

**The nature of Chinese hegemony in the early modern era:  
Implications for today**

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As China continues to grow and expand its international profile, one of the dominant questions in the study of international relations has been whether China's rise is a threat or an opportunity. Scholars from a number of different perspectives have addressed the issue, and have proffered a range of optimistic and pessimistic arguments that emphasize factors such as the distribution of capabilities in the system, the economic growth and openness of China's economy, and Chinese nationalism and identity.<sup>1</sup>

History rarely occupies a central place in the analysis, although it is woven throughout much of the scholarship. Indeed, many of our ostensibly "universal" theories about international relations that are actually empirically derived from a stylized set of historical cases, usually the European experience. For example, Aaron Friedberg's famous 1994 article compared modern Asia to the past 500 years of European history, concluding that, "for better or for worse, Europe's past could be Asia's future."<sup>2</sup> Another common use of European history is to compare China's rise with the rise of other great powers in history, with 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany being a favorite example.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Z. Brzezinski and John Mearsheimer, "Clash of the Titans," *Foreign Policy* 146 (2005): 46-49; Jeff Legro, "What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power," *Perspectives on Politics* 5 (2007): 515-534. Thomas Christensen, "Fostering Stability or Creating a Monster?" *International Security* 31 (2006): 81-126, and David C. Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Aaron Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry," *International Security* 18 (1993/94): 5-33, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Richard Rosecrance, "Power and International Relations: The Rise of China and its Effects," *International Studies Perspectives* 7 (2006), pp. 31-35, 32; Liselotte Odegaard; Dilip K. Das, "The Chinese and Indian Economies: Comparing the Comparables," *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies* 4, no. 1 (February 2006), pp. 77-89, 79; Zhang Wenmu, "Sea Power and China's Strategic Choices," *China Security* (Summer 2006), pp. 17-31, 27.

The little East Asian “history” that is a part of the contemporary discussion tends to focus on the last century – mostly exploring the issue of how “memories” of Japanese colonization affects contemporary relations in the region.<sup>4</sup> Thus, whether Japanese politicians should visit the Yasukuni shrine, who owns disputed territory such as the Senkakus/Dokdo/Kurile islands, and how Japanese textbooks treat the Pacific War are all relevant to current East Asian relations.

Yet we know little about East Asian history itself! It seems a bit puzzling to use historical evidence and analogies from a different region while overlooking historical evidence from East Asia itself. Putting East Asian history at the center is particularly important, because a wealth of new scholarly research in the past twenty years has overturned, extended, and expanded our understanding of East Asian history in numerous ways.<sup>5</sup> This paper attempts to de-universalize political analysis, because close examination reveals that the European experience was neither first, nor was it universal.<sup>6</sup> As Susanne Rudolph has observed, “there appeared to be one race, and the West had strung the tape at the finish line for others to break.”<sup>7</sup> Even now, few scholars have taken East Asia on its own terms and not as a reflection of Europe, and few have directly examined East Asian history for clues about how contemporary East Asian states might behave.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Alexis Dudden, *Troubled Apologies Among Japan, Korea, and the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Sung-Jae Choi, “The Politics of the Dokdo Issue,” *Journal of East Asian Affairs* 5, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 465-494.

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent summary, see Alice Miller, “Some Things We Used to Know about China’s Past and Present (But now, not so much),” (paper presented at the “Conference on History and China’s Foreign Relations,” US-China Institute, University of Southern California, February 16, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Kaufman et al., 2007; Osiander 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Rudolph 2007, 2; Buzan and Acharya 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Exceptions are Johnston 1995; Hui 2004.

For long stretches of its history China was the hegemonic state in East Asia, with a civilizational influence that affected all other states in the region. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Sinicized states had evolved a set of rules and institutions with China clearly the hegemon, which resulted in a clear hierarchy and very long peace. The rules of the game, the hierarchy, and status were explicitly defined. The surrounding states benefited from the system, and conflict tended to occur not to check rising Chinese power but rather as order within China itself was decaying.<sup>9</sup> China appeared to have no need to fight, and the secondary powers no desire to fight. The simple explanation for why this system was stable is that China was a status quo hegemon, and the other states in the region knew this. China had written the rules of the game for international relations and was the source of many domestic political and social institutions in the region.

The Confucian international order that existed in East Asia for well over ten centuries encountered no intellectual challenge until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Built on a mix of legitimate authority and material power, the China-derived Confucian international system provided a normative social order, clear benefits to secondary states, and also contained credible commitments by China not to exploit secondary states that accepted its authority. This order was explicit and formally unequal, but informally equal: secondary states were not allowed to call themselves equal with China, yet had substantial latitude in their actual behavior. China stood at the top of the hierarchy, and there was no intellectual challenge to the rules of the game until

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<sup>9</sup> Even the nomads valued Chinese stability, and John Mears (2001, 8) notes that, “Nomadic confederacies...seemed best served by the preservation of a stable Chinese regime.” See also Perdue 2005, 521.

the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the arrival of the Western powers. Korean, Vietnamese, and even Japanese elites consciously copied Chinese institutional and discursive practices in part to craft stable relations with China, not to challenge it.

This essay takes this issue of history directly, and asks “What was the nature of Chinese hegemony in the early modern era? Is there any link, or lesson, that may connect this deep history to the present?”

In this paper I draw three main conclusions, each of which has implications for our theories of hegemony and for the contemporary East Asian region:

First, the early modern East Asian experience suggests that hegemony can be associated with peace across regions, and that international stability may not be a function only of the contemporary era, such as the *Pax Britannica* in the 19th century and the *Pax Americana*/long peace after 1945.<sup>10</sup> After all, much of world history has involved hegemons building hierarchy and establishing order, and studying these relations in different historical contexts promises to truly universalize our theories and our evidence. These Sinic states possessed a shared sense of legitimacy that presupposes, in the context of Confucianism, that relations operate within an accepted hierarchy. The research presented in this paper helps clarify the distinction between an international system based on polarity and an international society based on culture.

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<sup>10</sup> [Owen, John M. Owen, 1994. “How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace.”, \*International Security\* 19 No. \(2\), \(XYZ\) pp. 87-125](#); [Waltz, Kenneth Waltz, “1990. Nuclear Myths and Political Realities.”, \*American Political Science Review\* 84 no.\(3, \(XYZ\) pp.\) 731-745](#); [Singer, Max Singer, and Aaron Wildavsky, 1993. \*The Real World Order: Zones of Turmoil, Zones of Peace\*. \(Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1993\).](#)

Second, the East Asian international order involved extensive trade and diplomatic relations, in well-developed form, many centuries before the arrival of the west. An enormous literature has attempted to explain why, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and other East Asian states managed to “catch up” to the West. Mainly focused on actions taken in the 1960s – and occasionally exploring the role of Japanese colonialism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century -- this debate has been fruitful and spurred advances in economics, institutional analysis, political science, and sociology.<sup>11</sup> Yet the evidence presented in this paper suggests that explaining current East Asian economic dynamism at least requires asking whether it is really anything new, or whether there were much deeper historical roots that laid the foundation for subsequent growth. Much of the contemporary organization, international economic integration, and institutional capacity of East Asian states existed centuries earlier. These institutions were not created from new cloth in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; but built upon deeply ingrained ideas about the proper role of institutions, government, and society, and the proper way to manage relations with each other. In this way, explanations for the modern economic development of these countries, and their rapid re-integration with China, appears to have historical roots.

