1 Introduction

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What, exactly, are the "lessons of history" for the current East Asian order?[1] Graham Allison has asserted that "war between the United States and China in the decades ahead is not just possible, but much more likely than recognized at the moment. Indeed, judging by the historical record, war is more likely than not."[2] Susan Shirk, looking specifically at Asia, follows Allison: "History teaches us that rising powers are likely to provoke war. The ancient historian Thucydides identified the fear that a rising Athens inspired in other states as the cause of the Peloponnesian War." Also drawing on historical analogy, John Mearsheimer has recently asserted that "a much more powerful China can also be expected to try to push the United States out of the Asia–Pacific region, much as the United States pushed the European great powers out of the Western Hemisphere in the nineteenth century."[3]

But what historical record are Shirk, Allison, and Mearsheimer referring to? By far, the most commonly examined case studies of rising powers in the scholarly literature are the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) and the rise of Germany under Otto von Bismarck and the Anglo-German rivalry of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[4] Paul MacDonald and Joseph Parent examine sixteen cases of relative decline in the "great power pecking order" since 1870, all from the European experience.[5] Kori Schake describes the British–US hegemonic transition in the late nineteenth century as the "only peaceful transition between global hegemons since the nation-state era came into being," although she makes this sweeping claim based solely on the European record.[6]

It is not just power-transition theory that relies exclusively on European cases. Realist theory in all its variants – rooted in a mechanical notion of balances of power – grew inductively out of a particularly violent European historical experience in which a number of similarly sized states competed for survival.[7] The reliance on European examples extends to comparative politics

[1] Shirk 2007, 4. [2] Allison 2017, 184. [3] Mearsheimer 2014, 18.
[4] Kugler and Lemke 1996, 41; Chan 2004. [5] MacDonald and Parent 2018.
[6] Schake 2017, 2. [7] Elman, Elman, and Schroeder 1995, 182–195.

and political economy as well. Bellicist theories of state formation – the argument that "war made the state, and the state made war" – and theories of the role of institutions in economic growth are derived from European history as well.[8] Indeed, it is a virtual cliché to point out the Eurocentrism of contemporary international relations theory.[9]

To be sure, there are reasons for doing so: the Westphalian order, with its underpinnings in the concept of sovereignty, did in fact influence the wider course of world politics, as it was exported beyond Europe to the developing country periphery. Ironically, new states and their leaders – including in Asia – were among the most jealous guardians of the sovereignty concept in part because of their histories of being colonized.

Yet there is also a growing recognition of a "deep bias in international-relations and comparative-politics scholarship that helps perpetuate the states-under-anarchy framework."[10] Moreover, there is an equally troubling circularity at work: theories derived from the study of European history were subsequently used to explain how this European model of international relations developed over time.[11] As Pinar Bilgin observes, "while theory builds on history, history is read through theory . . . addressing the Eurocentric limits of IR [international relations] involves addressing the Eurocentric historical accounts that students of IR draw upon."[12] These biases are perpetuated through graduate curricula. David C. Kang and Alex Yu-Ting Lin examined the syllabi of core international relations seminars at forty-two PhD programs in the United States and found that 29 percent of the readings use examples *solely* drawn from Europe while none of the readings use examples solely drawn from Asia.[13]

With the powerful world history movement that has emerged in the last two decades, it becomes less and less defensible to operate with a canned set of "greatest hits" from European history as our theoretical and historical reference point: the Peloponnesian War; the classical European balance of power; the rise of Bismarckian Germany; the two world wars; the bipolarity of the Cold War and its end with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet those who have not been trained in non-Western history have few easily accessible sources for pondering whether different international systems might have operated in quite different ways: on the basis of very different structures and units and fundamental ordering principles.

[8] Tilly 1975; North and Weingast 1989, 803–832. For a powerful critique, see Rosenthal and Wong 2011.
[9] Hobson 2004; Rosenthal and Wong 2011; D. C. Kang and Ma 2018, 137–154; Hobson 2012; Acharya and Buzan 2007, 287–312.
[10] McConaughey, Musgrave, and Nexon 2018.
[11] Ruggie 1993, 139–174; Elman, Elman, and Schroeder 1995, 182–195.
[12] Bilgin 2016, 494.
[13] D. C. Kang and Lin 2019, 395.

Toward an East Asian International Relations

The purpose of this book is straightforward: to remedy this lacuna by providing an introduction to the international relations of Asia looked at over a *longue duree*: from the seventh through the nineteenth century, when contact with the West definitively upset the Sinocentric order. The book draws on leading historians and students of international politics, but is nonetheless written in a straightforward way that would engage a general audience.

