International Order in Historical East Asia: Tribute and Hierarchy Beyond Sinocentrism and Eurocentrism

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Abstract   IR theorizing about international order has been profoundly, perhaps exclusively, shaped by the Western experiences of the Westphalian order and often assumes that the Western experience can be generalized to all orders. Recent scholarship on historical East Asian orders challenges these notions. The fundamental organizing principle in historical East Asia was hierarchy, not sovereign equality. The region was characterized by hegemony, not balance of power. This emerging research program has direct implications for enduring questions about the relative importance of cultural and material factors in both international orders and their influence on behavior—for describing and explaining patterns of war and peace across time and space, for understanding East Asia as a region made up of more than just China, and for more usefully comparing East Asia, Europe, and other regions of the world.

Ji-Young Lee, *China's Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination* (Columbia University Press, 2016)

Seo-Hyun Park, *Sovereignty and Status in East Asian International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2017)

Feng Zhang, *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History* (Stanford University Press, 2015)

Theorizing about international order has been profoundly, perhaps exclusively, shaped by the Western experiences of the Westphalian order and often assumes that the Western experience is generalizable to all other orders. Recent scholarship on historical East Asian orders challenges these notions.[1] Surveying the literature on historical East Asian international relations, I make two main arguments. First, the fundamental organizing principle in historical East Asia was hierarchy, not sovereign equality. Second, the region was characterized by hegemony, not balance of power. This emerging research program has direct implications for enduring questions about the relative importance of cultural and material factors in the Westphalian and East Asian international orders and their influence on their

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1. Acharya and Buzan 2007; Hobson 2012.

members' behavior: on descriptions and explanations of patterns of war and peace across time and space; on how to understand East Asia as a region made up of more than just China; and on how to more usefully compare East Asia, Europe, and other regions of the world.

Many scholars define historical East Asia as having emerged during the Qin/Han era of 221 BCE to 220 CE, becoming a complete international system only three centuries later.[2] Feng Zhang points out that "Japanese scholars have long argued that an East Asian international society had come into being no later than the Sui-Tang period (589–907)."[3] The order lasted until the arrival of the Western imperial powers, marked by the first Opium War between Britain and the Qing dynasty in 1839–1842. Regular participants in this system included Tibet, peoples in the long northwestern Central Asian steppe, Japan, the Ryukyu Islands, the Korean Peninsula, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, and even occasionally Siam.

The East Asian historical experience offers scholars an opportunity to study cases, patterns, and eras that differ markedly from those of the Western experience.[4] The three books at the center of this review essay are outstanding examples of this first wave of social science scholarship about historical East Asian international relations. Collectively, Feng Zhang, Ji-Young Lee, and Seo-Hyun Park make an important contribution to the study of international order. An order in which hierarchy, not sovereign equality, is the fundamental organizing principle reveals a world with a greater variety of experiences than much contemporary scholarship assumes. International relations scholars often simply assume that the European balance-of-power system is universal across time and space. As McConaughey, Musgrave, and Nexon observe, there is a "deep bias in international-relations and comparative-politics scholarship that helps perpetuate the states-under-anarchy framework."[5]

Zhang, Lee, and Park all argue that cultural factors were as important as material power in creating and sustaining historical East Asia's hegemonic order. This should not be a surprise. As Martha Finnemore notes, in a hegemonic system, "material constraints are small. Much is determined by social factors, notably the identity of the unipole and the social fabric of the system it inhabits."[6] The issue for scholars is to determine the relative importance of ideational or material factors within a specific context and the ways in which legitimate authority can coexist with rationalist cost-benefit calculations.

All three books argue that tributary relations were the primary institution of the historical East Asian international order. Yet they also show that this tributary order was incomplete and flexible. Moreover, they demonstrate that hierarchy endured not only because of the structural condition of continued power asymmetry in the region among the member units, but also because many of those units saw hierarchy as legitimate in

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2. For example, Rosenthal and Wong 2011.
3. Zhang 2015, 12.
4. Hui 2005; Johnston 1995; Kang 2010; Khong 2013; Suzuki 2009; Wang 2010.
5. McConaughey, Musgrave, and Nexon 2018, 1.
6. Finnemore 2009, 59.

domestic politics and international relations. In addition to sharing a focus on international order and hierarchy, the three books offer rich empirical details that contribute to international relations scholars' understanding of the variety of international orders. Finally, each relies extensively on primary sources, often in multiple languages.

Both Feng Zhang and Ji-Young Lee examine East Asia's tributary order. Each considers Chinese hegemony and the principle of hierarchy as foundational components of this order. Lee explores the ways in which domestic politics influenced the functioning of international hierarchy in states that were secondary to hegemonic China. Zhang argues the hegemon and secondary units experienced and conducted hierarchy in various ways, arguing that tribute relations, although central to international order, were not the only way in which the order was manifested.

International relations scholars often assume that the process of how units became incorporated into the contemporary state system is unproblematic, total, and instantaneous. In contrast, Seo-Hyun Park examines how international systems and orders change. She argues that East Asian states continued to be concerned about status and hierarchy even after the arrival of the West. While Japan and Korea sought recognition by the Western powers as modern nation-states, they also sought to increase their international status against the backdrop of historical East Asia's disintegrating hierarchical system.[7] Understanding how China and other East Asian countries transitioned from the tribute system to the Westphalian system, and identifying the elements they brought with them and still maintain today, can help scholars explain contemporary East Asian regional dynamics and anticipate change in the international order more broadly.

Describing and explaining patterns of war in historical East Asia and comparing these to patterns of war in European history are also important elements of the recent wave of scholarship on East Asian history. Focusing as much on explaining East Asian stability as it does on instances of war, this scholarship generally argues that periods of Chinese unity tended to witness stability, whereas periods of Chinese disunity led to turmoil in the region. War between the core participants in the tributary order—China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam—was also rare.[8] However, war and conflict between core and periphery were common. Internal rebellion was far more likely than were external challenges for many of the key participants throughout much of this period. Patterns of war and other violence in historical East Asia do not appear to have been the result of differences in relative capabilities, nor do they initially appear to mirror the European experience in which foreign wars were much more common. Careful scholarship that puts this research in conversation with the mainstream study of war and peace is only beginning.

Here I distinguish between a "tributary" and a "Sinocentric" order. Although scholars often use the terms interchangeably to describe historical East Asia, they have different implications and expectations. *Tributary* is a regional term that emphasizes

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7. Carlson 2005; Foot and Goh 2018.
8. Kelly 2012.

the normative and institutional basis of the system. *Sinocentric* refers specifically to China to the exclusion of other units, and overemphasizes China's pervasiveness in the historical system.[9] Scholars sometimes write about East Asia as if China as hegemon were the only participant in the system—"China without neighbors"—and contrast Europe and China, rather than Europe and East Asia.[10] Yet historical East Asia included many political units that often interacted without the involvement of China. *Sinocentric* has also become a contentious term among historians, so to enhance interdisciplinary clarity, I use the term *tributary* order.

Not naming a hegemonic order after the hegemon may seem initially odd, but it is crucial if the discipline of international relations is going to widen inquiry beyond China and examine both the core—of which China was often the most influential member—and the periphery. After all, scholars write about the Westphalian system and the Western liberal order while recognizing that the United States is not the only member and acknowledge that the majority of actors are often unenthusiastic participants. Authoritarian countries and peripheral countries that only partially or superficially accept its institutions and norms vastly outnumber more eager democratic participants. Stability might exist within the core of the Western liberal order but a fair amount of violence occurs in the periphery and between core and periphery. Historical East Asia was similar—although there was a core of Confucianized countries that largely pursued tribute relations, many others in the periphery engaged in tribute relations but had no interest in emulating Chinese civilization or adopting Confucian ideas.