Third, East Asian states were deeply incorporated into and involved with the Confucian international order, both in identity and in practice. Japan in particular was not as isolated nor as removed as conventional wisdom imagined just a few

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<sup>11</sup> Stephan Haggard, “Institutions and Economic Growth in East Asia,” *Studies in Comparative Development* (2004); and Robert Wade, “States, Markets, and Industrial Policy,” *Governing the Market* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): 8-33. On the colonial era, see Atul Kohli, “Where do High-growth Political Economies come from? The Japanese Lineage in South Korean Development,” *World Development* (September 1994); and Stephan Haggard, David Kang, and Chung-in Moon, “Japanese Colonialism and Korean Development: a critique,” *World Development* 27, no. 6 (June 1997): 867-881.

decades ago. Although Japan was most skeptical of Chinese leadership, Japan took for granted the norms and institutions of the Confucian international order, even incorporating many Chinese innovations for their own domestic application.

In short, while we are all “Westphalian” now, exploring the breadth and depth to which these institutional and normative practices have emerged in East Asia promises to provide new insights into the region’s economic, diplomatic, and social development in the contemporary era.

### **I. Hierarchy, hegemony, and legitimacy**

It is increasingly accepted that, “every international system or society has a set of rules or norms that define actors and appropriate behavior,”<sup>12</sup> which Christopher Reus-Smit calls the “elementary rules of practice that states formulate to solve the coordination and collaboration problems associated with coexistence under anarchy.”<sup>13</sup> Yet the distinction between an international system based on polarity and an international society based on shared norms is often vague. This section clarifies three theoretical distinctions: between hierarchy and anarchy; primacy and hegemony; and legitimacy and capability as sources of power.

Although Waltz posed them as diametrical opposites a generation ago, recent research has increasingly posited the existence of hierarchies within an anarchic

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<sup>12</sup> [Krasner, Stephen Krasner, “2001-Organized hypocrisy in nineteenth-century East Asia,” \*International Relations of the Asia-Pacific\* 1 \(2001\), pp. 173-197, p. 173.](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Reus-Smit, Christopher Reus-Smit, “1997-The Constitutional Structure of International Society and the nature of Fundamental Institutions,” \*International Organization\* 51 No. \(4, \(1997:\)\), pp. 555-89, p. 557; \[John Ruggie, “John 1983-Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis,” \\*World Politics\\* 35 No. \\(2, \\(1983\\), pp.\\) 261-285.\]\(#\)](#)

international system.<sup>14</sup> Hierarchy is an external restriction imposed on a state, what David Lake calls an “authority relationship – a form of hierarchy within systemic anarchy.”<sup>15</sup> That is, one state cedes to another state the right, or control, over an action. Hierarchy is not an absolute, but can range from minimal authority, such as a sphere of influence, to complete hierarchy, such as a formal empire. Wendt and Friedheim note that, “control can range from proscribing a particular policy while still permitting significant local autonomy...which define behavioral expectations for each party.”<sup>16</sup> Although the extent of hierarchy may vary by situation, scholars are increasingly noting that authority relationships exist within international orders.

Viewed this way, hegemony is a form of hierarchy, and is distinct from unipolarity or primacy. The simple fact of material preponderance by one power connotes only primacy, or unipolarity. Although realists often equate primacy with hegemony, an alternative formulation of hegemony emphasize “the social, or *recognized*, status of hegemony.”<sup>17</sup> In this view, hegemony is not merely based on the relative coercive capabilities of states, but involves consensual acceptance of a leading state’s legitimate authority. For example, Ikenberry and Kupchan note that although material incentives are one way that hegemons assert control over other

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<sup>14</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1979; Katja Weber, *Katja. 2000. Hierarchy Amidst Anarchy: Transaction Costs and Institutional Choice*, (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2000); Darel E. Paul, *Darel E. “1999. Sovereignty Survival, and the Westphalian Blind Alley in International Relations,”* *Review of International Studies* 25 no. {2 (1999.)} pp. 217-231.

<sup>15</sup> Lake, David A. *Lake. 2003. “The New Sovereignty in International Relations,”* *International Studies Review* 5, (2003), pp. 303-323, p. 311.

<sup>16</sup> Wendt, Alexander *Wendt,* and Daniel Friedheim, *“1995. Hierarchy under Anarchy: Informal Empires and the East German State,”* *International Organization* 49 no. {4, (1995)}, pp. 689-721, p. 697.

<sup>17</sup> Ian Clark, “How Hierarchical Can International Society Be?” (m.s., Aberystwyth University, 2009), p. 6. For realist versions of hegemony, see Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion,” *International Security XYZ*, p. 11-12; John Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Powers*, p. 40; M. Haugaard, “Power and Hegemony in Social Theory,” in Haugaard and H.H. Lentner, eds, *Hegemony and Power: Consensus and Coercion in Contemporary Politics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), p. 62.

nations, “the exercise of power – and hence the mechanism through which compliance is achieved – involves the projection by the hegemon of a set of norms and their embrace by leaders in other nations.”<sup>18</sup>

Distinct from mere preponderance of material capabilities, stable hegemony requires both a social order that legitimizes the system and also a credible commitment on the part of the dominant state not to exploit the secondary states if they accept the dominant state’s authority.<sup>19</sup> That is, crafting a set of norms and rules that are viewed as legitimate by secondary states is an integral task for the dominant state. As Mastanduno notes that, “the most durable order is one in which there exists a meaningful consensus on the right of the hegemonic state to lead, as well as the social purposes it projects.”<sup>20</sup> This consensual view of hegemony focuses on why secondary states would defer to the hegemon, rather than the position of the hegemon itself.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to a social purpose, hegemony is stable when secondary states receive believable assurances from the dominant state that it will not abuse its position and exploit smaller states. There has been extensive research on the

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<sup>18</sup> John G. Ikenberry, G. John, and Charles A. Kupchan, “Socialization and Hegemonic Power,” *International Organization* Vol 44, No. 3 (Summer 1990), pp. 283-315, p. 283; David Lake notes that hegemony, “rests on a bargain between the ruler and the ruled premised on the former’s provision of a social order of value sufficient to offset the latter’s loss of freedom.” Lake, David A. Lake, “2007. Escape from the State of Nature: Authority and Hierarchy in World Politics,” *International Security* 32, No. 1 (2007), pp. 47-79, p. 54.

<sup>19</sup> Lake, David A. Lake, 2006. “American Hegemony and the Future of East-West Relations,” *International Studies Perspectives* 7 (2006), pp. 23-30, p. 28. See also Ian Hurd, *After Anarchy: Legitimacy and Power in the United Nations Security Council* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp 78-79.

<sup>20</sup> Mastanduno, Michael Mastanduno, 2003. “Incomplete Hegemony: The United States and Security Order in Asia,” in *Asian Security Order: instrumental and normative features*, edited by Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford 2003), p. 145.

