The London School of Economics and Political Science

Chinese Primacy in East Asian History: Deconstructing the Tribute System in China's Early Ming Dynasty

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Declaration

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Abstract

The "tribute system" has been the central organizing concept for our thinking about historical East Asian politics since the 1940s. Despite its dominance in the literature, however, the concept remains ill-defined and underspecified. The extant frameworks constructed around the concept also have not been evaluated conceptually and empirically in a systematic way. Most importantly, the tribute system, as an important institution for interstate relations in East Asian history, remains undertheorized in the existing literature.

This thesis identifies three interrelated ways in which the "tribute system" concept has been used in the literature and argues that they all encounter problems in interpreting or explaining historical East Asian politics. The thesis deconstructs this concept by developing a theory of Chinese primacy in historical East Asia and by evaluating it against evidence from early Ming China's (1368-1424) relations with Korea, Japan, and the Mongols.

The theory and evidence show that East Asian politics under the condition of Chinese primacy or unipolarity are best described as the dynamics between China's political/military domination and other states' accommodation and resistance. A variety of motives and strategies that China and its neighbours can employ toward each other are identified. The multiplicity of the relations between China and its neighbours suggests the need to deconstruct the analytical category of the "tribute system" and develop new conceptualizations about historical East Asian politics. The thesis calls for new thinking about historical East Asian politics, contributes to theorizing in this field by developing a synthetic theory of Chinese primacy that draws on both realist and constructivist theories of International Relations, and evaluates some persistent myths about Chinese foreign policy and East Asian politics in history.

Acknowledgements

But most importantly, I would not have undertaken this PhD or completed this thesis without the unwavering support and help of my wife Shu Man. She has provided indispensable moral support while pursuing her own master's study in London. Although the topic of my project may seem obscure to her, she is the most important person behind its initiation and completion.

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Note on Romanization and Transliteration

Chinese names and terms are romanized in accordance with the *pinyin* system unless the authors in question have followed the Wade-Giles system or Cantonese system in English publications. Following the Chinese custom, Chinese names start with the surname followed by the given name unless the authors publish in English and have followed the English custom of putting their given names first.

The Hepburn system is used for the transcription of Japanese names and terms, and the McCune-Reischauer system for Korean names and terms.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Two notable features stand out in existing studies of historical East Asian politics: the dominance of the tribute system framework since the 1950s and the lack of analytical innovations to systematically update or supersede it. Although the "tribute system" is an analytical category invented and refined by historians over half a century ago, today we are still following it when trying to make sense of imperial China's foreign relations. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the "tribute system" has been the only clearly recognizable paradigm in the study of East Asian diplomatic history. Its remarkable staying power demonstrates its intellectual attractiveness while at the same time attesting to the dearth of conceptual innovation.

Despite the dominance of the "tribute system" in the academic discourse on East Asian history, however, the concept remains underspecified. As a result, it is not always clear what is meant by the "tribute system" as it appears in the writings of various scholars. As a "system" of foreign relations, the fundamental characteristics of the tribute system are also ill-defined. For example, it is not clear whether it is supposed to encompass the whole range of relations between China and its neighbors. The extant frameworks constructed around the concept also have not been evaluated conceptually and empirically in a systematic way. Most importantly, the tribute system, as an important institution for interstate relations in East Asian history, remains undertheorized in the existing literature.

With a few notable exceptions in recent years, the "international relations" of historical East Asia has been purely the field of historians. Yet, after a remarkable period of intellectual creativity from the 1930s to the 1960s thanks largely to the pioneering work of John King Fairbank,[1] historians' interest in East Asian diplomatic history gradually waned, so much so that the field has become

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[1] These include Fairbank and Teng 1941; and Fairbank 1942, 1953, and 1968a, b.

