THE CHINESE SYSTEM OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
IN EARLY MODERN EAST ASIA:
CHINA AT THE CENTER IN THE EYES OF THE PERIPHERY

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THE CHINESE SYSTEM OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN EARLY MODERN EAST ASIA: CHINA AT THE CENTER IN THE EYES OF THE PERIPHERY

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ABSTRACT

What explains the longevity of the China-centered international order in early modern East Asia? Why did Japan and Korea continue to stay below China in the periphery position instead of forming alliances to balance against Chinese power, especially when China was weak and divided? Contributing to the current debate on the stability of a unipolar world, the dissertation asks which domestic or international conditions bind secondary states to support the existing order at times of power transition.

My answer to the question focuses on the strategic of soft power. Building on insights from the historical institutionalist and constructivist literatures, I argue that the hegemonic structure of an international system is likely to persist longer when the hegemon’s institutional innovations are turned into sources of international authority, allowing the hegemon to use its legitimizing ideas for realpolitik purposes. A systemic model of stability reproduction is presented to elucidate how hegemonic power, ideas, and social dynamics interact with one another over time to have bearings on international order.

To test the model, I look into the system-changing challenges that could
have disrupted the hierarchical structure but did not in early modern East Asia: 1) the Mongol invasions of Korea and Japan in the thirteenth century; 2) the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea, 1592-98; and 3) the rise of the Qing Empire in the 17th century, isolating the mechanisms that glued East Asian states to the China-centered international order.
To Daisaku Ikeda
who inspired me to take the courage to pursue a Ph.D. in international relations
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INTRODUCTION

Why do some international systems outlast periods of system-changing challenges while others do not? Which domestic or international conditions bind secondary states to support the existing international order at times of power transition? These questions are far from being only of academic interest and speak directly to the U.S. position in the world today with the rise of Chinese power. While the global financial crisis has fanned the talk of America’s decline, rising China’s new assertiveness and “Charm Offensive” strategy of using soft power to appeal to the world stage has further fueled speculations about Chinese behavior in the future. To ask the implications of these subtle yet intriguing observations reveals the limits to our understanding as to what makes a hegemonic order solid beyond the preponderance of power.

My dissertation turns to the Chinese Empire for an answer. With China, whose record of history is longer than that of any other existing state, at the center, the East Asian states system had evolved its own system of international relations over millennia. When we extend our horizon further back into the history of East Asia, the empirical evidence is at odds with conventional wisdom of the field that the balance of power mechanism works effectively to prevent hegemonies from forming and maintaining. When standard European history books describe the one half century balanced state of power in the Concert of Europe as the heyday of Europe’s
peace, a far longer period of stability in East Asia’s history existed under the unbalanced power of the late imperial China. While the European states system experienced upheavals of the Renaissance, Thirty Years’ War, the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, and the French Revolution, the East Asian states system from the thirteenth through the end of the eighteenth century continued with the China-centered hegemonic order. If more international relations theory were built upon the recurring historical patterns of the East Asian states system, and not on the European experience of the past four centuries, the balance of power may not still be “the best known, and perhaps the best” theory in international politics.

What is striking to students of international relations is the fact that these hierarchical relational patterns under the “Chinese world order” could have been “so thoroughly institutionalized” and persisted for over two thousand years. The dissertation tackles this puzzle of the persistence of the hierarchical order under the Chinese Empire that encompassed the states in modern day China, Korea, Japan and some Southeast Asian states. In particular, the recurring systemic outcomes in early modern East Asia suggest that China was able to maintain the hierarchical order in the East Asian states system despite occasional changes in the distribution of power, wealth and legitimacy. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that there were significantly fewer interstate wars compared to those of Europe during this period.

The central question of the study emerges from this empirical puzzle: Why did East Asia’s secondary states continued to stay below China in a
periphery position instead of forming alliances to balance against Chinese power? At various historical moments of the Chinese Empire, China has been weakened to the extent that hypothetically joined military forces of Korea and Japan, for example, could have successfully disrupted the China-centered order. But this has rarely occurred and the hierarchical order has invariably been restored after shocks to the East Asian states system. Why did powers in East Asia that could pose serious military threat to China somehow keep returning to the China-centered order despite the windows of opportunities for exit after wars or during the changes of dynasties in China? To put it differently, what glued these states to the “Chinese world order” for such a long continuous history?

My answer to this question focuses on the strategic use of soft power in the form of the tribute system. The dissertation examines the reproduction mechanisms that create stability of hierarchical relational patterns, focusing on how hegemonic power, functional efficiency and ideas interact with one another to bear on international order. In particular, I elucidate the processes under which Chinese institutional innovations centered on the tribute system that locked in power, and ideas of Chinese superiority took on a life of their own over time to create a remarkably stable system of international political authority.

In doing so, my project also engages an important debate about how to empirically interpret China’s imperial history. I directly address some of the criticisms that the tribute system model, as described by John K. Fairbank in his
1968 volume *The Chinese World Order*, has received in recent years as an overly simplified presentation of the Chinese system of international relations in early modern Asia.¹ By engaging in a macro-historical comparison of the China-centered order between the thirteenth and the end of the eighteenth century, I build on the more recent historiography of “new Qing history,”² and show that the tribute system under the Mongol, Ming, and Qing Empires has indeed evolved over time to result in more institutionalized form of hierarchy in East Asia.

While the dissertation makes a compelling case that the institutional approach provides an important clue to the riddle of the Asian states system’s resilience and stability, it also examines three possible alternative hypotheses: 1) Asian secondary states were simply too weak to balance against China; 2) the Confucian culture has led Asian secondary states to seek peace through hegemony and deference to the dominant power; and 3) trade and economic interests were the major incentives for

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participation in the China-centered order. Although these views are useful in explaining partial mechanisms for the hegemonic management of the Chinese Empire, I will show in the subsequent empirical chapters that power, economic interests, and culture alone cannot account for the entire picture of Chinese hegemonic stability.

For a project of this longue durée and macro-historical comparison, caveats on the study’s scope conditions deserve attention here. First, the study focuses on the reproduction mechanisms of Chinese hegemonic order, but not the processes of formation or decline of the Chinese Empire. This means that I do not necessarily study foreign relations under earlier dynasties of Qin, Han, Sui or Tang of the Chinese Empire, but focus on the Mongol (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing Empires (1644-1911), the last three dynasties of the Chinese Empire. Second, its scope conditions do not cover Chinese interactions with the tribal steppe nomads in Inner Asia unless they had a direct effect on the East Asian states system. Despite the geographical proximities, China has dealt with these tribal nomads in Inner Asia

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quite differently from highly bureaucratic sovereign states in East Asia, employing
distinctively different approaches and strategies.

**The Debate: Preponderant Power and System Stability**

Potential theoretical explanations for the puzzle of the longevity of the China-centered order all seem to grow out of their own puzzles from the balance of power theory. At least three well-established, albeit controversial, theories examine the causal relations between unbalanced power and system stability in a parsimonious, falsifiable manner, and thus deserve good attention here. When one carefully delineates the scope conditions of each thesis’s application, these help explore structural foundations for the dissertation’s puzzle, and yet prove to be short of providing the entire picture for the Asian states system under the Chinese Empire.

**Preponderance of Power Thesis**

William Wohlforth, in an answer to “the mystery of the missing counterbalance” to American preeminence today, challenges the neorealist belief that “unbalanced power, whoever wields it, is a potential danger to others.” He does so by extending the realist logics embedded in hegemonic theory and balance of power theory. According to Wohlforth, unipolarity can be both peaceful and durable, and

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the underlying logic is a realist one: the U.S. concentration of capabilities has passed the threshold at which counterbalancing becomes prohibitively costly, making the current international system “de facto hierarchical.”

His attention to a hegemon’s comprehensive power portfolio backed up by geography is illuminating for the Chinese Empire as well. That is, there is little doubt that Chinese superior, comprehensive material capabilities and China’s central geographic location anchored the Asian states system towards stability, effectively discouraging Asian secondary states from engaging in hegemonic rivalry, or great power competition most of the time. However, if it were only material factors that kept the system relatively peaceful, what explains the behavior of Asian secondary states that tended not to balance against China even when the Chinese weaknesses passed “the threshold” at which counterbalancing became fairly cheap?

Wohlforth’s theory is built to explain the peacefulness and durability of unipolarity, not across unipolarities over longue durée. Historical evidence suggests that the system stability of the Chinese Empire over a long continuous history has been maintained despite the occasional absence of the hegemon’s comprehensive power portfolio. In fact, Asian secondary states, Korea and Japan in particular, could have taken advantage of the windows of opportunities, such as the decline and internal chaos of various imperial dynasties in China’s heartland to counterbalance against China at a relatively cheap price. But they did not. To explain the Chinese

world order, one should address the mechanisms for the continuity despite the changes in the distribution of power.

**Hegemonic Stability Theory: Cost-benefit Calculation**

The theory of hegemonic stability links the presence of a single, dominant actor in international politics with system stability with the logic that an unequivocal hierarchy of power ensures that the existing system reflects the kind of equilibrium that no state believes it profitable to attempt to change it. Naturally, instability or wars occur when cost-benefit calculations suggest otherwise that a rising power would gain more by challenging the status quo; the outcome of such challenges is a new international structure. Originally inspired by the dynamics of the world economy, hegemonic stability theorists tend to attribute system stability to the mechanisms of 1) rational cost-benefit calculations of participants in the system, and 2) public good dynamics.

The idea that a stable system takes the kind of political, economic arrangements that reflect the interests of both powerful and less powerful actors in the system lies at the heart of the tribute system; by design, the hierarchical nature of the tribute system enabled Chinese rulers to set the terms of foreign relations in its

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favor, while the secondary states tended to find the rules acceptable and beneficial to them most of the time.

However, looking into the attempts to disrupt the equilibrium in the later phases of the Chinese Empire reveals that Robert Gilpin’s two mechanisms of cost-benefit calculation and public goods should come with a caveat against “rational myth.” Gilpin’s approach to political changes and equilibrium tends to ignore the accumulated effects of legitimacy from path dependence dynamics. In the present study, I will show that Korea’s refusal to pay the tribute to the newly enthroned Manchu ruler upon the establishment of the Qing Empire had to do with the views within Korea that looked down on the Manchus that overthrew the legitimate Ming Empire by force. Broadly speaking, it had to do with Korea’s identity being superior to the “barbarian” Manchus and loyal to the previous “Han Chinese” Ming Empire. Its behavior in the face of the Manchu threats of aggression cannot be explained if we take Gilpin’s mechanisms of rationality in a vacuum outside the cultural, social contexts of an actor.

**Constitutional Order Theory: Institutions**

On the question of how leading states with the windfall of power after major wars build international order and make it last, John Ikenberry argues that they have

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increasingly used institutions to turn their raw power into legitimate order, thereby trying to “lock in” their favorable postwar position. In his constitutional order, the mechanisms for system stability have to do with *how* power is exercised; the leading state with an eye on the future employs “strategic restraint” in exercising its power by binding itself to the same rules and norms of institutions, thereby obtaining the acquiescence from the secondary states.

The explanatory power of Ikenberry’s theory for the Chinese world order is at least twofold; first, the institution of the tribute system with a set of rules and norms clearly was the source of political order under the Chinese Empire. Second, it is the case with the Chinese world order that the China-centered institution came with significant power legitimation mechanisms, and this in fact played an important role in gluing the secondary states to the system.

Ikenberry argues that political order may be more or less constitutional in character and postwar institutions can come in many forms—regional, global, economic, security, multilateral and bilateral. However, his theory does not elaborate on variations in institutions, and under what conditions a hegemon creates different forms of institutions with different international outcomes of multilateral versus bilateral order formation. Ikenberry suggests that the “increasing returns to institutions” design put participants on an equal footing, therefore, providing a hegemon with legitimacy. However, the case of the China-centered tribute system

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shows that sometimes institutions can “increase returns to power of a hegemon” when the institutions color the preponderance of power of the hegemon with symbols of superior culture that other participants could accept. It is, then, possible to argue that depending on the cultural norms the institutions are embedded with, and on how the hegemon would design those institutions, we can expect to see different forms of international order over time.

**The Argument in Brief**

The dissertation argues that the key to solving the puzzle of the Chinese Empire lies in the concept of the *strategic use of soft power* in the form of the tribute system. A complete picture of China’s strategy of maintaining the stability of the hierarchical order cannot be found in Chinese power alone, but requires a keen understanding of how different combinations of power, interest and the level of elite socialization produced variance in the acceptance level of the China-centered order. In addition to the mechanisms of power and interest, it was primarily a function of the level of elite socialization to the Confucian idea of accepting China as morally superior, and the following domestic politics dynamics that explained the kind of acceptance that the secondary states showed toward the China-centered order.

As such, against the commonly held dichotomy of portraying the Chinese Empire either as an emblem of coercive domination of *realpolitik*, or of benign Confucian culture, I make an argument that the longevity and resilience of the
China-centered hierarchical order can be best explained by a combination of soft power elements of the Confucian notion of rule-by-virtue and the smart (non)use of military power. Beyond the dichotomy of coercion versus culture, the achievement of Chinese hegemonic management involved an ability to fuse the Confucian ideas with military power in a functional institutional setting. On the part of China, the tribute system was a genius grand design that enabled it to reap the fruits of possessing superior power without having to use it every time, once the reputation for power had been established and locked in that institution.

More importantly, why would China’s neighbors continue to buy this Chinese institutional deal, not just once but continually? For East Asian secondary powers, the practices of the tribute system that had initially begun as mere reflections of superior power and preferences of China turned into an institution, “a form of legitimation” that came to shape their own interests and preferences over time. The critical but “less deliberate” turn to a system-wide legitimation occurred through path-dependent processes where secondary states bought into the ideas of the hegemon largely for domestic politics. Once these dynamics set in, ironically enough, less powerful actors found it in their interest that the hegemon possessed more political authority and power because it strengthened their domestic regime legitimacy. These processes ultimately contributed to the hierarchical character of the international order. Adopting the comparative historical analysis approach, I develop this argument in a systemic model delineating how the preponderance
of power evolves into international authority and hierarchical patterns of relations persist even when the hegemon experiences occasional declines in power.

Indeed, powers in East Asia tended not to balance against China when states in China’s heartland vied to change the distribution of power, which left the international system fluid. At various points in history, Japan and Korea could have opportunistically taken advantage of a power vacuum within China when it was weak and divided, but did not. At the same time, although the security dynamic of East Asia appears to have been in a bandwagoning mode with China historically, understanding the behavioral patterns of the secondary states at such rare historical junctures show that they did not simply bandwagon with the dominant Chinese power for survival, either. In the Chinese Empire’s context, simply repeating the balancing or bandwagon mantra would not sufficiently explain the East Asian states’ behaviors vis-à-vis China. Both they resisted the China-centered order quite effectively when China broke the rules of the game embedded in the tribute system, trying to interfere with their domestic affairs or militarily subjugate them. My study shows that it was in fact the interplay of the three mechanisms of Chinese power, interest, and elite socialization that explained variation in the acceptance level of the China-centered order, as well as the longevity of the hierarchical order in early modern East Asia.

After a brief illustration of the enigma of the persistent hierarchy under the Chinese Empire (Chapter 1), an examination of the existing literature on
the puzzle is provided from both fields of international relations and diplomatic history in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 builds a historical-constructivist theory of hegemonic stability based on a combination of a deductive theory of hegemonic stability and the generalizable mechanisms inductively drawn from the Chinese Empire. By paying special attention to path dependence reinforcing dynamics, the model yields two basic findings. First, with the preponderance of power as a given, under the conditions that the secondary states find the hegemon’s ideas appealing and buy its advertised social purposes for their domestic politics, international institutions can actually increase the power of hegemon over time rather than diffuse it. Second, variations in the degrees of hierarchical relationship of the secondary states vis-à-vis the China-centered order across time and space are a function of the extent to which Chinese social purposes are transportable between international and domestic levels via the mechanism of elite socialization.

In the subsequent chapters 4, 5, and 6, I use process-tracing to examine the historical moments that could have dislocated the hierarchical structure of the East Asian states system but did not, isolating the mechanisms that glued East Asian states to the system. The cases that came with serious shocks to the system such as changes in the distribution of power but failed to dislocate the system during the later phase of the Chinese Empire include 1) the Mongol Empire’s invasion of Korea and

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10 I draw on Keohane’s two approaches to institutions- rational and reflective- as the analytical basis for my understanding of the tribute system. See Robert Keohane, “International Institutions: Two Approaches,” *International Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (December 1988): 379-96.
Japan in the thirteenth century, 2) Asia’s first world war: the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea of 1592-1598, and 3) the rise of the Qing Empire in the seventeenth century.

While being mindful that history is “not like mathematics and chemistry, where the repeated combination of variables in the same amounts and under the same conditions will always produce the same result,”11 I adopt the comparative historical-institutionalist approach to establish generalizable causal mechanisms that pay special attention to initial and environmental conditions, timing and sequencing of the historical contexts. In so doing, the dissertation employs research methods applicable to path dependent phenomena to shed light on reinforcing mechanisms of power-distributional, utilitarian/functional and legitimation dynamics to explain the Chinese Empire’s reproduction mechanisms for system stability. This method is particularly apt for this study, given that historical sequences in which contingent events of Chinese preponderant power set into motion institutional patterns of the tribute system that came to bear deterministic properties in the system.12

The dissertation’s implications for contemporary international order in East Asia and world are explored in the final chapter. I provide a window into the future of the international system with the rise of China by studying “constant aspects of change” from the China-centered order in early modern Asia. The final thoughts are

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also shared in this chapter with regard to the study’s contribution to our theorizing of international relations.

The Puzzle: The Longevity of the China-centered Order

This chapter has two goals in mind. It explores the dissertation’s dependent variable, the persistence of the hierarchical order under the Chinese Empire, with the relevant historical descriptions in a broad brush and long term fashion. Then I move onto the task of introducing my definition of the stability of an international system.

System Stability under the Chinese Empire: the Persistence of the China-centered Order

The international politics of the Chinese Empire is a puzzle to the realist theory of balance of power. In lieu of “the ubiquity of the struggle for power and the eternal rhythms of international relations,” the East Asian states system between the thirteenth and the end of the eighteenth century is characterized by constant hierarchy under the Chinese hegemony, which is not found elsewhere in the world. The European states system after the disintegration of the Carolingian Empire by the end of the ninth century, for example, would always form a multi-state system, in which equally powerful actors checked and balanced a concentration of power. Clearly, it poses an intriguing puzzle to students of international relations that an

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international system would not only continue with its hierarchical structure, but also grow more stable and mature over time.

The periods specified above as early modern Asia’s constant hierarchy can be categorized roughly into three hegemonic orders under the Mongol, Ming, and Qing Empires: 1) The Mongol-centered order in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, 2) the Ming-centered order in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and 3) the Qing-centered order in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Prior to the thirteenth century, the East Asian states system had formed a multi-state system, in which China found itself “among equals,” somewhat like during the Warring States Period before the Qing unification of China in 221 B.C. It was in fact a world-wide conquest of the Mongol Empire throughout the thirteenth century that effectively ended the previous balance of power in the East Asian states system. Since then, the

14 For an overview of the historical evolution of the European states system, see, for example, William Brown, et al., Ordering the International: History, Change and Transformation (London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2004).
15 The scope of this dissertation does not cover the entire period of the Qing Empire until 1911, but is limited to the so-called “high Qing” period until the end of the eighteenth century. Historians tend to concur that starting from the nineteenth century, the Qing government began to decline, losing control over its state affairs coupled with the intensified intervention from the West. The study’s presentation of the three Chinese hegemonic orders will look like the following in terms of the relations that China-Japan-Korea formed: 1) the Mongol Empire (1271-1368)- Japan’s Kamakura government (1185-1333)- Korea’s Koryŏ government (918-1392), 2) the Ming Empire (1368-1644)- Japan’s Muromachi government (1336-1573)- Korea’s Chosŏn government (1392-1910), and 3) the Qing Empire (1644-1911)- Japan’s Tokugawa government (1603-1868)- Korea’s Chosŏn government (1392-1910).
16 For a good discussion of the systemic dynamic of this period, see Morris Rosabi, ed., China Among Equals: the Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1983); and Peter Yun, Rethinking the Tribute System: Korean States and Northeast Asian Interstate Relations, 600-1500 (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1998).
The primary logic of East Asian politics never returned to the balance of power until the end of the eighteenth century.

In terms of the relevant historical periods of this study, Bin Wong says: “at the end of the first millennium C.E., China’s mid-imperial period and Europe’s Middle Ages have few obvious political parallels. Politics appeared to be headed in different directions after the tenth and eleventh centuries, with the Chinese enjoying the far more stable and integrated political order.”17 Comparatively speaking, the Chinese Empire during these periods was at the height of its hegemonic power and stability before showing signs of a breakdown in the early nineteenth century.

There are at least two indicators of the stability of the Chinese Empire’s hierarchical order. First, there were few challenges from East Asia’s established states of Korea, Japan and Vietnam against Chinese power during those six hundred years’ time span. Of course, it may hardly be surprising that China’s neighbors were status-quo oriented in light of the gap in the power distribution between China and other secondary powers throughout most of its history. However, when we study the systemic dynamics of East Asia carefully over time, there were times when China experienced occasional declines in its hegemonic power, and yet the secondary powers would continue to stay in the China-centered order.

As will be discussed more in the case studies, the periods of dynastic changes in China provided windows of opportunities for its neighbors to take advantage of.

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fluidity in the power distribution, had they wanted to prevent Chinese hegemonies from occurring in East Asia. The period of the Ming-Qing transition in China, for example, offered a high chance for both Japan and Korea to thwart the China-centered order. Instead of acting to take advantage of Chinese weakness, however, they remained as status-quo powers. Both Japan and Korea were not too small to challenge Chinese power, either, especially in a hypothetical situation of Japan-Korea alliances. In the face of the Mongol invasions of East Asian states in the thirteenth century, both Japan and Vietnam successfully fended off the Mongol Empire; Korea resisted the Mongol forces militarily for nearly thirty years, and it was only when Korea decided to submit that the warfare ended.

In any event, compared to the earlier periods, interstate wars were rare in early modern East Asia, with Hideyoshi’s invasions of Korea in the late sixteenth century as the only case that involved all the three major players in East Asia—China, Korea and Japan. Giovanni Arrighi’s following observation confirms relative stability of the East Asian states system in early modern Asia.

The East Asian system of national states stood out for the near absence of intra-systemic military competition and extra-systemic geographical expansion. Thus, with the exception of China’s frontier wars to be discussed presently, prior to their subordinate incorporation in the European system the national states of the East

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18 For details, see Chapter 5 of this dissertation.
19 It was not entirely impossible to think of a Japan-Korea deal to balance against the Chinese power. Upon the Manchus’ (later the Qing Empire) first invasion of Korea in 1627, Japan offered Korea to send troops to help fight against the Manchus if Korea’s security was still at risk. For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter 6 of this dissertation.
Asian system were almost uninterruptedly at peace with one another, not for one-
hundred, but for three-hundred years… Indeed, in so far as China is concerned, we
should speak of a five-hundred years’ peace, since in the two-hundred years
preceding the 1592 Japanese invasion of Korea China was at war against other East
Asian states only during the invasion of Vietnam in 1406-28 to restore the Tran
dynasty.20

Second, there was a remarkable durability in the hierarchical relational
patterns between China and the secondary states in the China-centered order. Based
on a measured understanding of the diplomatic history of East Asia, I provide Figure
1 that reveals the fact that with an exception of few crises, the China-centered
hierarchical order persisted between the thirteenth through the eighteenth century
without turning back to a multi-state system in East Asia. Equally notable is the
invariable restoration of the China-centered order after the crises. A positive scale
along the Y axis in Figure 1 signifies that the China-centered order was being
accepted by Japan and Korea, while a negative scale shows that it was being
challenged by them, meaning that the East Asian states system was experiencing a
system-wide crisis (lower than -5).

Upon a close look into the diplomatic history of East Asia in conjunction
with Figure 1, the three governments of China under the Mongol, Ming, and Qing
Empires all asserted its hegemonic presence in East Asia, requiring its neighbors to
acknowledge its superior position via tribute relations. The reality of Asian hierarchy

20 Giovanni Arrighi, “Historical Perspectives on States, Markets and Capitalism, East and West,”
centered on China involved the fact that its neighbors lived under the preponderance of Chinese hegemonic power, the regulatory rules of trade, and diplomatic protocols set by the Chinese Empire.

Figure 1. Japan’s and Korea’s Acceptance of the China-centered Order during the Mongol, Ming, and Qing Empires

Note: On the Y axis above 0 means that the relations can be considered within the China-centered order. During the Mongol, Ming, and Qing Empires each has the occasion(s) that is below 0 and it means the disturbances to the hierarchy: 1) the Mongol Invasions of Korea (1231-59) and Japan (1274 &1281), 2) the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea (1592-98), and 3) the rise of the Qing Empire. The figure shows that the order was restored after the disturbances.

Roughly speaking, the numbers of the level of hierarchy signify the following:
-10: war
-5: military confrontation short of a large scale war
0: coexistence without major interaction
5: economic and cultural exchanges
10: political investiture relationship
15: ideological bondage

When it comes to the secondary states’ acceptance of the China-centered hierarchy, there were variations across time and space. Figure 1 reveals that both Japan and Korea accepted the China-centered order mostly at a practical level (the scale between 0-10). But importantly, during a brief period after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea, Korea’s acceptance of the China-centered order was at a normative level (above 10). To put it differently, both Japan and Korea remained in the China-centered hierarchical order mostly as a matter of practice, except when the post-war Korea took its inferior position below the Ming Empire as ideologically legitimate.21 In general, Korea’s acceptance scale tended to be higher than that of Japan with exchanges of official tributary envoys, encompassing political, economic and cultural relations, while Japan tended to participate in the China-centered order through economic and cultural relations.

**Defining the Stability of an International System**

The question of the persistence in the hierarchical order under the Chinese Empire leads us to think about what exactly the “stability” of an international system...

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is. Although the concept makes a popular dependent variable in the field of international relations, we tend to take it for granted as if we all agree on its meaning rather than rigorously defining it. The few past attempts at explicitly defining the term include the following:

The probability that the system retains all of its essential characteristics; that no single nation becomes dominant; that most of its members continue to survive; and that large-scale war does not occur.

Any set of conditions that under which the system would return to its equilibrium state; instability as any set of affairs that would not return but rather would continue to change until reaching some limit or breakdown point of the system.

The ability of a regulator to cope with disturbances threatening to undermine an existing power distribution.

In the international relations literature stability is sometimes presented as the simple antithesis of war, as implicit in Gilpin’s treatment of stability as a state of equilibrium, in which there is no differential power growth in the system, and therefore, no hegemonic war. Other scholars such as Richard Rosecrance seem to pay more attention to the durability of the order, focusing on the system’s ability to endure disturbances with an element of the order’s longevity. More recent key

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22 Jack Levy echoes a similar view when he says that in the literature on international relations the central concepts such as balance, power, equilibrium, and stability are rarely defined in any rigorous manner. See Jack Levy, “Balances and Balancing: Concepts, Propositions, and Research Design,” in Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate, ed. John Vasquez and Colin Elman (Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2003), 128.


features common in international relations theorizing and in discourse in the policy world seem to consider both *peacefulness* and *durability* of the international order as indicators of system stability. William Wohlforth’s study on the stability of the unipolar world examines why the current international order will be both peaceful and durable, and operationalizes stability as 1) an absence of a hegemonic war or great power competition, and 2) the continuation of the status-quo order into a foreseeable future.\(^\text{26}\) Similarly, John Ikenberry views that today’s U.S. hegemonic order’s stability is indicated by the absence of balance of power dynamics against the U.S. power since the end of the Cold War.\(^\text{27}\)

All of these definitions, however, are not entirely fit for this study of *longue durée*, thereby requiring me to suggest a new, more nuanced conception of system stability. The stability of the international system in the context of early modern Asia can be defined as the continuation of the architecture of the hierarchy, the China-centered order. This occurred, despite system-wide crises, in which instead of opportunistically taking advantage of such crises, its neighbors tended to be status-quo oriented. In this study, therefore, I define international system stability as the persistence of the relational patterns among major actors, patterns that survive system-wide disturbances.

\(^{26}\) Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World.”
\(^{27}\) Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*, Introduction. Note that if the earlier debate on stability focused on the question of polarity in the field of international relations, i.e.) which one of the international structures- bipolarity or multipolarity is more conducive to stability, now the concept of stability is studied more as a puzzle, the “non-barking dog” situation of international politics.
As such, I challenge the existing international relations theories’ approach to a “snapshot” view of political life and their rather one-sided focus on the actors’ strategies and their individual actions. From a perspective of macro-historical processes, I deliberately focus on the relational patterns among actors to capture both peacefulness and durability, as opposed to the condition or state of the power distribution in the system. In other words, a change in the underlying power distribution does not necessarily mean instability as long as the relational patterns persist and retain the essential characteristics of the relations. But it is instability if the change in the power distribution leads to a breakdown of the relational patterns and the order’s essential characteristics.
The most prominent Asian international relations theories and diplomatic history fail to fully address the question of system stability under the Chinese Empire. I begin by examining three most important theories in the field of international relations on East Asia that focus on the Asian notion of status, strategic culture and the state formation process of the Chinese Empire, and situate my dissertation within the larger research program that looks at East Asia through understanding its past. Then I turn to American, Japanese and Korean diplomatic historians’ writings that are relevant for the puzzle to examine their explanations for the longevity and the workings of the Chinese Empire.

History in Asian IR Scholarship and “Mother of all Isms”

The current debate about whether or not the rise of Chinese power will provoke balancing behavior by the rest of the region has relied on the theory of international relations drawn from the European security dynamic. However, this may be a mistake, given that East Asia today is the result of a long historical process from its own past. Furthermore, any mention of “history” in the East Asian security context seems to leave an impression that it is a variable that is equated with
instability in the region. Together with other variables such as the rise of Chinese power, a lack of a NATO-type security institution, or the varying levels of democracy, Asia’s past has been reduced to simplistic “historical animosities,” thus understood as only having destabilizing impacts on the regional security.29 Seen through the lenses of “isms” approaches in international relations theory, the history of China and of its foreign relations, the longest record of any organized state, has been reduced to “China’s unresolved grievances” toward the Western powers and Japan.30

These tendencies betray broader problems associated with the “ism”-focused approach in the field of international relations in general. Andrew Bennett notes that “there is growing dissatisfaction with the almost cookie-cutter style of writing articles around the contending “isms,” enshrining one’s own favorite “ism” as the best explanation of whatever phenomenon is at hand.”31 Similarly, the “isms” approach in Asian international relations theory and its use of history as one unified independent variable without looking into the underlying mechanisms has also shown signs of “a state of diminishing marginal utility.”32

29 I thank David Kang for sharing his insight on this point.
31 Bennett, “Mother of All “Isms,” 1.
32 Ibid. It is interesting to note that while many Asian experts have shown more optimistic views toward the regions’ future, more international relations theorists with “ism”-focused approach have
First, the current theorizing in international relations that uses Asian history is not only underdeveloped but biased by focusing only on certain historical periods of instability. Past attempts at explaining the systemic dynamic of East Asia either ignored Asian history, or mentioned it only in passing. However, as Buzan and Little remind us, the fruits of union between international relations theory and history can be powerful and compelling in a way that neither of them can be when taken alone.\textsuperscript{33}

The theoretical debate on the rise of China and its likely impact on the regional order, for example, could have drawn on historians’ insights into the traditional/historical approach in the study of Chinese foreign policy, instead of solely relying on the “snapshot” view of East Asia today.\textsuperscript{34} Of course, Asia’s future is not likely to be its past,\textsuperscript{35} but key causal mechanisms that contributed to Asia’s system stability in the past may be able to travel to present Asia under certain conditions.


\textsuperscript{35} For a convincing view that argues that Asia’s future will be different from its past, Amitav Acharya, “Will Asia’s Past Be Its Future,” \textit{International Security} 28, no. 3 (Winter 2003/04): 149-64.
Moreover, it is interesting to note the “instability bias” in the literature when it comes to the Asian historical experiences. International relations scholars tend to consider only the “bad” historical periods such as Japanese colonial rule or the Western powers’ interruption of the Chinese Empire as having bearings on the contemporary regional security. It is just as important to elucidate mechanisms for cooperation from Asia’s past that could potentially have “good” implications for the political order in East Asia today. As an example, while Kenneth Waltz refers to China’s Warring States period to show how balancing works across space, scholars like Muthiah Alagappa, Victor Cha and David Kang noted the relative peace of the Chinese Empire and have raised the question of whether bandwagoning, not balancing, may be the norm in East Asia.

Second, when it comes to the existing analyses projecting the future of Asia’s regional order through its past, overgeneralization abounds, with many scholars neglecting the scope conditions of their theories’ application. One such common mistake is the view that China dominated Asia as a coercive hegemon, and therefore is likely to repeat the pattern as its power increases in the future. Equally troubling is the approach that argues the a benign Confucian culture led China to use force

only as a last resort and as such, China’s foreign policy behavior today will be
guided by the similar notion of rule-by-virtue.\(^{39}\) Both of these extreme views need to
be tempered by a more nuanced understanding of the potential ways that China may
exercise its rising power.

Much of the conventional international relations literature does not
necessarily render distinctions to China’s different strategic interests toward its large
periphery. It was the tribal nomads of Inner Asia that posed direct threats to China’s
heartland security and therefore, took strategic precedence over East Asia- the
Korean peninsula, Southeast Asia, or Japan. Accordingly, despite the same moral
principle of the Emperor’s “tender cherishing of men from afar” under the tribute
system, China tended to employ limited yet more frequent expansionist military
domination toward the tribal nomads of Inner Asia, while pursuing more of status
quo strategies toward less strategic areas in East Asia. I will demonstrate that the
combination of other considerations such as state capacity, the dominant Confucian
or Buddhist school of thought of the time, and domestic elite attitudes both in China
and in the secondary states all contributed to explaining the variations in China’s
foreign policy behavior within the East Asian context.

\(^{38}\) See for example, Steven Mosher, \textit{Hegemon: China’s Plan to Dominate Asia and the World} (San

\(^{39}\) Alastair Iain Johnston, \textit{Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History}
(New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 1-31. See his discussion on the first generation
literature on strategic culture; for an overview, see Yuan-Kang Wang, “Chinese Power Politics and
the Confucian Culture,” a paper presented at the Brookings Institution, December 9, 2005.
Asian Hierarchy, Logic of Domination, and Cultural Realism

There are important exceptions to relative paucity of well informed international relations theorizing on Asian international politics. Scholars David Kang, Iain Johnston, and Victoria Hui have recently and very productively embraced more comprehensive historical views in understanding Asian international relations.40 Puzzled with a lack of balancing behavior by Asian neighbors against the rising Chinese power, David Kang argues that simply deploying theories derived from the European experience to project onto Asia has led scholars to mistaken conclusions that Asia is “ripe for rivalry.”41 He further argues that historically, East Asian regional relations have been hierarchic, and that it is more likely that “a rich and strong China could again cement regional stability” than provoke a regional balance of power.42

His logic of early modern Asian systemic hierarchy is based on a combination of three mechanisms: 1) the distribution of power, 2) interests, and 3) identity.43 Kang’s efforts to take the dynamics of hierarchy into an analytical

43 Kang, China Rising, 18-49; For his more recent research on the topic, see David Kang, “Hierarchy and Legitimacy in International Systems,” a paper presented at the 2009 International Studies Association meeting, New York, February 16, 2009.
framework have pushed the research program of Asian regional order forward by initiating the debate and shedding light on Asian history other than the destabilizing effects of historical animosities. By so doing, his works help bring the scholarship closer to the more puzzle-driven causal mechanisms approach.

While his research on the Asian states system between 1300 and 1900 produces some groundwork for the dissertation, two important foundational pieces are missing in his analysis. First, to argue for system stability in East Asia in the late 20th century requires first explaining how these states arrived there, yet his aforementioned mechanisms do not render explanations on the very question of continuities in Asian interstate system across time. Given his argument that Asia’s past experiences matter in understanding the contemporary Asian states’ alignment strategies, it must be shown whether, and to what extent the stability mechanisms of the past remain to work under the current regional order today with the rise of China.