<sup>21</sup> Ian Clark, “Towards an English-School Theory of Hegemony,” (m.s., Aberystwyth University, 2009); B. Cronin, “The Paradox of Hegemony: America’s Ambiguous Relationship with the United Nations,” *European Journal of International Relations* 7, No. 1 (2001), pp. 103-30.

problem of crafting credible commitments in international relations, but I focus here on one key task – setting mutually recognized borders.<sup>22</sup> Clear boundaries between states are a good indicator of their status quo orientation toward each other. In this way, borders are the “political divides [are] the result of state building,” and they are a useful indicator of a state’s acceptance of the status quo.<sup>23</sup> Yet borders are not mere functionally rationalist institutions designed to communicate preferences – they also inherently assume the existence of two parties that recognize each other’s legitimate right to existence. Demarcation of a boundary is thus a costly signal that a state intends stable relations with a neighbor.

This is a form of hierarchy: as Wendt and Friedheim note, “Recognizing the sovereignty of subordinate states imposes certain restraints on dominant states,”<sup>24</sup> while Beth Simmons notes that, “when they are mutually accepted, [borders] drastically reduce external challenges to a government’s legitimate authority...and clarify and stabilize transnational actors’ property rights.”<sup>25</sup> Viewed this way, hegemony is indeed a form of hierarchy, in which a dominant state provides a social order that is seen as legitimate by secondary states, and that imposes some measure of constraint upon the behavior of states.

<sup>22</sup> ~~Fearon~~, James D. ~~Fearon~~, “~~1995~~-Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization* 49 No. {3 (1995)}, pp. 379-414.

<sup>23</sup> ~~Michiel~~ Baud, ~~Michiel~~, and Willem Van Schendel, “~~1997~~-Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands,” *Journal of World History* 8, No. {2 (1997)}, pp. 211-242, p. 214; ~~Adelman~~, Jeremy ~~Adelman~~ and ~~Aron~~ Stephan ~~Aron~~, “~~1999~~-From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History,” *The American Historical Review* 104 No. {3 (1999)}, pp. 814-841; ~~Batten~~, Bruce ~~Batten~~, “~~2003~~-To the Ends of Japan: Premodern Frontiers, Boundaries, and Interactions,” (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, ~~2003~~).

<sup>24</sup> Wendt and Friedheim, ~~XYZ~~, 1995, 704.

<sup>25</sup> ~~Simmons~~, Beth A. ~~Simmons~~, “~~2005~~-Rules over Real Estate: Trade, Territorial Conflict, and ~~International~~~~International~~ Borders as Institutions,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, No. {6 (2005)}, pp. 823-848, p. 827. See also ~~Taylor~~ Fravel, ~~Taylor~~, “~~2005~~-Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: explaining China’s Compromises on Territorial Disputes,” *International Security* 30 No. {2 (2005)} pp. 46-83.

A final analytic clarification distinguishes legitimacy and material power. Norms and beliefs are not merely epiphenomenal to material power; that is, they are more than a convenient velvet glove over an iron fist. While legitimacy is a form of power itself, it derives from the values or norms that a state projects, not necessarily merely from its military might and economic wealth. As David Lake argues, “pure coercive commands – of the form ‘do this, or die’ – are not authoritative. Authority relations must contain some measure of legitimacy...and an obligation, understood by both parties, for B to comply with the wishes of A.”<sup>26</sup> The links between material power and legitimacy are complex, and neither is likely to exist in its pure form. Indeed, the relationship between authority and capabilities is a “contingent, empirical matter,” which varies with circumstance.<sup>27</sup>

As Ian Hurd argues, “the relation of coercion, self-interest, and legitimacy to each other is complex, and each is rarely found in anything like its pure, isolated form...the difficulties attending to an attempt to prove that a rule is or is not accepted by an actor as legitimate are real, but they do not justify either abandoning the study...or assuming ex ante that it does not exist.”<sup>28</sup> Dominant states, like individual leaders, lead through a combination of bullying, bribing, and inspiring.<sup>29</sup> Although coercion can substitute for legitimacy in certain instances and for a short

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<sup>26</sup> Lake, [The New Sovereignty in International Relations](#), 2003, p. 304. See also Clark, [How Hierarchical Can International Society Be](#), “[How Hierarchical...](#)” p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Jack Donnelly, “Sovereign Inequalities and Hierarchy in Anarchy: American Power and International Society,” [EJIR-European Journal of International Relations](#) 12, No. 2 (2006), pp. 139-170, p. 142.

<sup>28</sup> [Ian Hurd](#), [Ian Hurd, 1999. “Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics.”, International Organization](#) 53 No. 2 (1999) pp. 379-408, p. 389, 392.

<sup>29</sup> [Richard Samuels](#), [Richard. 2003. Machiavelli's Children: Leaders and their Legacies in Italy and Japan.](#) (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003); [Lebow](#), Richard Ned [Lebow.](#) -2008- [Honor, Interest, and Fear: A Cultural Theory of International Politics.](#) (-Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); [Wohlforth](#), William [Wohlforth.](#) -Forthcoming. “Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great-Power War.”, [World Politics](#), forthcoming.

while, they are both intertwined, as well. Legitimacy is stronger when backed by coercive capacity, and coercion seen as legitimate is also more effective.<sup>30</sup> As Lake notes, “despite their clear analytic differences, political authority and coercion are hard to distinguish in practice...there is no ‘bright line’ separating these two analytic concepts, and I offer none here.”<sup>31</sup>

In sum, hierarchy involves some proscription on the part of the subordinate state, and anarchy and hierarchy are not incompatible. Primacy and hegemony are different forms of preponderance; one derived purely from material power, the other involving legitimation and consensus. Hegemony is a form of hierarchy that involves more than material power, it also involves a set of norms – a social order -- that secondary states find legitimate, and hegemony is thus a social system. Legitimacy itself is distinct from material power, and although the two are intertwined, legitimacy grows out of the social purpose a state projects. These distinctions are important in helping us categorize and explain the different patterns of international relations found in early modern East Asia.

## **II. The Confucian international system**

The research presented here extends Iain Johnston’s pioneering work about the sources of Chinese grand strategy, where he identifies two deeply enduring Chinese worldviews that encompass central paradigmatic assumptions about the

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<sup>30</sup> [Hurd, Ian Hurd, 2007.](#) “Breaking and Making Norms,” [\(2007\)](#), p. 194.

<sup>31</sup> Lake, [Escape from the State of Nature](#), 2007, p. 53. See also [Hurd, Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics, 1999](#).

nature of conflict, the inevitability of violence, and the enemy.<sup>32</sup> Calling one “Confucian,” and the other “parabellum,” he argues that China and nomads operated in a parabellum strategic culture that, “[views] the best way of dealing with security threats is to eliminate them through the use of force.”<sup>33</sup> Sinic states, which shared China’s “Confucian” worldviews, had enduring stable and peaceful relations with China. Early modern East Asia – like 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe – operated in two very different international societies based on two different sets of rules: one which included the Sinicized states; and a different set of rules that regulated relations with the “uncivilized” nomadic world.<sup>34</sup> Yet important as Johnston’s work is, he does not address a key issue: why those threats arose mainly from non-state actors on China’s northern and western frontiers, instead of arising from powerful states to the east and south such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.<sup>35</sup>

Sinic states, which shared China’s “Confucian” worldviews, had far more stable and peaceful relations with China. Early modern East Asia – like 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe – operated in two very different international societies based on two different sets of rules: one which included the Sinicized states; and a different set of rules that regulated relations with the “uncivilized” nomadic world.<sup>36</sup> This central

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<sup>32</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1995).

