sup>68</sup> In a fascinating description that interweaves details of

<sup>64</sup> Bu, 'Anti-germ warfare campaign posters'.

<sup>65</sup> See Yang, *Chinese propaganda poster collection*; Gentz and Yang, *Poster art of modern China*.

<sup>66</sup> Lu Zhuguo, *Fengxue dongxian* [Blizzard on the eastern front] (Shanghai: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2001); Chen Kaige, Tsui Hark and Dante Lam, co-directors, *Changjin hu* [The battle at Lake Changjin] (Beijing: August First Film Studio, 2021).

<sup>67</sup> See Landsberger, *Chinese propaganda posters*, pp. 185–6.

<sup>68</sup> D. R. Millard, 'Oriental peregrinations', *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* 16: 5, 1955, pp. 319–36 at p. 334, <https://doi.org/10.1097/00006534-195511000-00001>. Also see So-Rim Lee, *Performing the self: cosmetic surgery and*

surgical technique and amateur ethnography, Millard answers the question ‘why the Oriental wants to change his face’ by pointing to ‘reasons which range from religious or economic to the universal desire to appear more beautiful’. Importantly, these Korean rhinoplasty patients were not necessarily trying to impress their fellow Koreans. Rather, they did it to better assimilate into life in the US as interpreters, war brides, converts to Christianity and other migrants.<sup>69</sup> This racialized logic of beauty standards is part of the ‘modernization as westernization’ view of governance that was popular in the 1950s.

Decades later, with the emergence of China, South Korea and Taiwan as economic powerhouses, such aesthetic surgery continues to be popular and iconic in east Asia.<sup>70</sup> South Korea and Taiwan even advertise themselves globally as ‘medical tourism’ destinations for aesthetic surgery.<sup>71</sup> It is not surprising, then, that ‘deorientalizing’ plastic surgery is criticized by feminists and postcolonial theorists for its noxious combination of military imperialism (US troops in Korea) and cultural imperialism (hegemonic western values). In other words, many critics follow Said’s analysis to suggest that this promotion of Euro-American beauty standards in east Asia is an enduring form of Orientalism.<sup>72</sup> As with the decolonization of IR that looks to authentic Chinese alternative world order ideas, here analysts and activists seek to decolonize the beauty industry to defend authentic Asian noses.<sup>73</sup>

But do Asians who have aesthetic surgery really want to look like Euro-Americans? So-Rim Lee, who studies the politics of aesthetic surgery in South Korea, argues that rather than see Koreans as ideological victims, we need to appreciate more how people actively and independently choose to have aesthetic surgery in order to change their external appearance.<sup>74</sup> Lee shows how aesthetic surgery has moved far beyond carving Euro-American features onto Asian faces, explaining that after surgery patients no longer look ‘western’, but look like Koreans who have had aesthetic surgery.<sup>75</sup> Consider the illustration of rhinoplasty in Taiwan in Figure 3: after surgery does the person really look more ‘western’?<sup>76</sup> Actually, Dr Chang Hsin Jen, a surgeon in Taiwan who carries out both medical and aesthetic rhinoplasty, explains that the ‘east Asian look’ is more popular than any Euro-American style nose.<sup>77</sup>

Aesthetic surgery is also evidence of the social and political economy of the neo-liberal era, where everyone is responsible for their own fate: people are

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*the political-economy of beauty in Korea*, PhD diss., Stanford University, 2018, p. 35.

<sup>69</sup> Millard, ‘Oriental peregrinations’, p. 336. Also see Lee, *Performing the self*, p. 36.

<sup>70</sup> *The Economist*, ‘Nipping and tucking: why so many young Chinese seek plastic surgery’, 8 May 2021, p. 57; Wen, *Buying beauty*.

<sup>71</sup> Teng, *Dangdai Zhongwen*, p. 236; Lee, *Performing the self*, pp. 35–6.

<sup>72</sup> See Lee, *Performing the self*, pp. 29–35; Wen, *Buying beauty*, pp. 7–8, 207–8. Also see *The Economist*, ‘Nip and tuck: a growing obsession with the body beautiful’, 12 May 2012, p. 52; *The Economist*, ‘Nipping and tucking’.

<sup>73</sup> Wen, *Buying beauty*, p. 213.

<sup>74</sup> Lee, *Performing the self*; Wen, *Buying beauty*, p. 207.