"unfashionable and underpopulated."[2] Researches during this "classic era" on China's foreign relations produced a number of important insights and laid the foundation for our understanding of historical East Asian politics. But this body of research is also marked by analytical confusion and empirical omissions. Starting from the 1980s, many historians began to reexamine Fairbank's "tribute system" and "Chinese world order" frameworks, exposing some previously hidden assumptions and bringing to light new historical evidence that contradicted existing interpretations. While these researches critique Fairbank, in general they do not seek to replace the tribute system model with some new explanatory frameworks. Historical scholarship in this area is thus still in the early stages of a paradigmatic shift.

Political scientists, particularly international relations (IR) scholars, should be very interested in historical East Asian politics. This can be a fertile field for theoretical innovations, just as European history has been for the development of modern IR theories. Yet, although this potential for theory building has always been recognized, relatively few scholars have ventured into this field with in-depth historical and theoretical research. Often researches that do look at the subject rely on secondary sources, thus impeding analytical and theoretical innovations in the first place.[3] The few works that have consciously tried to exploit historical Asia for theory development have produced fresh approaches and insights. Two most innovative works in this regard are Iain Johnston's *Cultural Realism* and Victoria Hui's *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe*.[4] However, although these two books have generated important perspectives on China's strategic culture and the state formation process in ancient China, they have said little about the tribute system itself. Little IR work has systematically examined the tribute system. Adding to this lack of attention is the widespread "sinocentric" bias in both the existing historical and IR scholarships—their tendency to focus on China's foreign

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[2] Wills 1988, 229. Holding a similar view is Michael Hunt, who wrote in the early 1980s that "little fresh work [on historical Chinese foreign relations] is appearing and... the pool of specialists in the field has not been sustained." Hunt 1984, 37, fn. 14.
[3] See, for example, Swaine and Tellis 2000.
[4] Johnston 1995; and Hui 2005.

relations to the neglect of those of other polities in the region.

This study is designed to address some of these gaps and inadequacies. It seeks to examine scholarly writings on the tribute system and evaluate their analytical utility for understanding historical East Asian politics. It does so, however, from an IR perspective and thus pays special attention to theory development and policy discussion in addition to historical analysis. My central objective is to clarify the nature of historical East Asian politics during a period when China was unified and strong by critiquing the application of the tribute system paradigm to that time and by developing a theory of what will be called "Chinese primacy" as an alternative explanation. In this introductory chapter, I review the extant literature on the tribute system, identify the historical and conceptual puzzles behind this study, outline the research methodology, and discuss the implications of this work for history, theory, and policy analysis.

The Literature

The literature can be broadly divided into three sets: the foundational researches initiated by Fairbank and the responses and critiques that these have stimulated, the somewhat similar perspectives and models in the Chinese and Japanese historical literatures, and IR scholars' recent efforts to build on this historical scholarship or apply IR concepts and theories to the study of historical East Asian politics.

FAIRBANK AND HIS CRITICS

A large English literature now exists on East Asian diplomatic history. General accounts of historical East Asian politics can be found in several works.[5] The most prominent part of this literature, however, still centers on the research efforts Fairbank initiated in the "classic era" and the critiques these have inspired subsequently. Fairbank's writings are prominent for both their intellectual creativity

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[5] Cohen 2000; and Holcombe 2001. For earlier overviews of East Asian history, see Fairbank, Reischauer, and Craig 1978; and Reischauer and Fairbank 1960.

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and widespread popularity and influence. They are still an important basis upon which contemporary scholars (both historians and political scientists) draw inferences about various aspects of historical East Asian politics.

Fairbank developed his interpretive frameworks largely out of research on the mid-Qing tribute system and Qing officials' inability to deal adequately with the encroaching Western challenge. He was also influenced, however, by the then prevailing assumptions on traditional Chinese foreign policy. The dominant view at the time was well captured by the prominent Chinese historian T. F. Tsiang in a seminal essay published in the 1930s. Tsiang characterized the nature of imperial Chinese foreign relations in this way:

> [The Neo-Confucian dogma in regard to international relations] asserts that national security could only be found in isolation and stipulates that whoever wished to enter into relations with China must do so as China's vassals, acknowledging the supremacy of the Chinese emperor and obeying his commands, thus ruling out all possibility of international intercourse on terms of equality. It must not be constructed to be dogma of conquest or universal dominion, for it imposed nothing on foreign peoples who chose to remain outside the Chinese world. It sought peace and security, with both of which international relations were held incompatible. If relations there had to be, they must be of the suzerain-vassal type, acceptance of which meant to the Chinese acceptance of the Chinese ethic on the part of the barbarian.[6]

On tributary relations, Tsiang argued that

> It must not be assumed that the Chinese Court made a profit out of such tributes. The imperial gifts bestowed in return were usually more valuable than the tribute. The latter was a symbol, signifying the submissiveness of the tributary state, which obtained in return, besides the imperial gifts, the

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[6] Tsiang 1971, 130-1.

much-coveted permission to do a limited trade...On China's part the permission to trade was intended to be a mark of imperial bounty and a means of keeping the barbarians in the proper state of submissiveness.[7]

Fairbank followed many of these arguments[8] and made two enduring contributions. He began research on the tribute system from the 1930s and developed an interpretive model in the next two decades. These researches then culminated in what he called the "Chinese world order," "a preliminary framework" advanced in the 1960s to account for traditional China's foreign relations.[9]

According to Fairbank, historical East Asia formed a unique sinocentric order characterized by the Chinese assumption of superiority and the extension of China's domestic order into the external realm. Since the Chinese empire was organized hierarchically internally, "China's foreign relations were accordingly hierarchic and nonegalitarian, like the Chinese society itself."[10] Such a "Chinese world order" was established and maintained through the tribute system, which Fairbank described as having "handled the interstate relations of a large part of mankind throughout most of recorded history."[11] Further, this order contained "an unusually large ideological component,"[12] that is, China's moral and cultural superiority underpinned by Confucianism.

On the tribute system, Fairbank and S. Y. Teng assert "(1) that the tributary system was a natural outgrowth of the cultural pre-eminence of the early Chinese, (2) that it came to be used by the rulers of China for political ends of self-defense, (3) that in practice it had a very fundamental and important commercial basis, and (4) that it served as the medium for Chinese international relations and diplomacy."[13] Foreign rulers were expected to observe Chinese rituals in order to enter relations with China.

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[7] Ibid., 131.
[8] More generally, Fairbank tended to interpret the record of the nineteenth-century diplomatic encounter between China and Western powers in similar fashion to Tsiang. Evans 1988, 27.
[9] See note 1.
[10] Fairbank 1968a, 2.
[11] Ibid., 1.
[12] Ibid., 6.
[13] Fairbank and Teng 1941, 137.

The formalities of the tribute system constituted a mechanism by which foreign countries were given their place in the sinocentric order. "Outside countries, if they were to have contact with China at all, were expected and when possible obliged to do so as tributaries."[14] It is argued that Chinese rulers initiated tributary relations because they valued the prestige that foreign tribute would bring to their rule, while foreign rulers participated in tributary politics because they valued the benefits of trade with China. Thus, "trade and tribute were cognate aspects of a single system of foreign relations, the moral value of tribute being the more important in the minds of the rulers of China, and the material value of trade in the minds of the barbarians."[15]

These interpretations have for a long time dominated scholars' understanding of the historical East Asian order. Many concurred with Fairbank's assessment of the tribute system or differed only slightly from it. Immanuel Hsu, for example, wrote that "the tributary relations were primarily ceremonial and ritualistic, rather than exploitative. Economically, the tributary practice was a loss to China, yet its prestige value could not be overlooked."[16] Some tried to expand and refine the model. Mark Mancall, for example, argued that the tribute system functioned to "intermesh" China and its neighbors, and this intermeshing was "highly institutionalized and simultaneously took place along several dimensions, such as the economic, the political, and the cultural."[17] He noted that there was a large element of trade in tributary relations, but tribute also carried its enormous political and diplomatic significance and therefore should not be misread as simply a cover for trade.