Second, it is not clear how the three mechanisms interact with one another to produce Asian hierarchy. He seems to argue that the role of history plays into the agents’ cost-benefit calculations to determine Asian secondary states’ alignment strategies, which will be embedded in social expectations about Chinese behavior. However, underspecification in his accounts on the relationship between those mechanisms has the danger of an “everything matters” type logic with no falsifiable theory.

Victoria Hui’s seminal work has taken the first, very important step toward
comparing two historical international systems of ancient China and early modern Europe. Puzzled with divergent trajectories of Chinese and European history despite the similar initial conditions of a multi-state system, Hui asks why the balance of power prevailed in Europe, while the opposite outcomes of a unified empire occurred in ancient China. She argues that instead of taking checks and balances for granted as the norm in international politics, a dynamic theory of international politics should also explain the logic of domination, while paying attention to agential strategies as well as structural mechanisms. While targets of domination are helped by countervailing mechanisms of 1) the balance of power and 2) rising costs of expansion, domination-seekers may overcome these obstacles by a) self-strengthening reforms, b) divide-and-conquer strategies, and c) ruthless tactics.

For the reason that Hui elucidates the formation processes of the Chinese Empire at its critical juncture, the dissertation finds her analytical framework of the logic of balancing and the logic of domination, and methodological insights of macro-historical comparison useful. But, clarifying the scope conditions of her theory’s application is in order. Hui’s dynamic theory of international politics begins with an *a priori* assumption that politics is viewed as processes of strategic interaction between domination-seekers and targets of domination. This assumption has naturally led her theory to explain the processes toward the unification or expansion of an empire better than politics-as-usual foreign relations with its neighbors under a unified empire at its stability.
The dissertation intends to explain a dynamic of international politics of this latter part of the Ming and Qing Empires when the Chinese Empire as a political entity had existed for over a thousand years since Qin’s unification of China’s heartland. Not only had the theatre of a multi-state system been expanded across Asia from China’s heartland, but by the Ming Empire, if not earlier, the dynamics of path dependence of shared norms, social expectations, and the reputation for superiority of Chinese power had settled in to govern foreign relations, making Hui’s distinction of agents over domination less meaningful. There is simply little evidence that China was a domination-seeker at least toward sovereign states in East Asia. China’s use of a) self-strengthening reforms, b) divide-and-conquer strategies, and c) ruthless tactics tended to be directed more toward the tribal nomads in Inner Asia when a new imperial dynasty attempted to consolidate its rule in its heartland.

Iain Johnston presents a strong case against ahistorical and acultural realist explanations on state behavior by carefully analyzing the effects of Chinese strategic culture on The Ming Empire’s grand strategic choice. According to Johnston, there are two distinct strategic cultures in Chinese thought about the use of force for political ends: the Confucian-Mencian paradigm and the parabellum or hard realpolitik paradigm. A common belief is that the Sun Zi strategy of “not fighting but subduing the enemy” associated with the benign Confucian-Mencian paradigm, was prevalent in ancient China and would explain the uniquely nonviolent Chinese approach to security threats. In contrast, Johnston argues that the parabellum
paradigm of “attacking and defending according to opportunity” was dominant in Chinese classical texts and in turn in China’s strategic behavior.

Johnston’s findings serve as important building blocks for my dissertation at least in two regards. First, he refutes the myth of benign Confucian culture being the mother of every Chinese behavior for the past and the present. Second, Chinese culture mattered in its strategic behavior even when its outcomes were seemingly consistent with ahistorical realist predictions. In other words, his research shows that the “power” variable did not exist outside the ideational, historical context dictating automatic balancing behavior. The balance of power is as much embedded in the broader settings of historical legacies and culture as in “objective” material conditions.

However, my dissertation problematizes rather ambitious attempts to apply Johnston’s research to the current affairs regarding China. First, it is one thing that the strategic behavior of The Ming Empire is explained by the strategic culture as written in the classical texts. Yet it is quite another to argue that today’s China would think in a similar way and act accordingly, just because it has done so in the past. Culture has persistent, enduring qualities, but it can also change through important historical junctures, which China has undergone. To make the claim that “China is not all that different,” there have to be separate comparative studies examining whether and to what extent the strategic culture and behavior of The Ming Empire are relevant for the present circumstances.
Second, it is worth noting that he draws conclusions about Chinese strategic culture and behavior mainly by looking at Ming-Mongol relations. However, given China’s different strategic approaches to the tribal nomads in Inner Asia including the Mongols and to the sovereign states in East Asia, his analysis covers only half of the picture in terms of the system dynamic. This is in part due to that fact that Johnston’s work is about China by design, but not necessarily about the interactions between China and other actors in the system. Filling in the gap of the other half, the dissertation will show how the strategic interactions between China and the states in East Asia were in fact influenced by the Confucian-Mencian paradigm more so than Johnston acknowledged. For example, The Ming Empire’s military campaign on the Korean peninsula upon Japan Hideyoshi’s 1592 invasion attempt to conquer China shows that China resorted to the Confucian-Mencian paradigm of “repaying the debt of the gratitude (jae-jo-ji-u
) to extract resources from Korea.

Historical Writing on East Asian International Relations

Although historical writing on East Asian foreign relations is enormous, only some of it addresses the puzzle identified in the present study. Most historians recognize the East Asian states system to be governed by a set of rules and ideas embedded in the tribute system and characterize the China-centered order as the
tribute system-based order (K: chogong chilsŏ).

I map their rich, detailed historical illustrations out into three broad analytical approaches: 1) a culturalist view on the East Asian order, 2) an interest argument with a focus on international trade, and 3) the tribute system as China’s political control mechanism in its dealings with other states in East Asia. There is no denying that these are not mutually exclusive, but they disagree on what primary mechanism(s) or incentive structure there was behind the tribute system. Each of these three approaches provides a necessary, but insufficient explanation to answer my question about the longevity of the China-centered order. I draw on all three approaches and systemically clarify how 1) a culturalist view, 2) an interest argument, and 3) China’s political control mechanism related one another to provide a full picture of the Chinese system of international relations in early modern East Asia.

Before exploring historians’ perspectives on the persistence of the China-centered order, a brief explanation of what “tribute” and “investiture” meant in the historical context of the Chinese Empire is in order. The English term “tribute system” in fact refers to both tribute and investiture as two sides of the same coin.

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45 Note that I focus on their primary mechanism while they offer more descriptive generalizations rather than a causal argument. As such, their accounts may not fall into a category that I suggest in a clear cut manner.

46 The term “tribute system” is an English translation that has no matching word in Chinese and generally refers to a set of rules, ideas and institutions that the Chinese Empire employed to regulate its domestic as well as foreign affairs.
“Tribute” is a presentation of local products by the rulers of China’s neighbors to the Chinese Emperor as a symbol of their inferior position vis-à-vis China within the larger Asian hierarchy. In return, they were given exclusive trading rights with China under Chinese trading regulations. “Investiture” literally means the official installation of an incumbent in public office. In the East Asian historical context, the Chinese Emperor’s grant of the investiture to the newly enthroned rulers of the secondary states signified that they were given a rank in the hierarchy of the Chinese Empire, which functioned as diplomatic recognition from China.

Once invested with the title of the King by the Chinese Emperor, he then was required to use the Chinese era name instead of his own in all of his diplomatic documents. These tribute practices were conducted through regular exchanges of diplomatic envoys, often called “tribute missions,” between China and its tributary states. As I will show more in detail in the subsequent chapters, typically both practices of “tribute” and “investiture” were symbolic gestures, designed to produce clarity about one’s own position vis-à-vis China in Asian hierarchy. But sometimes China requested local products of strategic importance to them as tributes, i.e.) horses, silver or gold. The Chinese Emperor’s grant of the investiture, too, was nominal in nature, since the Crown Prince recommended by its tributary states usually received the imperial investiture as the King without interrogation. The tributary relations did not necessarily involve any formal obligation to send troops or funds for war efforts on either China or its tributaries, but on the parts of China’s
tributaries, there were the benefits of deterrence by being China’s tributaries.47

The East Asian States System as Cultural Construct

The first is a culturalist approach that takes meanings, symbols, and identity infused in the tribute system as the primary mechanism in explaining the international order of the East Asian states system. According to this view, the hierarchical nature of order in East Asia came from the Confucian culture that emphasizes one’s own place in the hierarchy of a larger social structure. And the tribute system, therefore, is about applying the culture of hierarchy into the areas of foreign affairs. Pye notes that in the Confucian tradition, it was the taboo to speak of power except in moralistic terms, and the Chinese committed themselves to seeing relations always in hierarchical terms.48 By a logical extension from this culturalist approach, the hierarchical structure of order in East Asia has been persistent despite changes in the power distribution or other disturbances to the system, because the dominant Confucian culture remained unchanged. This approach informs my argument that the symbolic power of the Chinese Emperor embedded in the tribute system was a decisive factor in determining whether the acceptance level of the China-centered order would be at a practical or normative level in the eyes of the secondary states. However, the study’s macro-historical comparison of the tribute

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system shows that it took repeated tribute practices first playing certain functions until China’s neighbors came to view it as an embodiment of international authority at a later stage.

In the U.S., the “tribute system” as an analytic notion for the Chinese Empire was pioneered by the Harvard historian John King Fairbank in the post-war period, and his answer to this study’s puzzle are rather straightforward. To Fairbank, the tribute system was above all “a natural expression of Chinese cultural egocentricity” plus trade. For China, the biggest incentive behind the tribute system was the symbolic prestige value of tribute, while for the secondary powers it was about trade opportunities with China. In his *Far Eastern Review* 1942 article *Tributary Trade and China’s Relations with the West*, he argues that the Chinese dominance in East Asia was not due to mere material power, but cultural superiority.\(^{49}\) A student of Fairbank, Mark Mancall makes a similar claim that focuses on the role of the Confucian ideology in defining the hierarchical nature of order in East Asia.\(^{50}\)

Both Fairbank and Mancall establish an implicit assumption that these secondary powers’ participation in the tribute system largely hinged on the degree to which they accepted Chinese culture. Accordingly, Fairbank’s graded hierarchy model suggests that there were three zones within the Chinese Empire, categorized by cultural and geographic criteria: 1) the Sinic Zone (Korea, Vietnam, the Ryukyu

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\(^{48}\) Pye, *Asian Power and Politics*, 31-54.  
\(^{50}\) Mark Mancall, “The Persistence of Tradition in Chinese Foreign Policy.”
Islands, and at brief times Japan), 2) the Inner Asia Zone, 3) the Outer Zone (most states in Southeast Asia, Europe, and Japan). This Fairbankian tribute system model has been under criticism due to its overly simplified presentation of East Asian history. The first of those is the model’s lack of variation across time. According to James Millward, the tribute system depicted by Fairbank is almost unchanging and monolithic that it runs a risk of being ahistorical. Indeed, Fairbank built his generalizable model on the tribute system based primarily on the history of the Qing Empire to be applied backwards to other earlier periods. As will be shown in the case studies later, even within the periods of the Mongol, Ming, and Qing Empires, the system has evolved over time, moving away from the balance of power toward more institutionalized hierarchy.

Second, the notion of “Chinese culture” as the central mechanism for Fairbank’s tribute system has been problematized. In Fairbank’s theory, the ideology behind the tribute system supports superiority of Han Chinese culture in terms of ethnicity, but in practice, non-Han Chinese Empires such as Mongol and Qing all employed the tribute system to govern foreign relations. In fact, the tribute system under the Ming Empire built by the Han Chinese was inherited from the Mongol Empire that included the Mongol cultural traits.

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53 James Millward, “Qing Xinjiang and Trouble with Tribute.”
In this regard, the grand strategy under the Qing Empire is most telling because its hegemonic style involved more diversity and flexibility than Fairbank’s description of the Chinese culture. The Qing Empire astutely employed different “cultures” to handle different types of political and commercial relations with the Dutch, Russians, Kazakhs, Mongols, Koreans, and later British all under the tribute system. For example, it embraced the priest-patron relationship vis-à-vis Tibet, pragmatic appeasement with regard to trade on the Inner Asian frontiers, and patronage of Buddhism and Islam in addition to the traditional Confucian culture toward more Sinisized Korea and Japan.55

In sum, while the culturalist approach provides deeply insightful clues for the puzzle of the system stability in East Asia, it is also true that one needs to take Chinese material power and wealth more seriously to have a better grasp at the reality of the tribute system. To put it differently, it is worth asking whether the Chinese culture would have had the same influence on the secondary states’ behavior in the absence of the Chinese material power or wealth. The case studies that follow later in the dissertation will show that the answer is no. The second caveat is the importance of defining “culture” in the context of the tribute system. As shown in the

54 The term the Confucian idea that I use in this dissertation does not refer to any particular school of thought within the broader ideology/philosophy of Confucianism. Rather I focus on common elements of Confucian idea that emphasizes one’s own place within a larger social hierarchical structure.
55 Perdue, *China Marches West*; Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror*. Millward similarly questions the validity of Fairbank’s graded hierarchy model built upon the degree of cultural affinity of the tributary states to China. And his question is pointed: who would be culturally similar to the Manchu Qing Empire- the supposedly first-tier Vietnamese, or the second-tier Mongols?
periods of Mongol and Qing, the Chinese Empire was shaped as much by non-Han Chinese culture as it was by the dominant Han Chinese culture.

**The Tribute System as Venue for International Trade**

A second approach is an interest-based argument that views the major reason for the secondary powers’ participation in the China-centered order as trade opportunities with China. A trade aspect of the tribute system has been understood as the primary incentive by many historians in part because the Ming and Qing Empires had a policy that allowed trade with China only through the tribute missions. More broadly, this approach defines the East Asian states system in terms of a network of foreign tribute-trade in the realm of international political economy. From this perspective, China as hegemon played a role of a public good provider keeping the system stable, and the tribute system can best be understood as an international trade regime whose rules and regulations were set by China for other participants to abide by.

This approach provides a part of the entire picture of my three causal mechanisms of power, interest, and elite socialization. There is no doubt that Chinese wealth and trading opportunities attracted some states in East Asian to the China-centered order, but not all. For example, Korea that kept probably the closest

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56 However, note that the volume of private overseas trade was fairly high despite this policy.
tributary relations with China throughout early modern East Asia often wished to avoid trading relations with China due to cultural and political reasons.

To introduce some works that fall into this category, Giovanni Arrighi provides a thought-provoking answer to the dissertation’s puzzle in line with world-system theory, directly asking the sources of “five hundred years’ peace (1815-1914)” of the East Asian system.\(^\text{57}\) His understanding of the East Asian system during the Chinese Empire’s stability periods deserves attention here.

The most important states of East Asia—Japan, Korea, and China to Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Kampuchea—were national states long before any of their European counterparts. What’s more, they had all been linked to one another, directly or through the Chinese center, by trade and diplomatic relations and held together by a shared understanding of the principles, norms, and rules that regulated their mutual interactions as a world among other worlds... The tribute trade system provided them with a symbolic framework of mutual political-economic interaction that nonetheless was loose enough to endow its peripheral components with considerable autonomy vis-à-vis the Chinese center.\(^\text{58}\)

According to Arrighi, the Chinese Empire showed a stark difference from the European interstate system for its near absence of system-wide military competition and territorial expansion. While a combination of capitalism, territorialism, and militarism was a major drive for Europe’s globalization during its emerging

capitalism, in East Asia Chinese policies during the Ming and Qing Empires developed the largest market economy of their times, making it unnecessary to seek “endless” territorial expansion. As such, his theory claims that the key to the puzzle lies in the relationship between state power to capital. In other words, European states were in military competition with one another to secure control over trade with the East, which was the basis for their wealth and power. In contrast, for an agriculturally-based China, control over trade routes was less important than peaceful relations with neighboring states, which was why Chinese capitalists remained subordinate to the state with little leeway to pursue their own financial interests.

Arrighi’s thesis is insightful with its focuses on the relationship between state and market in seeking an answer to system stability in East Asia, and on the Chinese state formation process to the kind of international system that East Asia developed as a result. But while his argument that the Chinese state did not need to take a mercantilist policy in need of territorial expansion fueled by commercial interest explains Chinese behavior, it does not cover the secondary powers’ part of the story. As a matter of fact, Japan’s bid for territorial expansion to replace China as hegemon in the sixteenth century has been viewed by some historians as an attempt to improve the Japanese economy.

The Japanese historian Takeshi Hamashita offers an alternative explanation that has two themes that are relevant for the puzzle.\textsuperscript{59} First, his notion of the East Asian states system focuses on the maritime regime, which linked China, Korea, Japan and Southeast Asia in an extensive trade network. Hamashita takes the geographic conditions of the East China Sea and the South China Sea as a starting point of this network, in which tribute, trade, and migration of people formed the East Asian system.

A second theme is the persistence of the tribute system and of its economic order. Some historians such as Mio Kishimoto consider the Ming Empire’s policy shift in the late fifteenth century from the maritime restrictions toward allowing private overseas trade outside the tribute system as a “post-tribute trade system.” But according to Hamashita, the prosperity from the post-Imjin War economic boom, smuggling, and commercialism that prospered outside the tribute trade system framework was not a collapse of the system, but a sign of its success, which resulted from strong demand for Chinese goods. Refuting the commonly-held view that the arrival of the Western great power politics in Asia marked a sharp disjuncture from the traditional China-centered order, he argues that the tribute-trade system was far stickier and more persistent than normally assumed. Based on the examination of a

series of treaties signed during this period, he makes a further claim that not only the tribute-trade system and the Western-style treaty order not mutually incompatible, but also that the tribute concept tended to subsume the Western treaty concept.

Hamashita’s analysis helps bring domestic interest groups into a big picture of the East Asian system by going beyond the formal, first-track foreign economic policy. However, on the flip side, a consideration of a political dimension of the tribute-trade system and of Chinese geopolitical power would enhance the study’s explanatory power. Moreover, for this dissertation’s purpose, it is not clear what his analysis offers for a causal argument to answer the puzzle of the system stability.

Third, from a slightly different angle, Jina Kang emphasizes a combination of China’s advanced technology, Chinese decision to use silver as the key international currency, and the following “catching-up” by Japan to describe the East Asian system between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The tribute system is viewed as a venue for technological transfers from China to the secondary powers who then could catch up with the leading economy in a relatively cost-effective manner. Logically, her answer to stability of the East Asian system and continuation of Chinese hegemonic power comes from China’s ability to stay ahead of other major states technologically.

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

61 Jina Kang, “16-19 segi tongasiyumyeokkwonui seyesajok pyonyong (Changes in East Asian Trade Zone between the 16th and 19th Centuries from a Perspective of the World History),” in Dongsiaui jiyouk jilsŏ (Regional Order in East Asia), ed. Young-sŏ Paik (Paju: Changbi, 2005), 36-78.
Kang argues that China’s fall from the dominant position in the East Asian system in the nineteenth century had to do with the fact that an aspirant Japan actively sought to adopt Chinese technology.\textsuperscript{62} Insightful as the thesis is, with its attention to the role of advanced technology in relation to hegemonic power, her analysis is yet to be tested against empirical evidence. Also, given the fact that Japan adopted most up-to-date technology of the time from the Western countries, an argument that the power transition from China to Japan in the nineteenth century came from Chinese technological transfer requires further scrutiny.

\textbf{The Tribute System as China’s Control Mechanism}

Although it is not very explicit or systematic, the historical writing that uses a third approach describes how China used its hegemonic power to control the behaviors of the secondary states through imperial investiture of the tribute system. Somewhat likening this to the modern day diplomatic recognition from the most powerful state in the international system, several historians have argued that tribute (C: chao kung) and investiture (C: tse feng) are two sides of the same coin, and as

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{62} According to Kang, Chinese technology was shared and actively used by an aspirant hegemon Japan. She notes that although Korea was initially more technologically advanced than Japan due to its better access to China under the kaikin or haegum policy through more frequent tribute missions, but it was Japan who did the better “catch up” to the extent to replace China’s dominant position in Asia. This was primarily because while the Korean government took almost no interest in taking the lead to “catch up” the Chinese economy, Japan was endowed with a large amount of silver to meet Chinese demand, which in turn led to the expansion of domestic consumers’ demand and the stabilization of market within Japan.
\end{flushright}
such, should be referred to as the “tribute-investiture system” instead of the tribute system.  

This approach informs my argument by elucidating how China was able to use the Confucian ideas for strategic purposes. As briefly stated above, the imperial investiture was granted without much difficulty to its tributary states as a symbolic gesture of China’s superiority in the East Asian states system. However, this institution of the investiture took on a strategic importance for China once it settled in domestic politics of the secondary states in the form of external validation for the legitimate position of the King vis-à-vis his other royal opponents. This is when China acquired a tool to influence foreign policy behavior of its neighboring states to its favor through the tribute institution of the investiture. The King of the secondary states had incentives to implement pro-China policy so as to induce the Chinese Emperor to grant the investiture so that his position would be secure within his country. Therefore, the importance of receiving the investiture was much more highlighted especially at times when the King’s authority was challenged amid power competition with his opponents.

Few historians have examined actual mechanisms of the investiture systematically in analytical terms, but episodes of Chinese behavior during

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63 Han-gyu Kim, ch’ónha kukka (A State under Heaven) (Seoul: Sonamu, 2005).
64 See Chapter 3 and 4 of this dissertation. For a good explanation of politics surrounding the investiture, see Jae-sŏk Sim, koryŏkugwang Ch’aekpongyŏn’gu (The Investiture Relations of the Koryŏ Government of Korea) (Seoul: Hyean, 2002); and Myŏng-ki Han, imjinwaerangwa hanchung kwan’gye (The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea and Sino-Korean Relations) (Seoul: yŏksap’yŏngsa, 1999).
diplomatic conflicts or war show that the tribute system was first and foremost a Chinese invention to serve its hegemonic interest and preferences vis-à-vis the tributary states as part of its foreign political tool kit. For example, the Korean historian Myŏng-ki Han describes that during the diplomatic contentions between China and Korea in the aftermath of the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea, the tribute system and its Confucian ideology were employed to exert control over Korean behavior on the part of China functioning as a tool for coercive diplomacy.\(^{65}\) Other episodes include China’s refusals to bestow the investiture on a new government in the secondary states such as Korea and Vietnam with the intention of exercising control over bilateral relations.\(^{66}\)

There is much room for this third approach of a political control relationship between the hegemon and the secondary powers to produce important knowledge on East Asian order as well as international relations theory in general. Empirical records surrounding the politics of investiture suggest that China’s exercise of hegemonic power in the absence of the actual use of hard power toward East Asian countries was more nuanced in the form of “negative soft power.” That is, because the Chinese hegemonic power was exercised within the framework of the tribute

\(^{65}\) See, for example, Han, *imjinnwaerangwa hanchung kwan ’gye (The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea and Sino-Korean Relations)*.

\(^{66}\) For example, Gye-hyun No, *Ryŏmong kwan ’gyesa (Diplomatic History of Koryŏ-Mongol Relations)* (Seoul: Gapin Press, 1993); So-ja Ch’oe, *ch’ŏnggwa chosŏn (The Qing Empire and Chosŏn)* (Seoul: hyean, 2005); Wŏn-ho Park, *myŏngch ’o chosŏn kwan ’gyesa yŏngu (A Study on Chosŏn’ Foreign Relations with the Early Ming Empire)* (Seoul: Iljogak, 2002).
system, which was colored with the Confucian ideals, power and legitimacy were more intricately woven than normally assumed in the literature.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I have laid out that the character and longevity of the international order in early modern Asia challenge our accepted theories and understandings of international relations. A measured survey of the existing explanations from East Asian relations scholarship and diplomatic history concludes with the following points: first, the biggest problem with the current literature is its inability to integrate Chinese military power into its perspectives on order in East Asia. The existing approaches are limited in their inability to incorporate Chinese military power within the framework of the tribute system. They have either ignored Chinese military power, considering the tribute system as the embodiment of the benign Confucian culture, or viewed it as existing outside of the tribute system framework. However, as I will show in the following chapters, the tribute system structure was compatible with the power politics dynamics.

A second problem lies in their relative monocausality of these approaches in terms of the sources of a long lasting order under the East Asian states system. A

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67 For the latter approach, see Yuan-Kang Wang, *Power Politics of Confucian China*; Johnston, *Cultural Realism*.

68 Peter Yun’s work on the tribute system makes this point by making an argument that one should not transport the Ming tribute system onto other earlier periods when the tribute system was merely reflecting the state of the power distribution in the system. See Peter Yun, *Rethinking the Tribute*
better answer to the puzzle will consider how three factors: 1) Chinese hegemonic power, 2) convergence of interest between China and the periphery, and 3) culture interact with one another to produce stability mechanisms under the Chinese Empire. Third, much more fruitful research on pre-modern East Asia can be born out of bringing the “two level game” in the analysis to incorporate domestic politics and the system level dynamics. Having determined what might make for a better model of international power and cultural dynamics in Asian history, I now turn to constructing such a model in the following chapter.

_System: Korean States and Northeast Asian Interstate Relations, 600-1500 (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1998)._
THREE
A Historical-Constructivist Theory of Hegemonic Order

An analysis of the stability of East Asia under the Chinese hegemony of early modern Asia requires the development of a theory that explains how relational patterns can endure to outlast system-wide crises over an extended period of time. As Bin Wong aptly points out, continuity is no more natural than change, and we must explain how the Chinese achieved the reproduction of empire. In this chapter I present a historically informed constructivist theory of hegemonic stability to understand the causal processes through which the initial condition of preponderant power leads to the persistence of a hegemonic order. Building on Robert Gilpin’s deductive theory on hegemonic stability, the generalizable mechanisms inductively drawn from the historically constituted tribute system of the Chinese Empire are suggested to reorder hegemonic stability theory. A better answer to the puzzle will consider how 1) hegemonic power, 2) convergence of interest between the hegemon and the secondary powers, and 3) elite socialization dynamics interact with one another to produce stability mechanisms in the international system.

Based on the model, I argue that the hegemonic structure of an international system is likely to persist longer when the hegemon’s institutional innovations are turned into sources of international authority, allowing the hegemon to use soft

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69 Please note that as my project studies the mechanisms behind the “continuity,” it rejects the notion of “unchanging, monolithic tribute system,” and understands that tributary practices of all three Mongol, Ming, and Qing Empires were different, as shown in Chapter 2. For the quote, see Bin Wong,
power for strategic purposes. The international system is most stable when the *normative* acceptance of that hegemonic power occurs among major states in the system, which means that the ruling elites of the secondary powers come to rely on the hegemon’s recognition-yielding institutions for legitimacy as a means to boost their own position in domestic politics.

The chapter proceeds as follows: first, I revisit the concept of hegemonic order to examine the China-centered order of the East Asian states system. Gilpin’s formulation of hegemonic order provides a useful, overarching analytical framework, and yet needs further theorizing to account for the stability of the hierarchical order that animates social aspects of international systems. Second, I propose a historical-constructivist theory of hegemonic stability. A new subtype to Gilpin’s hegemonic theory is built based on the heuristic case study on the workings of China’s establishment of the tribute system as it inductively identifies new causal paths. Lastly, I briefly discuss methods of case selection before moving onto the case studies in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

**Hegemonic Theory Revisited**

The dissertation advances the argument that power, institutions and ideas are not opposing explanations of systemic outcomes in the theory of international relations. Rather, a focal point of our inquiry should be concerned with clarifying the

*China Transformed*, 79. While Wong is more interested in the Chinese state formation, my project
ways these mechanisms are arranged or interact with one another. If Gilpin’s formulation of hegemonic theory rests heavily on power to explain systemic outcomes, a historical-constructivist theory of hegemonic stability must incorporate mechanisms through which hegemonic power can be reproduced and reconstituted when infused with ideational and social dimensions that are embedded in the institution.

To understand stability of an international system, it is useful to start by asking what changes or ends the condition. Robert Gilpin provides three types of political change in international politics depending on the level of analysis: 1) systems change, 2) systemic change, and 3) interaction change. Of them, systems change refers to a major change in the character of the international system itself, such as the rise and decline of empires or nation-states; systemic change involves the replacement of a declining dominant power by a rising dominant power, thereby causing a change in the governance of an international system. If one uses Gilpin’s framework to understand the history of the China-centered order, it is a story of negative cases of systemic change, which means that China has always been the hegemon in early modern Asia, and the resulting international order has continued to be centered on China. It is also a story of how the systems change from the Chinese Empire to modern nation-states came in comparatively late, meaning that the

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examine the continuity of the international system.

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70 Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*.}

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Chinese Empire persisted over two thousand years before its final breakdown, the longest of any recorded history of international systems.

Gilpin’s theory of system stability and change provides a good starting point for this dissertation as an analytical framework. Although his theoretical proposition leans more toward rational choice theory, it embraces both the economic approach and the sociological approach to understand the logic behind the governance of the international system; that is, a combination of material factors and a perception of one’s place in the system. That is, according to Gilpin, the international system is governed as a function of three components: 1) the distribution of power, 2) the hierarchy of prestige among states, and 3) a set of rules and rights that influence the interactions among them. Similarly, the dissertation takes Gilpin’s view that both approaches of the material conditions of power and the hierarchy of prestige function to ensure that the secondary states acquiesce to the commands of the leading state.

Gilpin’s hegemonic theory is particularly relevant for a study on the East Asian states system particularly for its focus on prestige, not just on power. According to Gilpin,

Prestige is the reputation for power, and military power in particular. Whereas power refers to the economic, military, and related capabilities of a state, prestige refers primarily to the perceptions of other states with respect to a state’s capacities and its ability and willingness to exercise its power… As E. H. Carr put it, prestige is “enormously important,” because “if your strength is recognized, you can generally achieve your aims without having to use it” (quoted in Wight, 1979, p. 136).
This makes the analysis acknowledge the importance of power distribution in international politics, but pushes beyond a notion of polarity to speak of “the hierarchy of power.” Subtle as the difference may be, instead of focusing solely on the amount of material capabilities, the hierarchy concept involves a qualitative, sociological dimension of power, which produces implications for the patterns of relations among major states in the system dependent upon that hierarchy of prestige. This is more so when comparatively speaking—while the historical European system was characterized by competition among relatively equal and autonomous great powers, the international order of the East Asian states system was relatively more hierarchical, which was justified at least rhetorically on a moral basis of “harmony in hierarchy” as much as on the power distribution, which was made of autonomous and yet formally unequal states.

**Theorizing Alternative Paths for Hegemonic Order**

Building on Gilpin’s model, I suggest new subtypes to his macro-level theory by taking the sociological approach more seriously and develop a theory that considers stability of the international system over *a longue durée* more in depth. In

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71 Ibid., 31.
short, the theory of system stability must take the social prestige aspect of system governance as a stronger determinant of stability and change in international politics. To put it differently, depending on the social contexts in which the rules of the game of a given international system are played at a given time, the neorealist conception of the system may not hold; a state may not necessarily compelled to expand its power within the anarchic and competitive conditions of international relations.

To Gilpin, system stability under a hegemonic structure of preponderant power is achieved in a state of equilibrium when the prestige of hierarchy has been well understood and remains unchallenged. A hegemonic war threatens and transforms the structure of the international system before reaching the next equilibrium when there is a disjuncture between the aforesaid three governance components of the system and the underlying distribution of power. In other words, a stable system is based on “unequivocal hierarchy of power,” one in which changes can take place without causing a war by threatening the vital interests of the hegemon and other dominant states in the system. In essence, stability is understood as the condition in between hegemonic wars as shown in Figure 2.
However, by limiting his understanding of a trigger for international change to power defined as material capabilities, and by putting more weight on a rational

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73 Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 12.
choice theoretic approach over a sociological one, he fails to pay enough attention to alternative paths to his theory as shown in Figure 3 above, the simple decision-making tree version of Figure 2. Gilpin’s hegemonic order theory focuses on changes in the power distribution, and as such, most explicitly explains the causal path 1-a) to 2-b). That is, it is almost inevitable for the hegemon to be challenged by the rising secondary state due to the economic costs associated with the maintaining of the dominant position at the equilibrium t-1. As the rising state accrues relative power vis-à-vis the hegemon, a hegemonic war will break out to eventually determine the systemic outcome to have a new distribution of power at the equilibrium t-2.

Less clear in Gilpin’s theory are the causal mechanisms for the rest of the three pathways: first, the path 1-a) to 2-a), the situation where there is disequilibrium in the system but the existing order stays together; second, the path 1-b) to 2-c), the case, in which the secondary powers do not challenge the hegemon despite the gap between the distribution of power and the hierarchy of prestige; and third, the path 1-b) to 2-d) describes a state where the system changes and reaches the next equilibrium t-2’s stability without the kind of disequilibrium that Gilpin envisions, a hegemonic war.

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74 Gilpin’s model assumes rationality in actors’ decision-making that a state will attempt to change the system if the expected benefits exceed the expected costs, which makes the use of this decision-making tree relevant here. Drawing a causal tree can be a useful exercise as it makes it explicit the causes and effects that are being considered and the counterfactual possibilities.

75 A prominent example of this pathway is the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc and the following international change, which was not the result of hegemonic or system-wide war.
Gilpin implicitly addresses the first alternative path 1-a) to 2-a) by showing if the hegemon wins the hegemonic war vis-à-vis the rising secondary power, the existing international order will stay as before. But for a study of system stability, this pathway needs further theoretical elaboration since it is not clear what happens to the existing international order after the hegemonic war. By a logical extension of Gilpin’s argument, it is quite possible that the order will only be short-lived or unstable short of reaching the equilibrium, because, if the hegemon’s victory is less than decisive, the costs of the hegemonic war will further weaken the hegemonic power, inviting another challenge.

As for the second alternative path 1-b) to 2-c), there is no priori theoretical reason at least in non-realist schools of thought to think that a change in the distribution of power will automatically lead the secondary states to decide to challenge the existing order. Gilpin’s theory assumes rationality that is “not historically or culturally bound,” but historical or cultural reasons can very well make the rising secondary state choose not to challenge the existing order. Or, other reasons based on the cost-benefit calculation such as political obstacles within the rising secondary states will lead to failures to challenge.76

The third alternative path 1-b) to 2-d) is the one that most theories of international relations tend to overlook when they only focus on the actors’ decision-making when studying the question of war and peace. If we accept assumptions from

sociological theory (as opposed to economic theory) as to how to understand political change, we can expect to see systemic outcomes from slow-moving changes in the constraining norms or social structures that are entirely reduced to the self-interest of the actors.\textsuperscript{77} The theory of system stability needs to explicitly analyze how an international system changes gradually over an extended period of time even without the actors’ decision to engage in a hegemonic war.

\textsuperscript{77} Gilpin in his preface provides a good discussion on two modes of theory construction, one from the sociological approach and the other from the economic approach. See Gilpin, pp. ix-xiv. For a good discussion on an analysis of slow-moving changes in social, political life, see Paul Pierson, “Big, Slow-Moving, and... Invisible,” in \textit{Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences}, ed. James Mahoney and Dietrich Reuschemeyer (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 177-207.
Table 1. Gilpin’s model and the East Asian states system in historical perspective

|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| The Mongol-centered order     | Change in the existing “set of rules and rights” | Mongol invasions/interference of Korea and Japan and their counterbalancing efforts | Korea: restoration of the tribute relations
Japan: political disengagement + economic, cultural exchanges | Restoration of the tribute system order |
| The Ming-centered order       | Change in the existing “distribution of power” | Japan’s rise and a hegemonic war between Japan and the Sino-Korean alliance | Korea: restoration of the tribute relations
Japan: disengagement + economic and cultural exchanges | Restoration of the tribute system order |
| The Qing-centered order       | Change in the existing “hierarchy of prestige” mechanism | The rise of the “barbarian” The Qing Empire | Korea: restoration of the tribute relations
Japan: disengagement + economic, cultural exchanges | Restoration of the tribute system order |

NOTE: For the purpose of this dissertation that examines the Chinese system of international relations “in the eyes of the periphery,” the criteria for the systemic crises are based on China’s relations vis-à-vis Korea and Japan, the two major autonomous states under the China-centered order, rather than the regime changes within China (i.e. from the Mongol Empire to the Ming Empire).
Disequilibrium is defined as events that threatened to break down the hierarchical structure of the East Asian states system.