Hierarchy and Tributary Relations as International Order

A system exists when units regularly interact; an order structures how those units interact. The three books under review are principally concerned with hierarchy—the fundamental organizing principle that ordered relations between units in the historical East Asian order—and the recurrent and enduring institutions and norms that units used to interact within that order. Although the contemporary international order's fundamental organizing principle is sovereign equality among states, many international orders have been hierarchic and have recognized a wide variety of units as legitimate members.

Lee defines hierarchy as "authority exercised by the ruler over the ruled." Zhang similarly defines hierarchy as an "international relationship of legitimate authority."[11] Park agrees. International hierarchy, she writes, is determined not only by "the

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9. Despite being anachronistic, we use the terms *China, Korea*, and others for ease of use and continuity. As Woodside observes, "The Vietnamese generally did not call themselves 'Vietnamese' before the twentieth century, any more than the 'ancient Greeks' called themselves Greeks; but anachronisms cannot be avoided here." Woodside 2006, 1.

10. E.g., Pomeranz 2001; The phrase is from Elisseeff 1963.

11. Lee 2016, 9; Zhang 2015, 6.

material capability of states but also by their relative social standing based on prestige and authority."[12] Key to this definition is the social nature of hierarchy. For one actor to be at the top necessarily implies that others must be below. Just as important, then, as understanding the role of the hegemon is exploring whether or not secondary actors consider its authority as legitimate. In this way, all three authors are building on a widely shared definition of hierarchy that incorporates rational calculations as well as social and ideational factors.[13]

Hegemony, which is a type of hierarchy, arises when units accept the leadership and influence of another unit. The simple fact of material preponderance connotes only primacy or unipolarity, and hegemony implies more than mere size. As Zhang defines it, hegemony is the "conjunction of material primacy and social legitimacy … a system of primacy is not necessarily one of hegemony. Hegemony entails a social recognition by other states that the leading state's material dominance and its consequent international rules and behaviors are broadly legitimate."[14] Lee concurs: "a country does not automatically become a hegemon by virtue of preponderant power but instead needs legitimation of its identity as such … an important aspect of hegemonic power is about using cultural resources for strategic purposes, 'rendering some activities permissible while ruling others out of order.'"[15] In this way, Zhang and Lee are at the forefront of theoretical scholarship on international order and hegemony. Scholars are increasingly looking beyond materialist or cost-benefit calcluations of hierarchy and hegemony and recognizing the social bases of these concepts.[16]

Hegemony within Hierarchy in Historical East Asia

This new scholarship's contribution lies not just in its theoretical sophistication, but even more so in its deep engagement with the evidence. Concepts that may be plausible in the abstract need to be carefully documented with empirical evidence. As far back as the rise of unified Qin dynasty in 221 BCE, Asia's predominant international pattern has been concentrated power, not balance of power. Within this tributary order, China as hegemon stood at the top of the hierarchy, allowing formally unequal and unlike units substantial freedom of action as long as they recognized its authority. China, viewed as a source of civilization, crafted a variety of relations with these units, tributary relations being most central.[17] Zhang notes that "China was the undisputed regional hegemon."[18] Lee concludes that the "Chinese state was an

12. Park SH 2017, 8.
13. Mattern and Zarakol 2016.
14. Zhang 2015, 6.
15. Lee 2016, 64–65.
16. E.g., Allan, Vucetic, and Hopf 2018, 845; Mastanduno 2003, 145.
17. Anderson 2007; Kelley 2005; Swope 2015; Wills 1984.
18. Zhang 2015, 2

empire, but the international order in which it occupied the central place was hegemonic rather than imperial."[19]

This international order influenced its members' behavior in numerous ways: in both core and periphery, patterns of war, alignment, diplomacy, and trade in historical East Asia were fundamentally different from those in historical Europe. Lee concludes that "in the early modern period [fourteenth to nineteenth centuries], China was the sole great power in East Asia … East Asia during the Ming and High Qing eras represents hegemonic order."[20] There was no challenge to this order until the arrival of the Western powers in the nineteenth century. The contrast with the European historical experience is stark. As Bin Wong points out, "missing from the Peace of Westphalia was any hegemonic power in Europe similar to China's hegemonic position in East Asia."[21] This order also stands in contrast to the contemporary international order which is based on equal sovereignty, the "foundational conceit" of Westphalia, as Saeyoung Park observes.[22]

Numerous peripheral units in the East Asian system either ignored or rejected Chinese culture and ideas, but used its basic tributary institutions and viewed their relations with each other and with China as inevitably hierarchic. Thus, the order was formally unequal, but informally equal: secondary units did not consider themselves equal to China, yet they had great latitude in their relations with each other. While cost-benefit calculations were made during this time, Zhang argues that "Confucianism was the major, not residual, variable" in the functioning of this order.[23]

Chinese power waxed and waned over the millennia: in some centuries China fell into political, economic, and social disarray, almost always as a result of internal conflict. Perhaps most enduring, however, was the country's ability to reunify and regain its central position following these periods of turmoil. Chinese disunity or weakness was always a temporary phenomenon, especially when viewed over the centuries from Vietnam, Korea, Japan, or the Central Asian steppe. So why was China able to reunify time and again, whereas many other ancient empires could not? According to Mark Edward Lewis, "China owes its ability to endure across time, and to re-form itself again and again after periods of disunity, to a fundamental reshaping of Chinese culture by the earliest dynasties, the Qin and the Han."[24] As Joseph MacKay characterizes it, "For more than two millennia … a relatively consistent idea persisted of what Imperial China was or should be. When China was ascendant, as during the Han and Ming dynasties, this identity justified Chinese regional dominance. When China was in decline, it provided a source of aspiration. When foreigners occupied the country, as did the Mongols under the Yuan dynasty and the Manchus under the Qing dynasty, they justified their rule by claiming the Mandate

19. Lee 2016, 16.
20. Ibid., 1, 16.
21. Wong 2018, 22.
22. Park SY 2017, 2.
23. Zhang 2015, 7.
24. Lewis 2007, 1.

of Heaven (*tianming*) for themselves."[25] Even when foreign invaders conquered China, it remained the center of gravity of East Asian political, economic, and social life. Brantly Womack observes that "the Mongols and the Manchus conquered China, but Mongolia and Manchuria did not become the new centers of Asia, nor did they obliterate the old one."[26]

The Functioning of Tributary Relations

In the study of historical East Asia, the term *tributary relations* refers to the institutions and norms that regulated diplomatic, political, cultural, and economic relations between two units. As Zhang puts it, "tributary diplomacy, as discussed herein, would constitute the tribute system's fundamental institution, embodying its primary norms, rules, and principles."[27] As the primary official mode through which the relationship between two political units was explicitly defined, these relations emphasized the norm of "asymmetry and interdependence of the superior/inferior relationship."[28] Tributary relations were formalized in two key institutions. The first was "investiture," which involved the superior state's diplomatic recognition of and granting titles to the secondary unit. Investiture represented a unit's acceptance of their subordinate status, and was also a diplomatic protocol by which one unit recognized the legitimate sovereignty of another, and the status of the leader in that tributary unit as the legitimate ruler.[29] Not only did investiture explicitly confirm an unequal relationship between the giving and receiving units, but as Lee points out, "investiture practice signified imperial China's respect for the political autonomy of the receiving country."[30]

The second key institution consisted of "tribute missions," or the exchange of diplomatic envoys between the subordinate and superior units. Lee observes that in East Asia, "diplomacy was conducted through regular exchanges of envoys … in a given social relationship, the meaning of A sending (as opposed to receiving) tribute to B signified that A acknowledged B's position to be superior to that of A … tribute practices refer to a reservoir of Confucian cultural scripts constituting a hierarchical order while regulating actors' socially acceptable behaviors in the conduct of diplomacy."[31] The frequency and size of tribute missions were explicitly negotiated between the two units, and were determined by their status: higher-ranked units were allowed more frequent missions, could remain longer in the host country, and could bring a wider and larger range of participants. Tribute missions also engaged in trade, and higher-status units were allowed greater trading privileges, but this was generally considered incidental to the diplomatic political purpose of the tributary order.