We undertake the task with two key purposes in mind, the first of which is relatively straightforward. First, we seek to offer an accessible overview of the evolution of the East Asian international system through what might be called the "early Westphalian" history of the region, which we date to the end of the nineteenth century. To do this, we do not construct a single narrative; rather we have focused on key *events* from this East Asian history as a way of focusing analytic attention. As in the European canon, these events include key wars, dynastic changes, and changing inter-unit relationships that had enduring consequence. The broader purpose is not just didactic. Rather, we also want to force a consideration of the implications of these cases for international relations theory. Long understudied by mainstream international relations scholars, the East Asian historical experience provides an enormous wealth of new and different cases that promise to enrich a theoretical literature largely derived from the Western experience.

We are in a position to achieve this most basic of purposes because of a groundswell of scholarship that has started to consider Asian international relations over the very long run. This work has emerged from two directions. First, historians have long been studying these issues but have increasingly drawn on global history frameworks to place local events in a much wider theoretical frame. Second, international relations scholars are increasingly incorporating East Asia into their research, in part because of the rising prominence of the region in world politics.

Regarding the first intellectual trend, it is not unfair to characterize much of the historical scholarship of previous generations as privileging national histories. Historians tended to study one period in one particular country, with China at the center. Perhaps the leading scholar whose work influenced a generation of students of Chinese foreign policy was John Fairbank.[14] From the mid-1940s and for decades following, his scholarship defined the field, particularly through his 1968 edited book, *The Chinese World Order*.[15]

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

[15] Fairbank 1968.

Other canonical work included Morris Rossabi's edited volume *China among Equals*, which focused on a period of Chinese weakness.[16] Historians produced accounts of developments in Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and Central Asia as well, but these tended to restrict their focus to the country in question.

Historians have begun to look at how regional or even global events and interactions have influenced local dynamics. Historians of China, Korea, and Japan are increasingly referring to themselves as "global historians" or "world historians," who are more interested in the connections among societies than on traditionally defined political or cultural units. This new history still has a core geographical area of expertise, but situates its scholarship more broadly. Some seminal books that explore the international relations of East Asian history in this vein include Evelyn Rawski's *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia: Cross-Border Perspectives*, which examines the interactions among all the actors in that region; Victor Lieberman's *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c.800–1830*, Vol. 1: *Integration on the Mainland*, which puts Southeast Asian history into a much larger global context; and Alexander Woodside's *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History*, which makes the powerful argument that East Asia was "modern" fully a millennium before Europe.[17] Almost by definition, much of the most exciting work in this vein is now drawing on sources in multiple languages. Kenneth Swope's history of the Japanese invasion of Korea in the late sixteenth century draws on Chinese and Japanese sources. Tonio Andrade's work on *The Gunpowder Age* draws on both Asian and European archives.[18]

In moving away from Sinocentrism, this new scholarship necessarily had to come to terms with the nature of the broader regional system. It may seem odd to call for *not* focusing research on a hegemonic order on the hegemon, but this move was crucial for opening up the discussion of core–periphery relations in premodern East Asia.

From the other direction, scholars of international relations have increasingly been diving into the historical record in search of data and cases that would permit tests of international relations theory. International relations scholars had on rare occasions studied Chinese history to explore questions of grand strategy, focusing for example on the origins of military doctrine and strategy.[19] In the past decade, however, an emerging first wave of social science scholarship focusing on East Asian history has considered the nature of the regional system, similarly using sophisticated methods and drawing on a wide array of regional sources.[20]

[16] Rossabi 1983. [17] Rawski 2015; V. Lieberman 2003; Woodside 2006. [18] Swope 2016b.
[19] Johnston 1995; Hui 2005.
[20] D. C. Kang 2010; Suzuki 2009; Yuan-kang Wang 2010; D. C. Kang 2013, 181–205.

Several books exemplify the state of the art of this first wave of scholarship about premodern East Asian international relations, all focused in various ways on questions of international order and hierarchy. Feng Zhang's *Chinese Hegemony* and Ji-Young Lee's *China's Hegemony* both focus directly on the tributary system, and while they disagree on particulars both argue that the tribute system was, in fact, an international order based on the fundamental organizing principle of hierarchy.[21] Seo-Hyun Park's *Sovereignty and Status in East Asian International Relations* explores how concerns about status and hierarchy continued for Asian participants even after the arrival of the West.[22]

In both these new literatures, in history and international relations, some common themes emerge. Historians and political scientists are both now thinking in terms of whole systems and how they work. Local histories are increasingly placed in a wider regional context. But at the same time, both are seeking to underline the agency of those actors in constituting the system.

