
State Formation in Korea and Japan, 400–800 CE: Emulation and Learning, Not Bellicist Competition

Chin-Hao Huang  and David C. Kang 

Abstract State formation occurred in Korea and Japan 1,000 years before it did in Europe, and it occurred for reasons of emulation and learning, not bellicist competition. State formation in historical East Asia occurred under a hegemonic system in which war was relatively rare, not under a balance-of-power system with regular existential threats. Korea and Japan emerged as states between the fifth and ninth centuries CE and existed for centuries thereafter with centralized bureaucratic control defined over territory and administrative capacity to tax their populations, field large militaries, and provide extensive public goods. They created these institutions not to wage war or suppress revolt: the longevity of dynasties in these countries is evidence of both the peacefulness of their region and their internal stability. Rather, Korea and Japan developed state institutions through emulation and learning from China. The elites of both copied Chinese civilization for reasons of prestige and domestic legitimacy in the competition between the court and the nobility.

The might and wealth of the Sui–Tang empires (618–907) at their peak deeply impressed China’s neighbors. Japan, the Korean states, and even (briefly) Tibet imitated the Sui–Tang imperial model, and to a greater or lesser degree adopted the Chinese written language, Sui–Tang political institutions and laws, Confucian ideology, and the Buddhist religion. It was during this era that East Asia—a community of independent national states sharing a common civilization—took shape in forms that have endured down to modern times.

—Richard von Glahn¹

Korea and Japan should not exist, according to the dominant theories of state formation, which were inductively derived from the European experience. Yet, by the eighth century CE, more than 7,000 men staffed the Japanese imperial bureaucracy.² This bureaucracy included a state council, eight ministries, and forty-six bureaus. A comprehensive administrative hierarchy of provinces, districts, and villages had been established throughout the empire. The court implemented a population census, a centralized tax system, a legal code, and a civil service examination, all based on Chinese Tang dynasty models.

1. Von Glahn 2016, 169.

2. Ebrey and Walthall 2014, 121.

Even by the thirteenth century, European state formation could not compare to that achieved half a millennium earlier in East Asia. The Catholic Church's legal office, the Curia, was so advanced compared to fourteenth-century European royal courts that it was a "template for sophisticated administration;"³ others observed that it "became the model for the beginnings of state bureaucracies."⁴ Yet the Curia had only 1,000 or so officials and was dwarfed by the complexity and size that the Japanese state bureaucracy had already achieved 500 years earlier. Further state formation in Europe was then driven by competition for territory and survival. As Gorski and Sharma summarize the literature: "The bellicist paradigm makes war the underlying mechanism driving virtually all aspects of state formation [and] has become the standard narrative of state formation within the social sciences."⁵

In contrast, in historical East Asia, state formation occurred in a region in which war was relatively rare. There was no balance-of-power system with regular existential threats: the longevity of the East Asian dynasties is evidence of both the peacefulness of their neighborhood and its internal stability. Instead, emulation and learning from China—the hegemon which had a civilizational influence across the known world—drove the rapid formation of centralized, bureaucratically administered, territorial governments in Korea and Japan. However, international relations scholars have not sufficiently investigated how the system affects the units, and in particular how hegemonic systems may differ from balance-of-power systems.

In this paper we provide evidence of Korean and Japanese emulation of Chinese civilization, which centrally included state formation. We show how extensively Korea and Japan borrowed from China during the fifth to eighth centuries. We show that this occurred through conscious, intentional emulation and learning, and that a regionwide epistemic community existed, composed mainly of Buddhist monks and Confucian scholars, who interacted, traveled, and learned from each other. Perhaps most importantly, we show that this occurred in an almost complete absence of war. Despite Charles Tilly's famous dictum that "war made the state, and the state made war,"⁶ neither war nor preparations for war were the cause or the effect of state formation in either Korea or Japan. Instead, as we will show, their local elites emulated Chinese models for reasons of prestige and domestic legitimacy.

The research presented here leads to new insights about state formation in all societies, not just East Asia. It moves the study of state formation beyond both Eurocentric and Sinocentric preoccupations to be truly comparative in nature. This research casts doubt on whether the bellicist thesis is a universal truth with explanatory power outside the European region in which it was inductively derived. If we are right, then the bellicist approach is just one possible causal mechanism that is often

3. Grzymala-Busse 2020, 27.

4. Mitterauer 2010, 150.

5. Gorski and Sharma 2017, 98.

6. Tilly 1975, 42.

applied as a partial narrative about a particular time and place. Further examination of East Asian history would probably generate different assumptions and theories about international relations, which would probably lead to different conclusions about how politics works.⁷ The willingness to acknowledge the Eurocentric origins of much of international relations theory is not new; what is new in this paper is the deep and extensive empirical evidence we bring to bear that shows this explicitly. Furthermore, it offers a positive theoretical advance with a new argument about the causes of state formation.

Theories of State Formation and International Diffusion

A state is most centrally composed of an administrative bureaucracy. Giddens defines a state as “a political apparatus (governmental institutions, such as court, plus civil-service officials), ruling over a given territory, whose authority is backed by a legal system and the capacity to use force.”⁸ Hui defines the state as “monopolization of the means of coercion, nationalization of taxation, and bureaucratization of administration.”⁹ Vu argues that “centralized bureaucracy is perhaps the most important institution in the structure of any state.”¹⁰ Centeno also focuses on bureaucratization as the key institutional element of a state, arguing that the lack of “total wars” in Latin American stunted the growth of the bureaucratic state in the region.¹¹

The bellicist causal arguments are clear: war and preparation for war lead to the creation of an administration and extraction that outlast the particular wars that states fight.¹² Furthermore, those states with the best administration and extraction are more likely to survive: “military competition winnowed out weaker states and led to vigorous new efforts to tax and extract resources ... Warfare was constant.”¹³ That is, war made the state, and then the state made more war; if it survived, the state was even more state-like, and even more war-like.

An enormous literature extrapolates from the European experience as if it is universal and, with various modifications, asserts that the demands of war drive states to create institutions that can extract resources from society.¹⁴ However, there are compelling reasons to think that much of the bellicist literature is actually sophisticated stories about Europe, not deductive theories. The bellicist argument is, in fact, a complex set of ad hoc and coincidental Europe-specific factors that appeared over the centuries in an uneven process that eventually resulted in the emergence of the eighteenth-century state.

7. Khong 2013.

8. Giddens 1989, 301.

9. Hui 2004, 181.

10. Vu 2010, 152.

11. Centeno 2003, 23.

12. Tilly 1992, 20–21.

13. Grzymala-Busse 2020, 23.

14. Centeno 2003; Han and Thies 2019.

Consider, as an alternative, the role of religion in the long history of Europe. The occasional mention by scholars like Tilly of the role of “the clergy” is not enough. The clergy were not simply another interest group: the substance of religious beliefs and influence was central to European state formation. As Grzymala-Busse argues about Europe, “The Church had the wealth, spiritual authority, and expertise to fundamentally mold politics ... It wielded doctrine, law, literacy, and administrative innovations to shape nascent states ... The struggle between the papacy and the rulers [was] unrelenting.”¹⁵

There were also processes of emulation in Europe, in addition to bellicist war. Ideational and institutional pressures pushed Europe toward cultural conformity. Gorski, for example, emphasizes the impact of Reformation ideas in driving a redefinition of the purposes of rulers and the institutions of statehood, in ways that helped drive European cultural conformity.¹⁶ Grzymala-Busse also emphasizes emulation of religious institutions in European statebuilding, writing that “the Church was a template for sophisticated administration ... The division of labor in the royal courts mirrored that of the papal administration, with distinct offices in charge of finances, judicial tasks, and correspondence that first arose in the eleventh century—and the same template was adopted across Europe.”¹⁷

In contrast to the extensive literature on European state formation, there is scant scholarship in the social science literature on state formation in East Asia. Most scholarship on East Asian state formation focuses on Phase 1—the emergence of unified China during and after the Warring States period (475–221 BCE).¹⁸ Yet this scholarship suffers from two main limitations, temporal and geographic. Temporally, it ignores almost all of East Asian history and focuses on the emergence of China 2,000 years ago as if it were the only event of consequence. This is as if scholars explored the rise of the Roman empire in the third to first centuries BCE and concluded that after that nothing of significance happened in European history until the twentieth century. In short, there is an overused stereotype of stagnant and endless dynastic Chinese cycles that should have been excised long ago from any serious scholarship on East Asia. Most state formation in East Asia occurred centuries after the initial emergence of centralized Chinese rule.

Geographically, much of the scholarship treats China as equivalent to all of East Asia, and barely acknowledges the existence of any other political units in the region. This overemphasizes the role of China in the system. Yet Korea and Japan (and later Vietnam and others) emerged as states over 1,000 years ago, beginning in the fifth to eighth centuries CE, which can be called Phase 2, and they often interacted with each other without paying any attention to China. It may seem odd to suggest *not* focusing on the hegemon. Our point, however, is that more emphasis

15. Grzymala-Busse 2020, 24.

16. Gorski 2003.

17. Grzymala-Busse 2020, 27.

18. Hui 2005; Kiser and Cai 2003; Zhao 2004. For exceptions, see Lieberman 2003; Rosenthal and Wong 2011.

needs to be placed on the agency that existed across the entire East Asian region. This is all the more necessary if the international relations discipline is going to widen its inquiry beyond China and Phase 1, and address state formation across the breadth of historical East Asia throughout the 1,700 years that encompass Phase 2 and beyond.