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25. MacKay 2016, 474.
26. Womack 2010, 154.
27. Zhang 2015, 170.
28. Hevia 1995, 124.
29. Yoo 2004.
30. Lee 2016, 50.
31. Lee 2016, 47.

Built on this mix of legitimate authority and material power, tributary relations provided a normative social order that contained credible commitments by China not to exploit secondary units that accepted its authority. Relations rested on a bargain that explicitly stated the relative status and behavioral expectations of both sides, such as the frequency of tribute missions and the types of trading rights. Chinese authority was considered legitimate because China's Confucian-inspired social order was generally valued by its subordinates. For example, during the Ming dynasty (1368 to 1644), Vietnam sent seventy-four tributary missions to Beijing, an average of one every 3.7 years. From 1644 to 1839, during the Qing dynasty, Vietnam sent forty-two missions to Beijing, an average of one every 4.6 years.[32] During the Ming dynasty, Lee notes that "Chinese envoys made 186 visits to Korea … but Korean envoys made three or four regular visits a year to China's capital."[33]

Hierarchy and tributary relations had their origins more than 2,000 years ago during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), but only in the fifth and sixth centuries CE did they begin to spread throughout East Asia.[34] During this time East Asia emerged as a distinct entity, with state formation in Korea, Japan, and later Vietnam building on the Chinese experience. This is how Richard von Glahn characterizes the era of China's Sui-Tang empires (581–907):

> The Sui-Tang empires 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.[35]

These institutions and norms continued to evolve for fifteen centuries until the full arrival of the West in the late ninteenth century.

Both Zhang and Lee argue that, when researching tributary relations, scholars need to move beyond the study of just China. Noting that "there is little work that systematically explores why Chinese neighbors accepted the tribute system in varying degrees," Lee focuses on both Korean and Japanese interactions with China.[36] Zhang explores the "multifaceted nature of past regional responses to Chinese hegemony," comparing Sino-Korean, Sino-Japanese, and Sino-Mongol relations.[37] Zhang and Lee also examine the same time period—the early modern era of the fourteenth through the nineteenth centuries—and show in granular detail how hierarchy ordered relations between the core units in the system.

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32. Kang, Nguyen, Fu, and Shaw 2019, 913.
33. Lee 2016, 40.
34. Ibid., 47.
35. Von Glahn 2016, 169.
36. Lee 2016, 3.
37. Zhang 2015, 4.

Lee and Zhang differ, however, in their assessments of tributary relations' roles in this period. Lee has a more encompassing view of the tributary order, emphasizing participants' "unthinking" practices and China's "symbolic domination." When units engaged in diplomacy with China and with each other, it almost always involved sending and receiving envoys through tribute missions, as well as conferring titles through investiture (i.e., the recognition of social hierarchy through diplomatic action). Lee argues that by the fourteenth century, there is no evidence that the Korean Chosŏn elites were debating whether to engage in tribute missions or to receive investiture from China. Such practices simply reflected how diplomacy was conducted, and China's "symbolic domination." Concerned primarily with why secondary units in the core would accept unequal relations with China and how this acceptance affected the domestic politics of these units, Lee writes that "Chinese hegemonic authority was in large part a function of symbolic power contingent upon other East Asian actors' recognition of Chinese ways of defining socially acceptable behavior … Chinese hegemony entailed establishing Chinese ways of doing international politics as the dominant mode of international legitimacy, determining the parameters of what was socially acceptable in early modern East Asia."[38]

The practice of hierarchy, however, did not imply the complete subordination of secondary units to China. Lee shows that even in a hierarchic relationship, subordinate units have agency, and leaders and elites in those units pursued, questioned, and sometimes modified their relations with China for domestic political purposes. She writes that "savvy political leaders of China's neighboring states manipulated external recognition from the hegemon in a form of symbolic politics but in ways that enhanced their legitimacy at home against domestic rivals."[39]

Zhang agrees with Lee that tributary relations were a fundamental institution in historical East Asia, but argues that tribute did not represent the whole range of hierarchical relationship in the region, nor did it characterize all of China's relations with its neighbors. Viewing the tributary order as a "society" as defined by the English School, Zhang argues that "the tribute system may be usefully conceived of as a significant international society with shared norms, rules, and institutions. But, like the 'organized hypocrisy' of Westphalian sovereignty, it was an incomplete system that was constantly revised, challenged, or avoided by different actors."[40] Zhang examines China's engagement in tributary relations with a range of particants and provides nuanced descriptions of the various types of hierarchy that existed in historical East Asia. Calling these types of hierarchic relationships "relationality," Zhang examines how different connections between China and its neighbors affected their behavior toward one another. He is particularly interested in the "grand strategies of imperial

China and its neighbors in their strategic interactions and the fundamental institutional practices of regional politics."[41]

Zhang distinguishes between two types of hierarchy—expressive and instrumental. Expressive hierarchy functions in "accordance with Confucian propriety by establishing ethically endowed relationships for the sake of having such relationships."[42] One of his purposes is to draw attention to the role of expressive rationality based on the Confucian cultural tradition and to compare its role with other instances of instrumental hierarchy that maximized self-interest. For example, Zhang asserts that the centuries of stable Chinese relations with the Korean Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) cannot be understood simply in terms of the balance of capabilities. Rather, Zhang—and Lee —argues that an explanation for the remarkable stability in their relationship must begin with a recognition of the Confucian "vocabulary" that China and Korea brought to their relations.[43]

Zhang contrasts this expressive relationship with instrumental hierarchy, which he claims characterized Sino-Mongol relations. Instrumental hierarchy was aimed at maximizing units' self-interest by exploiting hierarchical relationships. Put differently, Zhang emphasizes the different ways in which hierarchy operated in both core and periphery, and thus highlights the gaps and omissions as much as the continuity of the tributary order. Even Zhang, however, considers hierarchy and tributary relations as enduring and foundational for East Asia's historical international order.

