



Sovereignty and Status in East Asian International Relations

This book provides a theoretical and empirical analysis of a key concept in East Asian security debates, sovereign autonomy, and how it reproduces hierarchy in the regional order. Park argues that contemporary strategic debates in East Asia are based on shared contextual knowledge – that of international hierarchy – reconstructed in the late nineteenth century. The mechanism that reproduces this lens of hierarchy is domestic legitimacy politics in which embattled political leaders contest the meaning of sovereign autonomy. Park argues that the idea of status-seeking has remained embedded in the concept of sovereign autonomy and endures through distinct and alternative security frames that continue to inform foreign policy debates in East Asia. This book makes a significant contribution to debates in International Relations theory and security studies about autonomy and status, as well as to the now extensive literature on the nature of East Asian regional order.

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Preface

This book is about the imagining and reimagining of hierarchy as an enduring and powerful structure and source of world politics. In that sense, an alternative title for the book could have been *Imagined Hierarchy*. The phrase “imagined hierarchy” obviously draws its inspiration from Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, in which he shows how the ideational construct of nationalism becomes crystallized through physical encounters, transformed and intensified via technological change. In other words, the imagining of national communities was made possible in the context of globalizing and accelerating material exchanges, which led to the increasing importance of delineating territorial boundaries (functional delineation) and identifying with people inside those boundaries (ideational attachment).

Like Anderson, I am interested in exploring how rapidly intensifying encounters between East Asia and Europe (and later, the United States) in the nineteenth century laid the foundations for major transformations in political and social institutions such as language, law, and the ideational framework for conceptions of status and legitimacy in domestic and international politics. Again, motivated by Anderson’s work, I also examine how identities become reproduced through institutionalized practices. In East Asia, this book contends, hierarchy continues to be imagined and reimagined through repeated use of language and institutionalized modes of political battle that evoke power asymmetry and external status as the primary source of the nation’s historical past and the determining factor in shaping its future fate. By “imagined” hierarchy, I do not mean that hierarchical social relations, domestic or international, diverge from or are independent of objective material conditions. Rather, imagination is the product of experiences and expectations, grounded firmly in the various physical surroundings and social settings to which we are exposed.

Hierarchy, like any other social structure, manifests itself in various context-specific ways. A common expression in Japanese and Korean

that is not easily translated into English is *kaioiro wo miru* (looking at the color or complexion of the other's face) in Japanese or *nunchi bogi* (gauging or measuring a person or situation with one's eyes) in Korean. It refers to the act of being sensitive to the context in which one interacts with a (usually) higher-ranked person (in terms of age, position, role, bargaining power, etc.). While the phrases are specific to Japan and Korea, the significance – and perhaps necessity – of skillfully reading a person (or room) is not unique to Asian social settings. Indeed, explicit and implicit hierarchies of power and status structure many aspects of social relations, from seating arrangements in airplanes to the order of agenda items and speakers in a board meeting. My book is an attempt to understand the broader question of how hierarchy constrains, and is at the same time shaped by, social relations through the specific lens of East Asian international relations.

The book is the culmination of many helping hands, whose timely and generous support allowed many stages of the manuscript to come to fruition. First and foremost, I would like to thank Peter Katzenstein, whose kind and unfailing encouragement as well as his always insightful feedback allowed me to persevere with the project, since its early incarnation as my Ph.D. dissertation. As many of his students before me have attested to, Peter's intellect, generosity, and dedication to his students are unparalleled. I can only hope to repay some of this debt by putting into practice what he has modeled for me as a scholar and teacher.

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Finally, the writing of this book would not have been possible without the loving and generous support of my family. My parents, Myung-Soo Park and Young-Ju Kim, and parents-in-law, Gyu-Yeol Cho and Seok-Rye Kim, provided me with shelter and food during my multiple research trips to Asia. My sister Seo-Jin and brother Chang-Seo were my loudest cheerleaders and tried their best to be interested in what their non-STEM sibling was up to. I am also grateful to my sisters-in-law, Mi-Young and Mi-Kyung, and honorary sister Mo-Eun Sung for their constant loving support. Finally, I dedicate this book to the three people who surround me with love and laughter every day as we journey together in our various literary, scholarly, culinary, and wayfaring adventures: Il-Hyun, Emily, and Jason.