Diffusion: Competition or Emulation

Much of the bellicist literature does not directly address the issue of diffusion, instead simply implying diffusion through war. Gorski and Sharma describe the dominant orthodoxy “as neo-Darwinian [where] natural selection on military capacity is the fundamental law of state formation.”¹⁹ Yet in East Asia, there was clearly diffusion from core to periphery. A key question is how to explain this diffusion. In both the bellicist literature and the literature on Phase 1 of East Asian state formation, it is simply assumed that interstate war was the main cause of state formation. As Solingen notes, “diffusion processes remain a focal point of contemporary international studies. Yet we have often paid less attention to conceptualizing diffusion itself.”²⁰ The main focus of diffusion has been on the spread of international norms or economic policies, although our concern here is broader.

Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett identify four distinct causal mechanisms through which diffusion can take place: coercion, competition, learning, and emulation.²¹ As Solis and Katada describe them, coercion exists when strong actors intentionally force weaker actors to adopt practices; competition is a horizontal process where polities try to increase their competitiveness relative to peers; rational learning occurs when states assess costs and benefits; and emulation is where actors adopt policies or ideas deemed appropriate from a social-cultural perspective.²²

These causal processes are not mutually exclusive, even if the bellicist literature treats a particular kind of competition—interstate war—as monocausal in the European case. Coercion from China was absent in the historical era under study. Indeed, during some of this period, even when it was divided and militarily weak, its ideas and civilization were enduring and eagerly sought.²³ While the conventional bellicist literature implies that competition over territory and survival was the key causal mechanism in diffusion, in East Asia learning and emulation were the main means. Perhaps they even played a larger role in the European statebuilding experience than the bellicist thesis credits them for.

In the case of competition, states can compete with each other in different areas: for capital and export-market share, as in the contemporary world, or for territory and prestige, as in historical Europe. While this process may involve intentional

19. Gorski and Sharma 2017, 98.

20. Solingen 2012, 631.

21. Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2006.

22. Solis and Katada 2015, 3.

23. Pines 2012.

copying (through learning or emulation), it is more of a selection process, in which states that develop strong institutions survive, while others are selected out.

As alternatives to competition, learning and emulation are similar causal mechanisms, distinguished by the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness. Learning involves both a simple tactical level of “how to better achieve a particular goal,” and a deeper level of “what goals they should pursue.”²⁴ Learning is intentional and conscious, best recognized “when we see a highly successful policy change in country A, followed by similar changes in countries B and C.”²⁵ Learning is based on a decision, after a cost–benefit analysis, that one behavior works better than another. Dobbin, Simmons, and Garrett define learning as “when new evidence changes our beliefs,” and “people add new data to prior knowledge and beliefs to revise their assessment of that knowledge,” a process often described as Bayesian updating.²⁶

Emulation reflects a similar process but focuses more on how actors aspire to and copy from others they respect or admire. This is a “focus on the intersubjectivity of meaning—both legitimate ends and appropriate means are considered social constructs [where] there is a broad consensus on a set of appropriate social actors, appropriate societal goals, and means for achieving those goals.”²⁷ In the contemporary era, Boli-Bennett and Meyer argue that what is “appropriate” in terms of actors, goals, and policy means has diffused around the world.²⁸ This focus on emulation is similar to the “practice turn” in international relations, which has focused on the “socially meaningful patterns of action which, in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world.”²⁹ Rather than being based on cost–benefit calculations, emulation is more aspirational. Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett note that “countries embrace new norms for symbolic reasons, even when they cannot begin to put them into practice.”³⁰ Failure of emulation is not necessarily rejection but rather inability. Johnston, for example, sees emulation as coping and adaptation, and particularly relevant for a country in a novel, unfamiliar environment.³¹

Distinguishing Between Learning and Emulation

Distinguishing between learning and emulation can be difficult because they are similar processes. Solingen points out that “mechanisms often operate in tandem and interactively and are hard to disentangle from each other” and that “learning and emulation [are] arguably separated by the extent to which alternatives are

24. Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2006, 795.

25. *Ibid.*, 798.

26. Dobbin, Simmons, and Garrett 2007, 460.

27. Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2006, 799.

28. Boli-Bennett and Meyer 1978.

29. Adler and Pouliot 2011, 7.

30. Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2006, 800.

31. Johnston 2008.

thoroughly considered and lessons ‘rationally’ learned, as opposed to merely imitated.”³² Experimental research in the natural sciences finds it challenging to neatly distinguish between emulation and learning among chimpanzees and other primates.³³ Drawing on the parallel ideas of authority and coercion, Lake recognizes the analytical challenges of distinguishing them in practice: “there is no ‘bright line’ separating these two analytic concepts, and I offer none here.”³⁴

In fact, as noted before, many of these causal mechanisms could be present at the same time—they are not mutually exclusive. In particular, while learning is an assessment of costs and benefits—and, empirically, there should be Bayesian updating that leads to changes in practices—it only takes place with agreement about what is desirable. As Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett put it, learning “is fostered by a cluster of intersubjectively defined conditions: shared norms, beliefs, and notions of evidentiary validity.”³⁵ In contrast, pure copying or mimicking is a sign of emulation. In emulation, “followers may copy almost anything, and they may copy ritualistically. Evidence of ritualistic copying of policies suggests an effort to mimic the success of leading states without fully comprehending the roots of that success.”³⁶ Writing about the contemporary era, Dobbin, Simmons, and Garrett observe that “evidence of the power of new policy norms is that countries often sign on when they have no real hope of putting new policies into practice.”³⁷

It is probably impossible to definitively differentiate between emulation and learning. Yet as a probative way of organizing research, we use three main ways to distinguish them: whether the overall scale of borrowing was total or selective; whether justification was based on the logic of consequences or appropriateness; and, for each individual case, whether there was mimicry or modification.

First, the overall scale of borrowing can provide clues. If there is only selective or occasional borrowing, it implies a deliberate process in which conscious decisions are made about whether to accept part but not all of another country’s norms, behaviors, and institutions. However, if the scale of borrowing is essentially total, it implies emulation. Total borrowing implies that there was no deliberate or conscious choosing or arguing about the costs and benefits of each individual element. It seems implausible that a country could rationally evaluate another country’s ideas and, in every single case, conclude that the benefits outweigh the cost and thus consciously learn and copy. It seems more likely that a large overall scale of borrowing is simply emulation—unquestioned imitation based on the acceptance of the overall traits as something to be valued or desired.

Second, we examine the types of justification given at the time for a particular choice. For emulation, justification is more likely to emphasize the logic of

32. Solingen 2012, 634.

33. Call, Carpenter, and Tomasello 2005.

34. Lake 2007, 53.

35. Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2006, 795.

36. Dobbin, Simmons, and Garrett 2007, 452.

37. *Ibid.*, 453.

appropriateness, with appeals to legitimacy and authority dominating the discussion. For learning, justification is more likely to be based on the logic of consequences, with explicit discussion of costs and benefits.

Third, outright mimicry with no modifications for the borrowing country is widely agreed to be emulation. Selective borrowing or modification to suit local circumstances implies more conscious deliberation, and that would imply learning. When there is a tension between the imported idea and domestic society, if society is expected to change, that implies emulation. In contrast, localization to new circumstances implies learning; and attempts to indigenize imply new evidence that changes beliefs.

The Absence of Bellicist Pressures

War and preparations for war were not the cause of state formation in East Asia in Phase 2. Rather, a relative *absence* of war was the result of a particular type of state formation within a particular regional civilization centered on China. Indeed, the patterns of warfare in Europe and East Asia were systematically different.³⁸ In contrast to the recurrent bellicosity of similarly sized multipolar European states, East Asia was a hegemonic system dominated by China that also shared a particular set of norms and values. Dincecco and Wang are representative of the scholarly consensus that “in centralized China ... the most significant recurrent foreign attack threat came from Steppe nomads ... External attack threats were unidirectional, reducing the emperor’s vulnerability.”³⁹ Rosenthal and Wong concur: “Periodically, the people living beyond the Great Wall mobilized armies that could threaten major disruptions. These types of threats typically brought dynasties to their knees, but they occurred very infrequently and were separated by long periods of stable rule ... Rates of conflict were radically different in China and Europe.”⁴⁰

Korea and Japan also experienced patterns of war much different from those in Europe. Kelly finds “a lengthy period of peace among Confucian states, plus strong evidence that this peace was based on their shared Confucianism.”⁴¹ Indeed, compared to European polities, China, Korea, and Japan were remarkably stable and long-enduring, both internally and externally. Mark Peterson observes that the history of Korea “is remarkably stable and peaceful,” and Kirk Larsen notes that there were “critical moments in which the Chinese dynasty possessed both the capability and the momentum necessary to complete aggressive expansionist designs [against Korea] but decided not to do so.”⁴²

38. Kang 2010.

39. Dincecco and Wang 2018, 342.

40. Rosenthal and Wong 2011, 162, 168.

41. Kelly 2012, 422.

42. Larsen 2012, 9; Peterson 2018.

Remarkably, between the fifth and eighth centuries there was only one interstate war involving Korea, Japan, or China: the Korean War of Unification of 660–668. For centuries before and after the period discussed here, Japan, Korea, and China did not compete with each other for territory, prestige, or authority. Most importantly, from the third to the fifth century, China was divided and posed no military threat to the Korean peninsula or Japan. Thus, the initial centuries of state formation in both Korea and Japan occurred without any threat from China at all and without any war between these countries. Michael Seth points out:

Chinese culture was introduced to Korea at a time when China itself was politically weak and divided ... Chinese states were useful sources of cultural ideas and practices, but during this period of political disunity in China they were not in a position to threaten the existence of the Korean states. Nor was there any great empire with universalistic pretensions and the ability to dazzle its neighbors with cultural brilliance or intimidate them with military might. As a result, the process of state building during the Three Kingdoms period [in Korea] was largely an indigenous development, and Chinese cultural borrowing was done on a purely voluntary basis.⁴³

The Korean War of Unification

At the beginning of the seventh century, three kingdoms existed on the Korean peninsula: Koguryŏ, Paekche, and Silla. All had origins in the first century BCE and had coexisted for seven centuries. Over an eight-year period beginning in 660, Silla allied with the Chinese Tang dynasty to crush Koguryŏ and Paekche, unifying the Korean peninsula for the first time. Yet this was not a regional war. It was a Korean war. Neither China nor Japan had territorial ambitions on the peninsula. Indeed, the direction of attention was from the Korean kingdoms to the Tang, even though a newly powerful Tang dynasty might have been expected to expand its ambitions to the Korean peninsula. As Kanagawa describes it, “Efforts to draw the Tang into the conflicts on the Korean peninsula began early—in 626 CE, both Paekche and Silla sent envoys to the Tang complaining that Koguryŏ was preventing them from sending tribute and asking the Tang ruler to take action.”⁴⁴ Lai’s detailed study of these wars emphasizes the same point: “The Sui and Tang only had limited ambitions in occupying Koguryŏ and only asked that tribute be paid ... China’s troops withdrew numerous times after victories and did not seize full control of Koguryŏ’s territory.”⁴⁵

In 660, Silla and the Tang formed an alliance, and Silla’s envoy to the Tang, Kim Ch’unch’u, “obtained China’s agreement that in the event the Silla–Tang army won the war against Koguryŏ, the territory south of Pyongyang would belong to Silla.”⁴⁶

43. Seth 2016, 37.

44. Kanagawa 2020.

45. Lai 2020, 2, 15.

46. Lee and de Bary 1997, 57.

The Silla–Tang alliance first attacked Paekche, which in turn sought assistance from Yamato Japan. To support Paekche, Japan sent a naval force to the peninsula in 663, but a Silla–Tang force destroyed it. This battle was so peripheral to the overall war that most histories barely mention Japan’s support of Paekche.⁴⁷ After that, Paekche was destroyed, ending Japanese participation in the war, its involvement on the peninsula, and its “influence on the continent for almost a millennium.”⁴⁸ The Korean *Samguk sagi* (History of the Three Kingdoms, written in 1145) recounts that “Tang general Su Ting-fang said to [Silla general] Yusin, ‘My command allows me to exercise authority as conditions dictate, so I will now present to you as maintenance lands all of Paekche’s territory that has been acquired, this as reward for your merit. How would that be?’”⁴⁹

In 668, the Silla–Tang alliance defeated Koguryŏ, the gates to the Koguryŏ capital having been opened from within by a traitor. By 676, all Tang forces had withdrawn from the peninsula, “and the Korean peninsula (up to a line somewhere north of modern Pyongyang) was unified.”⁵⁰ As Kanagawa describes it:

By 679 CE the Tang had abandoned the peninsula, allowing Silla to consolidate its control over the territory. Over the course of the 680s, Tang–Silla relations would gradually improve, and Silla would once again send regular envoys bearing tribute to the Tang court and receiving investiture from the Tang ruler.⁵¹

There is almost nothing in the historical record to link state formation with this war. In particular, there are three bellicist hypotheses that do not find support in the historical record: the more advanced the state formation, the better the state performs in war; state formation as an effect of war; and state formation as a cause of war.

First, if the bellicist account explained East Asia, it should have been the most state-like polity that defeated its rivals; and that state should have continued to pursue territorial expansion. Yet the victor, Silla, was considered the most backward of the Three Kingdoms and was the last to Sinicize because it was isolated and far away. Koguryŏ was the first to import Buddhism and Confucianism, and even Paekche was considered cultural and institutionally superior to Silla. These signs of state formation, which had slowly been adopted over the centuries, were not reforms aimed at war fighting; they were aimed at improving domestic governance and gaining prestige. Lee and de Bary reflect a historiographic consensus that Silla “had the lowest standard of culture and was the last to develop as a state.”⁵²

The second causal mechanism in the bellicist thesis is state formation as effect: war and preparations for war result in state formation. There is no evidence that Korean or

47. Hwang 2017.

48. Holcombe 2011, 111.

49. Quoted in Lee and de Bary 1997, 60.

50. Holcombe 2011, 111.

51. Wang 2013, 84, notes that Silla sent twenty-five envoys to the Tang between 686 and 886 CE.

52. Lee and de Bary 1997, 34.

Japanese state formation was undertaken as preparation for war or for war itself. The centuries in which these countries did not fight but instead engaged in emulation, learning, and state formation belie the idea that war was the cause and state formation the effect. As Seth points out, over a span of nearly three centuries there were no interstate wars that spurred institutional development in Korea or Japan.⁵³

The third bellicist causal mechanism is state formation as cause: the more state formation, the more war. Those states that did develop state institutions were more powerful—the more state-like countries should have engaged in more war than the less state-like, and should have used their relative advantage in state-building capacity to expand. However, this also was not the case in the East Asian experience. The Tang refrained from annexation, and the Silla did not expand beyond the peninsula. Moreover, as we show later, Japan before and after the Korean War of Unification had quite clear boundaries that did not include continental expansion.

In addition to the three causal elements of the bellicist argument, there is a temporal assumption embedded in its logic: state-building and war should occur at or around the same time. However, the timing of this war does not fit that argument. This war occurred long after state consolidation began in East Asia, and it ended quickly, with no further impact on state formation, even while state consolidation continued for centuries thereafter. There were no identifiable shifts in military technology that sparked the only war during these centuries. Therefore, it is only plausible to conclude that the war was incidental to state formation in Korea, either as cause or effect.

The Absence of Japanese Territorial Ambitions

Japanese state formation was also not aimed at war. In the 400 years of slowly evolving Japanese state formation under consideration here, the Korean War of Unification was the only war in which Japan was involved. Furthermore, it is still not clear why Japan participated. Batten sums up the historiographic consensus: “Why the Japanese should have thrown themselves with such vigor into a war that, if not quite an intramural Korean conflict, had at least no direct bearing on Japanese territory, is not easy to answer.”⁵⁴

Japan was not involved militarily on the continent for centuries before or after the 663 intervention. As with the Korean state-building experience, war did not lead to Japanese state formation, either: for about a decade after the defeat in 663, Japan feared possible Silla or Tang reprisals. The Japanese built three fortresses and a series of signal fires for the possibility of an invasion. However, there was no imminent threat, and within a few decades such efforts were abandoned. Batten notes that “scattered references to construction or repair of fortifications continue until 701, when the final Takayasu Fortress was abolished.”⁵⁵ By the end of the eighth

53. Seth 2016.

54. Batten 1986, 212.

55. Ibid., 216.

century, the military had atrophied from disuse. Holcombe observes that “Japan no longer faced any serious foreign military threats, and the conscript army was allowed to lapse by as early as 792.”⁵⁶ As Batten observes, during the Sui–Tang era of the sixth to tenth centuries, Japanese relations with China continued, but “there is no hint of military interaction ... Japanese contact with Tang was carried out almost exclusively by diplomatic channels, specifically via *kentoshi* or ‘Japanese missions to Tang.’”⁵⁷

Throughout centuries of state formation, Japan did not involve itself in war at the beginning or at the end of the period studied here. Nor did more state formation lead to more war. As with the Korean peninsula, there were no interstate wars in the fourth to fifth centuries that provoked Japanese state formation, nor were there more wars in the seventh and eighth centuries. Japan’s territorial borders had been largely fixed by this time, and they remained fixed for centuries into the future. Batten notes that “the most important section of the border was the Korea Strait, located between the island of Tsushima and the Korean peninsula ... Aside from the late sixteenth century, during Hideyoshi’s invasions ... the strait has always defined the western limit of Japanese territory.”⁵⁸ In fact, after the defeat in 663, Japan had no military interaction with the peninsula, and, “with the exception of Hideyoshi’s invasions in the 1590s, Japan never crossed the East China Sea to encroach upon Korean ground (or vice versa).”⁵⁹ The historical Japanese state was involved in war so rarely that most scholarship on Japan treats its premodern foreign relations as a subset of cultural history: Japanese elites engaged in foreign relations “to gain access to luxury goods, ideas, and other aspects of ‘advanced’ culture ... This culminated in the Nara period with Japan’s full integration into what Nishijima Sadao refers to as the ‘east Asian world.’”⁶⁰

Civilization in East Asian Core and Periphery: Phase 2, 400–800 CE

Describing and explaining state formation in Korea and Japan is fundamentally about understanding the transformative and enduring impact of Chinese civilization across the East Asian region and across thousands of years. The best way to understand Chinese civilization and its neighbors is as core and periphery—a massive hegemon’s influence. This was not multipolarity—East Asian state formation was distinctive from the 1,000 “state-like political units” in fourteenth-century Europe, and 500 similarly sized units in sixteenth-century Europe, that competed viciously for territory and survival.⁶¹

56. Holcombe 2011, 119.

57. Batten 2003, 149.

58. *Ibid.*, 30.

59. *Ibid.*, 236.

60. *Ibid.*, 147.