For more than fifteen centuries, secondary members of the East Asian order hardly ever questioned China's position as the hegemon. Lee's detailed research on Japan is particularly important in this regard, showing that although Japanese leaders only occasionally formally accepted Chinese authority, they did not question the principle of hierarchy or the institution of tributary relations. They were also deeply influenced by, and borrowed from, Chinese ideas and culture.[44] A particularly instructive example is the Imjin War (1592 to 1598). Asia's first "regional world war" was larger in scale than anything experienced in Europe at the time.[45] Although Ming China (1368 to 1644) was at the height of its power, Japan, under General Toyotomi Hideyoshi, invaded Korea with 281,840 troops in 1592 in an attempt to conquer China, failing miserably.[46] Many of the war's contours manifested characteristics of the tributary system. As Lee writes, "one of the most striking examples of how tribute practices assumed the 'self-evident and undisputed' quality of defining the socially possible is Japanese general Toyotomi Hideyoshi's plan to build a Japan-centered order through the tribute practices of gift exchange and investiture. Hideyoshi … revealed his vision to move the Japanese emperor to China's capital;

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41. Ibid., 3.
42. Ibid., 7.
43. Ibid., 39–43.
44. Jansen 1992.
45. Swope 2005, 11.
46. Palais 1996, 78.

to turn Korea, Ryukyu, Luzon (the Philippines), and Taiwan into Japan's tributary states; and to have one of his three sons invested as the ruler of Korea."[47]

Indeed, Hideyoshi's challenge to China was the sole exception in premodern Japanese history: leaders before and after him neither envisioned challenging China nor conceived of supplanting China as hegemon. Womack concludes that "to say China was 'among equals' would be missing a key element of the regional situation. Even to Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Japan's second 'great unifier,' the (un-achieved) ultimate glory would have been to rule China. China was at the center of a set of regional relationships that it could not force, but were not transposable."[48]

John Wills observes that in the eighteenth century, "Qing foreign relations with Siam and with Annam were very much within the tribute system."[49] Womack characterizes the "remarkably resilient" China-Vietnam relationship from 968 to 1885 as "a patriarchal one of unequal but stable roles that guaranteed China's recognition of Vietnam's autonomy and Vietnam's deference to China's superiority."[50] Liam Kelley's conclusion from his comprehensive study of Vietnamese scholar-officials could easily apply to Korea as well: "Vietnamese envoys passionately believed that they participated in what we would now call the Sinitic or East Asian cultural world, and that they accepted their kingdom's vassal status in that world."[51] Koreans and Chinese both long saw Korea as the model tributary, and Lee cites numerous Korea historians who "subscribe to the investiture model, and have demonstrated the centrality of investiture practice in the overall maintenance of hierarchy."[52]

Various other units engaged in tributary relations, including in the vast Central Asian steppe, across to Burma, Tibet, Siam, Champa, and along Eastern Asia to the Ryukyus. Although scholarly attention to tributary relations in East Asia has focused on the main participants such as Korea, China, Japan, and Vietnam, numerous political units across the region used elements of the tributary order's norms and institutions, even when China was not involved. Some units within the core embraced a "thick" conception of the tributary order and emulated much of Chinese civilization; others preferred to remain on the periphery and simply used the institutions of the tributary order but did not emulate Chinese civilization.[53]

Korea was a core member of the order but it also conducted its relations with more periphal units through tributary relations. Kenneth Robinson shows how the early fourteenth-century Korean Chosŏn government had to contend with frontier issues such as raiding and smuggling similar to those confronting China, and how Korea used tributary relations in ways similar to China in dealing with frontier peoples such as the Jurchen. "The Chosŏn court modified the Chinese system of tributary

47. Lee 2016, 52.
48. Womack 2010, 158.
49. Wills 2001.
50. Womack 2010, 186.
51. Kelley 2005, 2.
52. Lee 2016, 34.
53. Crossley 2006; Di Cosmo 2002; Elliott 2001.

relations to meet its own needs … The fundamental feature of court policies toward the Japanese and the Jurchen was the effort to control the country's border areas."[54] This clearly was a system: units across the region regularly engaged in diplomacy and trade with each other.[55]

The steppe peoples of Central Asia existed along a vast frontier zone and the disparate cultural and political environment of the Central Asians and China produced a relationship that, although mostly symbiotic, never resulted in a legitimate authority relationship. The world views and political structures of the peoples of the steppes differed significantly from those of the Sinicized states; the former rejected Chinese ideas of civilization and Confucianism, such as written texts or settled agriculture. What centralized political authority that did exist among the various Central Asian peoples was often the result of the ruler's personal charisma and strength, and as Peter Perdue summarizes, "tribal rivalries and fragmentation were common."[56]

Yet even in Central Asia, the principle of hierarchy and tributary order guided relations among the units. Alan Kwan observes that by the seventh century CE, the main ordering principles of Chinese-Central Asian diplomatic relations had been established. These relations were "formally hierarchic, legitimized by heaven and made manifest by victories on the battlefield, and incorporated ceremonies, titles, and diplomatic rituals that were common to both the Chinese and the nomads."[57] Jonathan Skaff writes that this region was characterized by "diplomatic rituals … elaborate displays of pageantry, status ranking, obeisance, gift exchanges, and feasting."[58] Kwan notes that by the Song dynasty (960 to 1279), China's relations with the Central Asian Liao peoples were formalized and highly specific, with previously negotiated travel routes, standards, rules, and etiquette, and even rules for dress and seating arrangements.[59] David Wright observes that the exchange of ambassadors and gifts between China and peoples of the steppe embodied "very elaborate and formalized practices of diplomacy."[60] Zhang points out that the Oirats and other Mongol tribes used tributary missions in their dealings with China and accepted investiture at various levels. For example, from 1411 and 1424, Mongol chieftan Arughtai sent twenty-seven tribute missions to the Ming imperial court, and the Ming conferred titles and ranks on the Mongols. Zhang points out that "Ming titles or ranks were themselves a matter of prestige, as well of material interest."[61] Even Altan Khan, the Mongol leader who created the position of Dalai Lama in 1580, was invested as a Ming vassal.

54. Robinson 1992, 94–95.
55. Von Glahn 2018.
56. Perdue 2005, 520.
57. Kwan 2016, 374.
58. Skaff 2012, 8–9.
59. Kwan 2016, 378.
60. Wright 2005, 108.
61. Zhang 2015, 147.

War and Peace in Premodern East Asia

Identifying different international orders and organizing principles would be uninteresting if patterns of behavior were not different as well. One of the most promising areas of new research is the increasingly sophisticated social scientific scholarship that measures war and other forms of violence in historical East Asia. To date, there has been little systematic study of this subject, and almost no attempt to compare patterns of war in historical East Asia and historical Europe. Although scholars have produced important studies of individual wars in East Asia, few have examined war and peace from a regional perspective that puts the study of the East Asian experience in conversation with mainstream study of war in the international relations literature, which tends to focus on Europe and, in particular, the wars of the last two centuries.[62]

Many eras in historical East Asia witnessed different or discrete patterns of war. Simply describing this immense sweep of history has hardly begun.[63] Assessing variation in war and peace is more theoretically challenging than merely assembling new "facts" from a different time and place because definitions and meanings across time and space are not self-evident, and it is not clear that what is considered a war in one era is the same as in another. In addition to measuring war, this research should assess cultural and material explanations for war, and ask whether the type of international system and order might affect patterns of behavior, bargaining, and war among the units.

A lively research program to explain variation in war and peace in historical East Asia is under way, and testing explanations and measuring war is producing exciting results. Research on war in historical East Asia has so far produced several theoretical puzzles. For example, is war an inevitable and frequent element of world politics? Is war the same everywhere and at all times? Does East Asia's experience mirror the routine bellicosity of the European historical experience? Answers to these questions hinge on the description and measurement of war and other violence, as well as on the explanation for those observed patterns. The disputes hinge on descriptions of the relative warlike nature of the system, how best to define scope and boundary conditions, and whether explanations for the observed patterns relate to cultural factors, the type of international order, or perhaps both.