Engaging Theory: Hegemony and Hierarchy

The second purpose of this book goes more directly to the issue of how history informs our assumptions and theories of international relations.[23] If the international relations of East Asia is fundamentally similar to that in Europe – in its patterns and causes – then studying it would simply be confirmatory of received wisdom. But if East Asia poses different observable patterns and causes, then we need to engage East Asia on its own terms and ask whether ostensibly universal international relations theories – such as those on balancing and power transitions – are as universal as believed. If not, there may be more fundamental theoretical insights to be gained about international relations from the exercise, insights that ultimately grow out of the ability to compare whole international systems. If East Asia and Europe not only had different cultures, social structures, and political economic systems, but also had different international systems, based on fundamentally different organizing principles, it could provide profound analytic leverage.

In our view, research on East Asian history can directly illuminate at least four theoretical issues that are central to the discipline of international relations: the effects of hegemonic versus multipolar international systems; the effects of hierarchy on international order; the relative causal importance of ideas and material interests in determining international political outcomes; and the question of how the past affects the present. Although in different combinations, all of the chapters in this book address one or more of these core

[21] J.-Y. Lee 2016a; F. Zhang 2015. [22] S.-H. Park 2017; Larsen 2008.
[23] Bially Mattern and Zarakol 2016, 623–654; Reus-Smit 2017, 851–885. For example, *International Organization* is devoting the entire seventy-fifth anniversary issue to "Challenges to the Western liberal order."

theoretical questions. The conclusion by Andrew Coe and Scott Wolford adds to this list by taking up several additional questions, including what we can learn from this long history about international political economy and the role of domestic politics. But while offering new insights, all of the chapters also summarize and build upon a growing body of scholarship on the East Asian order that has come to a general consensus on some core issues.

To begin with one of the more obvious differences between the East Asian and Westphalian order, we start with the question of polarity. Polarity has long preoccupied international relations theory. For much of the postwar period, the debate largely focused on whether multipolarity posed a particular risk of conflict. (Only for a brief fleeting moment at the end of the Cold War did unipolar models make a comeback, quickly to fade in the face of China's rise and America's relative decline.) For almost 2,000 years, however, historical East Asia was a hegemonic system with one dominant member, not a multipolar system of numerous equally-sized units or a bipolar system with a great power duopoly. Nor was sovereign equality of states a norm. As such, East Asia provides an important comparator to the international system that developed in Europe.

Many scholars define historical East Asia as having emerged during the Qin/Han era of 221 BCE to 220 CE, becoming a complete international system three centuries later.[24] Nor was this a Chinese historiographical conceit. As Feng Zhang points out, "Japanese scholars have long argued that an East Asian international society had come into being no later than the Sui–Tang period (589–907)."[25] The order lasted until the nineteenth century, when Western imperial powers challenged the system in a more frontal way; the first Opium War between Britain and the Qing dynasty in 1839–1842 (Chapter 10) is often taken as a conspicuous breakpoint even though there was a much longer Western imperial presence (e.g., see Chapter 9, on the Dutch). Regular participants in this system included, in addition to China, Japan, the Ryukyu Islands, the Korean peninsula, Taiwan, Vietnam, occasionally Siam as well as Tibet, and the very different social organization of the peoples in the long northwestern Central Asian steppe.

The case studies in Part II probe the nature of this hierarchical and hegemonic order, and it is important to underline its persistence. As Yuri Pines writes, choosing particular starting and end points:

> The Chinese empire was established in 221 BCE, when the state of Qin unified the Chinese world . . . the Chinese empire ended in 1912 . . . for 2,132 years, we may discern striking similarities in institutional, sociopolitical, and cultural spheres throughout the imperial millennia. The Chinese empire was an extraordinarily powerful ideological construct. The peculiar historical trajectory of the Chinese empire was not its

[24] E.g., Rosenthal and Wong 2011. [25] F. Zhang 2015, 12.

indestructability . . . but rather its repeated resurrection in more or less the same territory and with a functional structure similar to that of the preturmoil period.[26]

Comparisons with Europe in this regard are telling. To be sure, there is a long-standing theoretical tradition that focuses on the rise and fall of European hegemons.[27] But those hegemonies were either brief or associated with maritime powers, and sat uncomfortably with models that emphasized multipolarity and bipolarity. For example, scholars refer to a "Dutch hegemony" that might have lasted for a few decades in the early seventeenth century, but it was notoriously thin; a passing dominance in terms of trade.[28] Great Britain's hegemony lasted perhaps a century, but even then was nested within a wider continental system of great power rivalries.[29] American hegemony in the postwar period referred to its relationship with the non-Communist world; the dominant characterization of the Cold War era was bipolar, not unipolar, and as we noted, belief in the emergence of a new unipolar order was relatively short-lived. Neither Dutch nor British nor American "hegemony" was anything like the centuries of Chinese hegemony's enduring civilizational influence across culture, religion, politics, society, and the economy.