<sup>33</sup> Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, p. x.

<sup>34</sup> Keene (2002) argues that nineteenth century Europe was operating in the context of two very different international societies: There was one set of rules that applied to the European states and there was a very different set of rules that regulated Europe's relations with the outside “uncivilized” world.

<sup>35</sup> China-nomad relations have been the focus of extensive research, including Wright 2002; Perdue 2005; Mears 2001; Crossley 1997, 2006; Barfield 1989; Jagchid and Symons 1989; Khazanov 1984.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Keene argues that nineteenth century Europe was operating in the context of two very different international societies: There was one set of rules that applied to the European states and there was a very different set of rules that regulated Europe's relations with the outside “uncivilized”

claim does not imply, however, that violence was rare in East Asia. There was plenty of violence, but it tended to occur between China and the semi-nomadic peoples on its northern and western borders, not between China and the other Sinicized states.<sup>37</sup>

This international order in East Asia encompassed a regionally shared set of formal and informal norms and expectations that guided relations and yielded substantial stability. Known as the “tribute system,” it emphasized formal hierarchy among nations while allowing considerable informal equality.<sup>38</sup> As long as hierarchy was observed there was little need for interstate war. Sinic states, and even many nomadic tribes, used some of its rules and institutions when interacting with each other. Status as much as power defined one’s place in the hierarchy: China sat highest, and secondary states were ranked by how culturally similar they were to China – not by their relative power.

A key element of hierarchy is the proscription of certain behaviors by subordinate states. These limits on behavior can involve both coercion and legitimacy. In early modern East Asia, although states were largely free to do as they pleased, there were some limits on their actions. Perhaps most significant was the explicit recognition that China was at the top of the hierarchy. Other states were not allowed to call themselves equal of China, although this had little impact on their daily functioning.

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world. ~~Keene Keene, Edward Keene, 2002.~~ *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> An extraordinary diversity of peoples, cultures, and polities existed on the northern steppes, and for expositional ease I refer to these in the text as “nomads,” although the term is far from satisfactory.

<sup>38</sup> Keyes 2002; Fiskesjo 1999.

Yet beyond these measures, China exercised little authority over other states: “When envoys bowed before the Chinese emperor, they were in effect acknowledging the *cultural* superiority of the Chinese emperor, not his *political* authority over their states.”<sup>39</sup> Relations with China did not involve much loss of independence, as these states were largely free to run their domestic affairs as they saw fit, and could also conduct foreign policy independently from China.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, China simply did not “dominate” Korea during at least two millennia before 1900--Korea was de facto independent, and its Sinicization was most pronounced when Korean Neo-Confucians quite self-consciously imposed that as an ideology on Korea, apart from whatever the Chinese might have wanted.<sup>41</sup> Gari Ledyard notes that:

While the Koreans had to play the hand they were dealt, they repeatedly prevailed in diplomacy and argument... and convinced China to retreat from an aggressive position. In other words, the tributary system did provide for effective communication, and Chinese and Korean officialdom spoke from a common Confucian vocabulary. In that front, the relationship was equal, if not at times actually in Korea's favor.<sup>42</sup>

For neighboring states, recognition was an important domestic and international sign. These states sought to emulate Chinese practices, but there is little evidence that the aim was to build up capabilities in order to match and rein in Chinese power. On the contrary, emulation actually had the opposite effect of ramifying the Chinese-dominated order. Status was defined as civilization, which essentially meant Chinese ideas and institutions. Being Sinicized meant being a

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<sup>39</sup> Smits 1999, 36.

<sup>40</sup> Son 1994; Kang 1997, 6-9.

<sup>41</sup> Thanks to Bruce Cumings for this point.

<sup>42</sup> Ledyard 2006.

“civilized” state, with deep links to the highest centers of learning and domestic institutions that reflected that learning. These were solutions to real world problems, but critically they were also *Chinese* solutions.

### **III. Trade**

Far from the West’s bringing trade and interaction to a somnolent East Asia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there existed a vibrant East Asian economic trading system well before the West arrived. China and its neighbors had far more interaction with each other than has been traditionally acknowledged. Recent scholarship is finding that trade, both private and tributary, made up a significant portion of both government revenues and the national economies. Furthermore, trade tended to expand region wide following increases in Chinese power, and tended to contract when China was preoccupied with internal troubles.

The system was geographically quite wide. China was the central trading focus of most East Asian states, but extensive trade also existed between states ranging from Japan to Java and Siam, and at times even including India and the Middle East. Furthermore, trade with the West (mainly the Portuguese and the Dutch) in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was at most a minor portion of overall East Asian trade. The countries in this system were part of a thriving, complex, and vibrant regional order. As Janet Abu-Lughod writes:

The literature generated both in China and abroad gives the impression that the Chinese were ‘not interested in’ trade, that they tolerated it only as a form of tribute, and that they were relatively passive recipients...This impression, however, is created almost entirely by a literal interpretation of official Chinese documents....Upon closer examination, it is apparent that much

more trade went on than official documents reveal, and that tribute trade was only the tip of an iceberg of unrecorded “private” trade.<sup>43</sup>

Trade served as a double-edge instrument of system consolidation, for it facilitated not only more intense state-to-state interactions but also the development of domestic state institutions. The picture that emerges is one in which the various states and kingdoms of early modern East Asia were involved in an elaborate trading system, one governed by national laws, diplomacy, and protocols, with states attempting to control, limit, and benefit from trade. Thus, early modern East Asia was interconnected diplomatically, culturally, economically, and politically.

China was the unquestioned center of international trade in early modern East Asia. Both as producer and consumer, the Chinese market was the most important factor in creating and sustaining trade. When Chinese power expanded, so did regional trade. When China was weak or focused on internal troubles, trade contracted. This was because China was by far the most important market, both as producer of goods, and as consumer. The “tribute system” was the official institutional basis for much of the trade that occurred, but even the tribute system itself was often reinterpreted and quite flexible.

The Ming dynasty (1368-1644) was deeply involved in international trade, and Lee notes that “China since the sixteenth century was even more deeply involved than Japan in trade with the larger world. Few other places produced the commodities that were universally in demand in greater quantity or variety, and

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<sup>43</sup> Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, p. 317.

few others attracted foreign traders in the same number.”<sup>44</sup> Deng agrees: “China is often portrayed as a country isolated from the outside world, self-sufficient and insulated from capitalism...with marginal, if not non-existent, foreign trade. In fact, China needed foreign trade, both by land and sea, as much as many other pre-modern societies in Eurasia.”<sup>45</sup>

During the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), the Chinese built more than one thousand ocean-going ships each year. Deng concludes that, “pre-modern China’s long-distance staple trade reveals a system of international exchange, a prototype of division of labor transcending national/ethnic territories, and great manufacturing capacity with considerable technological advancement.”<sup>46</sup> Table 1 shows Chinese ships visiting Japan in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, and other evidence is consistent with this view. For example, 630 junks traveled to Manila from China between 1571 and 1600.<sup>47</sup> Thus, although the popular views of China see it as largely closed off from the outer world, the reality was much different. China interacted on a regular basis – both formally and privately – with traders and people from around the region. This led to the develop of state institutions and international norms.