<sup>75</sup> Also see *The Economist*, ‘Nipping and tucking’.

<sup>76</sup> For similar ‘before and after’ rhinoplasty illustrations from the early 1950s and 2023 see Millard, ‘Oriental peregrinations’, p. 336; ‘Rhinoplasty’, Max Beauty Clinic, <https://www.max-beauty.com.tw/service/surgerySculpture/mbsi20211026165438467>.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Dr Chang Hsin Jen, ENT surgeon at Wan Fang Hospital, Taipei, Taiwan, 12 April 2021. Also see Wen, *Buying beauty*, p. 212.



changing their faces to improve their chances on the job market and on the marriage market.<sup>78</sup> As one young woman in Shanghai explains her decision to get ‘high-bridged nose’ surgery, ‘This is a lifelong investment, which will help me get a better job, and an ideal husband’.<sup>79</sup>

Importantly, people who elect to have aesthetic surgery often think beyond this materialist logic of self-improvement to pursue cosmological power. Many Chinese, Koreans and Taiwanese believe that your face reveals your cosmological fate, and thus respect physiognomy (*mianxiangxue*) and face-reading by fortune-tellers.<sup>80</sup> As Lee explains, physiognomy ‘treat[s] the physical attributes of different bodily parts as maps to one’s inner self as well as to the complex phenomena of fate’. Here the face serves to intimately connect the individual to the universe.<sup>81</sup> Recognizing such resonance between individual bodies and the cosmos, many people use fortune tellers’ physiognomy advice to guide aesthetic surgery.<sup>82</sup> In this way, people can actively take control of their material face, and thus of their cosmological fate, in order to change both for the better.

While cosmological politics may seem far-fetched, Vivienne Shue persuasively argues that to understand Chinese politics in the twenty-first century, it is necessary to understand it in ‘the cosmic frame’ so as to appreciate the continuing resonance of ‘the symbolic, ritual, and aesthetic elements of CCP rule’.<sup>83</sup> To grasp the ‘aesthetic dimensions of power systems’, we thus need to understand the important role of ‘astrologers, soothsayers, and philosophers’.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, while Xi Jinping’s ‘Community of Shared Fate for Mankind’ [*sic*] speaks of fate at the global level, the physiognomy/aesthetic surgery dynamic shows how it shapes how individuals envision and act in social order, world order and cosmological order.

The creative approach to external appearance seen in Taiwan and South Korea suggests that people there have a more fluid notion of identity than that seen in China’s Tang figurines and Maoist posters that characteristically appeal to static essential identities. In China aesthetic surgery likewise is the site of nationalism, where ‘images of beautiful Chinese women become a nationalistic representation signifying modernity and the country’s presence on the global stage, and yet at the same time upholding traditional Chinese cultural values’.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, Korean and Taiwanese celebrities, along with their surgically altered faces, have provoked a moral panic in China, with the state cracking down on androgenous high-bridged nosed people whom it calls ‘sissy-men’.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Lee, *Performing the self*; interview with Dr Chang; *The Economist*, ‘Nip and tuck’.

<sup>79</sup> Cited in Wen, *Buying beauty*, p. 93.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Ci Xiang, physiognomer at Longshan Temple Fortune-Tellers Street, Taipei, Taiwan, 4 May 2021; Interview with Feng Tzu-ying, physiognomer at Hsing Tian Kong Temple Fortune-Tellers Street, Taipei, Taiwan, 19 April 2021; Lee, *Performing the self*, p. 40ff.

<sup>81</sup> Lee, *Performing the self*, p. 40.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Ci Xiang; Interview with Feng Tzu-ying; Lee, *Performing the self*, p. 40ff.

<sup>83</sup> Shue, ‘Regimes of resonance’, pp. 681–2.

<sup>84</sup> Shue, ‘Regimes of resonance’, pp. 708, 682.

<sup>85</sup> Wen, *Buying beauty*, p. 213.

<sup>86</sup> Xu Tianyi, ‘The CCP’s masculinity crisis’, *China Talk*, 23 September 2022, <https://www.chinatalk.media/p/the-ccps-masculinity-crisis>.