Patterns of War in Historical East Asia

The debate about war in historical East Asia has revolved around whether to describe more than 2,000 years of Chinese history as "peaceful" or "warlike." For example, Victoria Hui calls the "myth of Confucian pacifism" an "unfortunate" development. Peter Perdue argues that "Chinese states fought 3,756 wars from 770 BC to 1912 AD,

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62. Andrade 2016; Di Cosmo 2009; Lorge 2005; Swope 2009; van de Ven 2000.
63. For example, to my knowledge, there is no definitive study of the "three kingdoms" era of China in the third century CE, nor on the Tang-Silla-Koguryo-Baekche-Yamato wars of 640–668 CE.

for an average of 1.4 wars per year."[64] Jean-Laurent Rosenthal and R. Bin Wong, however, argue that "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."[65]

This focus on China highlights the concern raised earlier about Sinocentrism and the need for scholars to view the East Asian region more broadly. Researching China alone misses a key point: it takes two to fight. Only by putting China in a regional perspective is it possible to assess patterns of violence and test competing causal claims. There is nothing essential about China that is either exclusively warlike or peaceful. Rather, different issues at different times with different adversaries can lead to a different propensity to use violence. Thus, only by taking account of both China and its adversaries can scholars explain why bargaining to avoid war succeeded in some cases but not in others, and arrive at a comprehensive understanding of patterns of war and peace in historical East Asia.

Instead of seeking to explain only a single pattern of conflict or drawing sweeping conclusions about all East Asian history, scholars should analyze patterns of both war and peace within discrete time periods subject to explicit scope and boundary conditions. Greater clarity is also needed about different types of violence. Prasenjit Duara rightly points out that "the overwhelming interest in interstate war or its absence … systematically ignores the variety of state violence and repression."[66] As some scholars have noted, internal threats were often more consequential to rulers in historical East Asia than were external challenges.[67] There is, in fact, increasing effort to measure war and other conflict in premodern East Asia using systematic methods similar to those used in contemporary social science and primary sources from China, Korea, and Vietnam.[68] Research is beginning to explore whether and to what extent differing levels of internal and external violence were endogenous with each other in East Asia. This new research will substantially broaden and complement the qualitative scholarship that scholars have generally used to study war in early modern East Asia.

This emerging scholarship focuses less on war versus peace and more on modes of governance and tributary order maintenance in hierarchy, as well as the impact of hierarchy on smaller units' security calculus and options. This research invites replication, as well as broader analysis of East Asian conflicts and comparison with the contemporary experience with war. These new data are measured and coded as closely as possible to the ways in which the Correlates of War defines and measures war and other incidents. The specificity and granular detail in these new

64. Hui 2012, 2; Perdue 2015, 1005.
65. Rosenthal and Wong 2011, 162, 168.
66. Duara 2017, 219.
67. Crossley forthcoming.
68. Kang 2010, 85–93.

measurements are substantially increasing scholars' knowledge of premodern East Asian international relations. For example, using primary sources from Korea and China, David Kang, Meredith Shaw, and Ronan Fu find that from 1368 to 1841—a period of more than four and a half centuries—Korea experienced border skirmishes in twenty-five years and wars in sixteen years. Similarly, China experienced border skirmishes in 166 years, but war in only twenty-eight years.[69]

Moving beyond China to take a regional perspective on war is another important step, and the initial findings are intriguing. Eugene Park observes that "the late Chosŏn [Korean] state maintained an army no bigger than what was dictated by internal security," estimating that the Korean military in the eighteenth century comprised only 10,000 "battle-worthy men."[70] Mark Peterson observes that "Korean history is remarkably stable and peaceful."[71] Vietnamese rulers also displayed very little military attention to their relations with China, which were conducted extensively through the institutions and principles of the tributary system. They were clearly more concerned with quelling chronic domestic instability and managing relations with Champa and other kingdoms to their south and west.[72] Looking at the socioeconomic calculus of conflict in Japan's Tokugawa period (1600 to 1868)—and how this shifts across the Meiji Restoration—may provide findings that reinforce earlier claims and also explains—while connecting to Western expectations—why East Asia was largely peaceful over the late imperial period.

Greater transparency about definitions and codings is also needed for the cumulation and replication of findings. Much of the disagreement among scholars over patterns of war in early modern East Asia is the result of ambiguous scope and boundary conditions. Scholars are often unclear regarding the geographic area or temporal era they are studying, how they define the international order, and how they code and define "warfare" in a system composed of unlike political units. Agreeing on how to differentiate low-level violence from full-scale war is not always self-evident.

Explaining Patterns of War and Peace

Explaining when bargaining prevented war among units in historical East Asia is just as important as explaining rarer instances of bargaining failure in the region. Both Lee and Zhang address the topics of war and peace. Lee devotes a chapter to the 1592 Imjin War involving Japan, Korea, and China but also explains the centuries of peace in the region. Zhang sees punitive war as one of the institutional practices of Chinese hegemony that, although rare, reinforced or restored the tribute order.[73]

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69. Kang, Shaw, and Fu 2016.
70. Park 2006, 6.
71. Peterson 2018.
72. Kang et al. 2019.
73. Lee 2016, chapter 4; Zhang 2015, 165.

Tribute relations appear to be a key element in explaining war and peace in East Asia. For example, Korea and Vietnam had demarcated clear borders with China by the eleventh century, they resolved disagreements using tribute diplomacy, and those borders have remained essentially unchanged to the present.[74] In a detailed study of China–Korea border stability in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, Seonmin Kim concludes that "it was not equal relations between the Qing and the Chosŏn that enabled them to achieve this feat; rather, it was the asymmetrical tributary relationship that led the two countries to pursue the same solution."[75] Writing about Vietnam, James Anderson observes that "by 1086 a clear border had been mapped out between the two states, the first such court-negotiated border in China's history … The existence of a formal border between the two polities was successfully challenged only once in the next eight hundred years."[76]

It is sometimes asserted that when Chinese hegemony broke down and significant fighting erupted, balance-of-power calculations must have driven the actions of the units. But this is at least a questionable assertion—a balance-of-power system does not imply constant warfare. Kenneth Waltz repeatedly points out that "the distinction between international and national realms of politics is not found in the use or the nonuse of force but in their different structures."[77] After all, the Cold War was a balance-of-power system that was not warlike precisely because power was balanced. Balance-of-power systems do not experience constant fighting, and hegemonic systems are not always peaceful. Rather, it depends on the ability of the actors to negotiate an equilibrium that can be adjusted without fighting, and that depends on their perceptions and intentions as well as their relative capabilities.

A major question, which scholars are only now beginning address, is whether wars in certain eras, such as the Warring States era (475–221 BCE) or the Song-Jin-Liao-Mongol era (tenth to thirteenth centuries CE) followed patterns that would justify a balance-of-power explanation. In other words, were the participants' relative capabilities the main causal factor for war and alliances? Or were other factors more important?