//Table 1 here//

Korea and Japan were also heavily involved in the early modern trading system. Goods, ideas, and people flowed back and forth, between Japan and Korea and with China and Southeast Asia, as well. For example, the Japanese appetite for

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<sup>44</sup> John Lee, “Trade and Economy in Preindustrial East Asia, c. 1500-1800: East Asia in the Age of Global Integration,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 58, no. 1 (1999), p. 14.

<sup>45</sup> Gang Deng, “The Foreign Staple Trade of China in the Pre-Modern Era,” *International History Review* 19, no. 2 (1997), p. 254.

<sup>46</sup> Deng, “The Foreign Staple Trade of China in the Pre-Modern Era,” p. 283.

<sup>47</sup> Andaya, “Interactions with the Outside World and Adaptation in Southeast Asian Society,” p. 349.

Chinese silk was virtually limitless, as was the corresponding Chinese demand for Japanese silver and copper. Given extensive trade, both Korea and Japan developed elaborate trading rules governing the number of ships allowed to visit the country, the manner in which trade was to be conducted, and who would actually be allowed to trade. For example, trade between Korea and Japan was so extensive in the 15<sup>th</sup> century that the two countries worked out a treaty in 1443 that limited the Japanese to fifty ships per year, and required Japanese ships to receive credentials from the lord of Tsushima that would be presented in one of three Korean ports: Tongnae, Ulsan, or Ungchon.<sup>48</sup>

Trade was so extensive that, “from the fifteenth century Japanese-Korean trade surpassed Japanese-Ming trade in quantity, and it had a greater impact on the daily life of the Japanese in western areas.”<sup>49</sup> This involvement necessitated both domestic laws – such as licenses for officially approved traders, and international diplomacy – such as agreements on how much trade and how many ships would be allowed each year.

Southeast Asia illustrates both processes of trade encouraging interstate relations, as well as domestic institution building. From roughly 1400 to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the expansion of international trade within Southeast Asia, and between Southeast Asia and China, Japan, and Northeast Asia, resulted in a region wide process of territorial consolidation and centralization of royal authority.<sup>50</sup> Siam sent

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<sup>48</sup> Lee, *A New History of Korea*, p. 191.

<sup>49</sup> Kang, *Diplomacy and ideology in Japanese-Korean relations*, p. 28.

<sup>50</sup> Victor Lieberman, “Local Integration and Eurasian Analogies: Structuring Southeast Asian History, c. 1350-c. 1830,” *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 3 (1993), pp. 475-572. Frank, *ReOrient*, p. 97; Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680, Volume 2: Expansion and Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993)

51 tribute missions to China between 1371 and 1420, with the Ming sending 15 missions in return. Over the next century Siam sent another 27 total missions.<sup>51</sup> And, as Cushman emphasizes, “Siam’s exports should not be seen as marginal luxuries, but as staple products intended either for popular consumption or for the manufacture of consumer goods by the Chinese.”<sup>52</sup> Due to growing population in 18<sup>th</sup> century China, rice imports from Southeast Asia grew rapidly, and by 1750 were importing over 10,000 tons of rice from Southeast Asia.<sup>53</sup> By 1767, the Chinese community in Siam numbered perhaps 30,000.

As Victor Lieberman concludes, “instead of a late 17<sup>th</sup> century retreat from foreign trade, we find a change in emphasis from Indian Ocean to Chinese networks, and a general intensification after 1710...[and] movement from high value, low bulk trade to the opposite mix.”<sup>54</sup> Rather than viewing early modern East Asian states as isolated and autarkic, we find a vibrant regional, as well as global, trading system. This system was extensive – China was clearly the central and most important economy, but trade throughout the region was much greater than has traditionally been recognized. This trade necessitated and facilitated both domestic and international consolidation.

Evidence on the relative importance of trade with the West suggests, moreover, that relations among Asian states continued to outweigh more sporadic interactions with outside powers. In contrast to Japan’s continued incorporation

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<sup>51</sup> Anthony Reid, “An ‘Age of Commerce’ in Southeast Asian History,” *Modern Asian Studies* 24, no. 1 (February 1990), pp. 1-30, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Cushman (1993: 78)

<sup>53</sup> Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese trade, 1652-1853* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 100-101.

<sup>54</sup> Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, p. 291.

into active trade in the region, Western trade -- mainly Dutch and Portuguese traders -- was simply never as important as has been believed. The annual Portuguese share of silver exports was usually less than ten percent of total exports.<sup>55</sup> The Dutch were actually pushed out once the East Asian system stabilized by the end of the eighteenth century. Thus, Klein concludes that “during the eighteenth century...the East China Sea saw the re-establishment of its traditional self as it more or less retired from the world [European] market.”<sup>56</sup>

Numerous estimates compiled by researchers on different regions, periods, and markets, show the overwhelming bulk of trade occurring within Asia as opposed to between Asian states and Europe. Klein’s assessment is typical: “European penetration into the maritime space of the China sea was marginal...weak and limited.”<sup>57</sup> Heather Sutherland observes that in Indonesia, “despite their military strength and wide-ranging commercial apparatus, the Dutch East India Company could not compete effectively with the Asian trade networks...they were marginal, whereas the Chinese were absolutely central.”<sup>58</sup>

In sum, research on trade patterns and diplomacy indicates a high level of system interaction in East Asia that was relatively independent of the simultaneously developing European system. As Hamashita contends, it is

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<sup>55</sup> Klein, “The China seas and the World Economy between the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” p. 76.

<sup>56</sup> Klein, “The China seas and the World Economy between the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” p. 70.

<sup>57</sup> e.g., Frank, *ReOrient*, p. 101; J.C. van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society: Essays in Asian Social and Economic History* (The Hague and Bandung: W. van Hoeve, 1955) p. 125; and Klein, “The China seas and the World Economy between the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” p. 86.

<sup>58</sup> Heather Sutherland, “Believing is Seeing: Perspectives on Political Power and Economic Activity in the Malay World, 1700-1940,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (March 1995), pp. 133-146, 138.

necessary to see “Asian history as the history of a unified system characterized by internal tribute/tribute-trade relations, with China at the center.”<sup>59</sup> He stresses that a “fundamental feature of the system that must be kept sight of is its basis in commercial transactions. The tribute system in fact paralleled, or was in symbiosis with, the network of commercial trade relations, the entire tribute system and interregional trade zone had its own structural rules which exercised systematic control through silver circulation and with the Chinese tribute system in the center.”