While Tang figurines, Maoist posters and aesthetic rhinoplasty each work in China to create the hegemonic self with and against foreign Others, in Taiwan and South Korea aesthetic surgery is interesting because it challenges assertions of national identity by questioning the essential binaries of East and West, and authentic and artificial, for a fluid practice of self/Other relations in personal politics and international politics. Even so, self/Other relations in Taiwan and South Korea still produce social hierarchies that value certain types of noses, while continuing to discriminate against other Others, especially workers from south-east Asia.<sup>87</sup> Aesthetic rhinoplasty thus shapes the possibilities available for foreign affairs among non-elite consumers as well as elite policy-makers.

### Intervisual assemblages of self and Other

So what is the relation of external appearance and external relations? What can the juxtaposition of these three images of Tang art, a Maoist poster and aesthetic rhinoplasty tell us? The article argues that these three examples show how the 'deep-set eyes and high-bridged nose' template works to actively create the Chinese self through a visualization of the Other. These nose stereotypes have a certain degree of continuity, but they also show variations on the theme, especially through the shifting images of high-bridged noses from central Asians to Euro-Americans, that are further complicated by recent rhinoplasty experience in China, Taiwan and South Korea. Like other visual images, they shape the realm of possibility for foreign policy in both domestic society and international affairs.

The critical juxtaposition of these large noses suggests that this is not simply a chronological argument of the linear development of Chinese identity and politics from medieval to modern times. As aesthetic rhinoplasty, propaganda posters and Tang figurines all show, this is not just an exploration of the top-down politics of tracing links between official representations of foreigners from the Tang dynasty to contemporary China. In other words, the Korean War posters do not simply reproduce the ideological logic of Tang dynasty figurines for a modern audience. Rather, the images resonate with each other intervisually in a visual assemblage, suggesting that China governs the Other by including and excluding difference in ways that Said would recognize. Although the Tang and Maoist eras had radically different ideologies, both include useful difference with a high-bridged nose, and exclude evil difference with a big nose. Starting with the Korean War, high-bridged noses for the PRC's Russian allies also began to resonate with the new desire for high-bridged noses in South Korea, Taiwan and China.

Although it is a harder case to make, I suggest that there is also intervisual resonance between CCP propaganda and Nazi propaganda seen in their similar demonization of enemies through images of external appearance. Although there may not be a clear line connecting Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia and Communist China—or a clear link between the global repertoire of anti-Semitic images

<sup>87</sup> For a discussion of Taiwan's imperialist relationship with south-east Asia, see Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as method: toward deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 17–64.

and Chinese ones—the ugly big noses and swastika-emblazoned features certainly appear in Chinese posters, again and again.

Korean aesthetic rhinoplasty also resonates with ‘Jewish noses’ seen in propaganda posters from Mao-era China and Nazi Germany. While the turn-of-the-twentieth-century obsession with the ‘Jewish nose’ led to the first scientific rhinoplasty surgery in Europe,<sup>88</sup> an analogous anxiety with the Asian flat nose led to the first deorientalizing aesthetic rhinoplasty surgery in mid-twentieth century Korea.

Tang figurines and aesthetic rhinoplasty also show intimate connections between material faces and cosmological fate, where people can change their fate by changing their physical appearance in China, Korea and Taiwan.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, in his chapter on ‘Physiognomy and the depiction of barbarians in Tang China’, Abramson explains that the *huren*’s physical ferocity was useful for them as imperial bodyguards tasked with the material protection of the emperor. Yet part of the allure of *huren* was mystical: the Chinese thought that the *huren*’s deep-set eyes and high-bridged nose were signs of cosmological power.<sup>90</sup> Since these *huren* statues are funerary art that was buried with Chinese elites to protect them after death, *huren* thus were useful for Chinese people’s cosmological fate, both in this world and the next. As Abramson concludes, these funerary statues are not simply representations of Tang reality because they ‘*did* things that were socially and religiously significant, and were able to do these things both because of their representative or symbolic value *and* because they harnessed cosmological power’.<sup>91</sup> Noses thus do not just represent things, but can actively ‘do’ things, emotionally and spiritually provoking new cosmological orders that shape elite views of international relations and foreign policy.

Indeed, Tang dynasty figurines help us to make sense of the odd statements made by China’s twenty-first century diplomats, business executives and filmmakers. While Tang dynasty emperors recruited high-bridged nosed central Asians for their physical and cosmological power, Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei told his Chinese audience that they need to recruit ‘high-bridged nosed’ Euro-Americans to exploit their technological ‘firepower’.