For example, Yuan-kang Wang makes an explicitly offensive realist argument about Song China's use of force between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, contrasting it with a Confucian culture argument. Yet Wang never attemps to measure relative power, the key factor in a balance-of-power explanation. Wang occasionally indirectly measures Chinese Song power with indicators such as the Song state budget from 960 to 1059, but he does not compare Song power to that of China's competitors, including the Liao, Jin, or the Mongols.[78] Without a measure of relative strength, it is impossible to test realist arguments such as Wang's about when states go to war. Furthermore, Wang's own evidence undercuts his thesis. Wang shows that three of

74. Ledyard 1994, 290.
75. Kim 2017, 3.
76. Anderson 2013, 271.
77. Waltz 1979, 103.
78. For example, Wang 2010, Tables 3.2 and 3.3.

the four times that the Song used offensive force came only after years of prolonged court discussion where the use of force was repeatedly discouraged as being against Confucian values because the "army is an auspicious instrument. The saint uses it only when he has no other alternatives."[79]

There is extensive evidence that East Asian units did not balance power and that smaller units did not ally to balance a larger threat: in the eleventh century, the Song never allied with the Xi Xia to balance Liao. More perplexing from a realist perspective, in the early thirteenth century, the Song focus on destroying the Jin was so intense that they allied with the Mongols, and ignored the clear and rising Mongol threat for long periods.[80] Charles Peterson points out how Song grand strategy was inextricably intertwined with its world view: "It has in hindsight struck observers since the thirteenth century that, with the Mongols rising in the rear of Chin [Jin], it was not a good idea to assist in the destruction of the regime. But was there ever a genuine choice? The Sung [Song] were prisoners of a powerful revanchist heritage which in turn rested on fundamental conceptions of their place in the world and in the cosmos. The former demanded unremitting efforts to recover the ancient Chinese heartland, the latter, uncontested Chinese supremacy over the nations of the world, morally and politically."[81]

There is, in fact, evidence that it was not differences in capabilities but rather cultural differences that drove much of the conflict in historical East Asia. Confucian world views and Chinese unity played important roles in whether conflict did or did not occur. Political units within the core shared a sense of legitimacy, and the institutions of the tributary order helped stabilize their relations. It is not surprising that units that rejected Confucianism and Sinic notions of cultural achievement engaged in conflict with those that embraced Sinic culture. Furthermore, periods of Chinese unity saw more stability than did periods of Chinese disunity. Exploring whether and why this was the case could sharpen theories and explanations for not only historical East Asia but theories of war more generally.

Selection bias is particularly common in studies of war in historical East Asia, where scholars tend to focus on fighting but not on enduring patterns of stability. For example, East Asia scholars often point to the endemic skirmishing between China and the peoples of the Central Asian steppes for a two-thousand-year period as evidence of widespread conflict.[82] Mark Dincecco and Yuhua Wang observe about China that "the most significant recurrent foreign attack threat came from Steppe nomads … external attack threats were unidirectional, reducing the emperor's vulnerability."[83] Rarely does anyone ask, however, why these threats were unidirectional and arose mainly from nomads, rather than from powerful states such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

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79. Wang 2010, 44, 66–68, 95.
80. Wang 2010, 60,
81. Peterson 1983, 230.
82. Di Cosmo 2002; Johnston 1995.
83. Dincecco and Wang 2018, 342.

Zhang, Lee, and others in this first wave of scholarship on historical East Asian international relations generally avoid the problem of selection bias. If one is interested in war, it is natural to look where there is fighting. Doing so, however, leads to selecting on the dependent variable—an overweighting of war—and a biased assessment for patterns of conflict and stability. Just as important as explaining why there was war in some areas is to explain why there was peace in other areas. Barbara Geddes pointed out that one of the key "tasks crucial to testing any hypothesis are to identify the universe of cases to which the hypothesis should apply … [there are problems if] cases are selected on a variable—geographical region—that is correlated with the dependent variable."[84]

Patterns of war and peace in historical East Asian appear to directly challenge an explanation based on a balance-of-power approach. Despite being far smaller than China by almost any measure, Japan invaded Korea in 1592, intending to conquer. This was the only war between China and Japan in more than six centuries. The truly fascinating question is why did these countries choose not to fight more frequently, despite having the logistical and organizational capacity to wage war across water and on a massive scale? Realist approaches that emphasize the causal role of relative capabilities have difficulty explaining the phenomenon. Realists would predict that the far more powerful state (China) would attack the weaker state (Japan), not vice versa. Realists would further predict that the two weaker states, Korea and Japan, would ally together against China. Yet it was Korea that sought China's help to counter the Japanese threat, not the other way around.

The works under review provide further intriguing findings. Lee and Zhang conclude that an early Ming–Chosŏn war in the late fourteenth century was avoided precisely because of tributary practices' signaling function.[85] The fourteenth century saw the rise of a new Chinese dynasty, the Ming (1368–1644), and the founding emperor considered attempting to move the border with Korea south, potentially claiming land that both sides had long agreed were Korean. This led to a crisis in Korea and ultimately a coup d'état and the creation of a new Korean dynasty—Chosŏn—founded by general Yi Song-gye in 1392. China and Korea were able to negotiate a mutually acceptable solution in which Korea deferred to China and accepted tributary status and, in addition, both sides affirmed the legitimacy of the previously agreed-upon border.

Lee and Zhang explore the episode in detail, with careful examinations of diplomatic missives, bargaining between China and Korea, and the situation in both countries' capitals. Zhang concludes that stabilization of the Sino-Korean relationship was more a function of legitimacy and authority than it was of cost-benefit calculations. He writes that although "Chinese emperors had important instrumental motives in their relations with Korea … both the Jianwen and Yongle emperors wanted to

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84. Geddes 1990, 134, 140.
85. Lee 2016, chapter 3.

establish an expressive tributary relationship with the Chosŏn kings. The Yongle emperor, in particular, identified Korea as Ming China's closest tributary vassal."[86] Lee points out that "the day after Yi Song-gye officially founded a new state in 1392, he sent his tributary envoy to Ming founder Hongwu to seek recognition."[87] She also notes that in a period of more than 400 years, major instability between China and Korea arose only three times and in no instance did this instability rise to the level of war, despite China's massive size advantage. Historian Kirk Larsen observes that there were "critical moments in which the Chinese dynasty possessed both the capability and the momentum necessary to complete aggressive expansionistic designs [against Chosŏn] but decided not to do so."[88] Lee's book is a story of historical East Asia's stability, and she uses those few episodes of instability to highlight those mechanisms that allowed for stability.

Zhang also highlights how China and its neighbors used hierarchies to maintain stability in the region across a range of diverse units. He notes that "the Confucian understanding of punitive expedition … is one possible institution for maintaining the international society of Chinese hegemony," and argues that the Imjin War was important for maintaining the East Asian order.[89] Zhang and Lee focus on stability as much as instability. Challenges to Chinese hegemony were unsettling to many units throughout the region, even those that were reluctant to accept Chinese investiture. Lee documents how, in the early seventeenth century, "the rise of Manchu power signified not simply major shifts in the distribution of material power in East Asia but also a threat to the deeply held notion among East Asian contemporaries about who was entitled to rule," pointing out that "Japan clearly preferred the Ming over the Qing. Leaders of Tokugawa Japan seriously considered forming an alliance with the Ming remnants to strike at the Qing."[90]

Researchers studying war in East Asia before the nineteenth century confront a number of questions: What is a war? Was war the same in early modern East Asia as it is today? The phenomenon of war predates the modern nation-state system.[91] What is interesting about these questions is not that they reveal that fourteenth-century data might not be the cleanest, or that typologies may benefit from revision, but that there might be problems—that extend across field and even discipline—with how scholars think about conflict and state violence (and, by extension, peace) and with how an exceptional marker, war (however defined), plays such an outsized role in scholars' understanding of presumed desirable outcomes and stability.