Yet here conceptual ambiguities immediately emerge. Mancall notes that the Qing tribute system did not embody a unified set of principles in China's foreign relations. The degree of acceptance of the system on the part of China's neighbors varied greatly—from complete acceptance of Confucianism as the tributary state's own ideology, as in Vietnam, to analogous, but distinct, set of assumptions, as in the case of Siam, to total political cynicism in the search for survival, as among the Turks in

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[14] Fairbank 1968a, 4.
[15] Fairbank and Teng 1941, 140-1.
[16] Hsu 1960, 5.
[17] Mancall 1984, 15.

Central Asia. Mancall thinks that this variation illustrated the flexibility of the tribute system.[18] One can ask, however, whether the variation reflected the flexibility of the tribute system or the multiplicity of China's foreign relations that could not be neatly captured by the tribute system.

At first sight Yu Yingshi's study of the Han tribute system seems to confirm Fairbank's and Mancall's interpretations of the tribute system. The Han system developed out of Chinese efforts to regulate Han-Xiongnu relations in a politically acceptable way. To the Han court, "it was the symbolic value of submissiveness rather than the actual economic worth of the Xiongnu tribute that was important."[19] The Han clearly considered the tribute system "a political necessity, despite its economic undesirability."[20] For the "barbarians," trade was always the paramount motive in participating in the tribute system, though they sometimes also sought protection from China. However, Yu also observes that for the tribute system to work, economic attraction must be accompanied by military awe. Moreover, because the maintenance of a well-balanced tribute system required political, military, and economic variables on both the Chinese and "barbarian" sides, Yu concludes that "the system was, by its very nature, unstable" and maybe conceived as "a state of delicate equilibrium, generally sensitive to the change of conditions on either side."[21] This raises several questions. What is the relationship between economic attraction and military force in the tribute system? Military force hardly figures in Fairbank's model, yet Yu demonstrates that the functioning of the Han tribute system depended on political, military, and economic variables. Yu gives a dynamic picture of the tribute system, and his argument that it was by nature unstable begs the question of what accounted for this instability and how to explain the variation in China's foreign relations.

Almost from its inception, Fairbank's argument has had its critics. *The Chinese World Order* is in many respects a classic statement on traditional China's foreign

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[18] Ibid., 65.
[19] Yu 1967, 46.
[20] Ibid., 49.
[21] Ibid., 58, 140.

relations partly because it contains Fairbank's "preliminary framework."[22] Yet this is also a volume with many other first-rate essays expressing a range of views some of which cannot be easily accommodated by the framework. The essays by Lien-sheng Yang, Joseph Fletcher, and John E. Wills Jr., for example, have raised doubts about the general applicability of the sinocentric framework. A more focused critique comes from Morris Rossabi's volume *China among Equals.*[23] Rossabi and his collaborators find that the "Chinese world order" as identified by Fairbank did not persist throughout China's imperial history, and they focus on the Song dynasty (960-1279) to show that Song rulers could not enforce a sinocentric tribute system and instead had to treat its neighbors as equals.

This finding would not be surprising even if one had just done a cursory review of imperial China's foreign relations. The sinocentric, hierarchic, and normative "Chinese world order" can be fairly called a myth in various periods of Chinese history. As Lien-sheng Yang writes, "Reviewing the whole range of Chinese history...one finds that this multidimensional Sinocentric world order was a myth backed up at different times by realities of varying degree, sometimes approaching nil."[24] In practice, China was not always superior to foreign countries; it could be equal or even inferior to them. Not only did weak dynasties such as the Song had to make humiliating peace with their powerful rivals, but apparently strong regimes such as the Han (206 BC-AD 220) and the Tang (618-907) also had to appease foreign chiefs by, for example, giving princesses or girls of the imperial clan as brides. Both the Han and the Song in fact paid tribute in reverse to their northern neighbors. And the "Chinese world order" simply collapsed during periods of the Middle Kingdom's fragmentation, leading to an East Asian order that was "uncentered."[25] Clearly, "there were limits to China's claim to be the suzerain of the civilized world."[26] Fairbank himself acknowledged that "the Chinese world order was a unified concept only at the Chinese end and only on the normative level, as an