When we apply Gilpin’s framework to the East Asian states system, it becomes clearer that we need to pay more attention to the aforementioned three alternative paths to understand the question of system stability. Table 1 shows that the equilibrium of the hierarchical order under the Mongol, Ming and Qing Empires returned without systemic changes after the disequilibria that threatened a breakdown of the international system. And at the same, it is important to note here that while the East Asian states system continued to return to equilibrium after systemic crises, the equilibrium point reached at the China-centered order itself kept moving slowly toward international change as the system matured over time.

Thucydides found that people go to war out of “honor, fear, and interest.” If the leading state can manage to govern the international system that upholds honor, mitigate fear and satisfies the interest of the secondary powers, there is no priori theoretical reason to expect that the balance of power logic will prevail in international politics. The stability of the East Asian states system challenges Gilpin’s macro-level theory on hegemonic stability by bringing in the cases where 1) there is no balancing against the existing hegemon despite the differential growth in material power, and 2) despite a hegemonic war, the international system does not

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78 These are the pathways 1-a) to 2-a) and 1-b) to 2-c) in Figure 3.
79 When one follows Gilpin’s advice to study systemic change of earlier, non-Western international systems in systemic, comparative, and theoretical vein with the case of the Chinese Empire, there has to be a departure from the equilibrium model assumed by neoclassical economic theory.
witness systemic change, while retaining the previous essential characteristics of the order.

Building on insights from the historical institutionalism and constructivist literature, the dissertation advances the claim that Gilpin’s three components of governance structure can better explain the stability and change in international politics when understood in a combination of causal mechanisms. The governance structure of the international system can be treated as institutions that go beyond the power and preferences of a given set of actors to take on a life of their own. And this is the approach that I bring in for this dissertation to address the counterfactual possibilities of Gilpin’s theory more effectively.

Toward a Historical-Constructivist Theory of Hegemonic Stability

As a first step to situate the hegemonic theory in a historically informed constructivism, I begin by making three arguments on an international system based on insights from the historical institutionalism literature, which will be the building blocks of my theory.\(^80\) First, one must avoid the binary notion of viewing system

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\(^80\) See Mahoney, “Path Dependence in Historical Sociology.” Historical institutionalists’ core question of how institutions are created, reproduced, and changed helps us to think about answers to the question of how governance of an international system might be reproduced and developed over time. There are three set of perspectives- 1) power distributional, 2) functional, and 3) cultural/sociological, which are equivalent to the above-mentioned Gilpin’s mechanisms of power, a set of rules and rights, and the hierarchy of prestige. According to the power distributional mechanism, actors contest to establish rules so that the outcomes will be favorable to them, and the resulting institutional development reflects the more powerful actors’ institutional preferences. The institution persists as long as the powerful actors from the existing order have sufficient strength to promote its reproduction. Changes occur when there is a change in the power distribution in the international
stability as static, and change as dynamic. Slow-moving changes could occur during
the periods of stability as well as of change in the form of cumulative causes, which
enables us to think in terms of x triggering the sequence a, b, c yielding y, instead of
x directing resulting in y. More broadly, the dissertation attempts to make a case that
a study of international order must “place politics in time.” North’s criticism that
“there is no time in neoclassical theory” applies also to Gilpin’s neorealist theory,
since it makes an as-if assumption that the passage of time within the equilibrium t-1,
or a moving picture from the equilibrium t-1 to t-2 has no effect on the nature of an
international system. However, even rational choice game theorists have argued that
the reiteration of the game changes the incentive structure of the actors over time,
hence the systemic outcomes themselves.

Second, I argue that understanding an international system as a historically
constructed institution is a useful way of theorizing many of the systemic outcomes

81 For a good discussion on the topic, Paul Pierson, Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social
82 According to North, “there is no time in neoclassical theory. The neoclassical model is a model of
an instant of time, and it does not therefore take into account what time does… I will be blunt:
without a deep understanding of time, you will be lousy political scientist, because time is the
dimension in which ideas and institutions and beliefs evolve.” See Douglass North, “In Anticipation
of the Marriage and Political and Economic Theory,” in Competition and Cooperation: Conversations
in international relations. Major theories of international relations—neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism, and constructivism—tend to treat the international system in a mono-causal manner in terms of the structure of power distribution, interests, and identity or ideas respectively. However, conceptualizing the governance structure of the international system in terms of “the rules of the game” and the institutions that embody these rules relaxes these theories’ rather rigid monistic views, thereby allowing us to incorporate both agent and structure to better explain the systemic dynamics and changes.

International systems in this sense can be treated as what Robert Keohane called “reflective approaches to institutions” as basic practices to the rules of chess or baseball. Similarly, Christian Reus-Smit speaks of “fundamental institutions” to explain the social textures of different international societies and their elementary forms of social interaction. Since institutions are practices constituted by norms and the actors’ beliefs, it is quite possible to analytically conceive that international systems can mature over time through the reproduction of those practices and the deepening of the norms and the actors’ beliefs.

Third, Gilpin’s three components of governance of an international system—1) power, 2) the hierarchy of prestige, and 3) a set of rules and rights can better shed light on the puzzle of system stability when combined as mechanisms of with Nobelists about Economic and Political Science, ed. James Alt, Margaret Levy, and Elinor Ostrom (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 316, cited in Pierson, Politics in Time, 1.


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reproduction and innovation rather than being treated as separate variables. That way, the reproduction dynamics of the hierarchical order can be explained with mechanisms of institutional reproduction, which is followed by moments of institutional innovations by the agents’ choice and decision-making.

Therefore, in building my model of system stability, I define the governance structure of an international system as being constituted with the underlying social dynamics of power, interests and legitimation. This approach is similar to that of Gilpin, but differs from his more material terms of the international systemic change. If Gilpin considers the differential growth of power to be the main determinant of systemic outcomes, my theory of hegemonic stability argues all three mechanisms of power, ideas (legitimation) and interests could change the social dynamics of relational patterns, thereby resulting in changes in the systemic outcomes.

Causal Processes of Solidifying Hegemonic Order

With these theoretical components, by subjecting Gilpin’s model to systemic empirical analysis, the case of the Chinese Empire generates the causal flows of the hegemonic stability model in a historical constructivist vein. I theorize how an integrated institutional approach to hegemonic theory can explain not only Gilpin’s power transition-type international change from the reconfiguration of the power distribution, but also incremental, slow-moving changes in the actors’ beliefs leading

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84 Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State.*
to the change in the practices, thereby resulting in the maturation of the international system, which holds the key for system stability over *longue durée*. A focus of my theorizing is the social system of tribute practices of investiture and tribute that held the China-centered order together to constitute the governance structure of the East Asian states system over time.

I argue that hegemonic stability persists to the extent that the hegemonic power is institutionalized in ways that yield legitimate recognition to the domestic politics of the secondary states. The enigma of the stability of the China-centered order in early modern Asia can best be tackled by focusing on how the institution of the tribute system captured the Chinese power, functional efficiency and socialization mechanisms within it to further strengthen the hegemonic authority.

Best captured in the notion of *strategic use of soft power*, the central argument of the dissertation focuses on the sequencing of three related, but distinct, causal mechanisms: 1) institutionalizing power and ideas, 2) elite socialization and 3) transformation of the institutions into international authority. The first mechanism has to do with the institutionalizing of hegemonic power and ideas during the historical moments of order building. To put it differently, based on the superiority of power, the hegemon gets to set “the rules of the game” for others to follow; it establishes institutions to project its power into the international system.⁸⁵

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⁸⁵ Ikenberry, *After Victory.*
These institutions are initially designed in the manner that primarily serves the hegemon’s interests and functional efficiency. What accompanies this process is the infusion of a sense purpose of the institutions, promoting the kind of ideology that justifies its domination over other states in the system.\textsuperscript{86} The secondary powers join the institutions based on the cost-benefit calculation of their own interests, in particular out of fear of coercive power of the hegemon. This is the stage when the practical acceptance of the hegemonic power takes place on the part of the secondary powers, meaning that they accept their subordinate position perceiving no realistic alternatives.

The second mechanism is about the process through which elite socialization via the institutional structure carries the legitimizing ideas of the hegemon into the domestic politics of the secondary states. Under the conditions that the secondary states find the hegemon’s social purposes embedded in the institutions acceptable and useful for their own domestic politics, through this process of elite socialization, the institutions first designed to serve the interest of the hegemon evolves into the kind of political, economic arrangements that reflect the interests of both powerful \textit{and} less powerful actors. At this stage, too, the acceptance of the hegemonic order by the secondary states is at a practical level, based on 1) the hegemonic power and 2) the cost-benefit calculation of their interests.

\textsuperscript{86}Gilpin, p. 30, cited Moore, 1958, pp. 10, 16.
The third mechanism is the transformation of the institutions into international authority. The higher the degree of elite socialization is, the more likely it is that the institutions will turn into the recognition-yielding authority somewhat independent of the hegemonic material power. And this involves “a less deliberate turn” of these institutions from rationalistic to reflective,\(^87\) during which time what Wendt and Friedheim called an “assurance game” takes place through the reiteration of the international politics game practices within the institutional structure.\(^88\)

That is, the institutions stabilize the expectations of the actors’ behavior by sharing information and promote interstate cooperation by lowering transaction costs. Through this process, the cost-benefit calculations of both the hegemon and the secondary powers come to find it profitable to maintain the status quo order within what Keohane called the *rationalistic* institutional framework. (This is at the stage of

\(^{87}\) I draw on Keohane’s two approaches to institutions- rational and reflective- as the analytical basis for my understanding of the tribute system. See Keohane, “International Institutions.”

the practical acceptance of the hegemonic order.) Then, depending on the degree to which the secondary states buy the legitimizing ideas of the hegemon and internalize them among the policy elites (elite socialization), the *nature* of the institutions evolves from rationalistic toward reflective, meaning a turn of the institutional structure from a functional one to an embodiment of intersubjective meaning among the actors. (This is at the stage of the normative acceptance of the hegemonic order.)

**Figure 5.** the extent of secondary powers’ acceptance of hegemony

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary mechanism behind hegemonic stability:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>power + ideas → rationalistic institution → reflective institution (=authority)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(elite socialization)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↔                         ↔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time--------------------time------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secondary powers’ relations vis-à-vis hegemon:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>practical acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>normative acceptance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systemic outcome:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>anarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more toward hierarchical relational patterns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These three mechanisms- 1) institutionalizing power and ideas, 2) elite socialization, and 3) transformation of the institutions into international authority work together in a cumulative manner over time, and generate three hypotheses.

**H 1:** The institutions established first to project hegemonic power into the system turn into the embodiment of international authority when the nature of secondary powers’ acceptance of the institutions evolves from practical to
normative.

**H 2:** The institutions first built to promote and reflect the power and preferences of the hegemon develop into a mechanism which the participating secondary states first find profitable and then instrumental for their legitimacy when the “assurance game” is played repeatedly.

**H 3:** The evolutionary process of rationalistic to reflective institution occurs through the elite socialization, which takes place as the rulers of the secondary state buy the hegemon’s legitimizing ideas and are able to use them to boost their own position in domestic political settings.

The causal flow below in Figure 6 is inductively derived from my reading of the processes from the tribute system’s development and evolution over time in the eyes of the periphery, and the resulting maturation of the hierarchical structure of the East Asian states system in early modern Asia.

Figure 6. A Historical-Constructivist Theory of Hegemonic Stability in the context of early modern Asia

After the anarchic structure of a multi-state system during the Song period, the Mongol Empire’s preponderant power adopted the tribute practices to
regulate foreign relations just like other previous Han Chinese dynasties had done. However, the Mongol hegemonic order in the thirteenth century is characterized by forceful tribute practices of heavily relying on *wu* (coercive power) over *wen* (culture), which involved the use of actual coercive military subjugation practices rather than symbolic gestures of submission from the secondary states. The Mongol Empire used the tribute practices to extract economic resources from its neighbors, interfered with their domestic affairs, and conducted the coercive practice of holding royal princes hostage. The East Asian secondary powers, after their initial resistance to the Mongol power, accepted the Mongol-centered order mostly out of their fear of the Mongol power and the cost-benefit calculation of their interest.

The subsequent Ming Empire, having been established under the banner of restoring the traditional Han Chinese rule against the “barbarian” Mongols, placed a heavy emphasis on the Confucian ideals of peaceful relations with its East Asian neighbors. Under the Ming-centered order, the tribute practices were institutionalized tribute *system*: all contacts by foreign governments with China—political, cultural as well as commercial—had to be made through the tribute diplomatic missions under the strictly codified regulations. On the part of the secondary states, the acceptance of the Ming-centered order was at a practical level to gain benefits of trade and non-interference from participating in the Ming tribute system (the rational institutions.) But the high level of elite socialization in countries like Korea led to the transformation of the tribute system into an embodiment of international authority.
(the reflective institution) after a national crisis of the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea.

Behind this unusual normative acceptance of the China-centered order is measured by Korea’s behavior of adhering to the Ming Emperor’s authority embedded in the Ming tribute system for Confucian ideological reasons, despite 1) the rapidly declining Ming power and 2) a credible threat to the survival of Korea as a state from the rising Manchus. In other words, prior to the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea, Korea’s attitude toward the Ming tribute system was based on its practical judgment of the asymmetry of power between China and itself. But through a high level of elite socialization, the Confucianization of Korean society in the sixteenth century, the investiture from the Ming Emperor came to embody the Confucian authority itself.

To explain how the tribute system evolved from a rational institution to a reflective institution (in other words, international authority), a brief discussion on the politics of investiture in the context of the secondary states’ domestic politics deserves attention here. Against the backdrop of elite socialization into the Confucian idea of China’s moral superiority, the importance of having to receive the investiture from the Chinese Emperor was particularly highlighted within Korea, especially when the King of Korea suffered the weakening of his own legitimacy from domestic crises in the eyes of the general populace and Confucian scholar-bureaucrats (nobles) alike. The position of the King was always under the threat of dethronement by other prince(s) allying with the King’s political opponents as well
as a danger of popular revolts from the peasantry.

Therefore, a delay or absence of the investiture from the Chinese Emperor at times like these crises would be detrimental to his position as the King of Korea, since his political opponents who are Confucian bureaucrats could use it against him to undermine the legitimacy of his rule. The Chinese Emperor’s grant of the investiture to the King of Korea would usually be a matter of regular practice, based on the principle of non-interference of the tribute system. But when the Ming Empire itself was in the middle of a security crisis from the rise of the Manchus, the Korean King’s need to receive the investiture will give China a convenient tool for political control to extract resources and to influence Korea’s foreign policy behavior to its favor.

The Qing Empire furthered the institutionalization of the tribute system, but the acceptance level of the Qing-centered order by the Confucianized East Asian states remained at the level of practicality. It had to do with the contempt that the East Asian states held toward the “culturally inferior Manchu barbarians,” which discouraged elite socialization between the Qing Empire and its neighbors. Now I turn to elaborate the three causal mechanisms above to explore how power, interest and ideas interact with one another to have bearing on the international order in further depth.

1. Institutionalizing Power and Ideas
If one follows Gilpin’s formulation of hegemonic stability, the persistence of a hegemonic order hinges on the continuation of the hegemon’s superiority in terms of material power capabilities. But when we understand that one of the most important dynamics of any political order has to do with the ability of the leading actor to ensure acquiescence from the followers, the question at hand is much more sociological than neorealists would normally assume. In this sense, it is useful to think of hegemonic power in terms of the degree to which the most powerful actor in the system gets to set the rules of the game, and continues to reproduce them in a cost-effective way. Understanding hegemonic governance in terms of these social relations between the hegemon and the secondary powers enables us to see that hegemonic governance is not fixed or attached to the distribution of power capabilities, but constantly undergoing reconstruction through the reproduction of the practices or the rules.

While major theories of international relations tend to treat power and ideas, or power and institutions as opposing explanations to systemic outcomes, the English School scholars have paid good attention to how power politics always comes with institutional, ideational, sociological dimensions to it in any given international system. The longevity of different types of hierarchies depends on the institutions, assumptions, and codes of conduct through which states try to order and regulate the

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89 According to Kurt Burch, the rules of the game in international politics refer to 1) regularities of behavior, 2) conventions identifying an equilibrium solution to coordination games or collective action problems, and 3) authoritative reason for action. Kurt Burch, “Changing the Rules:
system, which bind them together. They see the rules of the game as institutions in which power and ideas are infused to generate the practices. Christian Reus-Smit’s historically developed constructivist theory of international relations argues that different conceptions of the moral purpose of historical agents (the state) have generated different constitutional structures, leading to different fundamental institutions, which can be taken as equivalent to the rules of the game.

In considering the relationship between power and ideas, power matters in the formation of the international order, but to answer the question of in what ways power matters requires us to explore the ideas or social purposes that the hegemon promotes to justify its dominance in the system. And this is what tells us about the nature, or content of the international order, which will always have some institutional expressions.


91 Reus-Smit, *the Moral Purpose of the State*.


93 Ikenberry, *After Victory.*
2. Elite Socialization

The key moment in hegemonic stability is a shift from practical to normative acceptance of the hegemonic order on the part of the secondary powers. And this process broadly coincides with the discursive transformation of the institutional structure from rationalistic to reflective, which will be discussed further below. At different points in time throughout the life time of the hegemonic order’s history, the secondary states in the system may be situated at different places along the spectrum of practical through normative acceptance of the hegemonic power, although we can generally expect to see a trend from practical toward normative.

What determines this variation is the level of the elite socialization, which takes place as the rulers of the secondary state buy into the hegemon’s legitimizing ideas and use them to boost their own position in domestic political settings. This domestic-international linkage in the form of socialization of the ruling elites of the secondary states deserves particular attention when conceptualizing hegemonic stability in historical-sociological terms.

A further look into the domestic politics of the secondary states shows how this dynamic provides the hegemon with useful, convenient leverage for political control over the secondary powers in the system. At the international level, John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan shed light on this mechanism and note that elites in the secondary states buy into and internalize norms that are articulated by the
hegemon, and therefore pursue policies that are consistent with the hegemon’s notion of the international order.  
But as Helen Milner reminds us, since international politics and foreign policy become part of the domestic struggle for power, this linkage can at the same time be a powerful tool for hegemonic management on the part of the hegemon.  
That is, when these ruling elites carry the hegemon’s legitimizing ideas into the domestic politics settings for instrumental reasons to use them to enhance their own position by borrowing the international authority projected from the institutions, this gives the hegemon a powerful tool to influence them by selectively refusing to provide the diplomatic recognition that they need for their domestic legitimacy.

3. Transformation of institutions into Authority

Typically neoliberal institutionalists focus on the functional aspects of institutions and understand that the institutions exist because powerful actors find them beneficial due to their utility of reducing uncertainty, underwriting commitment, and providing enforcement mechanisms. On the other hand, constructivists view institutions more in line with the cultural/sociological legitimation dimension of the historical institutionalist literature. In other words, the institutional development

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94 For the concepts of practical and normative acceptances, see Mann, “The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy.”
depends on whether or not, and to what extent the actors view them as legitimate.  

What has been overlooked in this debate, however, are the processes through which the repeated social interactions and practices (elite socialization) within the institutional structure can strengthen the norms and change the identity of the actors, leading to the transformation of the institutions' nature from rationalistic to reflective.

I hypothesize that the high level of elite socialization leads to a change of the nature of the institutions in the eyes of the secondary states through the path-dependent dynamics of institutional development. As briefly mentioned above, the institutions first built to promote and reflect the power and preferences of the hegemon evolve into a mechanism which the participating secondary states find profitable as well. It is true that on the part of China, the Chinese became better and better at using the tribute system and they also thought of new things to do and incorporated them into the existing institutions. This “competency trap” becomes a powerful stabilizing force, resistant to change with a surprising source of durability.  

This is in line with the argument put forward by March and Olsen that political actors accumulate experience with existing institutions, practices, and rules as they try to track and adapt to their environments and to changes in them. Capabilities for using institutions are refined through mundane processes of learning,

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97 Keohane, “International Institutions.”
interpretation, reasoning, education, imitation and adaptation of these actors, furthering the development of competence in the service of existing institutions.\(^{99}\)

On top of the hegemon’s adept use of the institutions, as the social relations among actors deepen based on the hegemon’s legitimizing ideas, the institutional structure transforms in “a less deliberate” manner from the rationalistic orientation to the legitimate, reflective one over time. The key moment in the durability of the tribute system as the central governance structure of the China-centered order has to with this transformation of the tribute system into international authority in the eyes of the East Asian secondary states. This transformation dynamic occurs when the secondary states need to receive the recognition from the institutions due to domestic politics against the backdrop of elite socialization. Then the secondary states are mostly likely to adhere to the existing status quo order despite changes in the power distribution (the normative acceptance).

For example, comparing tenth century Korea during the Song era and seventeenth century Korea under the late Ming Empire vividly reveals how the Korean ruling elites’ socialization into the Confucian idea led to a transformation of the tribute system from a mechanism reflecting balance of power to an embodiment of authority in domestic politics. The tribute system’s investiture practices and indoctrination of the country in neo-Confucian ideas changed Korean identity over time from a fiercely independent, pragmatic kingdom manipulating the balance of

\(^{99}\) Ibid., 964.
power dynamics against the Song toward a more rigid Confucian state situating its place below China in the system based on “the moral purpose of the state.”

In this regard, John Owen’s study of the forceful imposition of domestic institutions by great powers is instructive to learn this mechanism. Although China tended not to forcefully implement domestic institutions in the secondary states, the investiture practices of the tribute system were as much the forceful imposition of domestic institutions as international due to domestic political reasons, resulting in a similar effect on interstate dynamics. According to Owen, between 1555 and 2000 there were 198 cases of domestic institutional promotion in smaller states advocated mostly by great powers regardless of their regime types. On the part of the secondary states, he argues that “transnational ideological struggles cause ideologues across states to favor close relations with great powers ruled by their chosen ideology.” On the part of the hegemon, when a great power needs to increase its power, it can pull secondary states into its sphere of influence by promoting in those states the institutions called for by the ideology.

Then, what explains the variation between pragmatic and normative acceptance and in between grey areas on the part of the secondary powers? In other words, how does elite socialization take place, leading to the normative acceptance

101 These great powers were legitimist, monarchies, constitutional monarchies, republics, dictatorships, and communist states.
of the hegemonic order? Given that legitimacy is a social, not material condition,\textsuperscript{103} it is partly by the hegemon’s intention, but more by the secondary states’ volition. The institutions provide an environment for forceful socializing in the beginning, but it is noteworthy that all choices of socialization are situated historically and can be understood only within the political contexts of any given state. The result is that the secondary states may look similar as they all participate in hegemonic stability, but may not develop the same degree of acceptance of the hegemonic authority. The different level of the acceptance, therefore, depends on the “cultural match” between the legitimizing ideas promoted by the hegemon and those dominant beliefs of the secondary powers.\textsuperscript{104} In other words, the social context of the secondary states can determine whether or not, and to what extent the hegemon may exercise political control in this manner.

Based on my model of a historical-constructivist theory of hegemonic order that covers the entire life span of a hegemonic order, therefore, a highlight of the causal mechanisms behind the acceptance of the order at any given moment will look like this:

\textsuperscript{103}Wendt and Friedheim, “Hierarchy under Anarchy.”
\textsuperscript{104}Amitav Acharya’s theory on norm diffusion clarifies the causal mechanism captured in the concept of localization, which refers to a process of idea transmission the actors borrow foreign ideas about authority and legitimacy and fitted them into indigenous traditions and practices. See Amitav Acharya, “How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism,” \textit{International Organization}, 58, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 239-275.
Figure 7. The Acceptance Level of the China-centered Order

As will be discussed in my case studies, the China-centered order was accepted as a matter of practice by East Asian secondary power as long as China maintained the mechanisms of power and interest locked in the tribute system. On the other hand, under the conditions that there was a high level of elite socialization between China and its neighbors, the hierarchical order took on a character of normative acceptance by the secondary states.
A Historical-Constructivist Theory of Hegemonic Stability in the Context of Early Modern Asia

The longevity of the Chinese Empire is found in China’s strategies of reproducing hierarchy, which is captured in the institution of the tribute system. To unpack the workings of the tribute system is to be able to identify East Asia’s differentiated set of international “rules of the game,” or logics of Asian international relations. China’s establishment of what is later known as the tribute system had to do with the use of coercion to force the neighboring states to accept its superior position in East Asia at the start of each dynasty of the Chinese Empire. This is the first mechanism of institutionalizing of power and ideas (the mechanism of institutionalizing power and ideas). As the tribute practices were repeated throughout the ensuing dynasties in China, states in East Asia developed what Nishijima Sadao called the East Asian civilization sphere forming an international system through regular contacts conducting diplomacy and war.

By the Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century, the East Asian system had been maintained by the rationalistic institution as East Asian secondary powers’ participation in the tribute institution was at the practical acceptance level. It was during the Han-Chinese Ming-centered order when Korea, through the deepening of

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105 Benno Teschke convincingly suggests that there are five axes of inquiry when it comes to the social relations of sovereignty; 1) a need to clarify different set of international rules of game specifying differences between varying geopolitical orders, 2) a causal inquiry that looks into the fundamental determinants of these systemic variations, 3) dynamic perspective that theorizes the major agents and processes of systemic geopolitical transformations, 4) chronological and geographical origins of modern international relations, and 5) reevaluation and refinement of
its country’s indoctrination of the Confucian teachings (the mechanism of elite socialization), developed the normative acceptance of Chinese hegemony after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea. The tribute system by then turned from a rationalistic institution to a reflective institution (the mechanism of transformation of the institution into international authority), which embedded the “intersubjective meaning” of Confucian moral superiority. With the rise of the Qing Empire, whose origin could not convincingly claim the moral superiority of the Confucian doctrine, both Korea and Japan returned to the pragmatic acceptance of the Chinese hegemony under the Qing Empire.

The question under which conditions secondary states bind themselves to the existing order depends on the extent to which the ruling elites of the secondary states find the legitimizing ideas of the leading state useful and buy them for their domestic politics, which has to do with the third mechanism. A combination of the mechanisms- 1) institutionalizing Chinese power and Confucian ideas in the tribute practices, 2) deepening of the indoctrination of Confucian ideas into the domestic politics of Korea and Vietnam while Japan remained at the practical acceptance level, and 3) a discursive turn of the tribute system taking on a normative characteristic - account for variation in how processes unfold in terms of the secondary states’ hierarchical relational patterns vis-à-vis China.

international relations. See Benno Teschke, the Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics, and the Making of Modern International Relations (London: Verso, 2003).
Comparing Korea and Japan in terms of their relations vis-à-vis China reveals that by the late Ming era after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea, the nature of Korea’s acceptance of the Chinese hegemony was normative as the Korean elites were socialized into Confucian ideology, while Japan’s relations with China tended to be that of practical acceptance of China’s hegemony, having an alternative source of domestic legitimacy from the Japanese Emperor. Across time, Korea’s relations with China changed from practical acceptance to a normative one with the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea, because the King of Korea needed and utilized the Chinese Emperor’s moral authority to strengthen his position within Korea, which had been weakened throughout the devastating war against Japan. The result is that China under the late Ming hegemony was given a tool called moral authority from the Confucian ideas as realpolitik power resources to influence Korean behavior in its security competition against the Manchus.106

**Research Method and Design**

An analysis of the Chinese Empire’s longevity of the hierarchical order requires the development of a theory that explains how stability can be reproduced over extended periods of time outlasting system-wide crises. Methodologically, I engage with two theory-building research objectives: one is to use established international relations theories to explain the case of the Chinese Empire, and the

106 Hall elucidates this dynamic in his article, Rodney Hall, “Moral Authority as a Power Resource,”
other is to look at the Chinese Empire to inductively identify new causal mechanisms for a new theory on hegemonic order. In presenting a positive theory of hegemonic order, I build on Robert Gilpin’s deductive theory on hegemonic order and bring the recurring relational patterns inductively drawn from historical Asia’s foreign relations to produce the generalizable mechanisms.

I borrow insights from historical institutionalism to better understand the institutional evolution of the tributary system. I adopt path dependence research methods to shed light on reinforcing mechanisms of power-distributonal, utilitarian/functional and legitimation dynamics to explain the Chinese Empire’s reproduction mechanisms for system stability. In so doing, I take heed of converting historical descriptions into analytic explanations comprising variables.

How, then, to go about testing the theory? If the hypothesis is built on the recurring relational patterns in China’s relations vis-à-vis its neighboring East Asian states, this continuity aspect of order is tested against the historical moments that could have disrupted the hierarchical structure of the East Asian states system but did not. I use process-tracing methods to examine those historical moments, isolating the mechanisms that glued Asian states to the system. The cases under investigation have been selected based on the historical events’ impact on the stability of the East Asian system in a manner that provides variance in terms of the sources of the crises, which draws from the three variants of the historical institutional literature. My


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hypotheses will prove plausible, if the mechanisms behind the stability of the hierarchical order turn out to be present during the periods of the restoration of the order. In each case, I illustrate the role that power, institutions and ideas played in maintaining Chinese hegemonic stability.

Chapter 4: the Mongol Empire’s invasions of Korea and Japan in the thirteenth century
Chapter 5: Asia’s first world war, the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea of 1592-1598
Chapter 6: The rise of the Qing Empire in the seventeenth century

Table 2. Identifying the Events that Could Have Dislocated the System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shocks to the system</th>
<th>Power-distribution (Chinese Superior Power)</th>
<th>Cost-Benefit Calculation &amp; Public Good (Economic Interests from Trade with China &amp; Non-aggression from China)</th>
<th>Legitimation (Higher Political Authority from Chinese Superior Culture)</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Mongol Invasions of Korea and Japan (Chapter 4)</td>
<td>* the Mongol Empire threatened the political autonomy of Japan and Korea; to Korea, it demanded heavy burden of tributes from tributaries</td>
<td>* Japan and Korea found the Mongol Empire unfair and lacking legitimacy</td>
<td>Aggression attempt failed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea in 1592-1598 (Chapter 5)</td>
<td>* the Ming Empire was in decline and Japan's rise</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiations/Restoration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**The Rise of the Qing Empire**  
*(Chapter 6)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Shock/Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Manchu origin of the Qing Empire was considered as culturally inferior “barbarian”; Korea’s refusal to pay tributes</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercion/Restoration</td>
<td>* The Qing Empire lost in Opium War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* The Qing Empire’s finance in deep trouble unable to remain as the benefactor of public goods in the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* The Confucian ways of statecraft being questioned with superior Western technologies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Empire collapsed</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * refers to the shock or crisis to that particular mechanism that could have possibly disrupted the system.

Within each case, the explanatory power of the three mechanisms and their combinations will be tested and compared. For a project of this *longue durée* and macro-historical comparison, caveats on the study’s scope conditions deserve attention here. First, the study limits its temporal scope to the imperial governments under the Mongol (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing Empires (1644-1911). A multi-state system in East Asia during the Song period establishes a baseline against which the system stability of the East Asian international system under the Mongol, Ming, and Qing Empires can be compared. By the Song era, the East Asian system had been created in its full shape through the earlier formative periods of the Han Empire (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) and the Tang Empire (618-906), and the practices of the tribute system had been well-established by then, taken for granted as the defining institutional setting of the China-centered hierarchical order.

There are some important reasons to believe the Mongol Empire
marked the start of the common ground we see in the late imperial China. John K. Fairbank and Merle Goldman conclude that the Mongol Empire must be viewed as “the seedbed of important phenomena” that one sees in the Ming and Qing Empires. Three characteristics include: 1) a shift in China toward emphasizing a stronger imperial-dynastic government through a trained and examined bureaucracy, 2) “China” no longer meaning an ethnic Han Chinese as the non-Chinese invaders from Inner Asia became integral participants in the Chinese polity, and 3) the primacy of political control reinforced by the Neo-Confucian ideology that stressed loyalty to authority in a hierarchic social order and esteemed agricultural self-sufficiency over the less controllable growth of trade and foreign contact.\(^{107}\)

In terms of a geographic scope, I define the East Asian states system as revolving around China’s relations with modern day East Asian states, including Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, as opposed to the Inner Asian tribes, unless they had a direct effect on the East Asian states system. Despite the geographic proximities, China developed what Edward Keene called “vision of a bifurcated world,”\(^{108}\) a

\(^{107}\) A Japanese historian Naito Konan is cited along with other scholars who examined the periods to argue that the changes of the Song era (the baseline period of this study) was so comprehensive that they became the birth of “modern” China, which means the China that persisted until the late Qing. Three characteristics define the periods of the Chinese Empire after the Song period: first, there was a shift in China toward emphasizing a stronger imperial-dynastic government through a trained and examined bureaucracy. Second, “China” no longer meant Han Chinese as the non-Chinese invaders from Inner Asia became integral participants in the Chinese polity. Third, the primacy of political control continued in the resulting Sino-nomadic imperial power and was reinforced by the Neo-Confucian ideology that stressed loyalty to authority in a hierarchic social order and esteemed agricultural self-sufficiency over the less controllable growth of trade and foreign contact. See John Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 126-7.

\(^{108}\) Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society*. 

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distinction between states in East Asia and nomadic tribes in the northern frontier of Inner Asia. That the Chinese Empire should be understood as operating based on two logics of international order has largely to do with the kind of states that China had to cope with.

Although to a varying degree, the late imperial China and other East Asian states like Korea, Vietnam and Japan met Charles Tilly’s criteria of state being “coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories.” Their governments maintained a high degree of domestic order run by the bureaucrats, extracted material resources from their population, defended their borders, and managed economic, commercial ventures. And this East Asian states system is the one that my dissertation focuses on, which is more crucial for present purpose of studying the system stability of the Chinese Empire.

On the other hand, the interaction between successive Chinese mainland empires and the various predatory nomads in the steppe to their north- Huns, Turks, Tatars, Mongols, and others- constitutes a separate historical system. Thomas Barfield’s research on a general history of the steppe tribal frontier in Inner Asia shows that frontier peoples often skillfully manipulated Chinese forms of the tribute

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system, but refused to accept China’s definition of itself as the center of the world order.

Throughout East Asia even fiercely independent neighbors such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam all adopted Chinese models of state organization and foreign relations, ideographic literacy, cuisine, clothes and calendars… There horse-rising nomads not only rejected Chinese culture and ideology, worse, they obstinately refused to see any value in it except in terms of the material goods the Chinese could offer. With an economy based on mobile nomadic pastoralism that scattered people across a vast landscape, living under the sky’s great blue dome in tents of felt, consuming milk, and meat as the central part of their diet, glorifying military adventure and heroic personal achievement, these horse-rising people stood in shark contrast to their Chinese neighbors.110

Being mindful of some historians’ reservation to view China as a single unit “China,” I regard all three imperial governments occupied by the Mongols, and the Manchus as well as the Han Chinese as “China.” I also accept and use a widely-used understanding that the rise of a new dynasty in China or in any other East Asian states is a change in their government, not a change in “state.” This is because of the “the common observation that China could be conquered but its system remained intact.”111 In other words, they all inherited the population, territory, domestic institutions and external sovereignty as China or Korea in the eyes of other states.

111 Wong, *China Transformed*, 90. The italic is added.
Empirical evidence for the study has been collected from various archival works, using the extensive secondary literature written in English, Korean as well as key archives, manuscripts. I consulted with historians to verify the historical facts from these records. To avoid bias from myth-making and glorification tendencies in some of these sources, I also try to cross-examine the historical events under investigation from different sources whenever possible.
FOUR
The Mongol Invasions of Korea and Japan in the 13th Century

Introduction

With the conquest of China in 1279,112 the Mongols became successors of the Chinese Empire, effectively ending the prior multi-state system in East Asia.113 Having built an empire twice the size of the Roman Empire, from Asia across Eastern Europe, the Mongol Emperor Kubilai Khan ordered the King of Korea to escort his envoys to Japan in 1266. Claiming to have received the Mandate of Heaven, the Mongol Emperor’s letter urged “the King of Japan” to establish relations and threatened the use of force in the event of Japan’s defiance. This letter signals the beginning of the Mongol invasions of Japan in the thirteenth century. An unprecedented crisis for Japan as a state, being the first ever foreign invasion in the history of Japan, the invasions left an indelible mark on Japanese thinking about national security for generations to come. When Japan refused to answer the repeated request for the opening of relations, Kubilai’s first invasion in 1274 mobilized Mongol-Korea forces of about 28,000 men in 900 ships. The second invasion in

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112 The conquest of China by the Mongols came with the defeat of the Southern Song forces in 1279, but the establishment of the Mongol Empire is generally considered to be 1271. In this chapter, however, I sometimes use the word the Mongol Empire to indicate the Mongols who later built an empire in 1271.