61. Tilly 1975, 15, 76.

State formation was inseparable from, and formed a central element of, wider Sinicization. Sinic civilization was an enduringly powerful force, even as Chinese hegemony waxed and waned over the centuries. Even during times of political division on the Chinese plain, there were regionwide expectations of a return to central, unified rule, and the ideas and institutions that had developed in China remained highly influential across the region. As Pines writes:

For 2,132 years, we may discern striking similarities in institutional, socio-political, and cultural spheres throughout the imperial millennia. The Chinese empire was an extraordinarily powerful ideological construct. The peculiar historical trajectory of the Chinese empire was not its indestructibility ... but rather its repeated resurrection in more or less the same territory and with a functional structure similar to that of the preturmoil period.⁶²

In the fifth century, the three Korean kingdoms, Silla, Paekche, and Koguryŏ, were slowly evolving into states. We focus on Silla (57 BC to 935 CE), since it unified the peninsula in 668, but all three Korean states emulated and learned from China extensively and intensively. Koguryŏ was largest and most advanced. It was the first to import Buddhism and Confucianism: in 372 Koguryŏ founded Taehak, an official Confucian academy and the first known center for the study of Confucianism in the peninsula. In 373, Koguryŏ promulgated its first Chinese-style law codes.⁶³ Paekche was also culturally more advanced than Silla, importing Buddhism and Confucianism at least a century before Silla did.

Historians call the new, centralized order built in Japan in the fifth to eighth centuries the *ritsuryo* state, because it was based on Chinese-style penal (*ritsu*) and administrative (*ryo*) codes. Sugimoto and Swain characterize Japanese borrowing of culture and technology from China in two historical waves; Chinese Wave I began circa 600 and lasted until 894.

Only twice in Japanese history has it been national policy to undertake an overall transformation of the entire social system according to an imported foreign model ... The first began with the Taika Reforms of AD 646 and continued through the Nara and early Heian eras (seventh–ninth centuries inclusive) when Japan sought to adopt the Chinese model of Tang society. Japan had been assimilating more elementary material forms of continental culture for several centuries, but the Taika transformation was the first effort consciously based on systematic, large-scale importation of high culture directly from China.⁶⁴

The impact of Chinese civilization was comprehensive, including language, education, writing, poetry, art, mathematics, science, religion, philosophy, social and

62. Pines 2012, 2.

63. Holcombe 2011, 82.

64. Sugimoto and Swain 1989, 1.

family structure, political and administrative institutions and ideas, and more. The government-related strands are almost impossible to understand outside this larger civilizational context.

As Murai describes it, “Needless to say, China was located at the center of this regional world-system; Japan and surrounding areas, [which] were located on its periphery, can be thought of as forming, or aspiring [to form], a subsystem with a certain degree of autonomy from China.”⁶⁵ In the first centuries CE, the three Korean kingdoms were still essentially confederations of tribal chieftains, and in Japan the Yamato state was just emerging from Yayoi and Wa chiefdoms. Holcombe observes that it was “roughly in the third century CE when a coherent East Asian cultural region that included China, Japan, and Korea first emerged.”⁶⁶ As Batten describes it, “Japan, like other regions of East Asia, can be regarded in many periods as a periphery of China. Not only were the two countries part of the same political/military network, but power relations took an unequal, hierarchical form, with China playing the role of core and Japan playing that of periphery.”⁶⁷

The peripheral states had their own unique cultures and social organizations. Although Chinese civilization was foundational in Korea and Japan, their societies retained key elements of indigenous cultures. China clearly was not engaged in diffusion by coercion—there was no Chinese pressure on its neighbors to adopt Chinese ideas or institutions. Even some of the most influential ideas, such as Buddhism, were not Chinese inventions but came to Korea and Japan *through* China. This allowed the surrounding peoples and polities to contest, modify, and adapt Chinese and other imported ideas to their own ends. Some societies closely copied a range of Chinese practices which were deemed highly prestigious. Others experimented with just some Chinese ideas, while some—such as the diverse semi-nomadic peoples of the northern and western frontiers—resisted almost all foreign cultural and political ideas but still interacted with China, occasionally using Chinese practices and ideas in their foreign relations.

Table 1 summarizes key events in the importation, emulation, and learning of Chinese ideas and institutions into Korea and Japan between 400 and 800 CE. State formation—such as taxes, meritocratic bureaucracies, and the military—was a key element of broader Sinicization and is inseparable from that larger Chinese civilizational influence. What is most obvious is the slow, gradual, and uneven transformation of these countries. Chinese civilization, Buddhism, and Confucianism were used for legitimacy and prestige within a domestic context, yet those elements of state formation were only effective within a larger intellectual, philosophical, and religious environment in which those ideas were not only valued and desired, but were considered almost “inevitable.”

65. Murai quoted in Batten 2003, 142.

66. Holcombe 2011, 5.

67. Batten 2003, 228.

TABLE 1. *Timeline of Sinicization in historical East Asia, 400–800 CE*

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Korea</i> | <i>Japan</i> |
|-------------|---|--|
| 413–502 | | Thirteen Japanese tribute missions to various Chinese kingdoms |
| 508 | Silla adopts Chinese-style titles | |
| 514 | Silla adopts Buddhism | |
| 520 | Silla promulgates Chinese-style bureaucratic government, administrative and legal codes, and seventeen official titles | |
| 552 | | Buddhism introduced to Japan from Korea |
| 570 | National conscript military introduced | |
| 600–894 | | Twenty Japanese embassies sent to China |
| 604 | | “Seventeen Injunctions” promulgated, based on Chinese regulations and rituals |
| 620 | | Yamato adopts Chinese calendar |
| 645 | | Taika Reforms based on Chinese administrative and legal codes |
| 649 | Silla adopts Chinese calendar | |
| 661 | Korean capital of Kyongju remodeled to imitate Tang capital Chang’an | |
| 663 | Silla–Tang alliance defeats Paekche–Yamato forces, in the only war involving any two of Korea, Japan, and China in over twelve centuries. | |
| 668 | Silla–Tang defeat Koguryō, leaving Silla as sole Korean kingdom | |
| 670 | | National tax, division of country into provinces, census decreed every six years |
| 671 | | National Confucian Academy founded; attempt to create civil service exams |
| 681 | Division of country into nine provinces | |
| 682 | Royal Confucian Academy founded | |
| 685 | | Centralized conscript military introduced |
| 694 | | Japanese capital at Fujiwara-kyō built as a copy of Tang capital Chang’an |
| 702 | | Taiho Code uses Tang model for administration and law |
| 788 | Civil service examination created | |

The key events in the Sinicization of Korea and Japan began with the importation of Buddhism to Korea in the early fourth century, and the numerous Japanese tribute missions that traveled to China during the fifth century. Most importantly, these both brought with them Chinese language and writing systems. Over the next century, the Korean kingdom of Silla adopted Buddhism and by the sixth century had begun to use Chinese-style titles and administrative codes for its government. In the sixth century, monks from the Korean kingdom of Paekche introduced Buddhism to Japan, where it quickly became influential. In the seventh century, both Korea and Japan began to use the Chinese calendar and timekeeping to provide far more precise organization of state activities; and both states increasingly used Chinese-style administrative and legal codes and engaged in national taxation. Both states created national conscript armies, founded national Confucian academies to train bureaucrats, and implemented civil service examinations to select officials on the basis of merit, not heredity.

The key institutional innovation in East Asia was the emergence of the world's first civil services. As Woodside describes it, these were "embryonic bureaucracies, based upon clear rules, whose personnel were obtained independently of hereditary social claims, through meritocratic civil service examinations."⁶⁸ The transformation over these few centuries was remarkable: by the end of the eighth century, both Korea and Japan were recognizably Sinicized across government, religion, philosophy, and society.

Emulation in Korean and Japanese State Formation during Phase 2

By the eighth century both Korea and Japan were centralized, bureaucratically administered states defined over territory with a monopoly of violence within their borders. They arrived at this primarily through emulation, but learning and competition were also factors. Recall earlier that emulation reflects a similar process to learning but focuses more on how actors aspire to and copy from others they respect or admire. Put simply, emulation reflects aspirations, while learning is rooted primarily in cost-benefit calculations. As discussed earlier, we use three main ways to further distinguish between emulation and learning: whether the overall scale of borrowing was total or selective; whether justification was based on the logic of consequences or appropriateness; and, for each individual issue, whether there was mimicry or modification. In theory, emulation, learning, and competition could all coexist as causal factors, and indeed, we can find traces of each mechanism of diffusion in historical East Asia. But emulation seems to be the main determinant involved at the time, as we will soon observe in the empirical evidence on state-building in historical East Asia.

The Overall Extent of Sinicization in Korea and Japan

The overall scale of borrowing can provide clues to distinguish emulation from learning. If the extent of copying is total, it implies more emulation than if only selective ideas are copied. In Korea and Japan, the borrowing was essentially total and comprehensive.

Key state-building elements were Buddhism, Confucianism, and the Chinese language and writing system, which fundamentally transformed religion, philosophy, government, society, and political life in both Korea and Japan. Batten sums it up: "China, Korea, and Japan all share a common cultural heritage centered on Buddhism, Confucianism, and the use of the Chinese writing system."⁶⁹ Lewis and Wigen emphasize that the "distinctive" Chinese writing system "became the crucial vehicle for spreading Chinese notions of philosophy, cosmology, and statecraft to the neighboring peoples of Korea, Japan, and Vietnam."⁷⁰

68. Woodside 2006, 1.

69. Batten 2003, 66.

70. Lewis and Wigen 1997, 144.

There was clearly a degree of learning, in that the bodies of knowledge in Chinese sciences, mathematics, architecture, and calendar were developed far beyond anything in Korea and Japan. Chinese learning was so advanced that being conversant with it was prestigious and impressive to Korea and Japanese elites. However, much of it was true emulation, as the following examples show.