## Conclusion

How does China view the world? This article argues that to understand China’s world-view, it is helpful to examine how elite and non-elite Chinese view the world, including how they visualize foreigners. In this way, it employs interpretivist methods to examine how Beijing’s official Foreign Policy (as capitalized by Campbell) is shaped by the non-official foreign policy of self/Other relations. Indeed, since Chinese officials, including Xi Jinping and his new Global Civilization Initiative, increasingly understand foreign relations in terms of history and

<sup>88</sup> Sander Gilman, *The Jew’s body* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 184–8.

<sup>89</sup> Abramson, *Ethnic identity in Tang China*; Lee, *Performing the self*.

<sup>90</sup> Abramson, ‘Deep eyes and high noses’, pp. 141–6.

<sup>91</sup> Abramson, ‘Deep eyes and high noses’, p. 120. (Italics in the original.)

culture, it is important to see how Chinese texts and images mobilize external appearance to think about external relations.

This article's first conclusion is that while Chinese ideas of world order are often presented as an alternative that will solve the problems of the current US-led world order, analysis here suggests that this is unlikely. Instead of the Chinese world order being 'all-inclusive', the article's discussion of noses in visual culture suggests that China has its own self/Other dynamic. Rather than simply excluding difference as Otherness, we have seen how Chinese images include difference through high-bridged noses and exclude difference through big noses. Even so, this inclusion/exclusion dynamic still relies on essentialized views of the Other, which as the Russian example shows, can easily switch from 'good' to 'evil'. Indeed, even when they are inclusive, these images actively reproduce a hierarchical system, with *huren* located below Chinese, Russians above Chinese, and Americans as demons that need to be eradicated like disease-carrying vermin. The visual international politics of noses thus shows how the social practice of dividing friends from enemies and comrades from barbarians in everyday life shapes how Chinese think about allies and enemies in foreign policy. Rather than transcending self/Other relations, here we have seen self/Other relations come back with a vengeance in China, presenting a different set of hierarchies and violences, as well as a different set of problems and possibilities for foreign policy-makers in China and abroad.

While the figurines and posters generally reproduce and recirculate essential identities, aesthetic rhinoplasty often calls these stereotypes into question. Rather than assert a Chinese self and a foreign Other, these newly crafted noses mix Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese and Euro-American looks in ways that complicate self/Other relations. Certainly, these new noses can reproduce the Chinese self for an exclusive nationalism. But aesthetic rhinoplasty also creates new identities that challenge national coding by questioning the essential binaries of East and West, and authentic and artificial, through a fluid practice of embodying identity and international politics. Thus, aesthetic rhinoplasty is interesting and important, because it underlines how both elites and non-elites can play with the fluidity of body politics in order to create alternative social relations, and thus alternative foreign relations.

Second, these images of external appearance and external relations show the close relation between ideological 'world-view' and aesthetic 'views of the world'. It is common in critical IR to deconstruct texts and images to show their underlying ideology: i.e. to show that a country's world-view shapes its view of the world. However, the visual IR analysis of this article suggests that how people aesthetically view the world (e.g. how they visualize foreigners) shapes their collective world-view. Attention to the visual IR of self/Other relations thus enables us to better understand China's 'world-view' through an appreciation of how officials and scholars actively 'view the world'.

This leads to the third conclusion. The 'world-view/view the world' dynamic is not only a rational process, where, for example, the CCP used posters in the 1950s

to visualize the abstract ideas of revolution, solidarity and enemy for a largely illiterate population. Rather, Tang figurines, CCP posters and aesthetic rhinoplasty all work more in an affective register to move and connect people viscerally. Such an affective politics works more through intervisual resonances than through linear arguments. Rather than a clear linkage between Tang figurines and PRC posters, these large noses are part of an assemblage of images and ideas that intervisually resonate among Chinese artists, surgeons, physiognomers and officials. The meaning and impact of such noses comes from visceral affect as well as from rational reasoning.

In this way, we can appreciate how visual IR enables research to go beyond questions of representation and 'authenticity' (such as the search for authentic Chinese alternative world orders or the defence of authentic east Asian noses), to see what visual images can 'do' in making social relations that shape international relations. Foreign policy-making thus becomes an aesthetic site of creativity, where people actively create figurines, posters and even new noses, that shape how they see the world, and thus how they act in the world.