113 I will use the term “the Mongol Empire” instead of its Chinese name “Yuan” simply to follow the practice that many historians adopt. In my empirical chapters, China as a hegemonic state is referred to as the Mongol Empire, the Ming Empire and the Qing Empire.
1281 brought 40,000 Mongols, and 100,000 Chinese, Korean and former Southern Song troops in 3,500 ships to Japan’s coast for an attack.\textsuperscript{114}

In parallel with this development in Japan, the Mongols invaded Korea in 1231 on the pretext of Korea’s plot in the killing of a Mongol envoy. After a brief period of suing for peace, Korea decided to fight, moved its capital to its fortress island Kanghwa and embarked on an armed resistance against the Mongols. When the King of Korea finally submitted to the Mongol Emperor in 1259 on condition that the Mongol army withdrew from Korea, it was after three decades of warfare during which the Mongols launched a total of six invasions of Korea.

This chapter on the Mongol invasions of Korea and Japan in the thirteenth century provides my first case study that looks into a counterfactual to the stability and persistence of the East Asian states system in early modern Asia. Against the backdrop of the Mongol Empire conquering the largest territory in the history of the world, the geographically adjacent East Asian states of Korea, Japan and Vietnam in fact escaped, albeit barely, a conquest by the Mongols.\textsuperscript{115} Yet the period marked one of the biggest challenges disrupting the East Asian states system in the diplomatic history of Asia.

\\[\textsuperscript{114}\text{Shoji, “Japan and East Asia,” 418.}\]

\\[\textsuperscript{115}\text{Although this chapter primarily deals with the Mongol invasions of Korea and Japan, similar dynamics are shown in the cases of Vietnam and Champa and their relations with the Mongol Empire. The Mongols invaded Vietnam three times in 1257, 1284, and 1287, but the Vietnamese like the Japanese fought off the Mongols on all three occasions. However, like in Korea’s case, both states decided to accept Mongol tributary status in order to avoid further conflict, and were thereby re-integrated into the orbit of the Mongol Empire.}\]

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Upon close scrutiny, it was not simply a matter of the superiority of power on the part of the Mongol Empire that resulted in this crisis. After all, the problem of power disparity has typically been highlighted whenever there is “a rising China” in the history of Asian international relations.\textsuperscript{116} Rather, it was the Mongol Empire’s resort to coercion over culture, which worked as a shock to the East Asian states system. To put it differently, the Mongols broke with the tradition of the China-centered order by breaching the non-interference deal and by imposing heavy tributes on their East Asian neighbors.\textsuperscript{117} Indeed, the Mongol Empire, despite its non-Chinese steppe origin, had adopted a time-honored Chinese style tribute system in governing the international system. However, their use of tribute practices was aberrant in that they not only demanded unbearably heavy tributes to improve their own economic conditions through the tribute system, but also intervened in the domestic political affairs of the secondary states. As such, under Mongol rule, the tribute system no longer represented a mutually beneficial arrangement embedded in the China-centered order, since the Mongols exploited the tribute practices to extract resources from the periphery. The Mongol invasions of Korea and Japan epitomized the Mongols’ behavior at its maximum.

\textsuperscript{116} For example, despite its superior military power vis-à-vis other East Asian states, the rise of the Ming Empire did not provoke the kind of crisis as we saw in the case of the Mongol Empire in the East Asian states system.

\textsuperscript{117} As stated earlier in the theory chapter, I define the governance of an international system as being constituted with the underlying social dynamics of power, interests and legitimation. For the Mongol Empire’s case, the Mongol governance style resulted in a crisis to the interest mechanism by forcefully demanding that East Asian states accept tributary status and by interfering in their domestic politics.
For this study’s purpose, however, it deserves attention that practically speaking, Korea and Japan ultimately ended up staying within the Mongol-centered order. This “practical acceptance” of Mongol hegemony on the part of Korea and Japan may come as no surprise, given the preponderance of Mongol power. But a deeper understanding of their actions during this critical juncture reveals that the dynamics of the system restoration were more complicated than they first appear. For example, why did Japan give up a plan of counterattacking Korea, which was used as the Mongol Empire’s forward base? Why did Korea decide to cease its armed resistance against the Mongol Empire in 1259, not earlier or later? In other words, what explains the continuation of the East Asian states system after a shock posed by the Mongol Empire’s coercive measures?

In this chapter, I argue that the historically informed theory of hegemonic stability presents a plausible explanation. At this comparatively earlier point of the East Asian states system in early modern Asia, the China-centered order was primarily maintained by a combination of power and interests mechanisms. Unlike later periods of the Ming and Qing Empires, during which the ideological influences of Neo-Confucianism played a bigger role in having the secondary states accept (or reject) China as the center of East Asia, what tied Korea and Japan to the Mongol Empire was the superiority of Mongol power for Korea, and economic gains from trade for Japan.

To elucidate the argument, the chapter proceeds in the following order. I
begin by showing how the Mongol invasions of Korea and Japan posed one of the most serious crises in Asian diplomatic history. Second, I proceed with my argument that it was primarily a combination of power and interest mechanisms, which played a critical role in restoring the Mongol-centered order in the thirteenth century East Asia. I offer evidence by analyzing the processes through which Korea and Japan were re-integrated into the orbit of the Mongol Empire. Third, the chapter concludes with some thoughts on the importance of the case in theory and in policy and with some suggestions for further research.

The Mongol-centered Order: Crisis and Restoration

This section illustrates that the Mongol invasions of Korea and Japan in the thirteenth century indeed brought about one of the biggest crises to the East Asian states system. Then, it moves on to describe how the hierarchical order was restored under the Mongol Empire. To do so, in light of the study’s topic on the persistence of the East Asian states system, placing the Mongol Empire in the temporal context in the history of East Asian diplomatic history is in order. As shown in Chapter 2, it was during this period of the Mongol Empire, at which point East Asian international relations began evolving around a unified “China,” and continued to do so until the collapse of the Chinese Empire in the nineteenth century. In other words, it was the Mongol Empire that put an effective end to the prior system-wide balance of power dynamics for the later periods in the history of early modern Asia.
Korea’s Resistance against the Mongols

Given that the Mongol Empire had the strongest army in the world at that time, it is in fact notable that a small country like Korea was able to fight against the Mongol forces for nearly thirty years. What triggered this resistance had to do with heavy political and economic demands by the Mongols, which far exceeded what the Koreans were willing to bear. A historian of Mongol-Korean relations, W. E. Henthorn describes the Mongols’ use of the tribute system vis-à-vis Korea as follows:

Although Koryŏ (Korea) was familiar enough with the ancient system of tribute and hostages, the Mongols were a new experience and their demands were of a different character than Koryŏ had previously encountered. For the Mongols regarded everything and everyone in a conquered nation as absolute chattels, a concept which differs considerably from the Chinese-oriented system with which Koryŏ was accustomed. The demands seemed endless: goods, hostages, transplanting of farming families, armies of men, ships, etc.¹¹⁸

For the Mongols, Korea was to be conquered to secure a base for the subjugation of the Southern Song and Japan.¹¹⁹ As a matter of fact, it is not the case that Korea rejected the Mongol-centered order from the outset. The first contact between Korea and the Mongols resulted in a joint effort in 1219 to fight against the Khitans who fled to Korea’s northern region to escape from the Mongol pressure.

Following the subjugation of the Khitans, the Mongols, self-claimed benefactors, demanded that Korea be its Younger Brother and pay annual tributes. The diplomatic rift started to show its signs when the Korean government refused to pay heavy tributes on several occasions. Then in 1225, the Mongol envoy Chu ku-yu was killed en route back from Korea. Subsequently in 1231, the Mongols took advantage of this incident to justify their first invasion of Korea and launched an attack led by Sartaq.\(^{120}\)

Korea’s Koryŏ government debated its course of action and decided to seek peace with the Mongols for the time being. Upon Korea’s formal submission, the Mongols left a total of seventy two military governors (daruhaci) behind in Korea “to remain and govern” before withdrawing their troops.\(^{121}\) Furthermore, the tribute demands by the Mongols were indeed enormous. They included gold, silver, pearls, otter skins, 10,000 small horses, 10,000 large horses, and clothing for their army of one million men. In addition, they demanded the King’s sons and grandsons, his daughters, and five hundred boys and five hundred girls for presentation to the Mongol Emperor; each high official of the Korean government similarly was requested to send a daughter, a thousand girls and a thousand boys; and the Korean Crown Prince himself was ordered to lead this retinue.\(^{122}\)

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\(^{120}\) For a detailed account of the 1231 war between the Mongols and Korea, see Henthorn, *Korea: the Mongol Invasions*, 61-7.

\(^{121}\) Ibid., 71- 72.

\(^{122}\) Ibid., 68.
While trying to keep on good terms with the Mongols but meeting as few of their tribute demands as possible, Korea refused to accede to the Mongol requests to send hostages and ignored their demands for a list of the names and positions of civil and military officials. Meanwhile, Korea’s top policy makers decided to go on resisting the Mongol forces in 1232 and moved the capital to Kanghwa Island. Following the decision, the ruling class of Korea entered Kanghwa and the general populace was ordered to take refuge in mountain fortresses or on islands.

Nor surprisingly, this decision provoked further invasions from the Mongols. On Korea’s part, the move to transfer the capital to Kanghwa was to utilize the Mongol army’s fear of the sea and to maximize Korea’s maritime strength. As such, it was not easy for the Mongols to capture the island to defeat the Korean forces, for the Mongols “could only glare across this narrow strip of sea and call to the Koryŏ [Korean] defenders to come out onto the mainland.” On the mainland of the Korean peninsula, some of the peasantry such as the army of slaves led by Chi Kwang-su fought bravely to defend their town but severe suffering and destruction were forced upon the lives of the Korean people during this period. Only after twenty seven years in 1259 did the King of Korea come back to the mainland and enter into formal tribute relations with the Mongol Empire.

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123 According to Koryŏsa, the official history of the Koryŏ period of Korea (918-1392), Korea’s decision to move its capital to Kanghwa was made in large part due to the Korean government’s inability and unwillingness to meet Sartaq’s unending appetite for tributes. See Gari Ledyard, “Two Mongol Documents from the Koryŏsa,” Journal of the American Oriental Society 83, no. 2 (April-June, 1963): 225-239. See p. 226 for this particular reference.

124 Lee, A New History of Korea, 148.
The Korean resistance against the Mongols described above tells us that the interest mechanism of the tribute system was breached in the form of heavy tributes and forceful interference in domestic affairs of Korea, which caused a rejection of the Mongol-centered order. This point becomes clearer when we remember that historically Korea had entered tribute relations with China, be it the Han Empire, the Tang Empire or Song China, on a voluntary, reciprocal basis for mutual gains in economy and security. The crisis under the Mongol Empire originated from Mongols’ resort to coercion and force, resulting in a rupture in Korea’s acceptance of the tribute system-based order.

Japan’s Rejection of the Mongol-centered Order

The Mongols’ record on Japan proved far less successful than that of Korea, which turned out to limit their world-wide expansion to the East Sea/Sea of Japan. Both in 1274 and 1281, Japan fended off the Mongols’ invasions, and was able to stay away from the Mongols’ likely demands for heavy tributes and domestic interference. Although those two actual invasions were relatively brief, Japan’s defensive war against the Mongol threat lasted nearly for a generation (1265-1291), giving its feudal society a new consciousness as a nation apart from other countries. The significance of these events is considered as one of the “nation-defining” moments in the history of Japan. That the storms (divine winds; kamikaze)

wrecked the Mongol fleets on both occasions gave rise to the popular belief that Japan was being protected by gods, helping the development of Shinto thought. More than anything, Japan’s actions spoke loudly of its rejection of the Mongol-centered order.

When the Mongols contacted Japan for the first time in 1266 to open diplomatic relations, it was the Southern Song that Japan had been maintaining relatively close relations in East Asia. Although Japan was wary of establishing any formal diplomatic relations either with the Southern Song or Korea, Japan’s Kamakura government did not intervene to prohibit private trade or cultural exchanges, and foreign trade with the Southern Song grew during the period preceding the Mongol invasions. According to a Chinese record, at least forty to fifty Japanese ships, each with crews of several hundred, were making annual visits to Chinese ports in the early thirteenth century. In that light, the initial Mongol decision to win over Japan most likely had to do with the strategic calculation to

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126 Varley, Imperial Restoration in Medieval Japan, 36-7.
127 According to Hori, it was the members of the Court who had opposed the opening of diplomatic relations despite requests from the Southern Song and Korean governments. He states: “As years passed it became a matter of tradition, rather than reason, that the Japanese should not be friendly with foreigners. See Kyotsu Hori, The Mongol Invasions and the Kamakura Bakufu, (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1967), 91.
128 Ibid., 80-2.
129 During the hundred-year period leading to the Mongol invasions of Japan, the record indicates that more than 120 Japanese and Chinese Buddhist monks had been traveling free from the official sanction of the Japanese government. Ibid., 81.
sever their trading relations, thereby stopping the fueling of war finance to the Southern Song.\textsuperscript{130}

Once Kubilai subjugated Korea to become its tributary state in 1259, he ordered the King of Korea to take the responsibility of negotiating with Japan and to prepare for 10,000 men and 1000 ships for an invasion of Japan.\textsuperscript{131} Korea’s diplomatic efforts to stop the plan went unheeded by Kubilai. Kubilai’s approach to Japan, at least outwardly, took the form of a traditional Chinese Emperor’s style of requesting “the King of Japan” to send tributary missions to the court of the Emperor. His letter of 1266 claimed that he had received the Mandate of Heaven and stated the following:

Although the legal relation between ourselves and the Koreans is that of sovereign and subjects, yet in feeling we are as father and children. We assume Your Highness and your subjects have known this. Koryŏ [Korea] is our eastern tributary state. Japan is located near to Koryŏ and since her founding has time and again established relations with the Middle Kingdom. However, since our accession you have not yet sent an envoy to our court; neither have you indicated a desire to establish friendly relations with us… We hope that henceforth you will enter into friendly relations with us, and that both our people and yours will enjoy peace and harmony… Who would care to appeal to arms?\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{130} Another view suggests that the Mongols wanted to give Korea a difficult time for it facilitated the Mongol control over the Korean government. See Shoji, “Japan and East Asia,” 415; and Hori, \textit{The Mongol Invasions and the Kamakura Bakufu}, 95-6.

\textsuperscript{131} Historians concur that Korea indeed made several attempts to stop the Mongol Empire from invading Japan.

\textsuperscript{132} Hori, \textit{The Mongol Invasions and the Kamakura Bakufu}, 102.
Despite the seemingly polite tone of Kubilai’s letter, the Japanese government led by Hojo Tokimune had been informed of the Mongol activities through the Song priests and thought, perhaps quite correctly, that the letter was tantamount to a declaration of war. Greatly alarmed by the impending threat from the Mongols, Japan decided not to reply, and began preparations for defense. Tokimune’s vassals, who had holdings in Kyushu but remained elsewhere, were called to rush back to their fiefs in Kyushu for its coastal defense. Kamakura was also considering its own plan of a preemptive attack on Korea, the Mongols’ base, and appointed Muto Tunesuke and Otomo Yoriyasu as commanders.

The first Mongol invasion of Japan in November 1274 was composed of an army of 15,000 Mongol, Chinese and Jurchen troops, plus an advance force of 5,000 Mongols and 6,000 to 8,000 Korean soldiers who had been waiting in Korea’s port city Pusan for departure. Another 15,000 men were recruited for the ships numbering 900, which were built by 30,500 Korean laborers upon Kubilai’s order to the King of Korea. The armada under the command of the Mongol general Hsin-tu brought destruction to the islands of Tsushima, Ike, and the coast of Hizen of Kyushu, and then engaged in desperate battles in Hakata. It is said that the Japanese soldiers who were used to fighting individual combat were taken aback by the Mongol invaders who advanced and retreated in close knit units, while employing strange military

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133 Mongol and Korean envoys came to Japan nearly every year after the 1266 envoy, but none of them made it to Kyoto or Kamakura.
134 Shoji, *Japan and East Asia*, 417.
tactics and new weapons.\textsuperscript{136} It was a great storm during the night that damaged the invaders’ fleets badly that forced them to withdraw. Many are reported to have drowned, among the 13,000 who lost their lives.\textsuperscript{137}

The Mongols did not give up, and a year later in 1275, sent another official delegation to Japan for negotiations, which actually arrived in Kamakura for the first time.\textsuperscript{138} However, Hoju Tokimune executed them. By the time of the second offensive by the Mongols, Japan was better prepared. The Kamakura government rewarded some 120 warriors with land holdings for their valor and reorganized the costal guard system to extend to the coast of western Honshu. Also, the construction of stone walls along the Hakata Bay coastline began in 1276 and was completed in 1280, a year before the second Mongol invasion.

The second attack on Japan was carried by a great armada of 100,000 men and 3,500 ships in 1281, which was nearly double the size of the invasion force from the first time in 1274. Kubilai had again ordered Korea in 1279 to build a new fleet of 1,000 ships and to prepare 20,000 soldiers. By 1279, Kubilai had conquered the Southern Song, and was able to mobilize all their shipping for his second Japan campaign. Just as a decisive attack on Hakatak and mainland Kyushu was about to happen, a storm destroyed most of the fleets. According to a Korean source, of the 26,989 Koreans who participated in the second campaign, 7,592 of them did not

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 120-21.
As for the sources of casualties of the Mongols and the Chinese, the figures are vague: between 60 to 90 percent. Many leaders of the allied invading forces on the Mongol side are said to have given up fighting, because they were enlisted by the Mongol government by force. This may not be surprising, given that Kubilai was primarily relying on the Mongols’ former enemies, the Southern Song and Korean soldiers.

Returning to Hierarchy

A series of rejections by East Asian states to the Mongol-centered order above indicates a crisis in the East Asian states system. However, after the Mongol invasions of Korea and Japan, they went back to “accepting” the Mongol-centered order at a practical level. To put it differently, these two major states in East Asia passively stayed within Mongol hegemony. The practical acceptance of the Mongol-centered order by Korea and Japan was expressed differently. As for Korea, its government after the 1259 submission to the Mongol Emperor Kubilai took on the status of Mongol tributary and sent regular tributary missions. For Japan, the Kamakura government continued to be a part of the Mongol-centered order via trading relations. In other words, after the Mongol invasions of the Korea and Japan,

138 Nowhere in Mongol Shih (the official history of the Mongol Empire) is it stated that the campaign was a failure. See Hori, The Mongol Invasions and the Kamakura Bakufu, 128.
139 Ibid., p. 142.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
these states were practically placed below China in the hierarchy of East Asia, and remained as *status quo* powers under the Mongol-centered order.

In thinking about Japan’s “return” to the Mongol-centered order, the key lies in its *status quo* oriented foreign policy vis-a-vis the Mongol Empire. As a matter of fact, to say that Japan “accepted” or “returned” to the Mongol-centered order requires some clarification here, because after all Japan came out of those two invasions as a victor and was not forced to accept Mongol tributary status. However, two points deserve attention. First, Japan’s participation with East Asian international relations has primarily been conducted through trading relations, except for a brief period under the Muromachi government in the fifteenth century. In that light, Japan’s relations with the Mongols after the second invasion signify that it was participating in the Mongol-centered order through trading relations that time, too. According to the *Cambridge History of Japan*’s chapter on Japan’s relations with East Asia, Japan’s trading and cultural relations with the Mongol Empire was “brisk.” In fact, the Kamakura government had reduced its official vessels to China in 1264 as the Mongol threat loomed larger. But after the invasions, despite the continued alertness from a possible third invasion, it publicly authorized the trading vessels so that they would not be mistaken for wako (Japanese pirates).\(^{142}\)

The other piece of evidence of Japan’s practical acceptance of the Mongol-centered order can be found in the fact that it eventually gave up on a plan to launch

\[^{142}\] Shoji, “Japan and East Asia,” 422-3.
an attack on Korea to counter the Mongols. During the interim period between the first and second invasions, Japan actually picked the date for their attack to be the third month of 1276. By the end of 1275, the government sent high officers from Kamakura to the Western provinces, and ordered their vassals to prepare warships and to recruit crews for training.¹⁴³ The plan detailed that the Japanese forces would start from Hakata Bay under the command of Shoni Tsunesuke. The soldiers and ships were to be supplied by Kyushu, supplemented by other western provinces. But eventually Japan did not carry out the plans.

On the part of Korea, its acceptance of the Mongol-centered order was still practical in nature, but differed from that of Japan, because it involved not only trading relations but also a geo-political dimension. Beginning with King Wŏnjong in 1259 until the fall of the Mongol Empire eighty years later in 1368, Korea was a Mongol tributary, tied with marriage alliances between Korean Princes and Mongol Princesses. Provided that Korea indeed fought against the Mongols for nearly thirty years, it is quite a puzzle to see that Korea not only returned to the tributary relations, but also first asked on its part to be the Mongol Empire’s “son-in-law” state.

When Korea’s Crown Prince Chon came to present a letter of submission to the Mongols, then Prince Kubilai was said to have been pleased and declared: “Koryŏ [Korea], a nation of 10,000 li (distance); T’ai-tsung of the Tang Empire himself led an expedition against them and was unable to obtain their submission.

Now their Heir Apparent comes to me. This is the will of Heaven.”\textsuperscript{144} When the Crown Prince ascended the throne, a Mongol envoy arrived with an Imperial Edict with instructions from the Mongol Empire, including Korea’s transfer of the capital back to the mainland of the Korean peninsula, to which Korea responded meekly. In return, the Mongols promised to withdraw their forces from Korea.

It should be noted that Korea’s return to the Mongol-centered order did stop the warfare between Korea and the Mongol Empire, but their tributary relations were of a coercive nature. A first example of this was Kubilai’s order to get Korea involved in his Japan campaigns, as shown above. Secondly, unlike any other period in the history of Sino-Korean relations, the Mongols’ interference in Korea’s domestic political affairs was visible to the extent that they took advantage of the investiture to replace the incumbent King of Korea with a new one to their liking. Other Mongol demands involved sending hostages, submitting population registers, establishing post-stations, raising an army, providing provisions, and supporting the Mongol army.\textsuperscript{145} These all gave a very different character to the tribute system-based order under the Mongol Empire.

**Stability Mechanisms of the Mongol Hierarchy**

As we have seen in the above section, the China-centered hierarchical order in East Asia was restored by the late thirteenth century after having gone through

\textsuperscript{144} Henthorn, *Korea: the Mongol Invasions*, 152.
turbulence from the Mongol invasions of Korea and Japan. Then, the key question of the chapter is this: what lay beneath the restoration of this Mongol-centered order continuing the East Asian states system’s hierarchical structure? In practice, why did Japan give up a plan to invade Korea to launch a counterattack on the Mongol army and live under the reality of the Mongol-centered order? Why did Korea, after nearly thirty years of armed struggle, give up the fight in 1259 and instead become one of the most active participants of the Mongol Empire as the “son-in-law state”?

Below I make an argument that the Mongol-centered order in East Asia was upheld by the Mongols’ use of tribute practices through which they projected military power. A close look into the restoration processes of the Mongol hierarchy after the invasions of Korea and Japan reveals that it was primarily the fear of the Mongol power combined with the cost-benefit calculation of interests and the degree of elite socialization that led the secondary states to stay within it at a *practical* level.

\[145\] Ibid., 194.
Figure 8. Return to the Mongol hierarchy: Power, Interest, and Elite Socialization

The Mongol Power

Undoubtedly, it was basically a function of the superior Mongol military power that Japan decided not to attack Korea in 1276, while Korea ultimately gave up their armed struggle against the Mongol Empire. Mongol power spoke for itself—it was the Mongol Empire’s military conquests that put an effective end to East Asia’s previous multi-state system during the Song period in the tenth through the
twelfth centuries. The Mongols mastered the art of siege, exceptional military organization, horsemanship, and brilliant tactics, and as a result, their offensive capabilities were unmatched anywhere else in the world. Fighting multiple fronts, by the time the Mongols defeated the Southern Song in 1279 and unified all of China, the Mongol Empire had either conquered or subjugated all the states in continental Asia and beyond in less than a century.

As for Japan, there still is a controversy as to how strong the Japanese forces were at the time of the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century. Against the commonly-held view that it was mainly thanks to the fierce storms that Japan was able to fend off the Mongols, Thomas Conlan, through his analysis of Japanese warrior Takezaki Suenaga’s scrolls on the Mongol invasions, makes an argument that the Japanese were “in little need of divine intervention.” Conlan claims that even without the help of the storms, the Japanese were able to fight against the Mongols to a standstill against the invading forces. Similarly, George Samson takes notice of “the courage and discipline” of the Kamakura government’s military men as an important contributing factor to Japan’s victory over the Mongols.

146 There were two sets of triangular interstate relations in the check and balance mode in East Asia: 1) Korea-Song-Liao/Jin and 2) Western Xia-Song-Liao/Jin. For details, see Peter Yun, Rethinking the Tribute System.

147 Interestingly, Suenaga’s scrolls describe that Japan’s military skills superseded those of all other nations, and suggests that the Mongols wanted to subjugate Japan because the strength of Japan and the Mongols combined would achieve world conquest. See Thomas Conlan, In Little Need of Divine Intervention (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 201.

148 See Conlan, In Little Need of Divine Intervention, the entire book.

Although there are no official records by the Kamakura officials for the number of Japanese men who actually fought against the Mongols, scholars such as Ishii Susumu and Kaizu Ichiro estimated it to range from 2,300 to 6,000 men, based on duty reports and other administrative documents.\textsuperscript{150} Notably, the Kamakura government did not order a nation-wide mobilization, and those Japanese warriors at war with the invading forces were from only the western provinces.\textsuperscript{151} It is unclear how big an army it would have been in case of a national mobilization. A hint of Japan’s total military power may be found in the total strength of those mobilized in 1221 against Gotoba’s imperial forces, which was less than 190,000.\textsuperscript{152}

In any event, although it would be wrong to assume that Japan was simply too small to dare to challenge the Mongol power, it is apparently true that Japan’s decision not to attack on Korea in a bid for a preemptive attack on the Mongol Empire had to do with their estimate of the stronger Mongol forces. Once the Kamakura government ordered the Kyushu Defense Commissioner to recruit soldiers to join a naval attack after the Mongols’ first invasion, a great number of warriors are said to have applied to participate. Ultimately, however, Kamakura decided that Japan could not afford to implement both offensive and defensive strategies, and

\textsuperscript{150} Conlan, \textit{In Little Need of Divine Intervention}, 261.
\textsuperscript{151} Hori’s answer to the question why the Kamakura government did not mobilize a nation-wide force had to do with the nature of the Mongol threat being that of “a waiting game.” Furthermore, he notes poor communication and transportation facilities, as well as political instability at that time within Japan. Hori, \textit{The Mongol Invasions and the Kamakura Bakufu}, 113-6.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 111.
opted to concentrate on building a powerful defense system.\textsuperscript{153} In terms of military technologies, the Mongols were also in a more advantageous position than Japan. While the Mongols used more advanced weapons that were effective for a long range, including crossbows and engines that could throw heavy missiles and combustible material, Japanese were more accustomed to one-on-one single combat.\textsuperscript{154}

In Korea’s case, too, power disparity between the Mongol and Korean military forces was a primary reason why Korea, despite unbearably heavy demands from the Mongol Empire, returned to accept the Mongol-centered order in 1259. By the time Korea was about to formally submit to the Mongol Empire in 1259, the lives of Koreans had been devastated by the cruelty of the war against the Mongols, and its government seized by the military during the invasions was rapidly losing the support of the peasantry and lower classes.\textsuperscript{155} According to the official history of the Koryŏ government Koryŏsa, in the aftermath of Jalairtai’s most destructive Mongol invasion in 1254, “an estimated 206,800 persons had been taken prisoner, the number of dead was beyond reckoning, and the countryside was reduced to ashes.”\textsuperscript{156} The point is that, despite the relative strength of Korea’s naval forces vis-à-vis the Mongol army,\textsuperscript{157} the increased Mongol pressure from amphibious warfare advancing further down to the south of the Korean peninsula eventually led Korea into its final submission in 1259.

\textsuperscript{153} Samson, \textit{A History of Japan to 1334}, 447.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 443.
\textsuperscript{155} Lee, \textit{A New History of Korea}, 149.
\textsuperscript{156} Herthorn, \textit{Korea: the Mongol Invasions}, 128.
On the other hand, the Mongols themselves decided to choose negotiations over a continued warfare with Korea, because they came to a conclusion that it was close to impossible to achieve a complete, unilateral victory. A letter from the Mongol Empire in 1260 illustrates the point: “Of all beneath Heaven who have not surrendered, there is only your nation and Song.” Roughly speaking, the bulk of the Korean forces calculated prior to the first Mongol invasion of 1231 is said to range from 42,000 to 48,000 men. It is worth mentioning here that by then, following the military revolt of 1170 and the subsequent military rule of the Ch’oe house, Korea’s military organization had gone through a major change; the Six Divisions’ regular army was reduced to a shadow of its name, and instead the top military ruler Ch’oe U’s private soldiery the Three Elite Patrols (the *sambyŏlch’o*; previously the *yabyŏlch’o*) was performing the public functions of police and combat against the Mongol forces at the public’s expense. After the formal submission of the Korean government, the Three Elite Patrols forces rose in opposition to the government’s decision and continued the bitter resistance against the Mongol-Korea allied forces on Cheju Island. But against the strong Mongol army, their armed resistance came to an end after four years in 1273.

The other indicator of the importance of the power mechanism in the restoration of the Mongol hierarchy is found in the palpable fear of Mongol power in

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157 Ibid., 131.
158 Ibid., 153.
159 Ibid., 57.
Korea and Japan. Even before the Mongols started their first invasion, the Korean government had been reluctant to enter into tribute relations in 1218 (as in brotherly relations) with the Mongols, because the Mongols were considered as “the most brutal of the all barbarians.” As for Japan, several records offer evidence that Kubilai’s 1266 letter and the ensuing attempts to establish relations with Japan frightened the court nobles and the Kamakura government, making them rush to shrines and temples with urgent prayers. Moreover, Japan did not dismantle its defense structure long after the second Mongol invasion, despite “an almost unbearable strain” on the Kamakura government. Also, as we will see later in Chapter 6, the psychological effect of the fear of the Mongols would guide Japan’s reaction to the rise of the Manchu in the early seventeenth century.

**The Interest Mechanism: Trade and Autonomy**

However, the power mechanism alone cannot explain why Japan did not completely isolate itself, but instead formed trading relations with the Mongol Empire. Nor can it account for Korea’s decision to submit to Mongol pressure in 1259, not earlier or later. As a matter of fact, as noted by Ki-baik Lee, it was possible for Korea to resist further if it had decided to do so, due to the geographical

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160 These forces were financed by public expenses. For a good account of Korea’s military organization during the Koryŏ government, see Lee, *A New History of Korea*, 116-8 and 145-47.
161 No, *ryŏmong oegyosa (the Diplomatic History of Koryŏ-Mongol Relations)*, 19.
162 Japan received intelligence reports from Korea, but had little information as to the conditions elsewhere in the vast Mongol Empire. It is not clear whether Japan knew of Kubilai’s order to stop the
advantage of the fortress Kanghwa Island and the Mongols’ fear of the sea. In addition to the fear of Mongol power, Korea and Japan accepted the reality of the Mongol-centered order, because they gained more than to lose by staying within it. For Japan, it was the economic profits that foreign trade with the Chinese merchants provided to its country. For Korea, it was the survival and autonomy of its country, which was a better option than a forced annexation as a part of the Mongol Empire.

In thinking about Japan’s motivation, it deserves a brief mention that for the years following the Mongol invasions, the Kamakura government was falling deeper into an economic quagmire, which contributed to its eventual fall in 1333. During those years, not only did Japan continue to maintain an expensive defense structure against the Mongols, but also faced the problem of not being able to grant rewards to the vassals and religious establishments that served the government during the Mongol invasions. It was against this backdrop that Japan responded on foreign trade, to make profits in order to finance big construction projects of building temple and shrines such as the Kenchoji, Sumiyoshi Shrine or the Tenryuiji in the final years of the Kamakura government. In fact, the Japanese economy during the Kamakura period had expanded by a considerable degree, and Sino-Japanese trade played an important part in this development. In particular, the Southern Song’s ship building and navigation

building of ships for the campaign against Japan by 1286. But it is possible that it knew through the exchanges with monks. Samson, *A History of Japan to 1334*, 452.
164 Shoji, “Japan and East Asia,” 423.
projects before its fall by the Mongols had given a big boost to Japan’s trading relations with the mainland. The fact that Japanese imports of Chinese luxury goods and copper coins eroded the economic foundation of the Kamakura government illustrates how deeply its economy was being integrated into the East Asian trading network. A good example of this will be a large amount of copper coins imported from China to be used as currency in Japan’s domestic exchanges.\textsuperscript{165} To sum, Sino-Japanese relations were sustained because of a stable demand for Japanese commodities on the part of China and wealthy vassals’ demands for Chinese luxury goods on the part of Japan.

Despite the fact that the nature of Sino-Japanese relations was economic in nature, it is important to note that the Kamakura government could have put a stop to these activities, and held authority over those trading vessels.\textsuperscript{166} Although there is no official evidence the Kamakura government actively encouraged foreign trade, it tended not to intervene to stop the commercial activities with China.\textsuperscript{167}

For Korea’s case, too, the return to the Mongol-centered order after the invasions had to do with Korea’s cost-benefit calculation. Faced with a situation of having to choose the lesser of two evils, Korea chose to endure the Mongol Empire’s coercive measures as its tributary state over continuing to fight the Mongols, which might have led to a forced annexation into the Mongol Empire. During those periods

\textsuperscript{165} Samson, \textit{A History of Japan to 1334}, 457.
\textsuperscript{166} At least two occasions offer supporting evidence. In 1254, the government ordered the Dazaifu to destroy all but five trading vessels with China, and 10 years later, issued an instruction to stop sending ships to China. Hori, \textit{The Mongol Invasions and the Kamakura Bakufu}, 82.
of armed struggle against the Mongols, Korea’s exchanges of envoys with the Mongol Empire gave it a good sense of the status of the withdrawal of Mongol forces from Korea. The highlight of the Mongol demands was repeated by Jalairtai just before Korea’s decision to finally submit to the Mongol Empire: “If the King comes out in person, I will then withdraw my forces. And if you order the King’s son to enter our Court, eternally, there will be no later grief.”