During the fourth to sixth centuries, the “Korean states regularly sent tribute missions to the states in China ... In exchange, Korean rulers received symbols that strengthened their own legitimacy and a variety of cultural commodities: Ritual goods, books, Buddhist scriptures, and rare luxury products.”⁷¹ By 503, the Silla dynasty had adopted Chinese titles such as “king” and abandoned native Korean titles. Ebrey and Walthall note that “Silla kings took steps to institutionalize their governments ... They made Buddhism the state-sponsored religion, and collected taxes on agriculture.”⁷² They also note that “the newly created board of academicians had specialists in medicine, law, mathematics, astronomy, and water clocks.”⁷³ All of this was indicative of emulation and nearly wholesale adoption from China.

In Japan, this first wave of Chinese influence was comprehensive importing of Tang-style institutions, language and writing systems, and education, including Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, geomancy and divination, law, literature, history, mathematics, calendrics, and medicine, not to mention art and architecture. Indeed, all three Japanese writing systems—hiragana, katakana, and kanji—were derived from Chinese characters.

Noting that the Chinese influence in early Japan is “quite conspicuous,” de Bary and colleagues point out that in place of the old political clan organization, the Yamato court intended “systematic territorial administration of the Chinese [model,] executing a uniform law.”⁷⁴ But a vast symmetric bureaucracy based on Tang China required sweeping changes that cascaded through various aspects of society that were all interlinked to state capacity and governance, like the economy, trade, taxation, and land rights and policies. “Implicit in the erection of this state machinery was the need for economic changes ... This was a vast system of coordinated knowledge and belief of which the Chinese imperial structure was indeed the most imposing terrestrial symbol but that stretched out into realms of thought and action both transcending and penetrating the immediate political order.”⁷⁵

In the seventh and eighth centuries, Sinicization became more institutionalized in Japan, particularly through a series of major governmental reforms: The Taika Reforms of 646, the Taiho Code of 701, and the Yoro Code compiled in 718 and subsequently promulgated in 757. As Sugimoto and Swain note, all three reforms “had

71. Seth 2016, 45.

72. Ebrey and Walthall 2014, 104.

73. *Ibid.*, 106.

74. De Bary et al. 2001, 63.

75. *Ibid.*, 64.

[their] roots in China's Han dynasty."⁷⁶ Taika literally means "great change." This was a sweeping set of reforms aimed at deepening and widening the Tang-style institutions across the Japanese state. More broadly, Sugimoto and Swain observe that "the pervasive influence of Tang culture in Chinese Wave I is uniquely exemplified in the collection of handicraft specimens ... from Emperor Shomu (724–749) ... The items cover a wide range: Furniture, stationery, games, liturgical implements, musical instruments, armor and weapons, ceramics, wood and metal work, weaving, dyeing and embroidery, and so on."⁷⁷

In sum, "This was an era when Korea and Japan turned to China as a model for everything from architecture to ceramics, music, and medicine."⁷⁸ The scale of borrowing in both Korea and Japan was so comprehensive as to imply emulation based on an aspiration to be like China, rather than deliberate selective learning where individual traits were consciously copied.

Confucianism as a Governance Model

The evidence for emulation is reinforced by examining the justifications made at the time. Overwhelmingly, the motivations were based on a logic of appropriateness, not consequences. An example of the influence of Chinese civilization on Korea comes from King Chinhung of Silla (r. 540–576). In 568, he installed a monument at Maun Pass, and the inscription is replete with Confucian ideas. Ideas such as the Way (*dao*) are woven into the justification for the King's reign. The inscription reads in part:

Emperors and kings established their reign titles, cultivated themselves to the utmost, and brought peace to their subjects ... I was fearful of going against the Way of Heaven ... The people now say "the transforming process of the Way extends outward and its favor pervades everywhere."⁷⁹

In Japan, the fifth and sixth centuries saw the gradual importation and implementation of Chinese ideas. For example, Prince Shotoku (573–621) wrote a seventeen-article constitution in 602, suffused with Chinese ideas on appropriate social and political structures. Article 1 reflects the Confucian ideal that the social harmony is a paramount goal: "Harmony is to be valued." Article 3 embodies the Confucian ideal of government: "The lord is Heaven; the vassal, Earth. Heaven overspreads, Earth upbears. When this is so, the four seasons follow their due course, and the powers of Nature develop their efficiency." Article 4 refers to the Confucian emphasis on the responsibility of the ruler to embody virtue and moral rule for his subjects: "If the superiors do not behave with decorum, the inferiors are disorderly." Article 7

76. Sugimoto and Swain 1989, 12.

77. Sugimoto and Swain 1989, 27.

78. Ebrey and Walthall 2014, 93.

79. King Chinhung's Monument at Maun Pass (from *Samguk Yusa* Appendix 14), from Lee and de Bary 1997, 19.

draws on the Confucian ideal of a “wise man” or “sage” who is fundamental to harmony: “When wise men are entrusted with office, the sound of praise arises. If unprincipled men hold office, disasters and tumults multiply.” Finally, Articles 12 and 16 are explicit expansions of the central authority of the court to tax and govern the entire country. Article 12 reads, “Let not the provincial authorities or the local nobles levy exaction on the people. In a country there are not two lords; the people have not two masters. The sovereign is the master of the people of the whole country.” And Article 16 reads, “Let the people be employed in forced labor at seasonable times.”⁸⁰

In 712, the authors of the oldest surviving Japanese history, *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters), explicitly based their writing, their phrases, and their ideas on the social norms represented in Chinese models. *Kojiki* was composed using Chinese characters and is replete with Chinese ideas, writing style, references, and imagery.⁸¹ The aspiration to emulate and conform to a more sophisticated style and complex form of writing in Chinese was clear. Its introduction states that “in high antiquity [of early Japan], both speech and thought were so simple that it would be difficult to arrange phrases and compose periods in the characters”—that is, Chinese ideographic writing. Another early history, the *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicles of Japan) of 720, was based on Chinese histories, aimed at legitimizing and cementing political power. De Bary and coauthors have a detailed exegesis of the *Nihon Shoki* and the *Kojiki*, showing that they are suffused with Chinese thought, forms, and phrases in phrase after phrase, and how writing and ideas are copied verbatim from Chinese models.⁸² Both histories begin with invocations of Chinese Confucian ideology as represented in the principle of *yin–yang*. For instance, the *Kojiki* begins, “Heaven and Earth first parted, and the Three Deities performed the commencement of creation; the yin and the yang then developed,” while the *Nihon Shoki* begins, “Of old, Heaven and Earth were not yet separated, and the yin and the yang not yet divided.”⁸³ The *Nihongi* declares, “Let the swords and armor, with the bows and arrows of the provinces and districts, be deposited together ... let all the weapons be mustered together ... let the officials who are sent there prepare registers of the population and also take into account the acreage of cultivated land.”⁸⁴

The appeals to Confucianism continued. In 757, for example, Empress Koken (r. 749–758) proclaimed, “To secure the rulers and govern the people, nothing is better than the Confucian rites.”⁸⁵ The justifications and debates in the historical record in both Korea and Japan lead to the clear conclusion that elites in both these

80. “The 17-article Constitution of Prince Shotoku” (in *Nihongi* II, 128–33), from de Bary et al. 2001, 53–54.

81. Holcombe 2011, 21.

82. De Bary et al. 2001, 73–75.

83. *Kojiki*, 4, and *Nihongi* I, 1–2, in de Bary et al. 2001, 67.

84. “Inauguration of the Great Reform Era” (in *Nihongi* II, 200–26), from de Bary et al. 2001, 78.

85. Holcombe 2011, 117.

countries desired and aspired to conform to Chinese traits simply because they were seen as more appropriate—that is, for reasons of emulation, rather than learning.

Systematic Mimicry in State-Building

When external ideas conflicted with internal or local identities, it was generally the internal identities that changed. This applied systematically across the various aspects of state-building in Korea and Japan, from administration, taxation, and the civil service, to education and deep into culture and society—architecture, writing, and even clothing style.

Under King Pophung (r. 514–540), Silla adopted Buddhism, and his reign also saw the first promulgation of Chinese-style bureaucratic government and administrative law. Issued in 520, the new laws included a seventeen-grade official rank system, and names and titles, based on Chinese models.⁸⁶ In 517, Pophung established a Ministry of War, which was part of the process of centralizing the military under court control.⁸⁷ Within a few decades, by the 570s, Silla was “replacing military lords with commissioners dispatched from the capital.”⁸⁸

King Sinmun (r. 681–692) reorganized the entire country into nine prefectures and five subsidiary capitals. Sinmun also further reformed the national military, creating a system of nine banners and ten garrisons deployed across the country. Taxation became national and uniform. Woodside notes that “tax rates could be treated by the mandarines as contingent categories, subject to change from above, in societies that, unlike much of Europe before 1789, did not have provinces, nobles, or clergy with ... tax immunities.”⁸⁹ Duncan explains the significance behind these reforms on state administration: “The model Silla used was the Chinese prefecture–county system, which featured a regular hierarchy of administration ... In the mid-eighth century ... King Kyongdok (r. 742–765) carried out a major reorganization of local administration, apparently to make the Silla system conform more closely to the Chinese model.”⁹⁰

In Japan, the Taika Reforms of 645 greatly strengthened the state against nobles and the people themselves. The court appointed provincial governors and abolished previous land ownership. It started a population census, a centralized tax system, a legal code, and a civil service examination, all based on Tang models. The reforms instituted the use of Chinese-style era names. In 685, the court created a conscript army based on Chinese models.⁹¹ “By their assertion of the imperial right to universal

86. Seth 2016, 40.

87. “Popkon Declares Buddhism the National Faith” (in *Haedong kosung chon* 1A:1018c-1019b), from Lee and de Bary 1997, 41.