#### **IV. Japan as part of the system**

Japan was deeply integrated into this Confucian world, and unquestioningly accepted the prevailing norms and institutions. There is, however, a myth of Japanese separateness that viewed Tokugawa-era Japan (1600-1868) as a closed and isolated nation, one that operated outside the East Asian international system. In the last two decades, however, a revisionist view has become widely accepted, one which sees Tokugawa as deeply interested in, and interacting with, the rest of East Asia. Although not fully reincorporated into the tributary system, Japan operated by essentially the same set of rules, following the function if not the explicit form of tributary relations with China. Most importantly, Tokugawa Japan continued to accept the Confucian international order and China’s place within that system, and used the same ideas and practices in its foreign relations. Kim writes:

The Tokugawa rulers...tacitly acknowledged Chinese supremacy and cultural leadership in the East Asian world...Although Tokugawa Japan maintained no formal ties with China...for all intents and purposes it

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<sup>59</sup> Takeshia Hamashita, “The Tribute Trade System and Modern Asia,” in A.J.H. Latham and Heita Kawakatsu, eds., *Japanese Industrialization and the Asian Economy* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 92.

was as much a part of the Chinese world as Ashikaga Japan had been.<sup>60</sup>

Although the conventional wisdom was that the Tokugawa shogunate closed itself off from the rest of the world formally in 1633 with a policy sometimes referred to as *sakoku*, the reality was that trade with China and the rest of the world continued to be an important part of Japan's economy.<sup>61</sup> The Tokugawa rulers remained integrated into East Asia, and made systematic efforts to gather information on regional affairs.<sup>62</sup> The more recent scholarship interprets *sakoku* as merely "maritime provisions" that were "simply a part of a sequential process rather than firm indications of new policy directions."<sup>63</sup> Historians today interpret these Japanese maritime provisions more as examples of normal statecraft and the extension of Tokugawa control, rather than paranoia or cowering anti-foreignism. Toby argues that Japan under Tokugawa had an "active state-sponsored program of international commercial and technological intelligence...that enhanced domestic sovereignty and enabled the state to regulate a desired foreign trade."<sup>64</sup>

Tokugawan trade was far more extensive than was previously realized: after the Qing court established full control of Taiwan in 1683, it lifted restrictions on shipping to Japan, and trade expanded dramatically.<sup>65</sup> The Tsushima profits from

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<sup>60</sup> Kim, *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order*, p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>62</sup> Ishii, *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia*, p. 2; William Wray, "The 17th Century Japanese Diaspora: Questions of Boundary and Policy," (ms., University of British Columbia, n.d.) p. 2.

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<sup>64</sup> Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan*, p. xvi.

<sup>65</sup> Yoneo Ishii, *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia: translations from the Tosen Fusetsu-gaki, 1674-1723* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998) pp. 6-11; Satoshi Ikeda, "The History of

Korean trade during Tokugawa were enough to feed the entire population of Osaka at current rice prices.<sup>66</sup> In 1688 alone, 193 Chinese ships and almost 10,000 Chinese merchants visited Japan.<sup>67</sup> Japan also had a permanent trading and ceramics factory in Pusan, Korea, with a population of over one thousand Japanese, operating continuously from 1611 to the Meiji restoration.<sup>68</sup>

Lee stresses the “undiminished importance of a trade relationship with China and, to a lesser extent, with Korea and the Ryuku” during the Tokugawa period.<sup>69</sup> Between 1600 and 1635, over 350 Japanese ships traded under the vermilion seal, visiting at least 19 ports, including Vietnam, Cambodia, Luzon, Malay-Indonesian archipelago. The Tsushima profits from Korean trade during Tokugawa were enough to feed the entire population of Osaka at current rice prices.<sup>70</sup> In 1688 alone, 193 Chinese ships and almost 10,000 Chinese merchants visited Japan.<sup>71</sup> By 1635, 350 permits had been issued – 43 to Chinese, 38 to European applicants, and 259 to Japanese traders. These ships carried an average crew of 225 men.<sup>72</sup> Between 1604 and 1635, at least 87 Japanese ships traded with Vietnam, 54 with Manila and 55 with Siam.<sup>73</sup>

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the Capitalist World-System vs. the History of East-Southeast Asia,” *Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), pp. 49-78.

<sup>66</sup> Ronald P. Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. xxviii.

<sup>67</sup> Gang Deng, *Maritime Sector, Institutions, and Sea Power of Premodern China*, p. 183.

<sup>68</sup> Toby (1977, 325) notes that “a ‘seclusion’ analysis ignores the fact that Japan is in Asia, and divorces European relations (‘seclusion’) from Asian relations.”

<sup>69</sup> Lee, “Trade and Economy in Preindustrial East Asia, c. 1500-1800,” p. 7.

<sup>70</sup> Ronald P. Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. xxviii.

<sup>71</sup> Gang Deng, *Maritime Sector, Institutions, and Sea Power of Premodern China*, p. 183.

<sup>72</sup> Marius Jansen, *China in the Tokugawa World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 19.

<sup>73</sup> Reid, “An ‘Age of Commerce’ in Southeast Asian History,” 10.

China under the Qing was much more willing to consider private trading relations in place of formal tribute relationships. After the Qing court established full control of Taiwan in 1683, it lifted restrictions on shipping to Japan, and trade expanded dramatically.<sup>74</sup> Von Glahn writes that, “Japanese trade with China grew substantially after the Tokugawa came to power in 1600. The Tokugawa *shogun* Ieyasu aggressively pursued foreign trade opportunities to obtain strategic military supplies and gold as well as silk goods.”<sup>75</sup>

Japanese exports in the 17<sup>th</sup> century are estimated to have reached 10 percent of its GNP.<sup>76</sup> <sup>77</sup> Japanese silver exports from 1615 to 1625 were between 130,000 and 160,000 kilograms, between 30 and 45 percent of total world production of silver.<sup>78</sup> Table 2 estimates Japanese silver trade in the mid-seventeenth century. Most notable is how small the Dutch portion of the silver trade actually was. So much silver was pouring out of Japan to buy foreign goods that the government restricted silver exports beginning in 1688 and completely banned its export in 1763, attempting to promote copper instead.<sup>79</sup> However, this government attempt to control exports was not entirely successful, and by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, precious metal exports had return to 16<sup>th</sup> century levels. “During the eighteenth century,” Klein writes, “Japanese exports of precious metals over the isle of

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<sup>74</sup> Yoneo Ishii, *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia: translations from the Tosen Fusetsu-gaki, 1674-1723* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998) pp. 6-11; Satoshi Ikeda, “The History of the Capitalist World-System vs. the History of East-Southeast Asia,” *Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), pp. 49-78.

<sup>75</sup> Richard von Glahn, “Myth and Reality of China's Seventeenth Century Monetary Crisis,” *Journal of Economic History* 56, no. 2 (1996), pp. 429-454.

<sup>76</sup> Howe, *The Origins of Japanese Trade Supremacy*, p. 40.

<sup>77</sup> Klein, “The China seas and the World Economy between the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” p. 69.

<sup>78</sup> Iwao Seiichi, “Japanese Foreign Trade in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries,” *Acta Asiatica* 30 (1976), p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> John Hall, “Notes on the Early Qing Copper Trade with Japan,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 12 (December 1949), pp. 444-461.

Tsushima into Korea and China actually surpassed the amounts of silver that had earlier been carried away from Nagasaki by the Chinese and Dutch.”<sup>80</sup> Wray adds that “[Tokugawa] Japan had a distinctive policy for virtually every country or area with which it traded. There were far more Chinese than Dutch ships coming to Nagasaki...”<sup>81</sup>

//Table 2 here//

However, despite their economic integration with the rest of Asia, Japanese ambivalence toward China was more powerful than in Vietnam or Korea. Japan stopped sending envoys to China in 890, and did not resume them until the mid-14th century and then only for a century. After that, the earliest formal foreign relations are 1871. During the period under study, most China-Japan trade was conducted in Philippines or southeast Asian ports, although there were periods when Chinese ships could visit Nagasaki. Japanese had a visceral resistance to the subordinating rituals required by the formal tributary conditions that China laid down. Internal criticism along those lines forced the Ashikaga shoguns to discontinue tribute relations after the short bout in the 15th century. Early attempts to import Chinese bureaucratic approaches in the 11<sup>th</sup> century failed in the smaller, more backward environment of Japan.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Klein, “The China seas and the World Economy between the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” p. 67.