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[22] Fairbank 1968a, b.
[23] Rossabi 1983a.
[24] Yang 1968, 20.
[25] For a good historical overview, see Cohen 2000.
[26] Liu 1980, vii-viii.

ideal pattern."[27]

The most significant critiques of the tribute system model, however, concern its conceptual foundation. Wills has for a long time cautioned against over-generalizing from the model.[28] He observed that the model was primarily relevant in the Qing period to relations with Korea, Vietnam, and Liuqiu, but could not fit into relations with the Europeans in the Canton system of trade in the eighteenth century. He noted the model's conceptual confusions and suggested that the term "tribute system" be used only for the Ming dynasty's systematic complex of bureaucratic regulation developed around 1400. More importantly, he suggested that scholars should "become more intellectually ambitious and more self-critical" and "should not tolerate the conceptual muddle that authors continue to get into around the phrase 'tribute system'".[29]

A number of scholars have challenged the rigidity and unitary nature of the model. In addition to Wills, Joseph Fletcher noted a high degree of flexibility in Ming foreign policy in as early as his 1968 contribution to *The Chinese World Order* volume.[30] James Millward criticized the model as monolithic and unchanging and argued that "the Sinocentric notions that underlie the 'tribute system' paradigm bear very little relation to Qing policy vis-à-vis the pastoral nomads or other peoples in or bordering on Xinjiang." Moreover, he pointed out that the Emperor Qing Gaozong's (1736-1795) pluralist configuration of the empire, which did not put Han Chinese or the Chinese civilization at the center, contradicted Fairbank's sinocentric, hierarchic scheme of the "Chinese world order."[31] Peter Perdue noted that "tribute" encompassed many different kinds of trading and power relations in both the Ming and the Qing.[32] In examining Qing relations with Kirghiz nomads in the early eighteenth century, Nicola Di Cosmo argued that the tribute system as it operated on the Qing's northwestern frontier was an integral part of the political management of

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[27] Fairbank 1968a, 12.
[28] Wills 1974, 1984, 1988.
[29] Wills 1988, 229.
[30] Fletcher 1968.
[31] Millward 1998, 49, 199.
[32] Perdue 2005, 269.

the frontier that helped reduce local challenges to Qing authority not so much in terms of its economic content, but rather by virtue of the political environment it created.[33] James Hevia examined Fairbank's model from a postmodern perspective and argued that the model was a functional one and thus shared the weakness of classic functional models. He sought to bypass it by conceiving of the Macartney embassy not in terms of tributary relations but in terms of an encounter between two expansive imperialisms.[34]

This part of the historical scholarship can therefore be read as a development from initial researches centering on Fairbank's "tribute system" and "Chinese world order" frameworks between the 1930s and 1960s to responses, critiques, and attempts to move away from them since the 1980s. However, although these critiques, both empirical and conceptual, have ably demonstrated the flaws of these models, the analytical category of the "tribute system" is still serving as a primary reference point in the study of East Asian history. Hevia, to be sure, has tried heroically to eschew it altogether, but his postmodern analysis is a method of deconstruction for a particular event, not even amenable to contingent generalization of a historical period. Many scholars still use the tribute system language in a taken-for-granted way without examining its underlying assumptions. Thus, although the attraction of Fairbank's arguments has waned over the years, the tribute system paradigm he helped to establish is very much alive. New approaches with greater interpretive and explanatory power have yet to emerge.

JAPANESE AND CHINESE PERSPECTIVES

Japanese scholars have made some important contributions to the study of East Asian diplomatic history. Two of the most prominent models in this area are those of the "investiture system" and "tributary trade." Nishijima Sadao was the first scholar in East Asia to have developed the "investiture system" (Japanese: *sakuhō taisei*) model. This model closely parallels Fairbank's tribute system model. Indeed it identifies the

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[33] Cosmo 2003.
[34] Hevia 1995.

same practices like the granting of Chinese titles and tribute-paying by foreign rulers as those of the tribute system. This is unsurprising since tribute and investiture were often two sides of the same coin in the ceremonial aspects of China's foreign relations. Sadao also argued that the "investiture system" embodied sinocentrism ideologically and extended China's hierarchical domestic order institutionally. Indeed, like Fairbank, he called this the "East Asian World." Also like Fairbank, he argued that whatever their motivations, foreign countries' contacts with China were, without exception, conducted through the medium of the "investiture system."[35] Since the "investiture system" model has so many similarities with the tribute system model, it must also share the latter's flaws.