88. Ebrey and Walthall 2014, 104.

89. Woodside 2006, 60.

90. Duncan 2000, 30.

91. Ebrey and Walthall 2014, 120.

labor and military service, reformers went far toward achieving for the ruling house the control over all the elements of power characteristic of the greatest Chinese dynasties.”⁹²

The Taiho Code of 702 was a further centralization of state authority based on Chinese models. The Nara state (710–784) “received its clearest expression in a series of Chinese-style penal and administrative law codes.”⁹³ Almost half of the persons who drafted the Taiho Code came from immigrant families that had come from China or Korea, and others had participated in Japanese embassies to the continent. These legal and administrative codes remained the basic law of Japan for over eleven centuries, being used into the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

Central to the Taiho Code were Chinese geomancy and ideas about political philosophy. Chinese ideas were so influential that in 675 a Department of Yin–Yang was established to guide the government. Details of the department are provided in the Taiho Code. Yin–yang—emblematic of the philosophies of Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, as well as the ideas of *feng shui*—affected everyday life as well as consequential decisions about statecraft.

Regarding national taxation in Japan, de Bary and colleagues note that “it was recognized from the first that the Tang tax system was indispensable to the functioning of the Tang-type administration. The Tang system, moreover, presupposed a system of land nationalization and redistribution ... So meticulously was the Chinese example followed that land and tax registers for those period ... are almost identical in form and terminology to contemporary Chinese registers.”⁹⁴ Batten notes that “large-scale conversion of domains began only in the late 660s ... It seems fair to conclude that the confiscation of some groups and private landholdings was actually planned and executed in 644–646.”⁹⁵ The Yoro Code, which was modeled after the Tang civil and penal codes and promulgated in 757, furthered strengthened the national tax system. “Archeological research strongly supports the view that the Nara-period tax system functioned not only on paper but also in practice.”⁹⁶

Fundamental to running a Chinese-style government were scholar-officials who were educated along Chinese lines. In 682, Silla established a National Academy (also known as the Royal Confucian Academy), where a small number of young Koreans were instructed in a Chinese-style curriculum that included the Confucian classics and Chinese (not Korean) history and literature. Belonging to the Ministry of Rites, the academy was called Taehakkam (Great Learning Institute).⁹⁷ In 788, Silla inaugurated its first Chinese-style civil service examinations, graduating students into three ranks.

92. De Bary et al. 2001, 64.

93. Holcombe 2011, 117.

94. De Bary et al. 2001, 64.

95. Batten 1986, 204, 206.

96. Batten 2003, 165.

97. *Samguk sagi* 38: 366, from Lee and de Bary 1997, 65.

Along similar lines, Japan established a Confucian Academy at Nara, most likely in 671, with instruction in the Confucian classics, calligraphy, law, mathematics, and Chinese language. A network of schools extending to every province was ordered to be opened. In addition, “three different kinds of institutes were founded in the *ritsuryo* system to propagate and utilize learning and science ... a university, an institution of divination, and an institute of medicine ... These institutes were all patterned after Tang models.”⁹⁸

Beyond mimicry in state administration, the physical construction of the capital cities in both Korea and Japan was exactly copied from the Chinese capital. Ebrey and Walthall note that “the Silla capital at Kyongju was laid out in checkerboard fashion like the Tang capital at Chang’an.”⁹⁹ In Japan, both Kyoto and Nara were also built to directly copy Chang’an, following *yin–yang* theories. The modeling of Nara after the Chinese capital was more than just the copying of a nice design. Chang’an—and Nara—were designed to be a “spatial dramatization of the *ritsuryo* geomantic order, court power, and theocratic authority.”¹⁰⁰ The central boulevard of Nara “divided the city into symmetrical halves just as the Chinese-style bureaucratic structure balanced the minister of the left with the minister of the right ... in line with Chinese models.”¹⁰¹

Similarly, Kyoto’s layout was not accidental but methodically modeled after and planned with Chinese architectural ideas in mind. “The palace, situated in the north in accordance with *yin–yang*, was surrounded by ninefold walls. The emperor was served by a bureaucracy organized into nine departments of state, with eight ranks of officials. To protect the capital from baleful influences from the northeast (the unlucky quarter), a Buddhist monastery was built.”¹⁰² Kyoto itself was chosen because it had an auspicious number of mountains, and rivers, based on *feng shui*.

Further evidence of emulation in Korea and Japan’s state-building could be seen in their culture, language, and clothing. The importation of Chinese writing and literary forms was so dominant that only fifty poems written in vernacular Korean survive from the entire period prior to the fifteenth century, “compared to thousands of Korean documents written in Chinese” from the same time.¹⁰³ Holcombe notes that “Chinese script, and even Chinese language itself, long remained the most prestigious vehicle for serious writing in Japan ... The intellectual primacy of Chinese writing in Japan would not be fatally challenged until modern times.”¹⁰⁴ As Sugimoto and Swain point out, “the cultural gap that had to be bridged to introduce new knowledge from China for the reshaping of Japan was overwhelming. The Japanese had not even developed their own system of writing, yet they wanted to

98. Sugimoto and Swain 1989, 32.

99. Ebrey and Walthall 2014, 106.

100. Walker 2015, 30.

101. Ebrey and Walthall 2014, 121.

102. De Bary et al. 2001, 70.

103. Holcombe 2011, 22.

104. *Ibid.*, 22.

import the highest levels of Chinese learning and science, along with Sinicized Buddhist teaching.”¹⁰⁵ De Bary and colleagues observe that “Outright imitations of Chinese thought and literature can be found in the *Kaifuso*, a collection of poetry written in Chinese dating from 751 CE.”¹⁰⁶

Even clothing, in both Korea and Japan, was copied identically from the Chinese. In 604, the Japanese Yamato court instituted cap-ranks in twelve grades—a direct copy of Chinese customs and specifically identical to the Sui dynasty, which distinguish rank by the form and materials of the official cap. Purple was for officials of the fifth rank and up, with other colors for the lower ranks. Princes and ministers wore the highest rank.¹⁰⁷

In Korea, in the seventh century, a Buddhist monk, Chajang, spent seven years studying in China. On his return to Korea, he persuaded Queen Chindok (r. 647–654) to change the court dress to Chinese style. The *Samguk yusa* (Tales of the Three Kingdoms, written in the thirteenth century) records that “In the third year [649], the caps and gowns of the Chinese court were first worn. The following year [650], the court adopted the Chinese calendar and for the first time used the Tang reign title of Yung-hui.”¹⁰⁸

Although choice of clothing may seem tangential or unimportant in relation to the bellicist thesis, choice and color of clothing was a central element of state formation. Breuker studies the symbolism of clothing in Korean rituals and concludes that it is not just a matter of pragmatism or opportunism:

In traditional East Asia, only the Son of Heaven was entitled to wear imperial yellow ... The [Goryeo] Ministry of Rites, responding to an inquiry by the monarch if it would be possible for him to wear colors other than yellow and red, compiled the relevant passages of Chinese works and reported its answer back to the monarch ... The emperor’s clothes hold valuable clues as to how Goryeo rulers perceived themselves, not only in terms of fashion, but, more importantly, in terms of status, position, culture, and ontology ... The clothes of the Goryeo ruler were intimately tied to his ritual functions. His clothes not only denoted his status as a ruler, but also his position in the human link between Heaven and the people.¹⁰⁹

The choice of court dress, and even colors for ranks of the civil service, is state formation at its most elemental level but also importantly obvious—a pure mimicry of the Chinese model. These conscious choices and deliberate practices in state formation were part and parcel of wider emulation.

105. Sugimoto and Swain 1989, 29.

106. De Bary et al. 2001, 68.

107. De Bary et al. 2001, 48.

108. *Samguk Yusa* 4:191–94, from Lee and de Bary 1997, 48.

109. Breuker 2003, 52–53.

The overall scale of borrowing (as demonstrated by the breadth and depth of the foregoing examples), the justifications given for borrowing, and the level of mimicry lead us to conclude that borrowing was more emulation than learning in both Korea and Japan. Both were undergoing profound change in social identity in terms of countries, elites, and even family organization and practices, down to the individual level. While retaining elements of their indigenous cultures, both began to overwhelmingly see themselves as members of a regional Sinic civilization in which China sat at the core. However, our conclusions go beyond characterizing the difference as a simple emulation–learning dichotomy. Adjudicating which motivation drove the diffusion process for state formation cannot be resolved easily, not least in an “either/or” approach. The evidence shows instead that these diffusion mechanisms occurred at different times and contexts, and that emulation—premised on the fundamental acceptance of Sinic influence—played a more significant role in Korea and Japan’s early state formation than hitherto appreciated. This conclusion is not a hunch but instead derives directly from the historical empirical evidence.

Domestic Politics: Prestige and Legitimacy Against a Noble Class

To further the probative argument for emulation, we consider the role of domestic politics in state formation. Specifically, why did Korean and Japanese elites borrow Chinese ideas so willingly in their state-building activities? Simply put, they did so for both domestic legitimacy and prestige. The court needed to justify its assumption of power at the expense of the provinces and their nobles. One of the defining features of East Asian societies that was different from Europe was the general eradication, or weakness, of the noble class. Domestic political rivalries and internal security concerns motivated state centralization and, in turn, the strategic adoption of institutions that would elevate their status and influence. This process is an extension of our argument centered on domestic legitimation; for reasons of space, we simply outline how it worked in Korea and Japan.