<sup>81</sup> Wray, “The 17th Century Japanese Diaspora,” p. 12.

<sup>82</sup> William Wayne Farris, “Trade, Money, and Merchants in Nara Japan,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 53, no. 3 (Autumn 1998), pp. 303-334, 319; Kenneth Grossberg, “From Feudal Chieftans to Secular Monarch: The Development of Shogunal Power in Early Muromachi Japan,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1976), pp. 29-49; Donald Shively et al., *The Cambridge History of Japan: Volume 2, Heian Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

Despite these reservations, the Chinese example as a normative precedent remained very important even for the Tokugawa Japanese. David Pollack writes that, “until modern times the Chinese rarely troubled themselves about Japan; the Japanese, however, were preoccupied with China from the beginning of their recorded history...for the Japanese, what was ‘Japanese’ had always to be considered in relation to what was thought to be ‘Chinese’...”<sup>83</sup> There is really no difference in this respect between Japan on the one hand and Korea and Vietnam on the other. Even for the last two, which had regular tributary relations with China, China in general and Chinese as individuals seldom thought of these tributaries as anything but validations of their own self esteem. Yet Korea could not forget about China for a day! Japan was no different, except in the dimension that its relationship was more cultural and economic, much less political, and military not at all, and the cultural relationship was with Chinese literature, not with China itself.

By the time of Tokugawa Japan (1600-1868), “educational institutions at every level across the nation followed a similar curriculum of Japanese and Chinese texts...the *Tangshixuan* collection of Chinese poetry a required text, where it was regarded as a canonical work.” Chinese literature was so in demand that between 1727 and 1814, one publisher – Suwaraya Shinbei, put out twenty seven editions of the *Tangshixuan*.<sup>84</sup> When Tokugawa shoguns (1600-1868) were looking for legal and institutional models for how to structure their own government and society, “they were usually Chinese in origin,” such as the “Six Maxims” first issued by Ming

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<sup>83</sup> David Pollack, *The Fracture of Meaning: Japan’s Synthesis of China from the Eighth through the Eighteenth Centuries* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> Toby, “Rescuing the Nation from History,” p. 228.

founder T'ai-tsu in 1398, as well as Qing and even T'ang and Song legal and administrative codes.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, the *Tokugawa jikki* (the official annals of the Tokugawa era) contains numerous references to Japanese legal scholars consulting with Chinese and Korean scholars as they attempted to interpret various Chinese laws and precedents and modify them for Tokugawa use. However, although the Japanese studied Chinese institutions in all periods, they did not import the names and terminology, but rather the *ideas* that those institutions reflected. There were no "six ministries," for example, in Japan. In this respect, the Japanese were much less slavish than their East Asian state counterparts.

Japan's sole attempt to challenge its position in the Confucian order was a disaster. The Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592 caused enormous destruction but failed completely.<sup>86</sup> Thereafter, although Japan remained formally outside the tribute system, it did not challenge the system. Swope writes, "because the Tokugawa maintained order in Japan, piracy was not the problem it had been in the past and the two states co-existed in relative peace until the late nineteenth century."<sup>87</sup>

Arrighi, Hui, Hung, and Selden note that, "the China-centered tributary-trade system can often mediate inter-state relations and articulate hierarchies with

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<sup>85</sup> Marius Jansen, *China in the Tokugawa World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 65, 228.

<sup>86</sup> Kenneth M. [Swope, 2005](#), "Crouching Tigers, Secret Weapons: Military Technology Employed During the Sino-Japanese-Korean War, 1592-1598," *Journal of Military History* 69, (2005), pp. 11-42; Mary Elizabeth [Berry, 1982](#), *Hideyoshi*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); [Hawley, Samuel Hawley, 2005](#), *The Imjin War*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and [Lee, Jang-Hee Lee, 1999](#), *Imjin waeransa yǒngu* (Research on the History of the Imjin War), (Seoul: Asea Munwhasa, 1999).

<sup>87</sup> Kenneth [Swope, 2002](#), "Deceit, Disguise, and Dependence: China, Japan, and the Future of the Tributary System, 1592-1596," *International History Review* 24 No. 4 (2002), pp. 757-782, 781.

minimal recourse to war. Japan and Vietnam, being peripheral members of this system, seemed more content to replicate this hierarchical relationship within their own sub-systems than vie directly against China in the larger order.”<sup>88</sup> Thus, even though Japan only sporadically accepted tributary status, the system as a whole was stable because Japan both accepted Chinese centrality in the system, and also benefited from the creation of trade and the general stability it brought.

Scholars such as Takeshi Hamashita have even explored the nature of East Asian economic and diplomatic linkages that existed well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and argued that Japan challenged China *within* the Confucian international order, not outside of it.<sup>89</sup> According to Hamashita, prosperity from the post-Imjin War economic boom, smuggling, and commercialism that prospered outside the tribute trade system framework was not a collapse of the system, but a sign of its success, which resulted from strong demand for Chinese goods. Refuting the commonly held view that the arrival of the Western great power politics in Asia marked a sharp disjuncture from the traditional Sino-centric order, he argues that the tribute-trade system was far stickier and more persistent than normally assumed. Based on the examination of a series of treaties signed during this period,<sup>90</sup> he makes a further claim that not only were the tribute-trade system and the Western-style treaty order compatible, but also that the tribute concept tended to subsume the Western treaty concept even into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, it was only with the arrival of

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<sup>88</sup> Arrighi, Hui, Hung, and Selden 2003, 269; von Verschuer 2000.

<sup>89</sup> Takeshi Hamashita, *China, East Asia, and the Global Economy: Regional and Historical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>90</sup> They include the 1876 Treaty of Kangwha between Korea and Japan, the 1882 Regulations for Maritime and Overland Trade between Chinese and Korean Subjects, and the 1885 Tianjin Treaty between China and Japan.

Western imperial powers and the implosion of the China-dominated system that Japan challenged China's position.

## **V. Conclusion and implications**

In sum, the East Asian region was a vibrant, coherent, developed region long before the arrival of the West that consisted of institutional and normative practices that endured – with modifications – for well over five centuries. China was clearly the dominant military, cultural, and economic power in the system, and it had written the international “rules of the game,” but its goals did not include expansion against its established neighboring states. These smaller states emulated Chinese practices and to varying degrees explicitly accepted Chinese centrality in the region. The system finally collapsed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the full arrival of the Western powers.

### *1. Hegemony and legitimacy*

Hegemony is not unipolarity, and the functioning of an international economic system requires consensus and legitimacy. What this paper demonstrates is that there is a hierarchical relationship in place in the context of China and the East Asian states that was generated by a common culture defined by a Confucian worldview. These Sinic states possessed a shared sense of legitimacy that presupposes, in the context of Confucianism, that relations operate within an accepted hierarchy. The research presented in this paper helps clarify the distinction between an international system based on polarity and an international

society based on culture. Both material power and legitimate authority are key aspects of international orders, and it is reasonable to hypothesize that all systems incorporate hierarchic elements of power and authority, and that the Confucian order was hardly unique.