Therefore, Korea’s calculated pros and cons of re-entering and staying in the tribute relations with the Mongol Empire were based on the benefits that came with the tribute practices. In a sense, the fact that the King of Korea received the Mongol imperial investiture meant that an independent position of the King would be guaranteed by the Mongol Emperor. After all, Korea turned out to be the only country in the Mongol Empire to remain a sovereign state, not as an annexed part of the Mongol Empire. And the Korean King’s position would be further protected by the authority of the Mongol Emperor once he entered into a marriage alliance with the Mongol Empire. Korea’s request for the marriage with Mongol Empire was designed mainly as a means to protect the King’s position, compromised but still independent in Korean domestic politics, but also helped to lessen the degree of Mongol exploitation of Korean resources on occasion. It should be noted that

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167 Ibid, 80-4.
168 Henthorn, Korea: The Mongol Invasions, 131.
169 Kim, hanchung kwan’gyesa (The History of Sino-Korean Relations), 512.
170 Jae-sŏk Sim, koryŏkugwang Ch’ae k pongyŏn’gu (The Investiture Relations of the Koryŏ Government of Korea), 183.
Korea’s submission and the sending of tributes raised the authority of Kubilai who himself was in the middle of a domestic power struggle.\textsuperscript{171}

Nevertheless, it is true that the Mongol exploitation of the tribute relations in its relations with Korea was indeed enormous, a high price that Korea had to bear until Mongol power was weak enough to be challenged by Korea again in the 1350s.\textsuperscript{172} The so-called Six Demands of the Mongol Empire was unique to Mongol tribute practices not found in any other Chinese Empire. Typically, the core characteristics of the tribute system implemented by many dynasties of China throughout the history of the Chinese Empire were 1) non-interference in the domestic politics of tributary states and 2) exchange of tributes and gifts at a symbolic level to acknowledge the superiority of China over its neighbors in East Asia.\textsuperscript{173} However, the Mongol tribute practices were used to actually extract resources of the conquered.

First proclaimed by Cinggis Khan, and later repeated by his grandson Kubilai, the imperial Mongol governance style transitioning from nomadic to sedentary power is reflected in the Six Demands, which lists as follows: Korea must 1) send hostages including the Crown Prince, 2) submit population registers, 3) establish post-stations, 4) raise an army for the Mongol Empire, 5) provide provisions, and 6)

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\textsuperscript{171} Henthorn, \textit{Korea: The Mongol Invasions}, 154.
\textsuperscript{172} For a good overview of the Mongol-Korea relations during this period after Korea’s final submission, see Dong-ik Chang, \textit{Koryŏhugi oegyosa yŏn’gu (A Study of Diplomatic History during the Late Koryŏ Period)} (Seoul: Ichogak, 1997); and Kim, \textit{hanchung kwan’gyesa (The History of Sino-Korean Relations)}, 520.
\textsuperscript{173} Kim, \textit{hanchung kwan’gyesa (The History of Sino-Korean Relations)}, 518.
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support the Mongol army. Korea took great pains to delay the transfer of its capital back to the mainland of the Korean peninsula and avoided implementing these Six Demands, passively resisting Mongol pressure. But it was unavoidable that Korea saw its sovereign rights infringed through the tribute practices, including the forced mobilization of Korea for the Mongols’ invasions of Japan, the establishment of the Mongol administrative organs in Korea, and the Mongols’ actual control over the investiture of the King of Korea. Nevertheless, an infringement of sovereignty by the Mongol Empire was a better option for Korea than no sovereignty at all.

**Elite Socialization**

In addition to the mechanisms of power and interests, for a complete picture one must turn to the degree to which the ruling elites of Japan and Korea were socialized into the idea that the Mongol Emperor symbolized moral superiority over their countries. In fact, this third mechanism of elite socialization explains the kind of acceptance that the secondary states showed toward the Mongol-centered order. The ruling elites of both Korea and Japan did not accept the idea of the moral superiority of the Mongol Emperor, which explains why the Mongol-centered order took a coercive character. In other words, they accepted their place below the Mongol Empire at a practical level, not taking it as legitimate or culturally appealing.

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In order to further inquire into this question of elite socialization and its impact on the Mongol-centered order, it is necessary to understand the ideological underpinnings of Japanese and Korean societies first, from which these top policy makers were drawing their legitimacy for their domestic rule. Simply put, in that light, Japan’s Kamakura government rulers had nothing to gain by accepting the Chinese tributary status. The Korean rulers, once forced to become a Mongol tributary, attempted to take advantage of the position opportunistically to suppress their political opponents. However, this was also done by resorting to claims of Mongol power, not the appeal of Mongol moral superiority. As such, in both cases, the return to the Mongol-centered order was basically a decision free of the ideological influence of China and its confluence with local cultures of the secondary countries at this point.

As a matter of fact, the Kamakura government established in the late twelfth century had marked a point in Japanese history as the first of a succession of feudal warrior governments in Japan until the nineteenth century.\(^{175}\) It was a period when Japan had begun developing the uniquely Japanese style of dual power structure of a *de jure* sovereign, the Japanese Emperor in Kyoto with the Chinese-style codes on the one hand, and a *de facto* ruler, the *shogun* in Kamakura on the other. As such, it was the *shogun* in the Kamakura government that was taking control of Japan’s

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\(^{175}\) For a comprehensive overview of foreign relations during this period, a document called *Zenrin Kokuhoki (an Account of Good Neighborly Relations as a Treasure of Our Country)* completed in 1470 is widely used. For a translated reference, see Charolotte von Verschuer, *Japan’s Foreign
foreign policy during the Mongol invasions of Japan in the thirteenth century. Importantly for this chapter’s question, it was noteworthy that the shift in power center from Kyoto to Kamakura also signaled the decline of Chinese influence enjoyed by the court nobles and “the beginning of a more truly indigenous culture.”

Two dominant thoughts of the Kamakura period were Buddhism and the shinkoku ideology (Japan as the country of gods), thus leaving little room for Confucianism whose tenets emphasize the moral superiority of China. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to trace the tenets of Buddhism and shinkoku ideology, most Buddhist sects of that time took on a role of state protectors offering prayers for the Kamakura government. Against the trend, a reformist monk Nichiren is famous for having predicted the Mongol invasions of Japan in his 1260 treatise Rissho Ankoku Ron (a treaty on establishing the correct teaching for the peace and security of the land) and was persecuted for this advice to the Kamakura government.

As for the shinkoku ideology, the Mongol invasions of Japan played a role in giving it new importance as another source of state protection for the Kamakura

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177 Varley, Imperial Restoration in Medieval Japan, 4-38.
government, which had previously been regarded as “little more than a derivative of Buddhism.” According to Paul Varley,

The experience of the Mongol invasions and the kamikaze confirmed in a strongly religious sense that the most powerful of these sources of protection were the kami [gods] and that Japan alone enjoyed its divine benefits. The potentiality for such a claim to uniqueness was, of course, inherent in Shinto from earliest times. But it was not until the events and intellectual developments of the Kamakura period that shinkoku, with the meaning of “divinely protected land,” came to be widely recognized as a special quality of the Japanese state.

That the Kamakura government employed the shinkoku ideology indicated that Japan’s unique position and identity as a country of gods was to be emphasized in East Asian international relations, and whose assertion was opposed to China’s claim of its emperor being the Son of Heaven. As we will notice later in Chapter 5 and 6, the shinkoku ideology, after this formative period as a state ideology, would continue to shape Japan’s ideological undercurrents vis-à-vis China, from which its ruling elites made their foreign policy decisions discouraging Japan from seeking formal diplomatic relations with China.

Likewise, a complete picture of Korea’s return to the Mongol-centered order by resuming tribute relations with the Mongol Empire cannot be understood unless one examines the degree to which Korean ruling elites were socialized into the

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180 Ibid., 38.
Confucian idea of the moral superiority of the Chinese Emperor. A few observations
deserve mention. First, throughout the entire period of the Mongol invasions of
Korea, the Koryŏ government was being controlled by the Ch’oe military house,
while the King was being reduced to a figurehead position.181 Despite the strong
Buddhist influence on the lives of both the ruling elites and the general populace, the
Koryŏ government had been founded on the basis of Confucian principles and
accordingly, adopted them actively into various government affairs. The King
Sŏngjong, for example, selected students for study abroad to Song China to study
Confucianism, while establishing a national university (kukchagam) built on the
Tang Empire’s model to produce capable Confucian scholar bureaucrats.182 However,
it should be noted that during those sixty years of military rule, Confucianism was
going through a declining phase.

A second observation has to do with debates within the Korean government
leading to the final submission to the Mongol Empire, which reveals the fact that the
government was divided between pro-negotiation and pro-war groups.183 There is
little doubt that both groups bore anti-Mongol sentiment,184 but it was the King and

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181 For a study on an attempt to reinvent an image of the Koryŏ King after the submission, see In-ho
Kim, “wŏngansŏpgi isangjŏk in’ganhyŏngŭi yŏksasang chuguwa hyŏngt’ae (Pursuit and Forms of
Historical Ideal-type during the Period of the Mongol Interference of Koryŏ),” Yŏksawa Hyŏnsil
182 For various efforts made by the Koryŏ government to promote Confucianism for governance
purposes, see Kim, hanchung kwan’gyesa (The History of Sino-Korean Relations), 433-445.
183 See Henthorn, Korea: the Mongol Invasions, Chapter 5; and Ung-sŏk Ch’ae, “wŏngansŏpgi
sŏngnihakjadŭl’i hwagwangwa kukkagwan (the China-centered ideology and state ideology of
Confucian scholars during the period of the Mongol [Mongol] interference),” Yŏksawa Hyŏnsil
184 Ibid., 103.
his Confucian scholar bureaucrats who advocated negotiations with the Mongols to end the war, while the military wanted to continue armed resistance. Once this understanding of the domestic politics comes into the picture, it sheds light on the timing of the final submission as 1259, which is immediately after the collapse of the military rule of the Ch’oe house in Korea.\footnote{Henthorn, Korea: the Mongol Invasions, 132-6. Rather, Ch’oe U’s fall had to with discontent among the leadership group and general populace, which was aggravated by Korea’s long armed conflict with the Mongols.}

This occurred when the military rule by the Ch’oe house lost support from the general populace as well as the leadership groups within the government. The fall of the top military man Ch’oe U was due to an internal power struggle with the alliance of the Confucian bureaucrats supportive of the King and the military faction Kim Injun. At this point, however, it was not necessarily the ideological hold of Confucianism, and the ideology vis-à-vis China did not provide a rationale for the Confucian scholars to take action against the Ch’oe military house.\footnote{For example, Kim In-jun who belonged to the military but worked for Ch’oe U’s fall supported Korea’s armed struggle against the Mongols.}

A third observation is concerned with the responses of the King of Korea and his Confucian scholar bureaucrats to the Mongols as the Son of Heaven after accepting the reality of the Mongol-centered order.\footnote{Hyŏn-Ch’ŏl Do, “wŏnmyŏngkyoch’egi koryŏ sadae bûi sojunghwa úisik (An Awareness as a Small Center among the Koryŏ Confucian Scholars during the Mongol [Yuan]-Ming Transition),” Yŏksawa Hyŏnsil (History and Reality) 37 (2000): 99-123; and Ik-ju Yi, “14 segi yuhakcha’ui hyŏnsilinsigwa sŏngnihak suyongkwajŏngūi yŏn’gu (A Study on the Confucian Scholars’ Awareness of the Reality during the Fourteenth Century and the Acceptance Process of Neo-Confucianism),” Yŏksawa Hyŏnsil (History and Reality) 49 (2003): 125-53.} The answer is found in the
flexibility of their adoption of Confucianism as well as its use in foreign affairs.\textsuperscript{188} When compared to the Chosŏn government of Korea during the early seventeenth century that refused to accept the Qing-centered order due to the Qing origin of the barbarian Manchu tribe, the Confucian scholars of the Koryŏ government in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were much more flexible in accepting the Mongol-centered order despite the Mongols’ “barbarian” origin. This is because Korea itself had not been as thoroughly indoctrinated with Confucianism as it would later during the seventeenth century.

According to Ung-sŏk Ch’ae, Korea acknowledged the Mongol Emperor as Son of Heaven based on the\textit{power reality} of the Mongols having unified all of China and beyond. Behind this attitude, the Mongol Empire’s adoption of Confucianism as its official teaching of the empire facilitated this compromise with the reality of Mongol power. To clarify, the ideological element of Confucianism accepting the Mongol Empire as the center was not a factor leading to the change in Korea’s foreign policy behavior, but rather came as a result of compromising with the reality of Mongol power after Korea’s final submission in 1259.\textsuperscript{189}

\textbf{Conclusion: Tribute Practices under the Mongol Empire}

\textsuperscript{188} For a good discussion on the introduction of “Neo-Confucianism” into Korea during the Mongol Empire, see, hyŏn-ch’ol Do, “wŏngansŏpgi Sasŏjipchu ihaeqa sŏngnihak suyong (An Understanding of Sasujapchu and the Introduction of Neo-Confucianism in Korea during the Mongol Empire’s Interference Period),” \textit{Yŏksawa Hyŏnsil (History and Reality) 49} (2003): 9-35.

\textsuperscript{189} Ch’ae, \textit{wŏngansŏpgi sŏngnihakjadŭlŭi hwaigwangwa kukkagwan (the China-centered ideology and state ideology of Confucian scholars during the period of the Mongol interference)}, 08-9.
The Mongol invasions of Korea and Japan were among the early events of East Asia where East Asian states featured in the world history. We notice that Korea came very close to the end of its existence as a state during the Mongol invasions of Korea for nearly thirty years. And the Mongol invasions of Japan provided Japan with the “distinct feeling of Japanese uniqueness and superiority” from the experience of the divine winds (kamikaze), which spoke loud during World War II as an ideological ground upon which Japan’s militarist government mobilized the people of Japan into the war effort. These historical events could have changed the course of East Asian diplomatic history by disrupting Asia’s hierarchical order with China at the center, but it did not happen.

The chapter has shown that the Mongol strategy of governing East Asian states system rested on tribute practices through which the Mongol Empire projected its power. The key to the persistence of East Asia’s hierarchical order lay in the extent to which China’s institutional innovations of tribute practices that locked in power, interest, and ideas were turned into sources of international authority over time. In that light, the Mongol Empire in the history of East Asian diplomatic history was still comparatively speaking at an early stage in which Mongol tribute practices did not represent international authority, but more Mongol coercion in East Asia. As seen above, all three mechanisms of power, interest, and elite socialization played an important role in the acceptance of the Mongol-centered order by its periphery in the late thirteenth century. The power mechanism constituted the backbone of the
Mongol hierarchy, while the interest mechanism of cost-benefit calculation on the part of the secondary states explains why both Korea and Japan actually returned to the Mongol-centered order after the Mongol invasions of their countries. The tribute practices were still “practices,” not yet developed into a system, and there were a lot of things done in the Mongol way under the guise of the tribute system of the Chinese Emperor.

With Mongol power and the cost-benefit calculation as two primary mechanisms, the Mongol-centered order was upheld at a practical level by its participants. Both Korea and Japan did not see their position below the Mongols as legitimate, signifying that Mongol superiority originated not from the ideological claim of China’s moral superiority, but from the reality of their power. This has to do with the fact that Confucianism had not yet taken root within their domestic politics. And this meant that their China policy was not yet influenced by the ideological claim of Confucianism, which was that China’s emperor was the Son of Heaven.
FIVE
The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea, 1592-1598

Introduction

Japan’s warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s letter to the Imperial Regent Hidetsugu in 1592 presents a glimpse of what might have been an alternative to the China-centered order, a “Japan-centered order” in early modern Asia.¹⁹⁰ Rejoicing over the early success of his army’s invasion of Korea, Hideyoshi revealed his vision to move the Japanese Emperor to China’s capital as part of twenty-five plans for conquering the Ming Empire, to designate three of his sons as the candidates to rule over Korea, and to expand Japan’s domination as far as India to establish the Japanese Empire in Asia.¹⁹¹

The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea in the late sixteenth century, the Imjin War, is called Asia’s first “world war,” marking the first hegemonic war between China

¹⁹⁰ For a good discussion of Japan’s attempt to establish hierarchical order with Japan at the center, see Yasunori Arano, “The Formation of a Japanocentric World Order,” International Journal of Asian Studies 2, no. 2 (2005): 185-216. Arano argues that early modern Japan adopted a Sinocentric rhetoric in governing relations with its “tributary states” for a ‘Japanocentric world order (nihongata kai chitsujo).’ Also note that the idea of conquering The Ming Empire was first proclaimed by Hideyoshi’s predecessor Oda Nobunaga in 1582, who was one of the three unifiers of Japan.
¹⁹¹ The letter was sent on May 18, in the year Tensho 20 (1592) to Toyotomi Hidetsugu who was the adopted son Hideyoshi had installed as the Imperial Regent. See Elisonas, “The Inseparable Trinity: Japan’s Relations with China and Korea,” 270-71; Etsuko Kang, Diplomacy and Ideology in Japanese-Korean Relations: From the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century (Houndmills, Basingstoke, and Hamshire: Macmillan Press; New York: St. Martin Press, 1997), 87. For an argument that Hideyoshi was aiming for an empire, see Elizabeth Berry, Hideyoshi (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1982). According to Arano, Japan under Hideyoshi wanted to have Europe and the Ming Empire as trading partners, while envisioning Korea, Ryukyu, Luzon (the Philippines) and Taiwan as its subordinate states. See Arano, “The Formation of a Japanocentric World Order,” 206.
and Japan in the history of East Asia. In a bid to conquer China, Hideyoshi mobilized the entire country of Japan with 158,800 expeditionary men in nine divisions, and fought against an alliance of 50,000 to 60,000 Korean and approximately 100,000 Chinese troops in the battlefield of the Korean peninsula. The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea was also the first large-scale warfare in the region in which East Asian states employed modern weaponry, including Japan’s muskets, Korea’s turtle-boats, and China’s cannon and other firearms.

Upon close scrutiny of the security environment of the late sixteenth century East Asia, one realizes that the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea indeed posed one of the biggest challenges to the hierarchical order centered on China, where it could have been possibly replaced by a Japan-centered one. In this rare historical moment, Japanese military power was in fact as formidable as that of China, seriously threatening Chinese hegemony in the region. For example, Kenneth Swope describes Hideyoshi’s Japanese armies as “arguably the most skilled in the world at the time,” while the Ming Empire had been forced to face two-front wars, struggling to fight off the Mongols in the north.

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194 Kang, Diplomacy and Ideology in Japanese-Korean Relations, 107. A bigger number is suggested in Kang for the size of Japan’s expeditionary forces (201,200 men) from a total of 303,500 troops that Hideyoshi mobilized. For the size of the war, see also Swope, “Crouching Tigers, Secret Weapons,” 11.
196 Ibid., 11.
This chapter on the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea (1592-1598) provides my second case study that serves as a counterfactual to the persistence of the China-centered hierarchical order in the East Asian states system. My focus is to bring our attention to the continuation of the Ming-centered hierarchical order, despite the war being on this large a scale. By the time the war ended with Japan’s total defeat, East Asia had gone through big changes both at the domestic and international levels. Interestingly, however, the Ming-centered order would be restored in a way that looked a lot like the pre-war period. Perhaps it should not come as a surprise that the Ming hierarchy was rebuilt after the war, because the Sino-Korean allied forces came out as the victor vis-à-vis Japan. However, once we are reminded that the Ming Empire found itself in a much reduced position in terms of power through its war efforts and other factors, it is puzzling why the Ming-centered order was rebuilt the way it was.

The Ming Emperor continued to act as the nominal “Son of Heaven,” while Korea resumed the sending of its tributary missions to Beijing. Japan and Korea began negotiations for normalizing their diplomatic relations almost immediately after the war ended. Upon Japan’s request, the Ming Empire allowed Japan to resume the tally trade with China under the same conditions as the prewar rules. A particularly striking aspect of the post-war order after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea involved Korea’s acceptance of the Ming-centered order at a normative level, taking its inferior position below the Ming Empire as morally justified. Why
would Korea strengthen its hierarchical relationship with the Ming Empire even further, when the Ming power was so weakened to the extent that the Ming government had to request military assistance from Korea and even from Japan to fight against the rising Manchus?

As a matter of fact, in the eyes of students of international relations, early seventeenth century East Asia presented many windows of opportunities for Korea and Japan to step away from the Ming-centered order, as the structure of the international system was fluid with rapid changes in the power distribution. For example, Japan could have joined hands with the Manchus to form a joint military front against the Ming Empire, thereby manipulating the power competition between the Ming Empire and the Manchus; if Korea feared the superior Ming power more than that of the Japanese, it was not entirely inconceivable to think of a Japan-Korea deal to defeat the Ming Empire, to form a different kind of international order in East Asia;\(^{197}\) Korea had the option of bandwagoning with the Manchus to balance against the Ming Empire. In sum, under the reestablished Ming-centered order, there was a clear gap between the reality of power distribution and the kind of governance system of the Ming-centered order. And yet, there was no direct challenge to the Ming-centered order in the aftermath of the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea. Therefore, the questions to be asked in this chapter include: Why was the post-war Ming-

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\(^{197}\) As noted earlier, the Japan-Korea deal was *not* entirely out of the question despite the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea. Some officials within the Korean government seriously considered Japan’s offer of military aid after the 1627 Manchu invasion of Korea, and suggested joining hands with Japan when the threat from the Manchus was on the rise in the early seventeenth century.
centered order still hierarchical despite the decline of the Ming power? Why would Japan and Korea accept Ming hierarchy under the circumstances?

In this chapter, I argue that the restoration of the Ming-centered order despite the decline of the Ming power after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea can best be explained by the Ming institutional innovations of the tribute system that had already locked in its power, fused with the Confucian idea of Ming moral superiority. Its institutional stickiness was critical for the Ming Empire to reassert its superiority over others despite the relative decline of its power, since the Ming tribute system had been serving certain functions that were mutually beneficial both for the Ming Empire and its neighbors.

In particular, against the backdrop of the high level of elite socialization of the Korean ruling elites to Neo-Confucianism throughout the sixteenth century, Korea, through the experience of national crisis, came to accept the Ming tribute system as an embodiment of international authority. In other words, the symbolic power of the Chinese Emperor embedded in the Ming tribute system became a powerful tool for the King of Korea to legitimize his rule in domestic politics. Therefore, although the outcome of the war itself was made possible by the superior Ming power vis-à-vis Japan, the continuation of the Ming-centered order has to be understood through a combination of Ming power, the interest mechanism and elite socialization.

To elucidate my argument, in the first section of the chapter, I show that the
Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea was one of the most serious crises in the China-centered hierarchical order of the East Asian states system in early modern Asia. It analytically describes the processes during which the Ming-centered order was being restored after a shock from Japan’s challenge to the Ming-centered order. In the second section, I proceed with my argument that considers how Chinese and Japanese power competition, interests from the tribute practices, and the degree to which Korean and Japanese elites were socialized into Neo-Confucianism interplayed to explain the system’s stability after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea. I test the argument above using process-tracing methods by looking into the processes of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Korea, Japan and China in the aftermath of the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea. The final section concludes the chapter by providing some analysis on the relationship between power, ideas and interests, through the example of Asian international relations centering on the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea.

The Ming-centered Order: Crisis and Restoration

This section offers a description of how the Japanese growth in military power threatened the China-centered hierarchical order in East Asia during the late sixteenth century. To do so, I first examine what the pre-war Ming hierarchical order looked like in order to compare it against the post-war order. Then, it illustrates that
the Ming-centered order, despite the weakened power of the Ming Empire, was restored to continue with the prior hierarchical structure, with China at the center in the East Asian states system.

The Ming Hierarchy before the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea

Late fourteenth century East Asia witnessed a sea change in its international order with the founding of the Ming Empire in 1368 replacing the previous Mongol Empire (1271-1368). In Japan, the Muromachi government was newly established in 1392 after the long civil war (1336-92), while in the same year, the Chosŏn government succeeded the previous Koryŏ government in the Korean peninsula. The international order in East Asia from the late fourteenth to the early seventeenth century can best be defined as the Ming-centered hegemonic order. Until the order was shaken by Japan’s invasion of Korea in 1592, East Asia’s international relations between China, Korea and Japan formed a triangular structure, as the Kings of Japan and Korea as co-equals each formed a hierarchic relationship with the top center Ming Empire, receiving the investiture from the Chinese Emperor.

198 In the fifteenth century, the Ming-centered order was buttressed by effective rulers in China, Korea, Japan and the Ryukyu kingdom. Emperor Yung-lo of the Ming Empire, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu of Japan, King Sarong of Korea, and King Sho Shin of Ryukyu consolidated their rule in their respective
Figure 9. A triangular China-Korea-Japan relationship in the fifteenth century

Compared to the previous Mongol Empire, the Ming-centered hierarchical order did not heavily rely on the exercise of military power to govern the states system in East Asia, but involved a high level of inter-governmental diplomacy and foreign trade within the larger framework of official tribute relations. The Ming government outlawed private trade by prohibiting Chinese from going overseas for trade, thereby making the formal tribute trade accompanied by the formal tributary mission the only means for trade in East Asia. The Ming policy resulted in a great trading network linking China, Korea, Japan and other Southeast Asian states.


Here I refer to the Ming Empire’s foreign policy orientation in general to be relatively peaceful than that of the Mongol Empire. The Ming Empire, for example, invaded Vietnam and annexed it to be a part of the Ming Empire.

During the Ming Empire, Ryukyu sent the most tributary missions to the Ming court (171 times), the second was Vietnam (89 times), Siam ranked sixth in terms of the number of tributaries (73 times), Korea was tenth (30 times), Malacca was twelfth (23 times) and Japan was thirteenth (19 times). See Kang, *Diplomacy and Ideology in Japanese-Korean Relations*, 32. It was not until 1567 that The Ming Empire abolished this maritime prohibition policy after two hundred years, because of the impossibility of controlling private trade. For a comprehensive account of equal relations between
In East Asia, the Ming hierarchy was also denoted by the proper use of the title and era name in diplomatic documents. Throughout the Ming Empire, Korea continued to use the title “King of Korea,” signifying his standing in the Ming hierarchy as a subject of the Chinese Emperor, and used the Ming era name instead of its own in all its diplomatic documents. Japan’s ambivalent position within the China-centered order was similarly expressed in its use of title and era name. When the third shogun of the Muromachi government Yoshimitsu sought a secure place for Japan in the Ming-centered order, he famously referred himself as the King of Japan in his state letter that received the investiture from the Ming Emperor with the Ming era name in 1404. But reflecting Japan’s reluctance to place itself below China, Japan later used other titles indicating the letter writer was a subject of the Japanese Emperor and a head of warriors. 201 A rare moment in Japan’s formal tributary relations with China was therefore brief during the early Muromachi government, 202 faced with strong criticism from the court nobles and warriors within Japan. Since then, Japan continued the Ming tally trade relations without using the Ming era name or the title of the King of Japan.

Japan and Korea, see Sŭng-ch’ŏl Son, chosŏnsidae hanilkwan ‘gyesayŏn’gu (A Study on Korea-Japan Relations during the Chosŏn Period) (Seoul: Kyŏnginmuwhasa, 2006), especially Chapters 1 and 2. 201 Kang, Diplomacy and Ideology in Japanese-Korean Relations, 40. Note that the word “shin” indicating the subject of the Ming Emperor disappeared in Japan’s diplomatic documents. Also, the title seii-tai-shogun means that the letter write is the subject of the Japanese Emperor and a leader of warriors, not the head of state. 202 Starting with investiture from China as king of Japan, Japan started the official tally kango trade and tributary relations with The Ming Empire. Between 1433 and 1599, Japan sent eleven missions to The Ming Empire. See Ibid., 34.
Hideyoshi’s Bid to Conquer China

Hideyoshi, having completed the unification of the sixty six provinces and their daimyos (powerful military families) of Japan, was leading the Japanese state into “what was to be its most successful centralization prior to modern times.”203 During the unification process from his predecessor Oda Nobunaga’s time, armies increased in size, and Japan witnessed an important progression in vassal band organization and in military mobilization; its fighting capabilities were significantly strengthened by technological revolution, through the introduction of firearms from contact with the Europeans.204

In fact, the Japanese forces were faring extremely well once the invasion of Korea started on May 23, 1592.205 Korea’s port city Pusan fell the next day and Seoul in merely three weeks, and the Japanese troops speedily advanced all the way northward to Pyongyang without much difficulty. The Ming decision to intervene eventually reversed the course of the war, but the near parity of military power between the two sides was clear. Although it is not convincing that Japan could have

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203 John Hall, Nagahara Keiji and Kozo Yamamura, “Introduction,” in Japan Before Tokugawa: Political Consolidation and Economic Growth, 1500 to 1650, ed. John Hall, Nagahara Keiji and Kozo Yamamura (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 7-26. The authors note that roughly from 1500 to 1650 was the period of the great centralization in Japan prior to modern times. The period of Japan’s centralization was created by three powerful military leaders in Japanese history: Oda Nobunaga (1534-82), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1535-98), and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616).


205 There are many works that describe the battles of the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea. See, for example, Wŏn-rae Cho, saeroun kwanjŏmŭi Imjinwaeransa yŏn’gu (A Study on the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea from a New Perspective) (Seoul: Asea Muwhasa, 2005); Chang-hŭi Yi, Imjinwaeransa yŏn’gu (A Study on the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea) (Seoul: Asea Muwhasa, 1999); Min-ung Yi, Imjinwaeran haejŏnsa (the History of Imjin Naval War) (Seoul: ch’ŏngŏrām Media, 2004).
won the war if not for the death of Hideyoshi in 1598, it is of importance to note that Japanese power posed a serious challenge in this hegemonic war against China.

When the war ended with “a complete failure for the Japanese,” the scale of its destructiveness and cruelty had been unprecedented in Asian history and the losses of life in all three countries were incalculably great. Not only were the Japanese and Korean economies badly devastated, but their domestic politics fell into serious turmoil. The Japanese army abducted approximately 100,000 Koreans to Japan for forced labor and slavery, causing a severe social dislocation of Korean society. The Ming public treasury and military manpower were drained to such an extent that most historians view the Ming intervention in the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea as precipitating its dynastic fall in the early seventeenth century. Korea, the “ostensible victor,” was left with “a land in ashes and anguish,” while Japan, despite its early success of having won most of the battle, had met none of its objectives.

Returning to Hierarchy

Thus, the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea of 1592-1598 posed one of the biggest threats to the China-centered order after the long peace and an age of diplomacy in East Asia under the Ming Empire throughout the fifteenth and

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206 According to the archives of two daimyo families, Kikkawa Hieoie’s contingent submitted no fewer than 18,350 noses to Hideyoshi’s field staff in a period of little more than a month in the year 1597 while Nabeshima Katsuhige’s band was credited with at least 5,444 noses between August 21 and October 1 of the same year. See Elisonas, The Inseparable Trinity, 291.


208 Elisonas, The Inseparable Trinity, 290.
sixteenth centuries, as Japan threatened to replace the Ming Empire at the top of Asian hierarchy. When the war ended, Ming national power reached its lowest point. The costly battles in Korea added pressure on the already weakened Ming government, adding to the problems of the absence of imperial leadership, fiscal bankruptcy, and the misdirection of court eunuch politics. Furthermore, while the Ming Empire was busy dealing with the Japanese on the Korean peninsula, the Jurchen tribes of Manchuria (the Manchus) grew to militarily challenge the Ming Empire and began attacking it by 1618, signaling the upcoming changes in the balance of power in China.

However, the post-war order was to be hierarchical in nature, with the Ming Empire at the center. In terms of Sino-Korean relations, ironically enough, those intervening years between the end of the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea in 1598 and the eventual fall of the Ming Empire in 1644 marked the period when the Ming national power was at its nadir, but Chinese influence and control over Korea were at their height in their diplomatic history. It was also during these years when there was a growing voice within the Ming government to place Korea under China’s

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209 So-Ja Ch’oe, myôngch’ong sidae chunghan kwan’gyesa yôn’gu (A Study on Sino-Korean Relations during the Ming-Qing periods) (Seoul: Ewha Womans University Press, 1997), 15-61. According to Ch’oe, there is little systemic research conducted on changes in the international order after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea in the early seventeenth century. For important exceptions, see Myông-ki Han, “myôngch’ong gyo ch’egi dongbugachilsŏwa chosŏnjibae ch’ungŭi taegŭ (The International Order during the Ming-Qing Transition and Responses from Korea),” Ṭŏksawahyŏnsil (History and Reality) 37 (2000): 124-47; and Myông-ki Han, “ch’omgyo, pyŏngjahorangwa dongasiachilsŏ (Chongyo and Byongja Warfares and the International Order in East Asia,) in chŏnjaenggwatongbuga kuchechilsŏ (War and the International Order in Northeast Asia), ed. Yŏksahak’oe (Seoul: Ilchogak, 2006), 224-58.
direct control. Not only did their military and economic requests grow exploitative, but Ming troops stationed on Korea’s soil after the war were also causing many social, political and economic problems for the Koreans. And yet Korea’s hierarchical relationship with China was at its height at this historical moment. Instead of acting to take advantage of the relative decline of the Ming position in East Asia, King Sŏnjo and his officials in the Korean government heavily used the language of Neo-Confucianism and further emphasized and justified Korea’s place below the Ming Empire.

If Korea’s acceptance of the Ming-centered order after the war was at a normative level, Japan did return to the pre-war practical acceptance of the Ming-centered order. After Hideyoshi’s death in 1598, the country fell into the turmoil of civil war until Tokugawa Ieyasu established the Tokugawa government at Edo (1600-1867). To avoid the diplomatic isolation of Japan after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea, Ieyasu took a series of initiatives to normalize relations with Korea and the Ming Empire, showing little discontinuity from the prewar Japanese foreign policy.\textsuperscript{211} As early as 1605-1606, after the war, it sought to reopen direct relations with the Ming Empire to gain access to its tally trade.\textsuperscript{212} The Ming Empire responded by offering the same trading terms as the prewar rules in 1621, in exchange for the suppression of the Japanese \textit{wako} piracy and diplomatic exchange,

\textsuperscript{210} For a good discussion of this dynamics, see Han, \textit{imjinwaerangwa hanchung kwan’gye (The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea and Sino-Korean Relations)}.
as in the past. The Tokugawa government decided not to open formal diplomatic relations with China and opted for less formal trading routes through Ryukyu and Korea.

**Stability Mechanisms for the Ming Hierarchy**

The section above offers us at least two observations. One is that the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea ironically highlights the fact that states in East Asia tended not to take action to thwart a concentration of power in China. Be it the Ming Empire or the rising Manchus, if they feared China, post-Imjin War East Asia provided an ideal environment to do so. Instead, when the Ming Empire was weakened to the extent that China had to request military assistance from Korea and Japan, they did not take advantage of Ming weakness opportunistically. Secondly, a study of the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea in light of the continuation of the Ming-centered order is important, because unlike in other periods, two major secondary states in the East Asian states system, Japan and Korea, showed different levels of acceptance of the China-centered order. (See Table 1 for a macro-historical comparison of the acceptance level.)

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213 Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan*, 62-63. As I will discuss more in detail in Chapter 6, Japan went on to debate how to respond to the letter for three months, and eventually decided to tell Japan to communicate through Tsushima and Korean interpreters to avoid direct contact with the Ming government despite its early attempts to open direct relations with China. According to Toby, this Japanese attitude has to do with the domestic political consideration of the time that it no longer needed to open direct relations with China once the Tokugawa government had achieved a degree of legitimacy in Japan.
Table 3.
Stability Mechanisms for the Persistence of Hierarchy in Early Modern Asia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restoration to: The Chinese Power</th>
<th>Interests (Trade &amp; Autonomy)</th>
<th>Elite Socialization</th>
<th>Outcome: Level of Acceptance (K: Korea/ J: Japan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Mongol-centered order</strong> (after the Mongol invasions of Korea &amp; Japan)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes/Weak</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Ming-centered Order</strong> (after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea, 1592-1598)</td>
<td>Yes/Weak</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes/Weak</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes/Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Qing-centered Order</strong> (after the initial period of its rise)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes/Strong</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For that reason, a comparison of Korea’s and Japan’s acceptance behavior of the Ming-centered order provides an ideal setting for a study of the China-centered order. To put it differently, during the late sixteenth century, Korea’s acceptance of the China-centered order was at its height, while Japan’s rejection of the China-centered order was at its height. Why did Korea go from the practical to normative acceptance of the Ming-centered order, while Japan went from practical acceptance to challenging it?