When scholars study and theorize about hegemony in its various forms, it would seem plausible to begin with an examination of the Sinocentric order rather than the European one. Chapter 2 begins this process with an overview and periodization of the international relations of historical East Asia, and an initial characterization of the important patterns and regularities that occurred over two millennia. Although Chinese power waxed and waned over time, perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the system was China's ability to reform after periods of chaos. After all, for all the utility in comparing Rome and the contemporaneous Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), the one most striking difference is that Rome fell and never recovered, while China did.

Kenneth Swope and David C. Kang (Chapter 2) consider the effects of oscillations of power within the core and whether they had discernible effect on the broader system. The central debate in the literature, however, is whether a persistent hegemonic order might have been more pacific than one in which relatively equal sovereign states jockeyed for power. The volume outlines the causes and consequences of a number of wars, including ones that look systemic in scope (Chapters 4 and 7). But there are reasons to believe that the China-centered order was more pacific, at least among its core members, and that the structure of the system was implicated. Moreover, the chapters in this volume show repeatedly that in the wake of wars, the system managed to reequilibrate in ways that appear novel in a realist framework. The reasons take us to some of the mechanisms sustaining the China-centered order.

[26] Pines 2012, 2. [27] For example, Modelski 1987. [28] E.g., P. Taylor 1994, 25–46.
[29] Spiezio 1990, 165–181.

Not only was East Asia's *structure* quite different than Europe's, the *ordering principle* of historical East Asia's international system was different from Europe's as well. Institutions and norms varied too. Although the contemporary international order's fundamental organizing principle is sovereign equality among states, many international orders have been hierarchic but nonetheless recognized a wide variety of units as legitimate members. Hierarchy endured over the centuries not only because of the structural condition of continued power asymmetry in the region among the member units, but because of an array of complementary conditions catalogued by Coe and Wolford in their conclusion to the volume. These included the standard international relations toolkit – such as threats of force or forbearance on the part of the hegemon – but also norms, political similarities across the units, and common views of the disruptive role that unfettered economic interdependence could play.

In reaching a judgment about the incidence of war in the Sinocentric order, it is important to draw a distinction between two sets of actors in the system, actors that ultimately took the form of quite different unit types. East Asian states such as Korea, Vietnam, the Ryukyu Islands, Tibet, and, for long stretches of time, Japan not only operated within a hegemonic system but accepted Chinese authority. The Central Asian peoples – which could barely be considered states at all – did not. This crucial difference had consequences: China's relations with the "nomads" were characterized by war and instability, whereas relations with the Sinicized states were characterized by greater stability. Unipolarity per se – defined as the distribution of capabilities – cannot easily account for these disparate outcomes. What is becoming increasingly clear is that a common culture, defined by a Confucian worldview, and its related institutional correlates – both international and national – had consequences.

Thus when we argue that the organizing principle of East Asian international relations was a hierarchy, we do not simply mean that there was a single dominant power.[30] Also implied is the idea that the units themselves are not to be seen as sovereign states equal in status or even type. We have already noted that China confronted not only states but nomadic steppe peoples and transnational pirate networks as well (Chapters 3 and 9). The system thus invites theorizing about completely hybrid structures. However, even those subordinate units that *were* statelike were not seen as juridical equals of China.

To the contrary. At the core of this hierarchical system was the international order known as the tribute system: a set of institutions and norms that regulated diplomatic and political contact, cultural and economic relations, and established the relationship between the political units. In contrast to the modern Westphalian ideal, the tribute system emphasized the norm of "asymmetry and

[30] The theoretical bases of hierarchy have been thoroughly discussed by Bially Mattern and Zarakol 2016.

interdependence of the superior/inferior relationship."[31] Indeed, inequality was the juridical basis for all tributary relations.

In the study of historical East Asia, the term "tributary relations" refers to the institutions and norms that regulated diplomatic, political, cultural, and economic relations between two units.[32] As Coe and Wolford note in the conclusion, this was a decidedly "hub and spokes" as opposed to multilateral world order and one that emphasized the explicit norm of hierarchy.