The intra-polity competition between the court and the nobility did occur, of course. As a core dynamic of this rivalry, the court strategically imported Sinic norms and cultural practices primarily as an instrument to tame the nobility and thus consolidate its power. Obviously, the cultural norms and practices that elites imported were not merely resources used to boost legitimacy, but were deeply (re)constitutive of both court and noble identities over the longer term. Domestic political competition could occur only within the larger acceptance of, and value for, Sinic civilization. Acharya argues that diffusion is more likely when the new idea works within an accepted identity, while Goddard observes that “whether an actor’s claim is legitimate depends on whether it resonates with existing social and cultural networks.”¹¹⁰

110. Acharya 2004, 248; Goddard 2010, 24.

Over the centuries, China, Korea, and Japan eliminated or reduced, to varying degrees, the influence of their noble classes. In China, the Sui dynasty (583–618) replaced the distinction between aristocrat and commoner with a distinction between officials and ordinary subjects. In Korea and Japan, while nobles survived up to the twentieth century, noble aspirations and their use of power were channeled through the institutions of the state, not against it. Thus, nobles in Korea competed for scholar-official positions in the state itself; and passing the civil service exam and becoming a government official became one of the most prestigious achievements one could aspire to in historical East Asia. “The Chinese bureaucratic model, with its ideal of possible upward mobility based on demonstrated merit (and service to the throne) rather than heredity, may have been useful in supporting the interests of the Korean kings.”¹¹¹

Status as a tributary of China was a powerful indicator of authority. As both Lee and Zhang point out, the authority of investiture—the Chinese court’s bestowing of reign titles on Korean and Japanese rulers—only mattered to other domestic actors who already viewed Chinese civilization as legitimate.¹¹² Holcombe observes that “The delegation of status from a Chinese sovereign gave Korean kings some leverage against the otherwise powerful Korean aristocracy.”¹¹³ Seth notes that beyond weakening the deeply entrenched nobility in society, “Chinese models ... appealed to the elites as forms of cultural enrichment.”¹¹⁴ Indeed, “newly emergent East Asian rulers in Manchuria, Korea, and Japan all, at various times, tried to buttress their positions against possible rivals by offering tribute to Chinese dynasties and being invested in return with prestigious Chinese titles.”¹¹⁵

To consolidate power, kings often adopted foreign religion and introduced it to further delimit the nobles’ influence. In Korea, Hwang notes that “political rulers found Buddhism, in particular the Buddhist clergy, a useful ally in further consolidating their dominion and in strengthening their aura of authority.”¹¹⁶ Similarly, Ebrey and Walthal observe that in Japan

between 592 and 756, the Yamato kings and queens transformed themselves into Chinese-style monarchs ... They saw the need to overcome violent factional and succession disputes that weakened ties between center and periphery ... They reorganized the court by instituting a ladder of twelve official ranks bestowed on individuals to correspond to Sui practice ... In the Seventeen Injunctions promulgated in 604, Prince Shotoku announced a new ideology of rule based on Confucian and Buddhist thought ... drawing on Chinese rituals and regulations.¹¹⁷

111. Holcombe 2011, 113.

112. Lee 2017; Zhang 2015.

113. Holcombe 2011, 113.

114. Seth 2016, 36.

115. Holcombe 2011, 87.

116. Hwang 2017, 13.

117. Ebrey and Walthall 2014, 118–19.

De Bary and colleagues also note that Japan attempted to

enhance its power and prestige in the eyes of foreigners and domestic rivals alike by adopting many features of the superior Chinese civilization and especially its political institutions. The measures included a reorganization of court ranks and etiquette in accordance with Chinese models, the adoption of the Chinese calendar, the opening of diplomatic relations with China, the creation of a system of highways, the erection of many Buddhist temples, and the compilation of official chronicles.¹¹⁸

Ebrey and Walthal observe that “The Yamato court attracted followers through its access to Chinese elite culture, including a written language, Daoism, Confucianism, the literary arts, sculpture (particularly Buddhist icons), painting, and music ... Pilgrims to China brought back masses of Buddhist sutras and Chinese books.”¹¹⁹ They also note that “in addition to religion and political ideology, contact with the continent brought a written language with which to transcribe the poetry and history that had previously been transmitted orally. It brought music, dance, and new standards of civilized behavior. The ruling class that enjoyed these advantages taxed the farmers.”¹²⁰ De Bary and colleagues reflect the historiographic consensus when they write, “As the Yamato people consolidated their position in central Japan and their rulers attempted to win undisputed supremacy over other clans of the confederacy, it was to the Chinese example that their rulers turned more and more for political guidance and cultural direction.”¹²¹

The promulgation of administrative statutes and law codes had long-lasting effects. “Even chieftains who still lived in the provinces competed for official appointments and titles. County, district, and provincial offices and temples spread across the landscape.”¹²² Batten notes that “most of Japan’s formal contacts with China, at least, were initiated by Japanese rulers in search of specific goals such as political legitimacy, security, or access to luxury goods.”¹²³

Summary

By any definition, Korea and Japan in this period were states: centralized, bureaucratically administered, and defined over territory. Chinese civilization, as expressed by institutions, lasted for many centuries in both Korea and Japan, and its norms and ideas were pervasive in Korean and Japanese society and culture. Well after the eighth century, successive dynasties continued, deepened, and expanded the import

118. De Bary et al. 2001, 40–41.

119. Ebrey and Walthall 2014, 125.

120. *Ibid.*, 127.

121. De Bary et al. 2001, 63.

122. Ebrey and Walthall 2014, 121.

123. Batten 2003, 155.

of Chinese elements. In particular, the Choson dynasty of Korea (1392–1910) was seen as deeply influenced by neo-Confucianism.¹²⁴ Korea used the lunar calendar and the civil service examination system based on Confucian classics until 1896. In Japan, the *ritsuryo* system survived for centuries. Only after five hundred years, by the time of the Ashikaga Shogunate (1338–1573), had the system begun to break down.

The long time frame—centuries of emulation—is significant. Yet the process of state formation is not linear, and there were reversions and evolution, as some ideas were kept and other discarded. Sinic civilization remained influential up to the twentieth century, even while some elements were modified and others were abandoned.¹²⁵

Conclusion

Deeply institutionalized and territorially defined states in historical East Asia emerged and developed under the shadow of a hegemonic international system through a combination of emulation and learning, not bellicist interstate war. Many of these institutions lasted over 1,000 years in both Korea and Japan. The research presented in this paper reveals that the bellicist argument linking war and state-making is a partial explanation based on one particular region and time, not a universal theory. We view this paper as introducing agenda-setting research that takes a central issue in the discipline—state formation—and opens up entirely new theoretical and empirical avenues for research. We identify two avenues as particularly important.

Theoretically, future research can more explicitly adjudicate between different mechanisms of diffusion. Emulation, learning, and competition are not mutually exclusive causal mechanisms. Theorizing this underexamination of noncoercive mechanisms of diffusion may be one useful way to go beyond a simple negation of the bellicist thesis. This would have the additional benefit of avoiding the trope of the West versus the rest. What were the domestic political causes of emulation? Most studies of diffusion do not explore the domestic politics, but instead simply identify a causal path without delving into the prior causal factors about why a certain path was chosen. Moving back along the causal chain is a potentially rewarding area of research. As Vu points out, “elite politics is another important cause of bureaucratization or its absence.”¹²⁶

In East Asia, state-building was an effort by the court to curb nobles’ power. One way to curb the power of the nobles and to channel their ambitions is to create a state with institutions and administration. This is potentially the opposite of the North–Weingast “contractualist” approach to state formation in Europe.¹²⁷ Rather than nobles building limits on the sovereign, it appears that, in historical East Asia, many of the reforms were undertaken to strengthen the court against an aristocracy.

124. Duncan 2000.

125. Jansen 1992; Park 2017.

126. Vu 2010, 154.

127. North and Weingast 1989.

As Vu notes, in ancient East Asia, “states dominated society but were not predatory,”¹²⁸ in contrast to Levi’s claims about ancient Europe.¹²⁹

Empirically, the argument presented here that emphasizes the importance of emulation and learning in state formation can be generalized across the region. By 973 the Vietnamese state had been recognized as a Chinese Song tributary, and within a century it had created centralized provinces, founded a Royal Confucian Academy, used Chinese in all its writings, implemented a national tax, and created a national military based on universal conscription. By 1471, the Vietnamese bureaucracy consisted of a civil service staffed through a three-stage examination system. The civil service comprised nine ranks, with set salaries, staffed by more than 5,300 officials, “with at least one official supervising every three villages.”¹³⁰

Societies that rejected Chinese civilization were more rare. Located mostly on the sparsely populated northern and central Asian steppe, some semi-nomadic societies saw almost nothing about Chinese civilization as appropriate or desirable. The societies of the central Asian steppe did not accept or value Sinic civilization, and hence did not have the same domestic internal court battles experienced by those that accepted Chinese hegemony. This contrast highlights how the instrumental-learning rationale of domestic competition is only possible within a larger cultural context that values, deems appropriate, and provides meaning to certain institutions and norms. As Wright concludes:

China’s failure to solve its barbarian problem definitively before the advent of the Manchu Qing dynasty was a function neither of Chinese administrative incompetence nor of barbarian pugnacity, but of the incompatibility and fixed proximity between very different societies, ecologies, and worldviews. Many statements in historical records strongly suggest that the Chinese and the Nomads had clear ideas of their differences and were committed to preserving them against whatever threats the other side posed.¹³¹

In sum, truly global and international scholarship that explains the bases of state formation across time and space has only begun.