I argue that the answer cannot be found in Chinese power alone, but requires
a keen understanding of how different combinations of power, interest and the level of elite socialization produced variance in the acceptance level of the Ming-centered order. As will be shown more in detail, it is primarily a function of the level of elite socialization to the Confucian idea of accepting China as morally superior and the following domestic politics dynamics that enables such ideas to exert a powerful hold on foreign policy vis-à-vis China. Below I examine each mechanism of power, interest and elite socialization with a particular emphasis on the elite socialization, to show how each was critical in determining the different paths between Korea and Japan.
**The Ming Power**

According to Gilpin’s hegemonic order theory, the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea was a hegemonic war between the status quo hegemon Ming Empire and the rising power Japan from the differential growth of Japanese military power vis-à-vis China throughout the sixteenth century. This hegemonic war threatened to transform the hierarchical structure of the early modern Asia based on China’s centrality, but it did not. Seemingly, the restoration of the equilibrium of the China-centered order
after Japan’s defeat in the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea may appear undisputed. After all, the existing hegemon Ming Empire came out as a victor in the hegemonic war vis-à-vis the rising power Japan, and restored an international order on Chinese terms in East Asia.

However, as stated earlier in the chapter, the Ming power was rapidly declining, opening many windows of opportunities for possible challengers to the empire. And a close look into the post-war security dynamic of East Asia reveals that the Ming-centered order was restored on the Ming power but remained unchallenged by other East Asian sovereign states, because of the manner the Ming power had been locked into the Ming tribute institutions before the war. In other words, if the pre-war Ming Empire had not locked in its power in the tribute system, the reality of post-war raw power of the Ming Empire would have not given it a chance to build a hierarchical order. As such, it was the stickiness of the tribute institutions that East Asian states followed after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea, not just Ming power itself.

It is worth remembering here that since its founding, the Ming Empire used diplomatic practices that were closest to the Confucian rhetoric of China as the Son of Heaven in the history of China. The key lay in the fact that the Ming Empire projected its power through the Ming-centered tribute system, which was fused with the Confucian idea of China’s moral superiority. Therefore, the Ming Empire’s tributary relations with Korea and Japan should be distinguished from the European
concept of tributary relations, which is based on hado (hierarchy based on military power relations). Rather, the Ming Empire’s position as the top center in Asian hierarchy was as much cultural as military in its nature, following the Confucian principle of odo, the fundamental principle of li (J: rei, K: ye). The tribute practices were in theory considered a natural expression of this li in the realm of foreign relations, and therefore, had a strong component of ethics embedded in the realities of power politics. As such, China’s position at the top of Asian hierarchy was justified as a reflection of its moral superiority, not of mere military supremacy. Accordingly, the Ming tribute institutions were designed to mitigate the tension stemming from the asymmetries of military capabilities among states, but were based on a clear understanding of one’s own place in the hierarchy of morality.

**Interests: Trade and Autonomy**

Also, equally important in the Ming power projection was the fact that although the Ming Empire was built on military superiority vis-à-vis other states in East Asia, as long as its superior position was acknowledged by others, it was satisfied with the symbolic gestures of its superiority. At the heart of the interest mechanism of the tribute system lay a policy of non-interference in the domestic and

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215 According to Han-gyu Kim, the tribute-investiture practices do not necessarily undermine the tributary states’ independence as a sovereign state. Tribute-investiture practices are an expression of traditional East Asian international politics. See Han-gyu Kim, “chŏnt’ongsidae chunggukchungsimŭi tongasia segyechilsŏ (The China-centered World Order in Traditional East Asia),” yŏksapip’yŏng, 50 (Spring 2000): 282-298.
diplomatic affairs of its tributary states. To say that Korea was a tributary state of the Ming Empire meant in no way that Korean politics and diplomacy were micromanaged by China.²¹⁷

That Korea was able to maintain its political autonomy as long as it symbolically accepted the Ming Empire’s superiority was a critical condition for Korea to continue to support the Ming-centered order. Korea’s *sadae* (faithful to the great) diplomacy vis-à-vis the Ming Empire epitomizes this arrangement that worked favorably both for the Ming Empire and Korea. Upon the founding of the Chosŏn government of Korea, the first Ming Emperor’s response to Korea shows the Ming Empire’s non-interference policy:

Korea is delimited by mountains, separated by oceans and it is a remote place. The eastern barbarian state [Korea] is not controlled by us. So if there are some incidents, how can Korea blame us? The foreign ministry has written a letter and advised Korea that if they can follow the will of heaven and go on the path which meets the heart of people, that will be all right… if the eastern barbarian state [Korea] sends emissaries to us, it is the good fortune of the country [Korea].²¹⁸

²¹⁷ It is important to note that the usage of the term “Chinese Empire” should not be translated as direct control by a center over its periphery on internal matters, as is the case in some other examples of empires. See Ch’oe, *ch’ōnggwa chosŏn*, 184.
In other words, at this point Korea did not take the Ming Empire’s superior position as morally legitimate, but was willing to acknowledge it for practical reasons of keeping its autonomy and ensuring non-intervention by China.

Korea’s sadae foreign policy deserves more attention here, for the concept characterized the practical nature of Korea’s acceptance of not only the Ming Empire but also the Qing Empire. Although it places Korea under China based on the Confucian idea of ethics, in essence it refers to the conduct of li, acknowledging the superiority of the stronger over the weaker in the realm of international relations.219 In the East Asian context, for many centuries the sadae policy was meant to reduce military tension arising from the asymmetries of power in the international system, and to guarantee the autonomy of smaller states like Korea vis-à-vis China.

Korea’s li conduct of sadae toward China, which was expressed as East Asian diplomatic protocols of tribute and investiture was neither the heart-felt willingness toward the China-centered ideology (Hwai) on the part of Korea, nor the binding treaty forcefully imposed by China. Rather, it came as a convergence of interests between the two countries as China expected of Korea to be friendly and to abide by the China-centered diplomatic protocol while Korea utilized this mechanism to deal with more powerful neighbor based on its own judgment on the strategic environment in the region.220

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219 The first record of sadae in history appears in the fourth century when Three Countries were competing with one another to dominate the Korean peninsula. See Yu, chosŏncho taeoesasangūi hūrūm (Flow of Foreign Diplomatic Ideology during the Chosŏn Period), 28.
220 Ibid., 25. The translation is by the author.
For this reason, Korea’s participation in the Ming-centered order through its *sadae* policy before the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea was used *not* to prevent Korea from challenging it when its sovereignty was threatened by Chinese behavior, and was more flexible than the ideologues’ claim after the war.\footnote{For example, when the Ming government forcefully attempted to annex Korea’s Ch’ŏllyŏng in Liaodong (in Chinese)/Yodong (in Korean) as part of the Ming territory in the early fifteenth century, those who had supported the pro-Ming policy immediately changed their course and went into military preparation against the Ming Empire. Even after Yi Sŏng-kye founded the Chosŏn government in 1392, the diplomatic row between the two countries over the Liaodong/Yodong area continued. It is the case that the first Chosŏn king, Yi Sŏng-kye, on his part, actively sought to forge close bilateral ties with the Ming Emperor on practical grounds, as a means to overcoming his weakness in the area of domestic legitimacy. After Yi Sŏng-kye’s seizure of power in 1390, he sent an envoy to the Ming Empire proclaiming his succession over Korea and swore *sadae* to the Ming Empire. However, this behavior has more to do with the calculation on Korea’s part that the principle of *sadae* was to preserve the integrity of its country by having equable relations with the Ming government as well as to suppress the remaining anti-Yi factions from the previous Koryŏ government.}

Sino-Japanese relations under the Ming-centered order were less formal and less hierarchical than bilateral relations between the Ming Empire and Korea. If the investiture of the Ming Emperor signified full political admittance to the China-centered order, typically trading relations through the Ming government-issued tally license (*kango*) to Japan under the maritime prohibition policy as part of the tribute system characterized the Sino-Japanese relations during the period of the Ming Chinese supremacy. In a sense, the Ming Empire’s hierarchy over Japan was through this institution of the tally trade system which Japan joined for commercial profits. Japanese ships had been allowed to trade in China throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries only if they carried a license called *kango*, originally issued to the
“King of Japan (shogun)” who in turn distributed them to the Japanese who wished to trade with China.

**Elite Socialization**

On top of the Ming power and the interest mechanism of trade and autonomy, depending on the degree to which Japan and Korea were socialized into the Confucian ideology, their behavioral patterns vis-à-vis the Ming Empire differed. If Korean King’s domestic authority would be strengthened by close ties with the Ming Emperor due to the ideological undercurrent of a Confucianized Korean society, in Japan the opposite was the case. The Japanese shogun had an alternative source of domestic authority, the Japanese Emperor, and an increase in military capabilities emboldened Japan to actualize the Japan-centered shinkoku ideology.

Figure 11. Korea’s Acceptance Level of the Ming-centered Order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practical Acceptance</th>
<th>Normative Acceptance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chinese power ↓ + Confucianization of Korea ↑ = the Chinese Emperor as a symbol of Confucian authority (Normative acceptance of the Ming-centered order)
The Case of Korea

For the purpose of this study, understanding the bilateral ties during the last years of the Ming Empire in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is the key to understanding the enigma of the longevity of the China-centered order. This is also the period when China’s strategic interest in the Korean peninsula was raised to the highest level,\(^\text{222}\) as Japan’s Korea campaign (1592-1598) posed a direct threat to the defense of China itself.\(^\text{223}\) Simply put, the post-Imjin War dynamics of bilateral ties show us the significance of ideas in the realm of national security as a rational, instrumental tool of domestic actors’ power politics, when there is convergence of

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\(^{222}\) Ch’oe, *ch’ônggw wa chosŏn (The Qing Empire and Chosŏn)*, 183. In *Ming shih*, she notes that one third of the Ming Empire’s concern over Korea was about the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea, which tells us that China’s interest in Korea was concentrated on the war throughout its entire period.

\(^{223}\) Other occasions will include the Korean War of 1950 and the first Sino-Japanese war of 1894. See Han, *imjinwaerangwa hanchung kwan’gye (The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea and Sino-Korean Relations)*, Introduction.
ideas between domestic and international politics through elite socialization. As I will illustrate the logic below with more empirical evidence, basically Korea’s unusual behavior of accepting the Ming Empire at a normative level after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea had to with the Korean Confucian bureaucrats’ socialization into the idea of “repaying the debt of gratitude to the Ming Empire.” The King Sŏnjo adhered to the Ming-centered order to take advantage of this idea to restore his weakened legitimacy after the war against his political opponents. Korea’s diplomatic endeavors striking a balance between the weakened Ming Empire and the rising Manchus were frustrated, as the later King Injo and his supporters used the idea against the then incumbent Prince Kwanghae, eventually leading to Kwanghae’s fall from the throne.

The central concept that defined Korea’s relations with the Ming Empire during this critical period is called jae-jo-ji-ŭn, literally meaning “repaying the debt of gratitude to the Ming Empire for rescuing Korea from Japan.” Based on the Confucian notion that one has to repay a debt of gratitude without fail, this idea originated from a series of actions taken by the Ming government coming to aid Korea during the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea. More specifically, it refers to the fact that China dispatched and stationed a minimum of 3,500 to a maximum of 100,000 ground forces in the battlefield of Korea at its own expense of 9,000,000

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224 According to Han, the concept itself was not new in the history of Sino-Korean relations, but was highlighted after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea. See Han, imjinwaerangwa hanchung kwan’gye (The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea and Sino-Korean Relations), Chapter 1 for a general discussion on the politics surrounding the concept in Korea’s foreign relations with China.
The face value of *jae-jo-ji--ūn* was, therefore, considered the debt of the Ming intervention in the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea, without which Chosŏn Korea may have not survived, as it was overwhelmed by the Japanese army.

However, a reality check on the idea *jae-jo-ji--ūn* that Korea was indebted to the benevolence of the Ming Emperor for its survival reveals that the Ming intervention of the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea was not that simple or ‘benevolent.’ The late Ming Empire did not act as the so-called “benevolent hegemon” providing the public good of security for its tributary state Korea or the region of East Asia. Not only did the Ming Empire attempt to avoid military involvement in the Korea peninsula until the last minute, but there was much economic, social and political harm done by the Ming troops on the soil of Korea. On the part of the Ming Empire, the intervention in the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea was about defending its capital city Beijing from Japan and nothing more.\(^\text{226}\)

There are at least two pieces of evidence that point to this Ming intention. First, the timing of the Ming decision to intervene came only after the Japanese forces advanced rapidly to Pyongyang, which is situated dangerously close to China’s strategic border area of Liaodong. Before the outbreak of the war, the Ming government had received intelligence about Japan’s impending aggression through the Korean government and other sources, but hesitated to get militarily involved in

\(^{225}\) Ibid., 23.

\(^{226}\) See Ch’oe, *myŏngch’ong sidae chunghan kwan’gyesa yŏn’gu* (*A Study on Sino-Korean Relations during the Ming-Qing periods*), Chapter 1; and Han, *imjinwaerangwa hanchung kwan’gye* (*The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea and Sino-Korean Relations*).
the Korean peninsula. Some 3,500 local Ming forces from Liaodong finally crossed the Yalu River on the day of Japan’s occupation of Pyongyang, but on July 17, 1592 those forces suffered a total defeat by Hideyoshi’s more skilled army.

If one looks into the internal debate within the Ming government between this Pyongyang defeat in July 1592 and the final decision to supply larger troops from the mainland after five months in December, it is clear that the defense of Beijing was what was on the Ming government’s mind. In fact, historians have long noted this logic of *sun-mang-ch’i-han* (if you loosen your lips, you teeth will catch cold) as a central notion guiding China’s strategic interest toward its neighbor Korea. The notion refers to the geo-strategic situation in which China’s primary interest vis-à-vis the Korean peninsula in the realm of security lies in the defense of Liaodong area near its Korean border as a gateway to Beijing, to keep it safe from any hostile maritime forces. Thus, the logic goes, if China allows the Liaodong area (lips) fall to the hostile forces of Japan, then it will end up losing Beijing (teeth).

Below is a letter written by a Chinese official Yŏgon to his emperor and sums up the internal logic behind the Ming decision to intervene in the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea:

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227 See Han, *imjinwaerangwa hanchung kwan’gye (The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea and Sino-Korean Relations)*, Chapter 1 for a detailed explanation on the background behind the Ming decision for the intervention.

228 See Ch’oe, *myŏngch’ong sidae chunghan kwan’gye yŏns’gu (A Study on Sino-Korean Relations during the Ming-Qing periods)*, Chapter 1; and Han, *imjinwaerangwa hanchung kwan’gye (The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea and Sino-Korean Relations)*.
Only Chosŏn Korea is geographically located under our arm to the East. Pyongyang is adjacent to the Yalu River to the West, and [Korea’s] Jinjoo shares the borderline with our Tŭngju and Naeju. If Japan, after taking over Chosŏn Korea, were to train the Koreans as soldiers under its command and to bring military supplies from Korea to build a powerful military force against us, this could lead to cut off our food ration route from Tongchang area with their forward-move, and to attempt to take over Liaodong from Korea’s Chŏlla and Kyŏngsang provinces with their backward move. Then, Beijing will fall into a dire situation [without our enemy having reached us]. This is a big worry for our security.\(^{229}\)

Second, that the Ming government’s concern over the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea lay in the defense of Beijing is well shown by the fact that it began negotiating with Japan at the first opportunity after securing Pyongyang at the battle of Pyongyang in January 1593.\(^{230}\) More to the point, the Korean government’s wishes to fight on were ignored, and it was left out of the negotiation process between the Ming Empire and Japan until the very end of the war in 1598. By May 1593 the top policy makers of the Ming government including the Emperor Sinjong and the high-ranking generals of the Ming military were leaning toward a peace negotiation with Japan in exchange for the grant of Ming tributary status to Japan.\(^{231}\) Upon securing

\(^{229}\) Quoted ibid., p. 32 The author’s translation from Korean.

\(^{230}\) After the Pyongyang battle, the Ming government thought that the strategic objective of their intervention had been met. The actual decision regarding the negotiation with Japan came after the February Pyŏkjae battle and the Ming forces’ total defeat against the Japanese army.

\(^{231}\) The peace negotiations ended in failure due to differences in the terms of agreement. See for example, Elisonas, \textit{The Inseparable Trinity}, pp. 281–85. Hideyoshi made seven conditions for peace, which included 1) the tally trade between Japan and the Ming Empire to resume, 2) a daughter of the Ming imperial family to become the consort of the Japanese Emperor, 3) the four Southern provinces of Korea would be annexed to Japan, 4) the two captive Korean princes to be released, 5) Korea to sear never to oppose Japan, 6) the Ming Empire and Japan pledge amity, and 7) high-ranking Korean
Pyongyang, the Ming Empire wished to end the war as soon as possible, given the logic that it “cannot supply and aid our tributary (Korea) with the blood of our own people.”

On the part of Korea, while having lost its own independent military command to the Ming Empire, the Korean government expressed its complaint against the Ming decision to seek negotiations with “the perpetual enemy Japan with which Chosŏn Korea cannot coexist” but to no avail. While the negotiations between the Ming Empire and Japan dragged on for another four years until 1596 with little progress, the Ming military not only stopped fighting on themselves, but ordered the Korean forces not to, either.

Therefore, the idea of jae-jo-ji--ún had more realpolitik layers than the Ming Empire’s benevolence of protecting Korea from Japan’s aggressive behavior. Nor was it the Ming Empire providing the public good of peace and security for East Asia as a hegemonic power. In fact, the Korean government did know about the Ming intentions quite accurately that their intervention was never about helping out Korea but helping itself to protect Beijing. In January 1593, the King Sŏnjo told the Ming official Yu Whang-sang that Korea’s loyalty toward The Ming Empire resulted in this disastrous war in Korea, and as such, it was only natural for the Ming

hostages to be sent to Japan. These were unacceptable to the Ming Empire, which was only willing to grant the investiture to Japan in exchange for peace.

232 Han, *injinwaerangwa hanchung kwan’gye (The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea and Sino-Korean Relations)*, 47.
233 Ibid., 51.
government to come to Korea’s aid.\textsuperscript{235} A careful reading of Sŏnjo Sillok also reveals that the Korean King and his top policymakers clearly understood that the Ming decision to intervene in the war was motivated by the strategic imperative of son-mang-ch‘i-han of defending Beijing, and therefore, showed a great deal of confidence that the Ming government had to intervene given the fact that “Korea was like China’s left arm and China would be incomplete without its left arm.”\textsuperscript{236}

Then, what explains King Sŏnjo’s behavior of praising and memorializing the ‘benevolence’ of the Ming Emperor, when he clearly knew that Ming behavior was guided by its self-interest that had little to do with Korea? Indeed by the time the war ended in 1598, the Korean perception of the Ming Empire was quite negative, to the extent that the view that “the Ming forces have been useless” had gained stronger ground among Korean government officials.\textsuperscript{237} The Ming envoys’ solicitation of a large amount of silver, the key currency in Asia, from the Korean government added to this negative perception.\textsuperscript{238} However, it was against this backdrop that King Sŏnjo embarked on a series of projects designed to memorialize gratitude toward the Ming Empire by selling the idea of jae-jo-ji--ūn. The King himself took the initiative in establishing several shrines to commemorate the military accomplishments of Ming

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\textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 49. In April 1593, the Ming military would go so far as to escort the retreating Japanese army to their ‘safe exit’ from Seoul in April 1953, while stopping Korean troops that were chasing them down.\\
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 40-1. Top policy makers in the Korean government including King Sŏnjo believed that the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea broke out as a result of Korea’s refusal to give in to Hideyoshi’s demand to open the passage to The Ming Empire.\\
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., 41.\\
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., 68-9.\\
\textsuperscript{238} Ibid., see Chapter 1, especially 68-84.
\end{flushright}
generals; in 1599 King Sŏnjo wrote down in his own calligraphy the four Chinese characters “jae-jo-ji-ŭn” for a tablet displayed in the Chinese Magistrate Hyŏng Gae’s shrine.\textsuperscript{239}

It is also noteworthy that while King Sŏnjo exaggerated and praised the accomplishments of the Ming forces, he was deliberately downplaying the efforts of local Korean soldiers called ŭibyŏng (local militia), who were voluntarily organized to take up arms to resist and fought against the Japanese army to protect the Korean people. The Korean government knew that military feat and victories of these ŭibyŏng generals such as Kwak Chae-u, Chŏng In-hong, and Kim Tŏk-ryŏng played a decisive role in shifting the course of the war toward victory. But King Sŏnjo decided to ignore the distinguished service by his own soldiers and said the following to his government officials:

That we were able to defeat Japan was all thanks to the Ming forces. Our soldiers were merely following the Ming military and would be lucky to have one Japanese soldier killed, not to mention any Japanese general. Of them, Yi Sun-shin and Kwŏn Yul may be the only exceptions. If we were to talk about why the Ming forces came to intervene and have our country saved from the disaster, that was all because you escorted me all the way to ŭiju and appealed to the Ming Emperor to intervene.\textsuperscript{240}

Why did Korea’s ruling elites attribute the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea’s victory to the Ming Empire, and emphasize that Korea repay the debt of gratitude

\textsuperscript{239} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{240} King Sŏnjo quoted in ibid., 81.
toward the Ming Emperor? It was because King Sŏnjo thought of the Ming forces as a fence that protected his own regime against his political opponents, including those ŭibyŏng generals who highlighted his inability to protect his own people and anyone who might cause a popular revolt against his royal power. To put it differently, the Korean king found the use of “the Ming Empire” instrumental in restoring his own authority in Korean domestic politics, which had been seriously debilitated during wartime.

If King Sŏnjo’s postwar foreign policy toward the Ming Empire took advantage of the idea jae-jo-ji--ŭn to restore his weakened legitimacy against his political opponents in the aftermath of the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea, King Injo and his supporters used the idea against Prince Kwanghae, the then incumbent King of Korea after the King Sŏnjo. Kwanghae’s fall from the throne in 1623 (the Injo Restoration) was done in such a manner that a group of pro-Ming Confucian bureaucrats (the Sŏin) were exerting powerful checks on then King Kwanghae’s royal power on the basis that he was not following the idea jae-jo-ji--ŭn in his China policy. The newly enthroned King Injo, in requesting the investiture from the Ming Emperor, criticized Prince Kwanghae for his disregard of the idea jae-jo-ji--ŭn and for his policy of carrying out a balancing act between The Ming Empire and its competitor Manchus.

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241 Ibid., Chapter 1.
It deserves mention here that by the time Prince Kwanghae came to the throne after his father King Sŏnjo’s death in 1608, the Manchu tribe in the Northern border was becoming more and more of an apparent threat, placing the Korean government in a delicate situation between the weakening Ming government and the rising Manchus. As part of the time-honored Chinese traditional strategy of “responding to a challenge from a barbarian (the Manchu) by having another barbarian (Korea) handle it,” the Ming government requested the Korean government to “repay the debt of gratitude” by dispatching Korean military forces to fight against the Manchus. Amid opposition from a great number of pro-Ming Confucian bureaucrats, who argued that a refusal of the Ming request would be tantamount to “an errant behavior betraying the country of parents and siding with the barbarians,” Prince Kwanghae (who is regarded as “the most astute diplomat in the history of Chosŏn Korea”) led Korea in skilled, practical diplomacy not to exhaust Korea’s military resources to help the Ming Empire.\(^{242}\)

Then, the Injo Restoration of 1623, which involved the ultimate removal of Prince Kwanghae from the throne, was justified by King Injo and the Sŏin faction on the ground that Kwanghae was reluctant to send the Korean forces in support of the Ming troops against the Manchu on top of his immoral behaviors during his drive to strengthen his royal power. The new regime under King Injo proclaimed the policy

\(^{242}\) Myŏng-ki Han, “chosŏngwa myŏngŭi sadaekwan’gye (the Sadae Relations between Chosŏn Korea and The Ming Empire),” yŏksapi yŏngsa 50 (Spring 2000), 314. The more recent historiography on Prince Kwanghae agrees that his strategy of neutrality between the Ming Empire and the rising
of “revering the Ming and rejecting the Manchu” as their China policy guideline. However, behind this lip service leading to the change in Korea’s China policy, there was a power struggle between the Pugin faction under Kwanghae and the newly powerful Sŏin faction supporting the new King Injo. In the broader context of Sino-Korean relations, what this highlighted was the ideological and political influence of jaе-jo-ji-ŭn among the Confucian bureaucrats. Because the political climate in which jaе-jo-ji-ŭn functioned was based on the “normative standard” of Neo-Confucianism, the Sŏin faction of sarim scholar-bureaucrats were able to justify the event on the basis of jaе-jo-ji-ŭn.

If Korea’s early foreign policy behavior vis-à-vis the Ming Empire until the mid-sixteenth century was based on the sadae policy of practicality, after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea during later periods until the fall of the Ming government, Korea adhered to the Ming Empire and stopped challenging it at the expense of losing the momentum of power politics. Behind this transition to the normative acceptance of the Ming-centered order, there were the processes of the Confucianization of Korea and the emergence of the sarim elites embodying the

Manchus had been successful until his dethronement, which was intended not to anger the rising Manchu while keeping a Ming tributary status.

244 Han, chosŏngwa myŏngŭi sadaekwan’gye (the Sadae Relations between Chosŏn Korea and The Ming Empire), 315.
245 Korean historians tend to concur that there is a clear distinction between prewar and post war Korean behavior vis-à-vis China in terms of accepting the China-centered order.
ideology and playing an important role in the Korean government.\textsuperscript{246} According to James Palais, by the sixteenth century almost all of the elite in Korea were Confucians, and a good many had a thorough grasp of Chu Hsi’s metaphysics as well. “This was truly Korea’s Confucian age, which meant not only that educated Koreans were affected by Confucian ideas in their behavior but also that Korean society was somehow subtly influenced by Confucianism as well.”\textsuperscript{247}

As a matter of fact, one of the most major political developments in the sixteenth century Korea was a great number of appointments of a group of Confucian scholar-bureaucrats called the Sŏin faction into government service. Many of them were pro-Ming policy makers, tended to be less tolerant toward other religions or schools of thought, and rigorously practiced Neo-Confucian doctrine in the realm of political life. Against the backdrop of factional strife and ideological rigidity of Korean politics from the late sixteenth century,\textsuperscript{248} one distinctive feature of power competition among different factions within the Korean government was the use of the normative standards of Confucian thought against the throne and other factions.

\textit{The Case of Japan}

\textsuperscript{246} For a good discussion of the process of elite socialization of Korean Confucian bureaucrats during this period, see Han-kyu Kim, \textit{han\'ch\'ung k\'wan\'gyesa (The History of Sino-Korean Relations)}, 638-73. 
\textsuperscript{248} For a good discussion on factionalism in Korea during the Chosŏn period, see Kang, \textit{Diplomacy and Ideology in Japanese-Korean Relations}, 131.
Japan shows a strikingly interesting contrast and comparison when juxtaposed with Korea in terms of its acceptance level of the China-centered order in East Asia. As illustrated in the above section, prior to the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea both Korea and Japan accepted the Ming hegemony as a practical solution to their security and economic problems, not because they considered their inferior position as legitimate. But it was more because their participation in the Ming-centered order provided them with more benefits than costs. To put it differently, Korea’s prewar sadae diplomacy was a practical means to an end of securing its political autonomy from a powerful neighbor China, while Japan’s participation in the Ming Empire’s tally (kango) trade rules of the tribute system was a means to the end of gaining economic profits from trade with China. Therefore, until the outbreak of the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea in the late sixteenth century, the primary mechanism behind system stability in East Asia had to do with my theory’s second mechanism of interest, as explained in Chapter 3.

However, with the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea as a turning point, Japan’s prior practical acceptance of the Ming-centered order via trading networks and cultural exchanges came to a rupture, as Japan challenged China’s position at the top of the Asian hierarchy. Hideyoshi’s private correspondence to his wife dated July 5, 1587 first expressed his intention of occupying Korea to conquer China, which reads: “I have sent fast ships in order to urge even Korea to pay homage to the Emperor of Japan (the tenno), stating that, if it does not, I shall conquer it next year. I shall take
even China in hand, and have control of it during my lifetime.”

Two years later in 1590, in his letter to the Korean embassy that requested Korea to guide Japan’s invasion to the Ming Empire, he spoke of himself as “the Child of the Sun” and claimed that because of this fact, “the world would hear the good news and the four seas will know his renowned fame.”

Similarly, in 1593 as he put forward terms of the peace negotiations to the Ming envoys, his famous Seven Peace Conditions proclaimed: “Japan is the country of the gods. Kami is the king of heaven [Tentei]. The king of heaven is kami. There is no difference. Japan’s national customs still carry the spirit of the age of the kami.”

Not surprisingly, when he realized all that the Ming Empire offered for peace was the investiture from the Ming Emperor as “the King of Japan,” and thus, Japan’s status as a tributary to The Ming Empire, he ordered that Japan resume making war.

Two points can be drawn from Hideyoshi’s above letters that were “unique in Japanese history and nearly unparalleled elsewhere” with regard to Japan’s place in the China-centered order. First, Hideyoshi was the first ruler of Japan who put into practice the claim of superiority over China. Based on Japan’s increased military power, Hideyoshi rejected the China-centered order and sought to activate Japan’s indigenous Shinto thought, embodied in the idea of deifying Japan as the county of

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251 Quoted ibid, 95.
252 Berry, Hideyoshi, 213.
the gods into the reality of international politics in Asia. Second, Hideyoshi used *shinkoku* thought to justify his offense-oriented, expansionist foreign policy toward Korea and China, which was meant to enhance his domestic legitimacy and raise the authority of his rule in the eyes of his domestic audience within Japan.

To explain the different responses to the Ming-centered order between Korea and Japan in the late sixteenth century centering around the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea, it is important to understand *in what ways* the ruling elites of both Korea and Japan were using the Confucian idea of “China at the center” politically to their own favor. Because of the differences in the dominant ideological undercurrents of Korea (Neo-Confucianism) and Japan (*shinkoku* thought), Korean kings had more to gain by sticking to the idea of the China-centered order or *chung-hua* (China as the civilized center), whereas Japanese shoguns had more to gain by distancing themselves from the idea. To put it differently, while Korean kings drew domestic legitimacy from the Chinese Emperor, Japanese shoguns had an alternative source of domestic legitimacy, the Japanese Emperor. Many warrior rulers of early modern Japan, having won power by military strength, drew legitimacy from the imperial court by accepting the title of *shogun*.

In the words of Checkel, Korea’s higher level of “cultural match” with the Ming Empire through the Confucianization of Korean society throughout the

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254 I use the term “shogun” to mean shogunal power in a broader sense, thus applying it to hegemonic figures such as Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, as it is used by some historians of Japanese
sixteenth century led it to support the Ming-centered order despite the changing realities of power distribution, while Japan’s historically constructed *shinkoku* thought influenced Hideyoshi to use Japan’s increased military power to challenge the pre-existing China-centered order.\(^{255}\)

To answer the puzzle of the longevity of the China-centered order, the key here is the ‘transmission belt’ between these ideological undercurrents and the actual foreign policy outcomes in Korea and Japan. Even if there had been a high level of “cultural match” between China and the secondary states, the actual foreign policy decision of supporting (or challenging for that matter) the China-centered order at times of China’s weakness requires what Acharya called “a dynamic process of *matchmaking*” by domestic actors in the context of the political power relationship.\(^{256}\) As we have seen in the case of Korea, Japanese ruling elites such as Yoshimitsu and Hideyoshi have often pushed their China policy in one way or another depending on the prevalent ideological undercurrent of the time, to increase their own authority in consideration of their domestic political opponents.

\(^{255}\) For a discussion on Checkel and other constructivists who study the diffusion of norms, see Acharya, “How Ideas Spread,” 240-48.

\(^{256}\) This point somewhat resonates with the constructivist debate that we must understand the agents as well as norms themselves. See Ibid., 243.
As we have seen, economic profits coupled with the Ming Empire’s superior power vis-à-vis Japan were the primary mechanism behind Japan’s practical acceptance of the Ming-centered order prior to the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea (Figure 4). Then, in light of my theory, how did the domestic ideological imperatives of Japan under Hideyoshi affect Japan’s expansionist behavior toward its neighbors through the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea? Scholars have debated the real motive
behind Hideyoshi’s invasion of Korea, and their arguments are divided roughly into three strands; 1) Japan’s wishes for economic ventures, 2) the importance of territorial expansion to divert the energies of Hideyoshi’s disgruntled daimyo vassals, and 3) Hideyoshi’s unique, ambitious personality. Interestingly, from the perspective of balance of power/threat theory, all of these had little to do with the power distribution vis-à-vis the Ming Empire at the international system level, but concerned Japan’s own domestic circumstances.

One common ground of all of these explanations is to consider Hideyoshi’s power relationship with his daimyos as being critical to his decision on the Korean campaign. Although some scholars have focused on economic profits as the primary reason for it, by looking at Hideyoshi’s interest in securing the regular, direct trading relationships with Korea and Japan as evidenced by his Seven Peace Conditions, the argument also looks to Hideyoshi’s need to grant economic rewards to the daimyo under his rule in the context of the lord-vassal power relationship. Other historians like Elizabeth Berry argue that although Hideyoshi did develop a strong interest in trade, his pursuit for glory and personal fame through the building of an empire in Asia was the more immediate cause for Japan’s invasion of Korea.

Noteworthy in this line of argument about Hideyoshi’s personality is the manner in


258 See Berry, *Hideyoshi*, 211-12.
which he attempts to pursue his personal glory through describing himself as “the Child of the Sun,” which was embedded in Japan’s indigenous shinkoku thought.

Overall, the most convincing answer to the above question about the mechanisms behind Japan’s attempt to disrupt the Ming-centered order must be found in Hideyoshi’s desire to enhance his authority vis-à-vis his daimyos using shinkoku ideology based on Japan’s increased power capabilities. As Asao Naohiro argues, the foreign campaign was an opportunity for Hideyoshi to consolidate his power over the daimyo.\footnote{Asao Naohiro, “Toyotomi sei ken-ron,” cited in Ibid., 277.} Unlike Korea, Japan’s political power structure was based on the lord-vassal relationship between Hideyoshi and the daimyo, which required a strong balance of power in favor of central authority to maintain Hideyoshi’s position.\footnote{Hall, “Hideyoshi’s Domestic Policies,” 199-200.} Against the backdrop of Hideyoshi’s reign immediately after unifying the senkoku (warring state) daimyo period, during which time there had been no single legitimate ruler in Japan, he had to be mindful of measures that could ensure the obedience of his former political opponents, “strong men capable of insurrection.”\footnote{Berry, Hideyoshi, 169. Berry also notes the following: “The transfer of authority in senkoku society was always traumatic, and Hideyoshi’s age, the absence of a strong heir, and the brevity of his time in power combined to make succession an unusually volatile issue.”}

In fact, Hideyoshi’s aggression of Korea can be understood alongside his efforts to centralize Japan, which were closely united with the authority of the

\footnote{Park, 15, 16-segi ilbon’i chōn ‘guxsidaewa Toyotomi jōnggwôn (The Senkoku Period Japan in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries and the Toyotomi Regime), 209-10 and 216-18.}
\footnote{Berry, Hideyoshi, 212.}
\footnote{Berry, Hideyoshi, 169.}
Japanese Emperor (the tenno) and of shinkoku thought.\textsuperscript{264} Although Hideyoshi unified Japan under the kogi power structure, to exercise command over the warrior class incorporating the tenno and the court nobles (kuge),\textsuperscript{265} it is worth remembering here that he “never succeeded in completing a pyramidal hierarchy among the military houses,” and as such, sought to “supplement his prestige through the acquisition of court titles and official appointments” from the Japanese Emperor.\textsuperscript{266} Etsuko Haejin Kang further notes the following with regard to Hideyoshi’s use of shinkoku thought and the imperial institution in relation to his shogunal power position vis-à-vis other daimyos within Japan.