Indeed, the appropriate comparison to the East Asian Confucian order is probably not Westphalian Europe, but the US-dominated Western hemisphere during the Monroe doctrine. Like China in East Asia, the U.S. quickly became the dominant state in the Western hemisphere, and also created a set of norms and institutions that governed how smaller states were to interact with the U.S. After the U.S. settled its borders with Mexico and Canada, war between states in the Americas became rare, although the U.S. has consistently intervened throughout the hemisphere when stability has been threatened, or when smaller states did not recognize the United States' status as hegemon. Because there have been fewer major wars in both the Americas and East Asia, scholars have naturally overlooked them when studying war and peace – but precisely because they offer different structures and norms than the European experience, studying these and other international systems is a promising avenue for further research. Europe may actually be the anomaly, not the norm, in international relations.

## *2. China has bought into the world system today*

Although China may have been the source of a long-lasting civilization in East Asia in the distant past, today it operates in a Westphalian world system dominated by norms and ideas that developed in the West. Indeed, there is a fair amount of

evidence that China has accepted this system as legitimate and hegemonic.<sup>91</sup> Few states or people in East Asia look to China for ideas, for example, or for practical solutions to present problems. China today is important and influential, to be sure – but it is important today merely because of its material power and its massive geographic and demographic size, not because of its ideas or the vitality of its culture.

This leads to an important question: Has China – and have other East Asian countries -- completely internalized and been socialized into Westphalian ideas? East Asian views, identities, and expectations emerged from their own historical experiences and intellectual worldviews. It might even be surprising to expect that their beliefs and norms about state behavior would be completely derived from a Western model.

This analytic ambiguousness is reflected in two competing views of East Asian states. On the one hand, scholars tend to take for granted that all states are now Westphalian, and to guide their expectations and theories based on that assumption. On issues such as economic development and territorial integrity, scholars view East Asian states as Westphalian: as Muthiah Alagappa argues, “it is the Asian states that most clearly approximate the Westphalian state.”<sup>92</sup> Yet on the other hand, there is a deep undercurrent of concern, or even suspicion, about East Asian and Chinese intentions and their degree of acceptance of “world” norms and

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<sup>91</sup> Iain Alastair Johnston, “Is China a Status Quo Power?” *International Security* 22, no. 5, (September/October 1999) 24-36.

<sup>92</sup> Muthiah Alagappa, *Asian Security Order: Normative and Instrumental Features* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 87. See also Kenneth B. Pyle, *Japan Rising: The Resurgence of Japanese Power and Purpose* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007), p. 18.

ideas, whether it be on issues of human rights; internet control; democracy; biodiversity, or even economic issues such as capital and current accounts, energy and climate change policy, and intellectual property rights. This is reflected in U.S. calls on China to become a “responsible stakeholder.” While these debates are often focused on politics at the domestic level, it is also worth considering how they also are affected the larger international system.

While much scholarly discussion about China’s rise has focused on whether the balance of power can remain stable, perhaps just as important is whether China finds the current U.S.-dominated order to be legitimate, [whether and how China seeks recognition and status within that order](#), and whether other major powers accept China’s place in that order.<sup>93</sup> Thus, as China develops, [its definitions of and aspirations for status, and](#) whether it finds the current norms and rules of the U.S.-dominated Westphalian order to be legitimate may be more important for stability than how the distribution of capabilities evolves.

By refocusing the question on the larger rules of the game, as well as the individual identities and values of the individual countries, we may make more progress in being analytically clear about how these issues manifest themselves and what the ramifications may be.

### *3. Japan is not a leader*

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<sup>93</sup> [Yong Deng, \*China’s Struggle for Status\* \(Cambridge, 2008\)](#); Evelyn [Goh, “Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies,”](#) [International Security](#) 32 [No. 3, \(2007\), pp.](#) 113-157.

Japan also serves as an intriguing case study about the extent to which states are affected by their history. Despite uncertainty about Japan's future course, Japan has shown little desire or capacity to lead East Asia. Historically, when China was strong, Japan did not challenge China, nor did it harbor designs on East Asian dominance or leadership. From its sole unsuccessful attempt to challenge Chinese hegemony in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, its reluctance to provide public goods during its era of high growth in the post-WWII era, its acceptance of U.S. predominance during the Cold War, and to its increasingly deep enmeshment in its U.S. security alliance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is little in Japan's domestic institutions, history, culture, or the structure of the region that leads to the conclusion that Japan will challenge China for regional leadership. Japan was never as powerful or influential as China. Japan fully accepted the larger Confucian international society and order, only challenging the rules and norms when an alternative, Westphalian, system arrived from the outside.

**Table 1. Chinese Data for Ships Visiting Japan, 1641-1683**

Year	Number of Ships
1641-5	310
1646-51	220
1652-6	259
1657-61	238
1662-6	182
1667-71	185
1672-6	138
1677-81	126
1682-3	53
Total: 43	1,711
Annual average	40

*Source:* Gang Deng, "The Foreign Staple Trade of China in the Pre-Modern Era," *International History Review* 19, no. 2 (May 1997), p. 262.

**Table 2: Japanese Silver Exports, 1648-1672 (kg)**

Year	Exports to China	Exports to the Netherlands	Total silver exports	Dutch share (%)
1648	6,727.50	23,332.50	30,060.00	77.6
1649	20,452.50	20,028.75	40,481.25	49.5
1650	25,605.00	14,775.00	40,380.00	36.6
1651	17,808.75	18,360.00	36,168.75	50.8
1652	21,326.25	21,446.25	42,772.50	50.1
1653	13,188.75	23,216.25	36,405.00	63.8
1654	30,678.75	14,430.00	45,108.75	32.0
1655	17,456.25	15,007.50	32,463.75	46.2
1656	19,653.75	23,212.50	42,866.25	54.2
1657	9,187.50	28,357.50	37,545.00	75.5
1658	41,358.75	21,150.00	62,508.75	33.8
1659	72,753.75	22,350.00	95,103.75	23.5
1660	75,566.25	16,008.75	91,575.00	17.5
1661	96,633.75	20,790.00	117,423.75	17.7
1662	48,536.25	22,350.00	70,886.25	31.5
1663	20,291.25	13,770.00	34,061.25	40.4
1664	62,490.00	20,895.00	83,385.00	25.1
1665	30,157.50	25,800.00	55,957.50	46.1
1666	27,135.00	14,913.75	42,048.75	35.5
1667	17,051.25	13,402.50	30,453.75	44.0
1668	12,806.25	0.00	12,806.25	0.0
1669	1,110.00	0.00	1,110.00	0.0
1670	1,481.25	0.00	1,481.25	0.0
1671	3,562.50	0.00	3,562.50	0.0
1672	33,615.00	0.00	33,615.00	0.0

Source: Richard von Glahn, "Myth and Reality of China's Seventeenth Century Monetary Crisis," *Journal of Economic History* 56, no. 2 (June 1996), p. 443.

*4. How we create the present today is more important than the historical facts*