References

- Acharya, Amitav. 2004. How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism. *International Organization* 58 (2):239–75.
- Adler, Emanuel, and Vincent Pouliot. 2011. *International Practices*. Cambridge University Press.
- Batten, Bruce. 1986. Foreign Threat and Domestic Reform: The Emergence of the Ritsuryō State. *Monumenta Nipponica* 41 (2):199–219.

128. Vu 2010, 159.

129. Levi 1988, 17–33.

130. Kiernan 2017, 205.

131. Wright 2002, 76.

- Batten, Bruce. 2003. *To the Ends of Japan: Premodern Frontiers, Boundaries, and Interactions*. University of Hawaii Press.
- Boli-Bennett, John, and John Meyer. 1978. The Ideology of Childhood and the State: Rules Distinguishing Children in National Constitutions, 1870–1970. *American Sociological Review* 43 (6):797–812.
- Breuker, Remco. 2003. Koryŏ as an Independent Realm: The Emperor’s Clothes? *Korean Studies* 27: 48–84.
- Call, Josep, Malinda Carpenter, and Michael Tomasello. 2005. Copying Results and Copying Actions in the Process of Social Learning: Chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) and Human Children (*Homo sapiens*). *Animal Cognition* 8 (3):151–63.
- Centeno, Miguel. 2003. *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation State in Latin America*. Penn State University Press.
- De Bary, Theodore, Donald Keene, George Tanabe, and Paul Varley. 2001. *Sources of Japanese Tradition, Volume 1: From Earliest Times to 1600*. 2nd ed. Columbia University Press.
- Dincecco, Mark, and Yuhua Wang. 2018. Violent Conflict and Political Development over the Long Run: China Versus Europe. *Annual Review of Political Science* 21:341–58.
- Dobbin, Frank, Beth Simmons, and Geoffrey Garrett. 2007. The Global Diffusion of Public Policies: Social Construction, Coercion, Competition, or Learning? *Annual Review of Sociology* 33:449–72.
- Duncan, John. 2000. *The Origins of the Choson Dynasty*. University of Washington Press.
- Ebrey, Patricia, and Anne Walthall. 2014. *Pre-Modern East Asia: To 1800: A Cultural, Social, and Political History*. Wadsworth.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1989. *Sociology*. Polity Press.
- Goddard, Stacie. 2010. *Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy: Jerusalem and Northern Ireland*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gorski, Philip. 2003. *The Disciplinary Revolution: Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe*. University of Chicago Press.
- Gorski, Philip, and Viveck Sharma. 2017. Beyond the Tilly Thesis: “Family Values” and State Formation in Latin Christendom. In *Does War Make States? Investigations of Charles Tilly’s Historical Sociology*, edited by Lars Bo Kaspersen and Jeppe Strandsbjerg, 98–125. Cambridge University Press.
- Grzymala-Busse, Anna. 2020. Beyond War and Contracts: The Medieval and Religious Roots of the European State. *Annual Review of Political Science* 23:19–36.
- Han, Enze, and Cameron Thies. 2019. External Threats, Internal Challenges, and State Building in East Asia. *Journal of East Asian Studies* 19 (3):339–60.
- Holcombe, Charles. 2011. *A History of East Asia: From the Origins of Civilization to the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hui, Victoria Tin-bor. 2004. Toward a Dynamic Theory of International Politics: Insights from Comparing Ancient China and Early Modern Europe. *International Organization* 58 (1):175–205.
- Hui, Victoria Tin-bor. 2005. *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hwang, Kyung Moon. 2017. *A History of Korea*. Palgrave.
- Jansen, Marius. 1992. *China in the Tokugawa World*. Harvard University Press.
- Johnston, Alastair I. 2008. *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980–2000*. Princeton University Press.
- Kanagawa, Nadia. 2020. East Asia’s First World War, 643–668 CE. In *East Asia in the World: Twelve Events that Shaped the Modern International Order*, edited by Stephan Haggard and David C. Kang, 67–80. Cambridge University Press.
- Kang, David C. 2010. *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*. Columbia University Press.
- Kelly, Robert. 2012. A “Confucian Long Peace” in Pre-Western East Asia? *European Journal of International Relations* 18 (3):407–30.
- Khong, Yuen Foong. 2013. The American Tributary System. *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 6 (1):1–47.
- Kiernan, Ben. 2017. *Viet Nam: A History from Earliest Times to the Present*. Oxford University Press.

- Kiser, Edgar, and Yong Cai. 2003. War and Bureaucratization in Qin China: Exploring an Anomalous Case. *American Sociological Review* 68 (4):511–39.
- Lai, Christina. 2020. Realism Revisited: China's Status-Driven Wars Against Koguryō in the Sui and Tang Dynasties. *Asian Security* DOI: 10.1080/14799855.2020.1782887.
- Lake, David. 2007. Escape from the State of Nature: Authority and Hierarchy in World Politics. *International Security* 32 (1):47–79.
- Larsen, Kirk. 2012. Roundtable Discussion of Yuan-kang Wang's *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics*: Introduction. *International Security Studies Forum* 4 (3). Available at <<https://issforum.org/roundtables/4-3-harmony-war-confucian>>.
- Lee, Ji-Young. 2017. *China's Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination*. Columbia University Press.
- Lee, Peter, and Theodore de Bary. 1997. *Sources of Korean Tradition: Volume 1—From Early Times Through the Sixteenth Century*. Columbia University Press.
- Levi, Margaret. 1988. *Of Rule and Revenue*. University of California Press.
- Lewis, Martin W., and Karen E. Wigen. 1997. *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*. University of California Press.
- Lieberman, Victor. 2003. *Strange Parallels: Integration of the Mainland: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1300*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mitterauer, Michael. 2010. *Why Europe? The Medieval Origins of Its Special Path*. University of Chicago Press.
- North, Douglass, and Barry Weingast. 1989. Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England. *Journal of Economic History* 49 (4):803–32.
- Park, Seo-Hyun. 2017. *Sovereignty and Status in East Asian International Relations*. Cambridge University Press.
- Peterson, Mark. 2018. View of the Frog Out of the Well. *Korea Times*, 8 July.
- Pines, Yuri. 2012. *The Everlasting Empire: The Political Culture of Ancient China and Its Imperial Legacy*. Princeton University Press.
- Rosenthal, Jean-Laurent, and R. Bin Wong. 2011. *Before and Beyond Divergence: The Politics of Economic Change in China and Europe*. Harvard University Press.
- Seth, Michael. 2016. *A Concise History of Korea*. Rowman and Littlefield.
- Simmons, Beth, Frank Dobbin, and Geoffrey Garrett. 2006. The International Diffusion of Liberalism. *International Organization* 60 (4):781–810.
- Solingen, Etel. 2012. Of Dominos and Firewalls: The Domestic, Regional, and Global Politics of International Diffusion. *International Studies Quarterly* 56 (4):631–44.
- Solis, Mireya, and Saori N. Katada. 2015. Unlikely Pivotal States in Competitive Free Trade Agreement Diffusion: The Effect of Japan's Trans-Pacific Partnership Participation on Asia-Pacific Regional Integration. *New Political Economy* 20 (2):155–77.
- Sugimoto, Masayoshi, and David L. Swain. 1989. *Science and Culture in Traditional Japan*. MIT East Asian Science Series 6. Charles Tuttle.
- Tilly, Charles, ed. 1975. *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*. Princeton University Press.
- Tilly, Charles. 1992. *Coercion, Capital, and European States, A.D. 990–1992*. Blackwell.
- Von Glahn, Richard. 2016. *The Economic History of China*. Cambridge University Press.
- Vu, Tuong. 2010. Studying the State through State Formation. *World Politics* 62 (1):148–75.
- Walker, Brett L.. 2015. *A Concise History of Japan*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wang, Zhenping. 2013. *Tang China in Multi-Polar Asia: A History of Diplomacy and War*. The World of East Asia. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Woodside, Alexander. 2006. *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History*. Harvard University Press.
- Wright, David. 2002. The Northern Frontier. In *A Military History Of China*, edited by David A. Graff and Robin Higham, 57–80. Westview Press.
- Zhao, Dingxin. 2004. Spurious Causation in a Historical Process: War and Bureaucratization in Early China. *American Sociological Review* 69 (4):603–07.
- Zhang, Feng. 2015. *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History*. Stanford University Press.

Authors

Chin-Hao Huang is Assistant Professor, Yale-NUS College, Singapore. He can be reached at chinhao.huang@yale-nus.edu.sg.

David C. Kang is Maria Crutcher Professor of International Relations, University of Southern California, Los Angeles. He can be reached at kangdc@usc.edu.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Anna Grzymala-Busse, Didac Cerault, Tanner Greer, Jacques Hymans, Pat James, Saori Katada, Sun Joo Kim, Na Young Lee, Gerardo Munck, Kyuri Park, Hendrik Spruyt, Sixiang Wang, R. Bin Wong, and the editors and referees of *International Organization* for thoughtful comments on earlier drafts. Thanks also to Jill Lin for superb RA work. A draft of this paper was presented at the EJIR twenty-fifth anniversary workshop, Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, University of Toronto, 26 March 2019, and the USC Center for International Studies Working Paper Series, 17 January 2019.

Funding

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Laboratory Program for Korean Studies through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea, the Korean Studies Promotion Service of the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2015-LAB-2250002), and the J.Y. Pillay Global Asia research fund at Yale-NUS College (IG19-SG117).

Key Words

State formation; emulation; learning; bellicist competition; Korean and Japanese history

Date received: December 11, 2019; Date accepted: January 29, 2021