Hideyoshi’s unification of Japan met its limit in controlling the daimyos. For instance, the influential daimyos from medieval times such as the Mori, Shimazu, Otomo, Chosokabe, Uesugi and Date clans stayed on in their old territories. Hideyoshi’s fear of the daimyos made these daimyos compel the loyalty to Goyozei tenno (the goyozei emperor) and their allegiance to himself at the Jurakudai in 1588. Moreover, Hideyoshi’s invasions of Korea were an ideal opportunity for him to confirm the daimyos’ allegiance and their capacity to offer military service. Imatani Akira points out that Hideyoshi’s defeat at the battle of Komaki Nagakute in 1584 was the turning point which led him to depend on the authority of the imperial institution. The battle between Hideyoshi and the Allied Forces of Ieyasu and Oda Nobuo resulted in a great victory for Ieyasu, thereby establishing Ieyasu’s control of

\textsuperscript{264} According to Varley, it was the Kemmu Restoration “to impel Chikafusa to translate shinkoku from a general concept of divine protection into a positive reaffirmation of faith in the imperial family and its lines of legitimate sovereigns.” See Varley, \textit{Imperial Restoration in Medieval Japan}, p. 38.

\textsuperscript{265} Historically Japan has had a dualism in authority structure,” meaning that the relationship between (military) lord-vassal and (imperial) bureaucratic-official system. For a discussion on the topic, see Asao with Jansen, “Shogun and Tenno,” 248-69.

\textsuperscript{266} Ibid., 258.
the eastern state… Hideyoshi was shackled by an inferiority complex toward Ieyasu, and this was the major reason for Hideyoshi’s seeking the tenno influence. Furthermore, Hideyoshi had few direct vassals due to his humble origins. This made him depend more on traditional authority.\textsuperscript{267}

In a similar vein, Elizabeth Berry points out that Hideyoshi was in need of bringing “a new formality and objectivity” to his relationship with the vassal daimyos, since he had to control “not twenty but two hundred daimyos” over sixty-six provinces with his success in unifying the whole of Japan. Therefore, he meant to broaden the basis of his legitimacy “in larger traditions of law and institutional authority.”\textsuperscript{268} In so doing, seeking the titles and appointments from the Japanese Emperor was ideal for Hideyoshi, precisely because the Japanese Emperor had emerged “as a symbol of historical continuity and political cohesion,” and “an inseparable part of the nation’s definition of itself.”\textsuperscript{269} Therefore, Hideyoshi did not become the shogun, which signified the top of the warrior hierarchy, but received the investiture with imperial title of kampaku (the Imperial Regent) from the Japanese Emperor.

Similarly, in the realm of foreign relations Hideyoshi continued to use the traditional authority of the Japanese Emperor (the tenno) and shinkoku thought to justify his Korea campaign so as to force the daimyos’ allegiance to him.\textsuperscript{270}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[268] Berry, \textit{Hideyoshi}, 169.
\item[269] Ibid., 173. The highlight is added.
\end{footnotes}
26th of the third month of 1592, Hideyoshi paid a visit to the Japanese Emperor to explain his plans for the Korea campaign and received imperial assent. In 1593 as Hideyoshi made the Seven Peace Conditions with The Ming Empire, he sent the Japanese Emperor a report about them in pursuit of the imperial sanction.\footnote{Ibid.}

The concept of \textit{shinkoku} which first appeared in the Japanese history book \textit{Nihon Shoki} as early as the sixth century,\footnote{It is noteworthy that the creation of the Nihon Shoki, one of the first history books in the history of Japan was a part of centralization efforts of Shotoku Prince in the sixth century.} regards Japan as the “land of the gods” or the “divine land \textit{(kami)},” and as such, holds the view that the gods who created Japan would protect the county.\footnote{See, for example, Kuroda Toshio, trans. Fabio Rambelli, “The Discourse on the “Land of Kami” \textit{(Shinkoku)} in Medieval Japan: National Consciousness and International Awareness,” \textit{Japanese...}} Kuroda Toshio argues that \textit{shinkoku} thought in medieval Japan functioned as a state ideology within the framework of Japan’s relations with other countries. His analysis of the \textit{shinkoku} concept as a form of state ideology points out the following:

Behind this image, however, lay Japan’s increasing sense of its own autonomy, which arose from the relaxation of the ancient system of tributary states centered upon China. This autonomy led to a new view of international relations, one accompanied by simultaneous feelings of subservience and disdain towards other lands, with Japan attempting to acquire a status of equality with China and of superiority over Korea (see Tanaka 1970a). The shinkoku concept reflected a similar sense of independence, and at times the same sort of self-righteous contempt with regard to the outside…. Such attitudes were based no on the reality of actual international contacts but on a quite conceptual “international awareness”
domestically produced for the purpose of a rather self-satisfied glorification of the kami.274

Similarly, Hideyoshi tried to glorify the Korean campaign when speaking before his commanding officers, describing it as “a heroic achievement in the tradition of the Jingu empress’s expedition to Korea.”275 And his invocation of shinkoku thought for political reasons was not without historical precedent. Paul Varley, for example, tells us that in the thirteenth century Kamakura Japan’s Minamoto chieftain worshiped kami “as a tool of military government.” Yorimoto “sought to strengthen his personal control over the eastern warriors by directing their reverence toward Hachiman, the tutelary deity of the Minamoto clan.”276

IV. Conclusion: Tribute System under the Ming Empire

A study on the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea, 1592-1598 in light of the continuation of the Ming-centered order is important at least for two reasons. One is that Korea’s and Japan’s status-quo oriented behaviors are highlighted, with a lack of challenge to the weakened Ming power in the post-war security environment of East Asia. The other is that it provides an ideal setting for students of international relations to understand the conditions under which secondary states decide to accept

274 Toshio, The Discourse on the “Land of Kami” (Shinkoku) in Medieval Japan, 380.
275 Quoted in Varley, Imperial Restoration in Medieval Japan, 30.
276 Ibid., 32.
a hegemonic power at a practical or normative level, or to reject the hierarchical order altogether.

The chapter has shown that although it was the Ming Empire’s relatively stronger military power that resulted in the Ming-centered order after the war, an explanation of the manner in which the hierarchical order was maintained centered on the Ming Empire requires us to have a keen understanding of how the mechanisms of power, interest and elite socialization interacted to produce different outcomes in terms of the acceptance level of the Ming-centered order. I have argued that it was the institutional stickiness of the Ming tribute institutions that had locked in the Ming power and the Confucian idea of China’s moral superiority that enabled the weakened Ming Empire to assert the hierarchical order after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea.

In particular, when it comes to the question of the conditions under which we are likely to see a normative acceptance of a hegemonic order as opposed to a practical one, the post-war Sino-Korea relations provide a critical clue. In Korea, the deepened acculturation of Neo-Confucianism throughout the sixteenth century led the Korean Kings and ruling elites to advocate the idea of the China-centered order at times of domestic legitimacy crises to take advantage of the Confucian authority. King Sŏnjo’s advocacy of the idea jae-jo-ji-ŭn against the reality of the Ming intervention, or the dethronement of Prince Kwanghae by King Injo and the Sŏin faction on the basis of jae-jo-ji-ŭn all show that the idea of ‘China at the center’
itself grew instrumental in the political power relationship within Korea, thereby determining its foreign policy of supporting the Ming-centered order.

In Japan, by contrast, the national crisis situations highlighted the *shinkoku* ideology, the idea that Japan is the country of the gods, as Japan’s *buke* ruling elite Hideyoshi found it instrumental to tighten their relationship with the Japanese Emperor, not the Ming Emperor, to raise his own authority and legitimacy. This is because unlike Korea, Japan’s acculturation process of Neo-Confucianism and of the idea “China at the center” was developed in a manner that emphasized Japan’s own ethno-centricism, while furthering the *de-*Sinification of imported Chinese ideas. The point is that the sources of the *buke* warrior elites’ legitimacy were associated with the idea of Japan’s divinity—-*shinkoku* thought. Just as Korean Kings were mindful of his political opponents within Korea in conducting diplomacy and borrowing the authority from the Ming Emperor, Hideyoshi utilized the authority of the Japanese Emperor to control his political opponents, the daimyos.
SIX
The Rise of the Qing Empire in the 17th Century

Introduction

News of the 1674 Revolt of the Three Feudatories in the Qing Empire flew fast to Korea and Japan via express messengers, raising their hopes for the restoration of the previous Ming Empire. The Revolt by Wu and other Chinese generals under the banner of restoring the empire to the Ming government would be remembered by later historians as the most serious threat to the survival of the Qing Emperor.277 To Korea and Japan, the event highlighted their wishes that the Qing Empire “might fall in the third generation, thus rendering its historical claim to legitimacy doubtful.”278

The rise of the Qing Empire in the early seventeenth century was a shock to the fabric of the East Asian states system because of the Qing’s origin as non-Chinese “barbarians.” As a matter of fact, this question of the Qing Empire’s legitimacy was causing more serious security problems than during the Mongol Empire, another empire ruled by the “barbarians” in the thirteenth century of early modern Asia. When the Manchus entered Beijing, driving the Ming Chinese forces away in 1644, the people of China had been ruled by the Chinese dynasty of the Ming Empire for the last two hundred and seventy years. Therefore, the Qing Empire’s vast expansion of its territory covering not only China proper but the Inner

277 Toby, State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan, 140-41.
278 Toby, 141.
Asian areas of Mongolia, Tibet, Manchuria and Xinjiang came with an acute cultural identity problem in terms of its imperial governance.

In its foreign relations, too, the Qing Empire’s Manchu origin reminded Japan of the Mongols who had invaded its country in the thirteenth century. Japan almost joined hands with the Ming Chinese royalists to take military action against the Qing Empire, while offering Korea military assistance when Korea suffered an attack from the Manchus in 1627. To Korea, the Manchus were simply uncivilized, inferior barbarians who toppled the Ming Empire by force. It refused to sever its official tributary relations with the Ming Empire even after being invaded by the Manchus in 1627. In short, East Asian states almost rejected the Qing-centered order during the early years of its rise, because they looked down on the Qing Empire’s Manchu origin, and distrusted its claim of moral superiority vis-à-vis its neighbors in East Asia.

This chapter on the rise of the Qing Empire in the early seventeenth century offers my third case study that surveys a counterfactual to the persistence of hierarchical order in early modern Asia. Compared to the Mongol Empire, by the time of the Qing Empire’s rise in the seventeenth century, East Asian states as a whole had been more Confucianized throughout the period of the Ming Empire, after adopting Neo-Confucianism at the end of the Mongol Empire. Therefore, although the Qing Empire would later develop one of the most elaborate Chinese institutions of governance hand in hand with its “Manchu way,” the initial phase of its
empire was filled with tension over identity and culture, which could have spilled over into a major military conflict in East Asia.

A scene from the 1636 Manchu invasion of Korea depicts such tension in a most dramatic way in the history of Korea. The Manchus had demanded that Korea sever its tributary relations with the Ming Empire in the 1630s with the threat of aggression. The threat was a credible one, since the Manchus had invaded Korea ten years earlier in 1627. But, puzzling behavior from Korea ensued, as it still hesitated to cut off its ties with the previous Ming Emperor at the risk of its national security. When the Qing Emperor himself led a large army of 100,000 into Korea’s capital city Seoul, resulting in a complete surrender on Korea’s part in 1637, Korea considered this defeat somehow more humiliating than the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea. Interestingly enough from a realist perspective, Korea risked its survival by prioritizing its identity as a civilized Confucian state serving the Ming Empire.

The primary empirical focus of the chapter is to elucidate the processes during which the Qing Empire, after this initial phase of the difficulty of being accepted by others, came to restore the hierarchical order in East Asia. Both Korea and Japan, despite some early signs of challenge to the Qing Empire, eventually formed a part of the Qing-centered order, which was quite stable and peaceful until the end of the eighteenth century. The questions to be asked include: How did the

279 This is despite the fact that more people died during the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea than during the 1636 invasion of the Manchus. According to Etsuko Kang, a deeper sense of defeat had to do with “anti-Qing feeling together with a sense of humiliation that Korea had been defeated by force.” Kang, Diplomacy and Ideology in Japanese-Korean Relations, 180.
Qing Empire overcome problems of identity and legitimacy to govern the East Asian states system successfully? Why did Japan give up a plan to ally with the Ming loyalists and choose not to challenge the Qing Empire? What explains elaborate Qing-Korea tributary relations, which turned out to be the most institutionalized of all time, under the Chinese Empire?

In this chapter, I will argue that China’s time-honored strategy of using ideas as a central part of power projection via institutional innovations was key in bringing about the practical acceptance of the Qing-centered order. As much as Korea and Japan did not buy the Qing claim of moral superiority over them, it mattered greatly especially for Korea that the Qing Empire still utilized Confucian language and practices. Due to the institutional stickiness of the tribute system that covered a range of activities of trade as well as diplomacy based on flexibility, both Korea and Japan were glued to the Qing-centered order at a practical level.

And while staying in the Qing-centered order at a practical level, we notice that both Korea and Japan exhibited interesting ideological responses of their own superiority vis-à-vis the Qing Empire. They developed their own image of themselves instead of the Qing Empire as a new center of East Asia, under the influence of Neo-Confucian ideas, now that the barbarians occupied China. Importantly, the Qing Empire was able to maintain the Qing hierarchy in part due to

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280 This is so especially as Korea’s relations with the Qing Empire entered into a phase of stability when the empire showed signs of prosperity and consolidation of its rule. It is not hard to imagine that the tribute practices gave the Koreans a sense of stability in dealing with “China,” which was very important both for psychological and practical reasons.
the fact that it allowed room for ideological balancing responses by the secondary states, instead of micromanaging to stop their ideologically-motivated behavior, as long as they did not disturb the empire in any serious manner. Therefore, the mechanisms of power and the cost-benefit calculation of interests explain the practical nature of accepting the Qing-centered order on the part of Korea and Japan.

The remainder of the chapter proceeds in the following order. First, I show that the rise of the Qing Empire posed a threat to disrupt the hierarchical structure of the East Asian states system due to the problems of culture and identity. Then I describe the processes through which the Qing-centered order was restored. Third, I move on to make an argument that the Qing power and the cost-benefit calculation of interests, combined with the level of elite socialization, are basically what explain the practical acceptance of the Qing-centered order. Finally, I conclude by providing some thoughts on the relevance of the rise of Qing Empire for today’s policy question of the rise of China and for the theory of international relations.

The Qing-centered Order: Crisis and Restoration

This section depicts how the rise of the Qing Empire in the seventeenth century resulted in one of the greatest diplomatic crises in East Asian diplomatic history. Then, I provide an illustration that the hierarchical structure of the East Asian states system was restored under the Mongol Empire. The crisis had to do with
the social fact that East Asian states through centuries of experiences in East Asian international relations had internalized the Confucian idea of distinguishing barbarians as “the other,” as opposed to “we” being the civilized states of China of the Han Chinese, Korea and Japan. As briefly mentioned above, despite the common disdain for any northern nomad tribes as the “barbarians” throughout most of history in East Asia, this distinction had become more salient in the seventeenth century, compared to the thirteenth century Mongol Empire.

**East Asia’s Rejection of the Manchus as “Son of Heaven”**

In 1636, the Manchu leader Hung Taiji proclaimed his intention of building an empire named Qing. By 1644, the Manchus were driving the Ming forces away from Beijing with the help of their famous military organization called the Eight Banners, and eventually extended its territory to be twice as large as that of the previous Ming Empire over a wide dominion of what is today’s People’s Republic of China. The security landscape of the seventeenth century Asia, therefore, faced the question of “a rising China.” During this critical juncture of East Asian international relations in early modern Asia, the threat perception of Korea and Japan vis-à-vis the Manchus (later called the Qing Empire from 1644) was aggravated by their belief that the latter were the uncivilized “other.” Unfamiliarity with the Manchu nomadic culture and geography played a big part in the threat perception as well. Whereas the Ming Empire, Korea and Japan had been interacting with one another for
centuries in the realm of international affairs as sovereign states based on traditional East Asian diplomatic protocols, Japan’s Tokugawa Ieyasu, for example, considered the rise of the Manchu power as a threat to its national security in part because he thought the Manchus were connected by land with Japan’s present-day Hokkaido.\textsuperscript{281}

In any event, by the end of the year 1636, Japan’s and Korea’s foreign policy responses to the rise of The Qing Empire became clearer. Notably, there was a possibility that Korea and Japan would have formed an alliance to balance against the rising Manchus, if it had not been for the experience of the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea only a few decades earlier and Korea’s equally strong fear of Japan.\textsuperscript{282}

Upon the first Manchu invasion of Korea in 1627, the Korean King Injo immediately informed Japan of the invasion through Tsushima, Japan’s vassal province in charge of diplomatic relations with Korea. Tokugawa Iemitsu, the third Shogun of the Tokugawa government of Japan, then ordered Tsushima to deliver the message to the Korean government that Japan would send troops to Korea to resist the Manchus together if Korea found itself still in danger.\textsuperscript{283} After some discussion, the Korean King declined the offer, stating that “there was no precedent for accepting the assistance of a Japanese expeditionary force, so no matter how strong the Manchus might be.”\textsuperscript{284} Nevertheless, records indicate that Tsushima frequently sent arms and


\textsuperscript{282} Toby, \textit{State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan}, 112-118.

\textsuperscript{283} Ibid., 113.

\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., 117.
materiel to Korea, including two hundred catties of gunpowder, and five hundred long swords in 1627.\footnote{Ibid., 114.}

For the Tokugawa government of Japan, in addition to the geographic proximity of Japan to China and the massive size of China, an ideological view that the Manchu conquest of China was not “an ordinary dynastic change of the sort China had undergone for the previous thousand years” further fueled the negative threat perception vis-à-vis the Manchus. Hayashi Gaho, who was the “rector of the Confucian college” and influential foreign policy maker Razan’s son, for example, wrote that China was now being transformed from “civilized” to “uncivilized” in his compilation of the events on the continent under the title of “Metamorphosis from Civilized to Barbarian.”\footnote{Mizuno, “China in Tokugawa Foreign Relations,” 137.}

In addition to Japan’s offer of military assistance to Korea, its fear of the Manchu rise in China is shown at least in two ways. One was the Tokugawa government’s unusually intensive intelligence gathering activities. According to Ronald Toby, Japan’s mobilization of a wide range of intelligence assets in response to the Revolt of the Three Feudatories in 1647 was “remarkably similar in both its methods and its organization and behavior to modern consular and military intelligence systems.”\footnote{Toby, State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan, 161.}
The strategic turmoil in East Asia that attended the rise of Manchu power would occupy Japanese attention for many decades, stimulate the development of systems of strategic intelligence-gathering and analysis that became the bakufu’s strategic sensory system in East Asia until the fall of the shogunate in the nineteenth century, and at times again bid fair to involve Japan in continental warfare.288

Japan utilized four different routes to collect intelligence on China: 1) Chinese merchants arriving in Nagasaki → Edo (Japan’s capital); 2) Beijing → Fukien → Ryukyu (present-day Okinawa) → Satsuma → Edo; 3) Dutch merchants → Nagasaki → Edo; and 4) Beijing → Seoul → Pusan (Korea’s port city) → Tsushima → Edo.289

The other indicator of Japan’s fear of the Manchu rise was the Tokugawa government’s contemplation of joining hands with the Ming Chinese loyalists. In part, Japan’s arduous intelligence gathering efforts for nearly ten years during the 1674 Revolt of the Three Feudatories reflect this consideration. In 1645, the Ming loyalist admiral Ts’ui Chih approached Japan to request Japanese military aid in an attempt to restore the already fallen Ming Empire. Until the late 1650s, Ming loyalists repeatedly sought Japan’s assistance in their armed struggle against the Manchus, saying that it was the Ming Empire that toppled the Mongols from China.290

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288 Ibid., 117-8.
289 Ibid., 142-67.
290 The remark is from Cheng Chih-lung arrived in Nagasaki. See ibid., 126-7.
Japan did not give any positive answer to them and ended up not sending any army, but there is strong evidence that the debate was in progress within the Tokugawa government, and was in favor of the dispatch.

Rather than being disinterested in responding to the Chinese request, according to Itakura, the shogun was not only interested, but there was even a plan of battle for an anticipated Japanese expeditionary force to China! The plan outlined in Itakura’s letter to land on the Chinese coast, to establish fortified positions there, and to continue to establish fortifications as they moved inland.291

By 1701, even the Qing Emperor K’ang-hsi learned of rumors of Japan’s military preparations for an invasion of the Qing Empire, leading him to send spies to Nagasaki to investigate the threat from Japan.292

In Korea, the security implications of the Korean identity as a Confucian state and its refusal to cut off tributary relations with the Ming Empire spoke even more loudly due to its geopolitical location sharing the borderline with the Manchus. During the Manchus’ early formative years of rule, particularly in the 1620s and the early 1630s, Korea was one of the most important neighbors to them along with the Mongols and the Ming government.293 The Manchu decision to assail Korea in 1627 should be understood in the broader context of power competition between the Ming

291 Ibid., 124.
292 See footnote 140 in ibid., 160.
293 Ch’oe, myôngch’ ong sidae chunghan kwan ’gyesa yŏn’gu (A Study on Sino-Korean Relations during the Ming-Qing periods), 62.
Empire and the Manchus. In particular, the presence of the Ming general Mao on the Korean peninsula made the Manchus very nervous, due to the possibility of an attack from Mao’s forces allied with the Korean Navy from the sea. In addition, the Manchus had been in a dire food crisis ever since they lost the Ming supply route, and wanted to extract some economic concessions from Korea. After the first invasion, the Manchus quickly offered peace negotiations on condition that Korea would ally with the Manchu army to invade the Ming, based on brotherly relations with them.

The Korean government accepted the Manchu conditions at that moment, but mostly ignored their demands. Then in 1636, immediately after the announcement of the building of an empire called the Qing Empire, the Manchus attacked Korea for the second time to make sure that the Korean government completely severed its tributary relations with the Ming Empire and accepted the status of Qing tributary. The event turned out to be a defining moment, because it was at this point when formal tribute relations were initiated between the Qing Empire and Korea.

During the interim period between 1627 and 1636, the Korean government was vacillating between the weakened Ming Empire and the rising Manchus, but it is noticeable that there were renewed anti-Manchu sentiments during this period.

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294 Han, “chŏngmyo, pyŏngjahorangwa dongasiachilsŏ (Chongyo and Byongja Warfares and the International Order in East Asia),” 224-58. After Nurhachi died in 1626, his son Abahai launched an attack on the weaker Korea first, instead of directly confronting the still formidable Ming forces, to remove danger from the east before they embarked on an all-out war against the Ming Empire. See also Ch’oe, myŏngch’ong sidae chunghan kwan’gyesa yŏn’gu (A Study on Sino-Korean Relations during the Ming-Qing periods), 96-98.
leading up to the second Manchu invasion of Korea. Symbolically, at the inauguration ceremony of the first Qing Emperor, the Korean envoys’ refusal to perform “kowtow,” unlike their counterparts from the Ming and the Mongols, plunged Qing-Korea relations further into crisis. Upon the Qing government’s demand that they change the previous brotherly relations to the formal tributary relations, the Korean King Injo rejected the request on the ground of Korea’s disdain of the “orangkae barbarian.” Then, when the second Manchu invasion was launched with a large army of 100,000, the Korean King Injo fled to Samjundo but had to unconditionally surrender by the first month of 1637.

**Returning to Hierarchy**

The return to the hierarchical structure of the East Asian states system under the Qing Empire took place as Japan and Korea accepted the reality of the Qing-centered order at a practical level. In other words, even while denying the Qing ideological claim of moral superiority, they remained as *status quo* powers and participated in the Qing-centered order. Following the pattern typical of Japan’s and Korea’s relations with China, Sino-Japanese relations were mostly trading relations without any formal diplomatic relations while Sino-Korean relations were those of the traditional tributary relations, which involved the practices of tribute and investiture. However, after the fall of Beijing to the Qing Empire, going against

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296 Han, “choch’ŏngkwan’gyeŭi ch’ui (Conditions of the Qing- Chosŏn Relations),” 266-67.
traditional East Asian diplomatic protocol of the China-centered order, Korea did not use Qing era names in its diplomatic letters to Japan, while similarly, the term “China” disappeared from Japan’s diplomatic correspondence.297

Japan’s foreign policy toward the Qing Empire was characterized by a pragmatic attitude, avoiding any situation where it was required to take action against the Qing Empire. A good example of this is with regard to the status of the Kingdom of Ryukyu. The Kingdom of Ryukyu had paid tribute to the Ming Empire since the late fourteenth century, but later was incorporated as part of the Satsuma province of Japan in 1429. When Japan learned the Qing Empire’s request to the Ryukyu Kingdom to send tributary missions on the basis of the Qing customs, the Tokugawa government decided to tolerate the Ryukyus’ inevitable acceptance of Qing customs.298 Japan refused to be integrated into the Qing tribute system, but allowed Chinese merchants to visit Nagasaki, maintaining commercial relations with the Qing Empire.

More broadly speaking, Japan’s Tokugawa period has been characterized by “a closed country” policy and the Great Prince Diplomatic Order, which are good examples of Japan’s practical participation of the Qing-centered order.299 Japan,

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296 Han, imjinwaerangwa hanchung kwan’gye (The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea and Sino-Korean Relations), 274.
297 Toby, State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan, 95.
298 For details, see Mizuno, “China in Tokugawa Foreign Relations,” 137-40.
299 Note that the so-called seclusion (sakoku) policy is a famous image that describes Tokugawa foreign relations, but more recent historiography has shown that Japan’s Asian diplomacy in the seventeenth century was in fact that of “the organic connection of ‘isolated’ Japan to the development of the entire East Asian region.” Between 1633 and 1639, during which the Manchus proclaimed their intention of building an empire in East Asia and beyond, Japan’s military government Tokugawa...
despite its power being strong enough to keep the Western states away from its country, did not attempt to militarily challenge the Qing Empire but compromised with the latter. And it was through this ideological reaction that Japan broke away from the traditional China-centered order, as shown by the fact that the term “Great Prince” did not have any diplomatic precedents in the East Asian diplomatic protocols.

There are three traits that were characteristic of Japan’s Great Prince diplomacy during the Tokugawa period. First, Japan claimed centrality in Asian hierarchy, while denying denoting any predetermined relationship with China or the China-centered order. For example, the Tokugawa government demanded that Korea agree to the removal of China as a reference in Japanese-Korean relations, as a break away from the previous international order.300 Second, Japan operated under the ideological pretension that all the other East Asian countries were inferior to Japan. While referring to the Qing Empire as “dealing with barbarians,”301 Japan advertised those diplomatic envoys from Korea and the Kingdom of Ryukyu as if they were coming to pay tribute to Japan’s capital Edo.302 Third, even as Japan claimed the

regime issued a series of edicts, designed to restrict the interaction of Japanese people with those outside. See Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan*, xxxi. Also see, for example, Warren Cohen, *East Asia at the Center: Four Thousand Years of Engagement with the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 216-44.

300 See Kang, *Diplomacy and Ideology in Japanese-Korean Relations*, Chapter 5; Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan*, 94. According to the East Asia diplomatic protocol, both Japan and Korea as China’s tributaries were supposed to Chinese era names when they communicated between themselves.


302 All of a sudden, Korea was paying “pilgrimages” to the shogunal shrines at Nikko, where Tokugawa Ieyasu was enshrined as the “Great Avatar who illuminated the East.” See ibid., 201.
Japan-centered order, it followed China-centered tribute system practices, in which Japan would be placed at the top. Japan copied from the time-honored Chinese tribute system institutions, such as the investiture, tributes and maritime restrictions vis-à-vis its neighbors.

In the case of Korea, after the second invasion of the Manchus in 1636, the period between 1637 and 1644 until the Qing Empire entered Beijing is considered as the biggest diplomatic crisis for the Korean government.\(^{303}\) It was during this time that the Qing Empire was finalizing the establishment of the Qing government in Beijing in place of the Ming, and as such, employed highly coercive measures before softening their stance after 1644. During this period, the Qing requests upon Korea’s 1637 surrender set the tone of bilateral relations. The Qing Emperor demanded of King Injo the following in his letter:

You break off relations with them [the Ming,] stop the era name of the Ming and all the documents will treat us as the suzerain state. You will send your eldest son and another son as hostages. Your ministers, those who have sons, will send them as hostages and those who have no sons will send their brothers as hostages. If something happens to you I will place your son who is hostage to succeed you. If I attack the Ming I will write edicts and send them messengers to ask you to gather infantry, cavalry and ships to the numbers of tens of thousands. We will designate the place to meet and there should not be any mistake.\(^{304}\)

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303 Ch’oe, Ch’ŏnggwa chosŏn (The Qing Empire and Chosŏn), 136.
Not surprisingly, after the surrender the King Injo changed from his vacillation between the Ming and the Qing to comply with Qing demands. The Qing Empire attempted to use the Crown Prince Sohyŏn who was taken as a hostage to extract more favorable terms from Korea, such as requesting Korea’s naval forces. The King Injo’s overall Qing policy was that of compliance so as not to anger the Qing government. When it was known that one of highest-ranking officials Ch’oe Myŏng-kil had been secretly communicating with the Ming, King Injo removed him of his position in the Korean government.

Ideologically, however, Korea developed a similarly fierce pride in being “a small center (Sojunghwa)” in place of the now demised Ming Empire, placing itself above the Qing Empire and Japan. As a clear indication that Korea’s acceptance of the tributary relations was not on a normative basis but on the practical side, “the Conquer Qing Argument” by a famous Confucian scholar Song Si-yŏl gained support from King Hyojong as well as many Confucian scholar-bureaucrats of that time. When King Hyojong came into the throne after King Injo, he ordered an increase of the size of the Korean military force and began to prepare for invading the Qing Empire. Despite the fact that Korean national power fell far behind that of the Qing Empire, thus making any realistic chance of victory for Korea elusive, the plan was consistently pursued throughout King Hyojong’s lifetime, thus boosting
Korea’s military power to its peak for the entire Chosŏn Korea period. But in the end, the plan did not materialize and died with the death of King Hyojong in 1659.

**Stability Mechanisms for the Qing Hierarchy**

Then, what held the East Asian states system together during the Qing Empire when the “barbarian tribe” claimed the top position of Asian hierarchy? As we have seen, during the rise of the Qing Empire both Korea and Japan did what they could to resist the Qing-centered order, but returned to accept it after a while. To make sense of the foreign policy behavior of Korea and Japan during this historical juncture, I argue that behind this practical acceptance of the Qing-centered order lay a combination of mechanisms of 1) the superior Qing power, 2) interest in acquiring trading opportunities (Japan) and political autonomy (Korea), and 3) adroit use of identity politics on the part of the Qing Empire.

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305 Jongnok O, “chosŏnkunsaryŏk’ui silt’ae (Reality of Chosŏn Military Power),” in Dŏkke Gu, et al., chosŏnchunggi chŏngch’iwa chŏngch’aek (Politics and Policy during the Mid-Chosŏn Period), 139-
Importantly, it is significant that the third mechanism of elite socialization and the resulting identity politics played an important role in defining the characteristic of the China-centered order under the Qing Empire. To overcome the perceived lack of legitimacy due to their non-Chinese origin, the Qing rulers explicitly employed a strategy of personifying themselves with multiple identities to appeal to different cultures as a tool for imperial governance. Interestingly, in a similar identity politics way, both Korea and Japan began to assert themselves as the new center of the East Asian states system with the demise of the Ming Empire,
short of actual military balancing against the Qing Empire. The variation in their foreign policy reactions to the rise of the Qing Empire can be best explained by the attempts of the ruling elites in Korea and Japan to adroitly use this new ideology of centrality to enhance their own authority based on their society’s local adaptation and socialization into Neo-Confucian teaching.

**The Qing Power**

There is little doubt that the establishment of the Qing Empire in the seventeenth century was built upon the superior military power of the Manchus to begin with. Nurhaci (1559-1626) had embarked on military conquest with the help of the military-administrative structure called the banners system, the most vital Manchu institution, and for the first 150 years, the Qing Empire continued to push its territorial barriers on the northern and western frontiers like no other previous Chinese dynasty had done. Indeed, Qing primacy until the end of the eighteenth century before the “triumph of the West” was not to be challenged in East Asia and beyond.306

In East Asia, the reality of the Qing-centered order was established on power, in which Korea and Japan were a part of it as a *fait accompli*. Japanese military power was such a formidable force in East Asia to the extent that it kept the Portuguese and Spanish away throughout the Tokugawa period. However, Japan had
to decide that the Manchus were too strong to be challenged, despite its inclination to favor the Ming Empire over the Qing Empire. In Korea, it was because of Manchu power that the Korean government was forced to be a part of the Qing-centered order after the second Manchu invasion of Korea in 1636. As was described in the section above, if it had not been for the Manchu use of force, the Korean government would have not switched its tributary status from the Ming Empire to the Qing Empire. There is no denying that militarily, The Qing Empire was undoubtedly at the top of Asian hierarchy.

Importantly, the Qing Empire’s success was not only about the preponderance of power, but had to do with success in answering this question: “You have conquered the empire on horseback; but can you rule it on horseback? (Lu Jia to the Han emperor Gaozu)” On the question of how and why the Qing Empire was so successful, an answer can be found in the manner in which it projected power through ideas. Qing governance had previously been understood in the context of “sinicization”: adopting the Chinese culture and institutions. However, the more recent historiography of “new Qing history” has shown us that the Qing rulers not only maintained their “Manchu way,” but in fact combined Inner Asian and Chinese traditions so as to simultaneously appeal to both constituencies. In her review on the new Qing history, Joanna Waley-Cohen notes that through this combination of

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306 For an account of the Qing patterns of territorial consolidation in a comparative perspective in world history, see Victor Lieberman, “The Qing Dynasty and Its Neighbors: Early Modern China in World History,” *Social Science History* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 281-304.
Inner Asian and Chinese traditions, Qing ritual matured from its earlier Chinese form “through its very bid for comprehensiveness.”

The Qing rulers exhibited more cultural savviness in forming relations with other peoples of different cultures. For example, the emperor Qianlong (r. 1736-1695) was “famously skillful at presenting a different face to different subjects” while embodying himself as the “new Khubilai” for the Mongols, the Confucian “Son of Heaven” for Koreans, Vietnamese and his Chinese population, and the reincarnation of the Bodhisattva Manjusri for the Tibetan Buddhists. That is, the Qing Empire’s ability to conduct “the aggressive imperial quest to embody multiple meanings in unitary form” was critical in the Qing’s success story.

Therefore, in thinking about the longevity of the China-centered order, it is wrong to assume that the tribute system took the same form across time. James Millward is right in critiquing the Fairbankian notion of the tribute system as being

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309 For example see Perdue, China Marches West. His account of the rise of the Manchus sheds light on the difficult transformation of the Manchu state builders with regard to the acculturation of Chinese ways and the following conflict among themselves over this transformation. For details, see Perdue, 109-29.
ever unchanging Chinese institutions across the entire history of China. The Qing government developed a so-called “bifurcated foreign policy,” in which Inner Asian northwestern affairs were dealt with through the institution of the LifanMongol, separately from the Libu designed for more Confucianized states like Korea. In line with the “new Qing history” historiography, it was exactly because of this that the Qing Empire’s ability to skillfully present different faces to different subjects that the Qing rulers employed more traditional Chinese institutions of the tribute system toward Korea. To put it differently, it was because the Korean society was highly Confucianized that the Qing Emperors presented themselves as an image of the “Son of Heaven.”

**Interests: Trade and Autonomy**

More recently, historians of the Tokugawa period have shown that the idea of Japan as “a closed country (sakoku)” does not represent Japan’s engagement with East Asia in the seventeenth century. Then, how did Japan remain as “a significant economic and strategic fact in East Asia,” when the Japanese clearly shared the

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312 For this line of argument, see, for example, Millward, et al., *New Qing Imperial History*; Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar*; Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror*; Perdue, *China Marches West*; Millward, “Qing Xinjiang and Trouble with Tribute”; and Wills, *Pepper, Guns, and Parleys.*

313 More historians show recently that Tokugawa Japan was not closed to Asia, nor was it entirely close to Europe. According to Ronald Toby, if one examines the Tokugawa government’s policies under the label sakuko to include Japan’s Asian environment, particularly Korea, Ryukyu and China, one realizes that there is less discontinuity in Japanese foreign policy in the 1630s from the pre-Imjin War period. He further argues that in Japan’s Asian relations, the same institutions have functioned at least until the 1850s when relations are traced further. See Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan,* Introduction, and especially p. 6.