86. Zhang 2015, 77–78.
87. Lee 2016, 79.
88. Larsen 2012, 9; Peterson 2018.
89. Zhang 2015, 165.
90. Lee 2016, 136–37.
91. Phillips and Sharman 2015, 437.

How International Orders Change: The Transition to Modernity

The most important system change in East Asia was from the tributary system to the Westphalian system, which occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The transition was consequential and wrenching for all East Asian societies. The system widened and changed drastically: most significantly, the colonizing Western powers presented new and dangerous challenges for some East Asian countries. Westphalian principles and institutions obliterated the tributary order in only a few decades. Seo-Hyun Park explores this transition, explaining how East Asian countries understood and adapted to this radical transformation of their international environment. She argues that although the international order changed dramatically, and although East Asian countries adapted to many of those changes, Korea and Japan did not wholly abandon ideas and concepts from historical East Asia. Park argues that "ideas of status-seeking have remained embedded in the concept of sovereign autonomy and endure as alternative security frames that continue to inform contemporary strategy debates in East Asia."[92]

East Asian countries were forced to deal with Western powers as a fact of international life. The order changed as well: hierarchy and tributary relations were of little use in dealing with these new powers, which brought with them notions of sovereign equality and diplomacy conducted in European ways in European languages. These concepts were not self-evident to East Asians. Park observes that in 1870s Korea and Japan, "the translation of the term *sovereignty* was chosen carefully to symbolize the power and authority of the state so that they could compete with the Western powers, and to a lesser extent, China." Park notes the speed with which Japan learned the new norms and institutions, rapidly beginning to use communications in French and English. Particularly important was signing the 1876 Kanghwa Treaty between Japan and Korea. The treaty explicitly identified the two countries as equals as defined in Westphalian international legal terms. The treaty was also written in French, the first East Asian treaty not to be written using traditional Chinese. Park points out that the treaty "symbolized Japan's status as a 'Western' nation-state."[93]

Although the contemporary international order is ostensibly based on sovereign equality, Japan and Korea were deeply aware of their peripheral status in the early twentieth century and continued to care about their ranking within the order. For Park, hierarchy is "neither culturally innate to the region nor structurally determined by asymmetrical distributions of power … hierarchy in East Asia has been *politically* constructed and contested by legitimacy-seeking political leaders."[94] In this way, Park's and Lee's works are highly complementary, using different time periods and eras to make similar arguments about the role and influence of international

92. Park SH 2017, 2.
93. Ibid., 94.
94. Ibid., 11.

hierarchy. Park concludes that even in the twenty-first century, "hierarchy is an enduring socio-political constraint in the discourse and conduct of foreign policy in Japan and South Korea," noting that "every issue of Japan's *Diplomatic Bluebook* since the 1970s, for example, has discussed Japan's international position and image."[95]

From the perspective of the twenty-first century, the centrality of the traditional East Asian tributary relations may appear to be mere rhetoric glossing over more basic geostrategic or political considerations. But East Asian participants historically did not question the hierarchy. Park, like Lee, argues that in historical East Asia, hierarchy and order defined what was permissible or even conceivable. In Park's words, "hierarchical orders endure not because of voluntary consent but because the constraints of hierarchy are a socially recognized fact and they provide meaning for leaders' actions and words."[96] For example, although Japan certainly had material reasons for seeking to colonize China and Korea in the late nineteenth century, it would be a mistake, as Shogo Suzuki asserts, "to somehow assume that the proclamations of Japan's 'civilizing' role within Asia were merely rhetoric, thus implying that the Japanese leaders were able to rationally detach themselves from their particular social world and cynically use the 'civilizing mission' to justify imperialist ideas that had somehow always been latent."[97]

Scholars often treat the contemporary order as if it appeared fully formed and unquestioningly accepted as it spread beyond its Western foundations. Alexander Anievas notes how, in the study of international relations, there is a "typical, Eurocentric process of unidirectional West-to-East diffusion."[98] Westphalian values are the norm, and East Asian states accept unquestioningly the basic rules of the international game. Not even China has offered an alternative approach. At the same time, however, Westphalian norms and values have not erased all norms and values associated with East Asia, either. In fact, they often coexist, sometimes uncomfortably, and manifest themselves in contemporary East Asia in surprising ways. Iver Neumann argues that "memories of previous systems are by necessity relevant for any entry into a new one. Former experiences and present actions are tied together."[99] Although the discipline of international relations has tended to ignore the transition to modernity, scholars in the humanities have been centrally concerned with this transition.[100]

Despite East Asia's inclusion in the Westphalian order, remnants of the old order survived, in partial form. Rosemary Foot and Evelyn Goh observe about East Asia in the twenty-first century, "a hybrid of 'indigenous,' 'Western,' and 'global' norms,

95. Ibid., 103.
96. Ibid., 22.
97. Suzuki 2009, 143.
98. Anievas 2016, 470.
99. Neumann 2011, 471.
100. Hanscom 2013.

institutions, and practices fill the economic and security arenas."[101] The source of that hybridity is found in East Asia's historical past. Park argues that "hierarchy did not disappear with the arrival of the west and the decline of China. It simply expanded, from a regionally circumscribed order to a global hierarchy."[102] This argument is similar to Goh's work on hierarchy and contemporary order in East Asia, where she claims that East Asia is a "layered hierarchy," one in which China is a "constrained, pro-status quo regional great power."[103] For Park, hierarchical orders are not created on a blank canvas. The post-World War II security and economic bargain between the US and its allies in East Asia occurred in a region that was "already familiar with the political challenge of advancing the nation with international hierarchy."[104] Park calls this a "usable past" similar to Thomas Berger's discussion of how collective memory sets "sharp boundaries to the kind of historical narrative that can be adopted and sustained over time."[105] The transition from the tributary to Westphalian order meant that status was now judged against "civilizational standards, as promoted by dominant powers in the international system."[106] How and to what extent this hybridity and enduring conceptions of international order from both East Asia and Westphalia interact will be an important area of future research. Park's work, in particular, highlights the need to make regional dynamics a central research focus, and not to assume that the Western ideas and principles will replicate themselves seamlessly around the globe.

Beyond Sinocentrism and Eurocentrism

This emerging international relations scholarship on historical East Asia has caused some controversy. David Howell observes how, "when historians have taken note of the tributary order's second career in IR theory, they have generally reacted with reserve or even open hostility."[107] Timothy Brook is skeptical of "more simplistic views of the system that have tended to find support and repetition within IR and political science … If we Asianists ask IR to send its dogged Eurocentrism out the front door, it would be advisable that we avoid letting Sinocentrism sneak in the back one."[108] Andre Schmid argues that "histories of premodern East Asian relations tend to reproduce Sinocentric assumptions … and neglect the many instances that ruffle a complacent tribute ideology.[109]

These observations have merit. As I noted earlier, it is critical to widen scholarship on East Asia beyond China to the region as a whole. One of the strengths of the works

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101. Foot and Goh 2018, 4.
102. Park SH 2017, 8.
103. Goh 2013, 209.
104. Park SH 2017, 11.
105. Ibid., 12; Berger 2012, 24.
106. Park SH 2017, 15.
107. Howell, 2017, viii.
108. Brook 2018, 7.
109. Schmid 2007, 140.

reviewed here, and of much of the emerging international relations scholarship on historical East Asia, is that it is explicitly regional and comparative. The discipline of international relations is principally concerned with explaining patterns of global interaction with reference to theories that are supposed to be case blind or case neutral, but that are all too often based exclusively on Western experiences. Avoiding a focus solely on China is one of this emerging literature's key contributions.