But tributary relations were also formalized in two key institutions. The first was "investiture," which involved diplomatic recognition and the granting of titles by the superior state to the secondary unit. On the one hand, investiture represented a formal recognition of subordinate status; the norm of inequality was explicit. Yet investiture was also a diplomatic protocol by which China (and other units) recognized the legitimate sovereignty of their interlocutors, and thus the status of the leader in that tributary unit as the legitimate ruler.[33] Not only did investiture explicitly confirm an unequal relationship between the giving and receiving units, but as Ji-Young Lee points out, "investiture practice signified imperial China's respect for the political autonomy of the receiving country."[34]

The second key institution consisted of "tribute missions," or the exchange of diplomatic envoys between the subordinate and superior units. Lee observes that in East Asia, "diplomacy was conducted through regular exchanges of envoys . . . in a given social relationship, the meaning of A sending (as opposed to receiving) tribute to B signified that A acknowledged B's position to be superior to that of A . . . tribute practices refer to a reservoir of Confucian cultural scripts constituting a hierarchical order while regulating actors' socially acceptable behaviors in the conduct of diplomacy."[35] The frequency and size of tribute missions were explicitly negotiated between the two units, and were determined by their status: higher-ranked units were allowed more frequent missions, could remain longer in the host country, and could bring a wider and larger range of participants.

Tribute missions also engaged in trade, and higher status units were allowed greater trading privileges. But such trade was rigidly controlled and was generally considered incidental to the diplomatic and political purposes of the tributary order; as we show, the land-based political economies of the central states in the system relegated trade to an unregulated fringe (Chapter 3).

Some sense of the nature of these relations can be seen by considering dyads extending into both Southeast and Northeast Asia. During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Vietnam sent seventy-four tributary missions to Beijing, an average of one every 3.7 years. From 1644 to 1839, during the Qing dynasty,

[31] Hevia 1995, 124. [32] F. Zhang 2015, 170. [33] Yu 2004. [34] J.-Y. Lee 2016a, 50.
[35] J.-Y. Lee 2016a, 47.

Vietnam sent forty-two missions to Beijing, an average of one every 4.6 years.[36] During the Ming dynasty, Lee notes that "Chinese envoys made 186 visits to Korea . . . but Korean envoys made three or four regular visits a year to China's capital."[37]

Even if disagreements exist on the consequences of this system, its existence is widely acknowledged as a crucial starting point for understanding the historical East Asian order. In her important book, Lee concludes that, "if there is one ontological reality that scholars agree on, it is that East Asian states and polities shared certain practices in their conduct of relations with one another . . . diplomacy was conducted through regular exchanges of envoys."[38] Seo-Hyun Park similarly concludes that tribute relations "functioned as a well-institutionalized, if regionally confined, system of states."[39] Yongjin Zhang and Barry Buzan write:

> That there existed an indigenous social order in the history and politics of what we call East Asia today is beyond dispute, be it called the Chinese world order, the tributary system, Pax Sinica, the East Asian order, international society in East Asia or any other. Acknowledging this is to recognize that East Asian states and peoples had historically chosen and established complex institutions and practices informed by their history and culture.[40]

Although scholarly attention on the tributary system has focused on China, a wide variety of political actors across Asia used elements of the tributary system norms and institutions, even when China was not involved. Political units across East Asia viewed unequal relations – hierarchy – as the natural and inevitable order. Nonetheless as noted, we can distinguish between a thick inner core of participants, in which shared normative elements played a more central role, and a much thinner peripheral layer of participants. Nonetheless, the scope of these relationships suggests why it is more accurate to call the system the "tributary system" rather than a "Sinocentric" system, because many actors operated within the institutions and norms of the tributary system even when they were not interacting with China itself.[41]

The view that historical East Asia was an international system with a clear international order and distinctive organizing principles, norms, and practices is shared by many scholars. At the very least, examination of East Asia's international system and order should remove any teleological idea that the European and contemporary international orders were inevitable. Research on the many varied ways in which hierarchy obtained and functioned over the centuries has barely begun, but it should rest on the full panoply of cases and not simply the succession of Western hegemons.

[36] D. C. Kang, Nguyen, Shaw, and Fu 2019, 913. [37] J.-Y. Lee 2016a, 40.
[38] J.-Y. Lee 2016a, 47. [39] S.-H. Park 2017, 54. [40] Y. Zhang and Buzan 2012, 10.
[41] MacKay 2016; Kwan 2016; Perdue 2005; Skaff 2012; Elliott 2001.