314 Quoted ibid., 5.
Koreans’ disdain for the Manchus? Compared with its neighbor Korea, Japan had been more successful in resisting direct political pressure from China, because the ocean is a convenient, if not unbreakable, barrier. Therefore, in thinking about Japan’s foreign relations with Korea, Ryukyu and China in the seventeenth century, the primary incentive for Japan to engage with these countries can be found in Japan’s pursuit of its commercial interest through trading relations.

While the Japanese government carefully weighed the implications of the rise of the Manchus in the 1630s, it decided that Japanese interests would be best served by the continuation of trade. Immediately after the 1639 order expelling the Portuguese from trade with Japan, the shogun’s message to the Korean government spoke of Japan’s intention: “Because commerce with [the Portuguese] has…been banned from this year, we must seek more broadly trade with other foreign nations besides them, and [the shogun] has ordered us to trade with your country even more than in the past.”315 In the midst of civil war in China after the Qing conquest in 1644, the Japanese government’s order to the daimyo of Satsuma in July 1646 stated that Japan should continue trading via Ryukyu for Chinese silk.316

During those years of the rise of the Qing Empire, the scale of Japan’s foreign trade continued to grow, deepening the degree of interdependence with the wider East Asian region. Economic historians of Tokugawa Japan tell us that the early Qing currency relied heavily on imports of Japan’s copper; Iwao Seiichi’s

315 Ibid, 9.
316 Ibid.
analysis of Japan’s trade with China in the seventeenth century shows that the records from the Dutch, Chinese and Japanese in Nagasaki indicate that average copper exports in the last quarter of the seventeenth century exceeded five million pounds annually, with a peak export in 1698 of over 13 million pounds.\textsuperscript{317} Many Japanese in Nagasaki, Tsushima, Kagoshima, Osaka, Kyoto and several other coastal areas were dependent for their livelihood on the foreign trade of Japan.\textsuperscript{318}

It deserves mention here that the Qing Empire showed some room for flexibility so that their bilateral relations were mutually beneficial. The Tokugawa government adopted a trade credential system and applied it to trading relations with the Qing Empire to place a restriction on the number of Chinese merchants. Japan’s era name\textit{ shotoku} was used in the trade credential, and even though the Chinese Emperor was thought to be the only one in the known world privileged enough to have an era name in view of the traditional China-centered order, the Qing Empire allowed the Japanese era name for trading relations.\textsuperscript{319}

Undoubtedly, Korea’s acceptance of tributary relations with the Qing government was made possible first via military subjugation, and therefore, the power mechanism played a critical role in restoring the tribute system after the Ming Empire’s fall to the Qing Empire. Korea’s participation in the Qing-centered order, therefore, was about Qing power combined with the Korean government’s cost-benefit calculation of wishing to maintain its political autonomy vis-à-vis the Qing

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{317} Ibid, xxvii.
\item \textsuperscript{318} Ibid, xxviii
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Empire by accepting its tributary status.\textsuperscript{320} As a matter of fact, despite the Qing cultural origin, Qing-Korea tributary relations are often considered “the most typical” and highly systemized.\textsuperscript{321}

With the end of the second Manchu invasion, Korea’s foreign policy toward the Qing Empire changed into a more conciliatory pro-Qing policy. After the humiliating defeat, King Injo’s domestic authority plummeted like no other king’s had done in earlier periods in Korean history, and he had reason to be worried about his position as King. Despite the suggestion by anti-Qing figures such as Cho Kyung that Korea accept Japan’s offer of military aid to fight back against the Qing Empire, King Injo decided to ignore them. Behind this change lay the fear of King Injo that the Qing government might remove him from the throne.\textsuperscript{322}

It also deserves attention here that it mattered that the Qing Empire’s tribute system allowed some flexibility and room for Korea to maintain its autonomy in terms of cultural diversification so that there were significant overlapping areas of interests between Korea and the Qing Empire. For example, in the eighteenth century,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{319}Mizuno, “China in Tokugawa Foreign Relations,” 142.  
\textsuperscript{320}Unlike Japan whose primary interest lay in having trading opportunities with China, Korea had little to gain from trading with The Qing Empire and thus, the economic factor did not weigh seriously in Korea’s thinking about bilateral relations with The Qing Empire.  
\textsuperscript{321}See for example, So-ja Ch’oe, \textit{ch’ŏnggwa chosŏn (the Qing Empire and Chosŏn)}. Her book examines the Korean embassies to The Qing Empire with details such as the regulations and practices concerning the kinds of embassies and the business they transacted, their appointment and composition, their preparation for departure to China, the routes they took and the ceremonies and activities in Beijing and their reports after they returned to Korea, and their frequency as well as economic activities. Also see, Hae-jong Chun, “Sino-Korean Tributary Relations in the Ch’ing Period,” in \textit{The Chinese World Order}, ed. Fairbank, 90-111.  
\textsuperscript{322}Han, “choch’ŏngkwan’gyeŭi ch’ui (Conditions of the Qing-Chosŏn Relations),” in \textit{chosŏnchunggi chŏngch’iwa chŏngch’aek (Politics and Policy during the Mid-Chosŏn Period)}, p. 282-5.
\end{flushright}
the Qing government was fully aware that the Korean government built a shrine called *daebodan* for the deceased Ming Emperors and held commemorative ceremonies. But the Qing Empire decided to ignore such behavior on Korea’s part on the grounds that they did not affect actual foreign policy between the two countries.\(^{323}\) What this meant was that the Qing Empire did not react negatively to Korea’s ideological moves against it, as long as it did not affect actual foreign policy in practice. According to a pioneer Korean historian of Qing history Chun Hae-jong, while the tribute system might have been closely linked to Confucian Chinese culture, the Qing government, “knowing consciously or unconsciously that Korea had already been fully Confucianized, felt no need to exert further cultural influence on Korea.”\(^{324}\)

**Elite Socialization**

Despite the importance of foreign trade in Tokugawa Japan, it would be wrong to regard commercial interests as the only factor that drove Japanese foreign policy during the Qing Empire. Rather, to better understand why the Tokugawa government reacted to the reality of the Qing-centered order in the manner that it did, one must view Japan’s diplomacy through the prism of elite socialization and the dynamics of enhancing the legitimacy of the *shogun* (a position equivalent to the Korean King). Under closer scrutiny of the context in which the Great Prince

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\(^{323}\) Ch’oe, *ch’ŏnggwa chosŏn (The Qing Empire and Chosŏn)*, p. 93.

\(^{324}\) Chun, 111.
diplomatic strategy was formulated, one realizes that the Japanese ruling elites used
Neo-Confucian ideology politically to present Japan’s self-image of centrality in
East Asia, just like Korea did during the same periods of the Qing Empire’s rise.
Indeed, while keeping a distance from the Qing Empire, a large part of Japan’s
diplomatic relations with Korea and the Kingdom of Ryukyu were designed to
increase shogunal authority in the eyes of domestic political public.

To explore this dynamic, it is useful to trace the Tokugawa government’s
calculations behind its decision to decline the Ming Empire’s offer of restoring direct
relations in 1621. Japan, as noted earlier, had been attempting to restore direct
relations with the Ming government immediately after the end of the Hideyoshi
Invasions of Korea. But, when the Ming finally responded with a positive answer,
the Japanese government decided not to pursue it. Why was this so? According to
Ronald Toby, it had to do with the Tokugawa government’s efforts to assert
legitimacy through diplomacy. In other words, it was not because Shogun Hidetada
was less interested in trade than his predecessor, but because the potential for
domestic challenges to shogunal authority had lessened by then, due to the death of
Emperor Goyozei-in and other factors. As such, the Tokugawa government “no
longer felt the need to compromise a burgeoning autonomous structure of legitimacy
for the marginal advantage of direct dealings with Ming.”³²⁵ To put it differently,

³²⁵ Toby, State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan, 63.
Japan declined to participate in the Ming tribute system in consideration of its own regime’s legitimacy in the eyes of the domestic political public.

Toby’s observation that the Tokugawa government maneuvered Asian diplomacy for the purpose of asserting shogunal legitimacy deserves further attention when we consider the Qing-centered order, because this is a key factor that explains the distinctive character of the Great Prince diplomatic order of Japan during the Tokugawa period. Indeed, Japan, in a strikingly similar fashion to Korea, responded to the rise of the Qing Empire by claiming its own centrality in the Asian international system. And this was clearly designed to inspire awe in the minds of the public so as to enhance shogunal authority vis-à-vis other domestic actors.

Then it begs the question of why claiming Japan’s ka-i (translate) centrality was seen as a means to enhance shogunal legitimacy. Hypothetically, why was the reverse not the case for Japan (i.e., accepting the investiture from the Qing Emperor as Korea did)? The answer can be found in the official introduction of Neo-Confucianism among the ruling elites in the Tokugawa government, which was combined with the shinkoku ideology. This unification of Neo-Confucianism and the shinkoku ideology explains the distinctive character of the Tokugawa diplomatic ideology, as Shinto remained its basic element, justifying Japanese rulers’ claim that Japan would be superior to others.\(^\text{326}\) It was during this time of the Tokugawa period

when Neo-Confucianism was put into practice for the purpose of maintaining social order—in particular, the political authority of the Tokugawa Shoguns.327

It is worth remembering that the early years of the Manchu rise coincided with the period in Japan when the Tokugawa shoguns were trying hard to consolidate their position at the apex of political power vis-à-vis their potential rivals, including the daimyo (powerful military families) and the Japanese Emperor. In the process, the third Shogun Iemitsu implemented policies such as “alternative attendance”, that required leading daimyos to remain close to the capital, thereby removing them from hands-on rule in local provinces. It is along this same line that the Tokugawa shoguns attempted to convince daimyos by advertising the Korean embassies as tribute-bearing missions to the daimyos and the imperial court.

Through such diplomacy, the Tokugawa sought to legitimize its domestic position as the hegemon of Japan. It hoped in particular to impress the many daimyos with the respect shown by foreigners to the Tokugawa. This goal is most evident in the way the Korean embassies were used, especially in 1617 and in 1634 around the time of the so-called expulsion edicts. The tozama and collateral lords were all commanded to attend a reception for 428 Korean visitors, a grand procession, and a visit to Ieyasu’s grave. They were to be impressed by the many gifts to the Tokugawa and the congratulations given by the Koreans on unification of the country. Over the

ensuing decades, Korean missions served to show the elite daimyo and top samurai that Japan’s domestic political order was respected by a wider world.328

Ideologically, a mixture of Buddhist, *Shinkoku*, and Neo-Confucian elements supported the Tokugawa shoguns’ efforts by emphasizing the virtue of hierarchy. Here it is interesting to note the differences in the localization process of Neo-Confucianism in Japan and Korea. If Neo-Confucian teaching regulated every aspect of Korean society strictly, against the backdrop of Japan’s political, cultural climate, Japanese ruling elites “attempted to utilize some Confucian elements to maintain the social order.”329

The same logic applied to Japan’s Asian diplomacy in general. According to Etsuko Kang, Japan’s refusal to use the title “*Nihon koku o* (King of Japan)” for “*Nihon koku Taikun* (Great Prince of Japan)” in its diplomatic documents with Korea represented a declaration of independence from the China-centered order in which Japan had participated. It was “the declaration of a new, self-sufficient domestic legitimacy structure willing to meet with others autonomously in the diplomatic arena.”330 More concretely, the Great Prince diplomacy found its expression in Japan’s creation of an autonomous system of diplomacy, which resembled that of the China-centered tribute system.

The title “Great Prince” was the means to elevate Japan’s ideological perception of itself from a peer level with China to the level of Japan alone in the center

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330 Ibid., 156.
subordinating Korea and The Qing Empire. The nature of the “Great Prince” diplomacy, therefore, was a strengthened embodiment of Japan-centered ideology which Japan had exhibited towards Korea since the Muromachi period.331

As such, in the propaganda efforts of the Tokugawa government to its public, Korean envoys throughout the Tokugawa period were advertised as coming to pay tribute to the shogunal power. The Korean embassy of 1636-37 during the national crisis of Korea with the second Manchu invasion was requested to pay pilgrimage to Ieyasu’s tomb at Nikko “as an act of splendor for the whole country [Japan].” In 1642, the Tokugawa government took advantage of the Korean situation (Korea was under heavy Manchu pressure) to have the Korean king Injo send a bronze bell with the 1643 embassy to Nikko. Toby provides us with details on the impact of the bell:

On the day that the Korean embassy of 1643 passed through Kyoto, 462 strong, the bell was apparently the talk of the town. Kujo Michifusa, then the Naidaijin and later imperial regent, recorded the entire scene in his diary… Michifusa was nearly overwhelmed, exclaiming, “Has this shogun’s military might already reached to foreign countries! Recently they have been sending embassies on every felicitous occasion. [Shogun] Iemitsu had good reason to be pleased… Hereafter every daimyo, every imperial envoy making pilgrimage to Nikko, as they were not infrequently required to do, would be greeted upon his approach to the shrines with tangible, graphic evidence of the far-reaching power and majesty of the bakufu [government].332

331 Ibid., 157.
332 Toby, State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan, 102-3.
The Korean embassies were never tribute missions, and Japan-Korea relations were conducted as being that of diplomatic peers throughout the whole Tokugawa period, as is shown by the fact that the Korean perception was starkly different from what the Tokugawa government advertised.333

As for Korea, too, in addition to the mechanisms of power and interest, an understanding of the degree to which Korea’s ruling elites were socialized into Neo-Confucianism is critical to explain 1) why Korea’s acceptance of the Qing-centered order remained at the level of practicality, compared to the normative acceptance of the Ming-centered order, and 2) why Korea responded differently at different times to the Qing-centered order. First, an answer to the question 1) can be found in the fact that Korea’s ruling elites, Confucian scholar bureaucrats, had developed a state ideology through the crises over the rise of the Manchus.

This deep elite socialization into the *hwai* recognized Korea as the new center of the China-centered order, in place of the demised Ming Empire. I argue that this aspect of identity politics vis-à-vis the Qing Empire was an important stability mechanism on the part of Korea, *cushioning* the reality of having to accept the “barbarian” Manchus as the “Son of Heaven” in a risk-averse manner. Etsuko Kang epitomizes this Korean behavior as “double-faced diplomacy,” ideologically pursuing its centrality, while accepting the Qing power at a practical level.334

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333 See Son, *chosŏnsidae hanil kwan’gye yŏn’gu* (A Study on Korea-Japan Relations during the Chosŏn Period), the entire book; and for Korean perception of Japan, see Woo-bong Ha, *chosŏnsidae han’gŭginŭ ilboninsik* (Koreans’ Understanding of Japan in Chosŏn Dynasty) (Seoul: Haean, 2006).
It was such a sense of cultural supremacy that Chosŏn [Korea] held at the time of the conquest by the Manchurian race of the Qing. The Qing was the seat of a “barbarous” race- orangkae- which Korea despised vehemently although forced to surrender to its military supremacy. Diplomatically, Korea adhered to sadae-kyorin diplomacy, but ideologically regarded The Qing Empire and Japan as barbaric states and after the demise of the Ming, Korea claimed itself sole cultural center in the Chinese world order.335

Second, the extent to which Korea’s ruling elites were socialized into Neo-Confucian teaching accounts for a divided government during the Manchu crises, and therefore, for the vacillation of Korean behavior vis-à-vis the Qing Empire. In other words, the vacillation of Korea’s Qing policies during those periods of the Qing Empire’s rise can be explained by the competition between these different political factions using different Neo-Confucian logics. And at the heart of this power competition was the Korean King Injo’s and Hyojong’s efforts to strengthen his authority in domestic politics.

If one looks at the period during which Korea was militarily preparing for an invasion of the Qing Empire under the reign of the King Hyojong, this was the high point of Korea’s centrality claim in the form of “the Conquer Qing Argument.” The idea was backed up by the prominent Neo-Confucian scholar Song Si-yŏl, who was the King Hyojong’s childhood teacher. Showing a remarkable similarity to a prominent, influential Neo-Confucian scholar Chu Hsi’s anti-Chin sentiments and
recommendation to the Song Emperor, Song Si-yŏl submitted his first sealed statement on how to govern the country.

A glimpse of Chu Hsi’s letter reveals how thoroughly Korean scholar Song was Confucianized: first, that “the Emperor should pursue the way of sovereignty in the Confucian way,” and second, that “we should resolutely carry out plans to expel the barbarians, in other words, Chin is Song’s mortal enemy, so we should not plan conservative peace negotiations with them, but expel them by our force and recover out territory from them.” Song Si-yŏl, too, in his essay advocated Korea’s continued tributary relations with the Ming Empire and endorsed the idea of “expel(ling) the barbarian Qing.”

This dynamic is also useful in elucidating Korea’s vacillating foreign policy during the rise of the Manchus. When we look into the political power relationship leading to the first and second Manchu invasions of Korea in 1627 and 1636, one realizes that the King Injo, having come to the throne through a coup against Prince Kwanghae on the ground that Kwanghae did not follow jae-jo-ji-ŭn, was not in a position to be overtly pro-Manchu. That was because the King Injo desperately needed an investiture from the Ming Emperor for his authority within Korea. For that reason, King Injo had little choice but to seek cooperation from the Ming general Mao encamped in the Korean island of Kado, and to provide military supplies to his

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Ibid., 187.
Ibid., 191.
Ming army. Not surprisingly, when the Manchus invaded in 1627, they justified their aggression as an act of removing a threat from the Ming general Mao from the east.

Moreover, a summary of the political power competition below should give us an idea as to how politics that involved the elites socialized into Neo-Confucianism combined with a pursuit of their own interest within the Korean government resulted in the Qing policies. Once the first invasion of 1627 broke out, the previously pro-Ming Confucian scholar bureaucrats from the Sŏin faction such as Yi Kwi and Ch’oe Myŏng-kil switched their positions and overtly supported peaceful negotiations with the Manchus. But these figures were placed under pressure from other anti-Manchu Confucian bureaucrats, who criticized them for switching sides.

The second invasion in 1636 should then be understood in the context of the louder voices of anti-Manchu scholar bureaucrats, which the King Injo could not simply ignore. In the midst of Manchu pressure requesting the Korean government to send its navy in support of their campaign against the Ming Empire, the policy council *pibyŏnsa* and the King Injo were leaning toward taking an appeasing stance vis-à-vis the Manchus. But the criticism from anti-Manchu scholar-bureaucrats such as Yoon Whang and Cho Kyung reminding them of the rationale for the Injo Restoration contributed to the indecisiveness of Korea’s position, leading to the second invasion in 1636.
Conclusion: Tribute System under the Qing Empire

The chapter’s discussion on the rise of the Qing Empire is relevant for today’s debate on the rise of China to the extent that the policy makers of Korea and Japan faced similar strategic imperatives in the seventeenth century as they do at present. This is not to argue that today’s East Asian neighbors would behave as they did in the seventeenth century, but the mechanisms for system stability can be generalized.

East Asia’s seventeenth century “rise of China” case does not necessarily support the balance of power/threat theory, since the rise of the Qing Empire did not provoke military balancing behavior on the part of Korea and Japan. This is despite the fact that both countries clearly felt threatened by the Qing Empire’s rise after the shift in the strategic power distribution in the region. At the same, however, it is important to note that there were moves against the rise of the Qing Empire both in Korea and Japan, which included military preparations but mostly in the form of “soft balancing” of ideology. To the chapter’s question, my answer focuses on China’s “ideological innovation” as a central part of the stability mechanisms, which kept the East Asian system under the Qing Empire relatively stable.

A closer scrutiny of variations in the level of acceptance of the Qing hegemony on the parts of Korea and Japan during the time period between 1627 and 1800 reveals that with the Qing military power as given, the mechanism of interests-political autonomy for Korea and trade for Japan- were the backbone of the
system’s stability. But in explaining the character/nature of the system, the ideological innovations in the ruling elites’ justification of their rule and the use of foreign policy as a tool for regime security defined what the Qing Empire looked like, which was quite different from the Ming Empire.

Japan attempted to create a different regional order on an ideological ground in East Asia before the reality of the barbarian Qing-centered order. But it is very interesting to see that what Japan did was to copy the time-honored tribute system to create an autonomous system in which it claimed to be the center. As such, even under Japan’s conceived Great Prince diplomatic order, the essential characteristics of the East Asian system would have remained.
Conclusion: The “Chinese World Order” and the Rise of China Today

From the thirteenth through the end of the eighteenth century, the international order in East Asia was hierarchical with China at the center of the East Asian states system. In the field of international relations, this question of the persistence of hierarchy has either been treated as an anomaly by the balance of power/threat school of thought, or has been addressed only partly by hegemonic order theorists. Although attempts have been made to explain the mechanisms behind system stability under the condition of unbalanced power by focusing on power, interest, or ideas, they have not been satisfactory in accounting for the longevity of the China-centered order in early modern East Asia. That is largely because the existing theories have failed to elucidate how all three mechanisms of power, interest and ideas interact with one another over time, leading to the maturity of the international system itself.

My dissertation presents a systemic model that clarifies how hegemonic power, interest and social dynamics are related to one another over time and in turn have bearings on the international order. I argue that the key to the persistence of hierarchical order in East Asia lies in the concept of strategic use of soft power. The hegemonic structure of the international system is likely to persist longer when the hegemon’s institutional innovations that lock in its own power, interest and ideas are turned into broader sources of international authority over time. It is
when the hegemon’s strategy of using its ideological claim of superiority projected through the international institutions is accepted at a normative level by the secondary states that the international system is most stable. If we look into the logics behind the strategic use of soft power, one realizes that the persistence of hierarchy occurs when the ruling elites of the secondary states come to rely on the hegemon’s recognition-yielding institutions for legitimacy as a means to boost their own position and legitimacy in domestic politics. When this occurs, it allows the hegemon to use soft power for realpolitik purposes, making the governance of the international system much cheaper and more cost-effective.

Empirically, from a comparative historical perspective, the dissertation examines how China’s institutional innovations of the tribute system have evolved over time, taking different forms across time and space, and accounting for the different levels of acceptance on the part of Korea and Japan. It embraces insights from recent historiography on the foreign relations of the Qing Empire that leads us to consider variation in tribute practices across time and space. In doing so, it avoids the problem of conflating China’s ideological claim of its superiority with the actual foreign policy behaviors of China, Korea and Japan.

Interdisciplinary in nature, the dissertation pushes forward the yet-to-be-explored avenue of research that takes Asian history seriously in our theorizing of international relations, which has been embraced by scholars like Victoria Hui, Iain Johnston, and David Kang, among others. It builds on Kang’s thesis on Asian
hierarchy, but disagrees with his argument that a rich and strong China could again cement regional stability in light of East Asian powers’ past history of bandwagoning behavior vis-à-vis China. For one thing, while the security dynamic of early modern East Asia appears to have been in a bandwagoning mode, my study on the secondary states’ acceptance of the China centered order in early modern Asia shows that East Asian states in fact fought back Chinese power when China challenged their territorial sovereignty or violated the rule of non-interference in their domestic affairs.

For another, it is likely that at least two key mechanisms of stability (interest and elite socialization) continue to be missing for China to be a force for East Asia’s regional stability. Despite some signs of the decline in the U.S. power, especially with the global financial crisis, the interest mechanism of the current international order is organized such that both the U.S. and other major states in the system continue to find it beneficial with the existing rules of the game. Furthermore, if we are reminded that East Asian states’ bandwagon with China was not simply about Chinese power, but what the Chinese Emperor meant for their domestic politics, “a fusion of power with legitimate social purpose,” China does not seem to provide any better “legitimate social purpose” than the existing hegemon in the eyes of others. In light of the mechanism of elite socialization, due to a lack of the transportability of the leading power’s legitimizing ideas, my study of the China-centered order

337 Kang, “Getting Asia Wrong.”
indicates that the rise of China today will have a long way to go to be the center if it makes it.

A Historical-Constructivist Theory of Hegemonic Order

The current debate on the stability of the unipolar world engages directly with the issues of this dissertation. Below I first summarize my argument and findings and then turn to how they shed light on the current period of potential transformation in international politics. I began by considering a strain of international relations theory that examines system stability under the condition of unbalanced power: 1) preponderance of power thesis, 2) hegemonic stability, and 3) co-binding mechanism of institutions. Building on these theories, in order to inquire about the longevity of the China-centered order, it specifically explores the conditions under which the secondary states support the existing order at times of changes in power distribution, public good provisions and social relations.

In so doing, it problematizes the existing theories’ rather rigid conception of the international system as a structure of power distribution, and provides an alternative way of viewing it. Taking the sociological approach, I argue that it is useful to think of hegemonic power in terms of the degree to which the most powerful actor in the system gets to set the rules of the game, and continues to reproduce them in a cost-effective way. My model of historical-constructivist theory of hegemonic stability focuses on the sequencing of three related, but distinct,
causal mechanisms: 1) institutionalizing power and ideas, 2) elite socialization and 3) transformation of the institution into a source of international authority.

China’s strategy of embedding Confucian ideas of its moral superiority and military power in the tribute practices can be found in time-honored tribute practices, first designed to serve as China’s control mechanism, came to evolve into the tribute system, a form of international institution. In the history of East Asian international order, a transition from the Mongol Empire’s self-serving use of tribute practices into the highly institutionalized tribute system of the Ming Empire signify that the tribute practices evolved into a rational institution, playing certain functions, such as reducing uncertainty.

Whether or not the tribute system (as a rational institution) could turn into a source of international authority depended on the degree to which the ruling elites of the secondary states were socialized into the Confucian ideas of China’s moral superiority. The higher the level of elite socialization, the more likely it was that these secondary states would accept the China-centered order at a normative level. Once the tribute system began representing not just the Chinese power but the social purpose in their domestic politics, it became a powerful source of domestic legitimation. Then, despite occasional changes such as in the power distribution, the ruling elites of the secondary states had incentives to support the existing international order to boost their own position in domestic politics.

My historical-constructivist theory of hegemonic stability offers a
plausible explanation for why Korea appeared more comfortable with the China-centered order than Japan. In addition to the fact that the Chinese power was felt more immediately by the Koreans than the Japanese for geographical reasons, it was undoubtedly the difference in the level of elite socialization between the Korean Confucian scholar bureaucrats and the Japanese warrior class to the Confucian ideas that made a difference in their acceptance level of the China-centered order. Therefore, while Japan stayed at the level of practical acceptance for most of the history of early modern Asia, a rare historical moment of Korea’s normative acceptance of the China-centered order took place immediately after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea of 1592-1598. This accounts for the reason why China was more successful in manipulating the Confucian ideology for strategic *realpolitik* purposes vis-à-vis Korea under the late Ming Empire in the late sixteenth century than any other periods.

These hypotheses on the stability mechanisms of the persistent hierarchy were tested against the periods where the East Asian states system’s hierarchical structure could have been disrupted but were not. They include the historical moments of 1) the Mongol invasions of Korea and Japan in the thirteenth century, 2) the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea of 1592-1598, and 3) the rise of the Qing Empire in the seventeenth century. In addition to the size of impact that these cases had on the East Asian states system, they were selected in a manner that provided variance in the sources of shocks in terms of the power distribution, legitimation, and utility
mechanisms from the historical institutionalist literature.

The process tracing of the restoration processes of the hierarchical structure in early modern East Asia was conducted in a manner that incorporated a macro-historical comparison from the Mongol through Qing Empires. My hypotheses prove plausible, since the same mechanisms that upheld the periods of the persistent hierarchy are found to be present during the restoration processes after those shocks, which produces the following conclusions. Table 1 summarizes these results. First, from the macro-historical comparison of the China-centered order under the Mongol, Ming, and Qing Empires, it shows that East Asian states did not challenge Chinese hegemony and accepted the China-centered order at a practical level, as long as China was powerful and they gained more by staying in it. In other words, the mechanisms of power and interest were primary for the practical acceptance of the hierarchical order.

Second, it turns out that a third mechanism of elite socialization is what determined whether or not the secondary states would accept the China-centered order at a normative level, taking their inferior position as something that was morally justified. Korea’s behavior after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea of 1592-1598 vividly shows the workings behind this normative acceptance, because by then both mechanisms of the Ming power and the cost-benefit calculation did not favor even the practical acceptance of the Ming-centered order. Interestingly for our theory of international relations, the results reveal that while the hegemon can work to
make the secondary states accept its order at a practical level by using its power and incentives such as trade and other public goods, it is in fact up to the secondary powers to determine the nature of the acceptance of the hegemonic order. In other words, only when the ruling elites of the secondary states come to buy the hegemon’s ideas justifying its governance, and find them useful for their domestic politics, are we likely to see continued support for the existing order at times of power transition.

Table 3-1. Stability Mechanisms for the Persistence of Hierarchy in Early Modern Asia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restoration to:</th>
<th>The Chinese Power</th>
<th>Interests (Trade &amp; Autonomy)</th>
<th>Elite Socialization</th>
<th>Outcome: Level of Acceptance (K: Korea/ J: Japan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **The Mongol-centered order**  
(after the Mongol invasions of Korea & Japan) | Yes | Yes/Weak | No | Practical Acceptance |
| **The Ming-centered Order**  
(after the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea of 1592-1598) | Yes/Weak | Yes | No | J: Practical Acceptance |
| | Yes/Weak | No | Yes/Strong | K: Normative Acceptance |
| **The Qing-centered Order**  
(after the initial period of its rise) | Yes | Yes/Strong | No | Practical Acceptance |

*This table is the same as Table 3.*
To offer some accounts on the mechanism of elite socialization in the context of the China-centered order, the normative acceptance of the Ming centered order took place within Korea even against the backdrop of weakened Ming power and Ming infringement of Korea’s sovereignty, an infringement of the interest mechanism. What bound Korea’s adherence to the Ming-centered order at the time of power transition from the Ming to Qing Empires, however, was the fact that Korea’s ruling Confucian bureaucrats had thoroughly been socialized into the Neo-Confucian ideas so as to take Korea’s position below China as morally justified. As Korea tried to overcome a national crisis of the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea of 1592-1598, the investiture from Chinese Emperor took on the meaning of international authority, which was instrumentally used by the King of Korea to restore his own authority in the aftermath of the crisis.

By contrast, around the same time in the late sixteenth century, in Japan the Neo-Confucian ideas were combined with Buddhism, thereby furthering the trend of de-sinification of Confucianism and the shinkoku ideology that emphasized the uniqueness and superiority of Japan in East Asian international relations. Therefore, the Japanese ruling elites in the warrior class who were socialized into the idea of Japan as the country of gods sought legitimacy from the Japanese Emperor, instead of taking Japan’s position below China as legitimate. On the whole, the acceptance of the China-centered order was a practical solution for most of East Asian diplomatic history in early modern East Asia for both Korea and Japan. But the
degree of their acceptance diverged to the extent to which there was a “cultural match” between China’s Confucian ideas and their own domestic political, social climates.

**Policy Implications: The Rise of China and the U.S. Hegemonic Order Today**

In offering my study’s implications for today’s security problems in East Asia and the international system in general, some caveats are in order. A study of a historical international system in East Asia comes with certain limits when generalizing its argument to include today’s problems or applying it to other areas of the world. For example, the East Asian states system has gone through what Gilpin called “systems change,” into the modern Westphalia system, through difficult transitions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Accordingly, East Asia should now be understood in the context of a regional order within the broader international system, whose regional dynamics cannot be separated from the international order at the systemic level. Having said that, however, the key mechanisms of my historical-constructivist theory of hegemonic stability themselves can travel across time and space, thus helping shed light on some of issues of today’s international order. Below I offer five policy suggestions that are relevant to the U.S. hegemonic order from my analysis on the Chinese system of international relations in early modern East Asia.
First, with regard to the future of American unipolarity, my study suggests that the preponderance of power does not necessarily lead to instability in the international system by automatically provoking counterbalancing responses from other major states. As shown in the longevity of the China-centered order, the stability of today’s American unipolarity thus far has been at least maintained by a combination of 1) American power, and 2) the mutually beneficial arrangement of interests between the U.S. and the rest of the world. As long as American power and these public good provisions embedded in the U.S.-led institutions continue, there is no \textit{a priori} reason to think that American power is bound to decline over time.

Second, a real test of the U.S. hegemonic order may come when its relative power vis-à-vis China or the European Union declines in terms of power distribution. Even then, in light of Korea’s behavior of supporting the weakening Ming Empire, today’s secondary states are likely to support the U.S. hegemonic order over any other rising power, be it China or any other state, depending on the degree to which the key policy makers of the secondary states are socialized into American values and culture. Also, given that many policy makers and elites are already socialized into democratic values and American culture in their respective domestic politics, an occasional decline of American power would not quickly replace the U.S. hegemonic order.

Third, from my dissertation’s inquiry into mechanisms leading to the differing acceptance levels of the China-centered order, I argue that the problem of
anti-Americanism in the world today will be exacerbated if the U.S. continues to attempt to implant or even impose American values or culture on other cultures without first understanding their own political and cultural atmosphere. My theory suggests that a turn from practical to normative acceptance of the U.S. hegemonic order hinges not on what hegemonic power or interests it can provide to the secondary states, but rather on the secondary states themselves. Thus, secondary states’ normative acceptance of the U.S. hegemonic power depends on American soft power. On condition that the secondary states find the social purposes projected by the U.S. appealing and useful for their domestic politics in terms of domestic legitimacy, there should be less worry about worsening anti-Americanism.

Fourth, while some disregard China’s “Charm Offensive” strategy of using soft power in foreign affairs as having little impact on the existing U.S. hegemonic order, I would argue that this may turn out to have a significant strategic impact on the future of the international order. China has been providing low interest rate loans, participating actively in multilateral institutions, and projecting peaceful Confucian image to many countries in Southeast Asia, Latin America and Africa. While I do not make any judgment on this Chinese behavior, I would point out that this strategy could have an important long-term effect on the international order, once this incentive structure offered by China becomes indispensable for their domestic politics through elite socialization.

Lastly, my study on the China-centered order under the Chinese Empire
does not attempt to make a claim that East Asia will travel “back to the future” with China at the center, just because China is coming back to the stage of international politics. It is true that the current economic crisis and a reduced confidence in the American financial system have provoked speculation that a strong China may be on its way to resume the role of center in East Asia or even beyond. However, if we remember it is up to the transportability of the ideas projected by the hegemon that should be accepted by other states in the system, it is doubtful whether the policy elites in other countries would find what China represents appealing to accept its potential hegemony, even at a practical level. China today has little soft power to take on leadership in East Asia much less in the world, which is a critical element of the international order. It may be after many decades when China continues to grow as a military power and could provide more public goods to other states in the system that it could be accepted at a practical level.

Final Thoughts

This dissertation has taken on the rather daunting challenge of theorizing about the East Asian international order in early modern Asia by using a macro-historical comparative analysis. By seeking an answer to one of the most obvious puzzles in the eyes of students of international relations, the longevity of the hierarchical order under the Chinese Empire, I have tried to make at least three points.
First, there is no such thing as an automatic balance of power in international politics. East Asia’s established states of Korea and Japan continued to be status quo-oriented for many centuries, not counterbalancing the superiority of China’s power in East Asia, even when opportunities presented themselves. Power in and of itself is neutral. It is rather the manner in which a power wielder exercises it, when governing the international system that determines the longevity of that power. In a sense, the Chinese were smart in that they knew how to color military power with the Confucian ideas of China’s moral superiority, and to lock them in the regular practices of the tribute system, thereby providing the international system with a sense of stable expectations and clarity of each country’s position in the system.

Second, understanding East Asian states behavior under the Chinese Empire tells us that the rational calculations of actors in international politics do not take place in vacuum. The Confucian ideas influenced the identity of the ruling elites of East Asian states, thereby placing their security calculations in that cultural, ethical context. This shows that identity and elite socialization can become powerful instruments for governance, in determining the acceptance level of a hegemonic order on the part of the followers.

Lastly, for a long time we have taken for granted that international institutions have equalizing effects among those states that participate in them. However, the workings of the tribute system and their relationship to the longevity of the China-centered order reveal that the opposite can be true, depending on the
design of the institutions and the nature of the dominant ideas that are embedded in those institutions. The tribute system kept the East Asian states system hierarchical, even when China went through occasional declines in its power.
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