The three books reviewed here are at the forefront of putting Chinese history more firmly within a framework that provides greater specificity and nuance to scholars' views of China. They also firmly embed China within a wider comparative and regional context that includes other actors, their agency, and the various kinds of relations that prevailed in historical East Asia. This new scholarship is consistent with Evelyn Rawski's call for "de-centering China from the perspective of the periphery rather than from the core."[110] None of these three books—and, indeed, none of the exciting international relations scholarship of the past decade—comes close to making generalizing claims about an essential Chinese identity or about the essential warlike or peaceful nature of the system itself and China's role within it.

In their reexamination of East Asian history, Lee, Zhang, and Park challenge the ways in which scholars expect all international relations to work, and they highlight the problems associated with an understanding of international order developed entirely by theories derived from the Westphalian system. Pinar Bilgin aptly observes that "while theory builds on history, history is read through theory … addressing the Eurocentric limits of IR involves addressing the Eurocentric historical accounts that students of IR draw upon."[111] The works reviewed here address theoretical and methodological issues at the heart of mainstream international relations scholarship. If they and other scholars are going to expand scholarship past the European experience, they will need to increasingly emphasize the application of social science theories and methods to historical East Asia. There is no other path.

The questions therefore are: How do scholars define and measure concepts such as political actors, wars, and their relations? How do they define a system, order, region, or time period? What are the scope and boundary conditions? What is the causal logic that explains observed patterns? Scholarship that answers questions like these allows for cumulation of research. It is possible to debate whether or not the historical political units were "states." One can also debate whether using the Correlates of War definition for war (1,000 battle deaths in a calendar year) is appropriate for early modern East Asia. Further, one can debate how to define the region of East Asia and which units to include in the system. The new wave of international relations scholarship on East Asia makes those positive contributions, and allows for better adjudication of debates and moves knowledge in the field forward. Anievas points out that "a growing body of literature has sought to reconstitute IR as a genuinely

'historical' social science while 'provincializing Europe'—or 'the West'—as the sole, sovereign author of sociohistorical change."[112]

What matters is not what the people at the time called the order, but whether there was, in fact, an order—an organizing principle and set of institutions, norms, and practices that endured over time and across space. By that criteria, the books reviewed here show clearly that such an order existed in historical East Asia. Cognizant of the need to be clear about definitions and terms, Lee devotes a chapter to engaging the literature on the tributary order, concluding that, "if there is one ontological reality that scholars agree on, it is that East Asian states and polities shared certain practices in their conduct of relations with one another … diplomacy was conducted through regular exchanges of envoys."[113] Park concludes that tribute relations "functioned as a well-institutionalized, if regionally confined, system of states."[114] Similarly, Yongjin Zhang and Barry Buzan write

> that there existed an indigenous social order in the history and politics of what we call East Asia today is beyond dispute, be it called the Chinese world order, the tributary system, Pax Sinica, the East Asian order, international society in East Asia or any other. Acknowledging this is to recognize that East Asian states and peoples had historically chosen and established complex institutions and practices informed by their history and culture.[115]

The view that historical East Asia was an international system with a clear order is shared by many scholars. Even while noting many exceptions to the international order, Mark Elliott observes about the eighteenth century that "in one form or another, a system of 'tribute' relations remained in place for much of the Qing, even if it was not applied uniformly."[116] Writing about Korea's subordinate relationship with China, Gari Ledyard notes that "Chinese 'control' was hardly absolute. 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."[117]

Conclusion

International relations scholars' recent attention to historical East Asia promises to enrich the study of IR scholarship and challenge some of the discipline's most central ideas. The most important contribution of the three books reviewed here is to bring into relief the geographically constrained nature of much of international relations theory: the Westphalian system and the Western liberal order were neither unique nor inevitable.

112. Anievas 2016, 468.
113. Lee 2016, 47; from chapter 1, "Understanding the Tribute System."
114. Park SH 2017, 54.
115. Zhang and Buzan 2012, 10.
116. Elliott 2014, 349.
117. Gari Ledyard, post on the Korea Web (Koreanstudies@koreaweb.ws), 22 March 2006.

The study of East Asian history shows that international orders are probably more contingent—and the range of political units more diverse—than the individualistic, sovereign and equal, states-in-anarchy assumptions that underlie virtually all ostensibly universal theories of international relations. Claims about international order are likely conditional: X occurs conditional on certain scope and boundary conditions, and is rarely a universal phenomenon. Hierarchy can be stable or unstable, depending on the types of legitimation and authority claims that are negotiated. Awareness of these issues will enable scholars to more carefully make discrete claims, assess evidence, and compare patterns across time and space.

There are two main ways in which scholarship that incorporates premodern East Asia can move forward. The first is to use historical East Asia as a generator for, and testing ground of, new international relations theories and theoretical constructs. Social science research on historical East Asia is in the beginning stages. The discipline has almost no conventional wisdom, stylized facts, or common knowledge about the region. The vigorous debates discussed here are important for expanding the field: there should be as much debate about the causes of the Imjin War, or the collapse of the Ming dynasty and the rise of the Manchus, as there is about the rise of nineteenth-century Germany and the causes of World War I.

Further research should also explore state formation in East Asia. The scant work on state formation in the region is an example of the Sinocentrism I mentioned earlier—this literature tends to focus solely on the Qin/Han era of 221 BCE–220 CE and almost completely ignores the next nineteen centuries of East Asian history.[118] Yet the fully developed Chinese state more likely dates from the Sui-Tang era (581–907).[119] Why did China emerge as both an idea and a material fact, and how did it endure and recombine for so long, even during periods of disunity? US hegemony is at most seventy years old, yet Chinese hegemony endured for many centuries. Unlike the Roman empire which fell, never to return, while the Han empire fell in 220 CE, unified China returned and has remained a fact of life in East Asia. More importantly, this work generally ignores the remarkable East Asian state formation in Korea, Vietnam, Japan, and elsewhere. State formation was a regional phenomenon, and it occurred through emulation of the hegemon, not a competition for power.[120] Far from mirroring Charles Tilly's famous dictum that "war made the state," it appears that these East Asian countries consciously copied China as an agenda of "best practices."[121]

The second area for further research is to more directly put scholarship on East Asian and European history in conversation with each other and to question, challenge, and widen the conventional wisdom of the history that informs the international relations discipline. Much of the research discussed in this essay, for example, calls for a more expansive definition of hierarchy. In this way, a hierarchic

118. Kiser and Cai 2003; Zhao 2004.
119. Woodside 2006, 1.
120. Deuchler 1992.
121. Tilly 1975, 42; Womack 2006, 132.

order could be seen as one in which inequality is taken for granted, and although the historical tributary order involved coercive and strategic elements, it also existed on a cultural basis that was not simply interchangeable with other cultural elements. The integration of such vivid cases from understudied regions of the world offers the possibility of dramatically advancing scholarship on bargaining theory, theories of hierarchy, and theories of international order.

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