The most prominent advocate of the "tributary trade" model is Takeshi Hamashita. This model still takes the tribute system as the larger framework—albeit viewing it as an organic network of relations between various layers of the center and the periphery—while singling out maritime trade as the most significant aspect of tributary relations.[36] Hamashita portrays a tribute-trade based economic exchange network that had matured in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and asserts that "it is quite legitimate to view tribute exchange as a commercial transaction."[37] He argues that a sinocentric tribute system spanning Asia, above all characterized by tributary trade relationships, was Asia's only—and only Asia's—historical system. Even during the second half of the nineteenth century when Western powers tried to impose a treaty port system in East Asia, the tribute system retained its primacy, subsuming the treaty system.

Although Hamashita's emphasis on regional economic integration is a departure from earlier accounts of the tribute system, he offers no distinctive challenge to the tribute system framework as a whole. Moreover, his theory purports to explain a small part of historical East Asian politics—maritime tributary trade in modern times—and says little about tributary relations in the Asian continent and during

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[35] See Wang 1989, 11-20.
[36] See Hamashita 1994, 1997, and 2003.
[37] Hamashita 1994, 96.

other periods. If on the maritime front trade was the defining characteristic whereas overland security was the dominant concern,[38] the analytical task ought to be a synthesis of these two perspectives for a systemic framework that can account for both features in historical East Asian politics.

In the Chinese literature dominant interpretations of historical East Asian politics tend to resemble those of Fairbank and his followers, though this has begun to change in recent years. Partly this is because of the influence Fairbank's work has had on many Chinese scholars. But partly this is also because many of these scholars have even more uncritically drawn on traditional Chinese sources and thus produced interpretations of China's foreign relations that mirror the views of the imperial Chinese state. In an influential essay entitled "the Huayi (华夷) Order", for example, the historian He Fangchuan outlined his own version of the East Asian order. In addition to sinocentric and hierarchic characteristics, He also argued that this order was distinguished by its peacefulness and harmony and that the tribute system was the institutional guarantee of this Pax Sinica.[39]

Song Chengyou also sees the interactions between China and its neighbors as having formed a distinctive international order. He manages to examine the political, economic, and cultural aspects of these interactions without mentioning the tribute system. However, although he offers an excellent historical summary of the origin, evolution, and decline of this order, he does not develop a conceptual discussion on the nature of this order.[40]

In another recent study, Li Yunquan offers the most thorough examination of the historical evolution of the tribute system available in the literature. But his emphasis is on the bureaucratic development of the tribute system on the Chinese side, not the nature of the East Asian order of which the tribute system may be regarded as a

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[38] Peter Perdue, for example, while recognizing the importance of trade, sees security as the overriding problem that made military rather than commercial power the decisive force in inter-state relations in the historical East Asian system. Perdue 2003.
[39] He 2007a.
[40] Song 2002.

notable feature. Li distinguishes between three types of tributary relations during the Ming dynasty: typical and substantive, general, and nominal. This can be a promising entry into an exploration of the nature of East Asian politics during this time, but Li's focus on the bureaucratic features of the tribute system has prevented him from examining further the implications of the variations in tributary relations.[41]

From a different perspective, the Taiwan-based historian Gao Mingshi examines in great detail the origin and evolution of the historical East Asian order (what he calls the Tianxia order) and offered his own Tianxia theory.[42] The term Tianxia (天下)—"under heaven", if translated literally—refers to a cosmology in which China is understood as "all under heaven." Gao argues that this order can be understood from the Confucian ideas of virtue (*de* 德), ritual (*li* 礼), administration (*zheng* 政), and punishment (*xing* 刑). These four key elements of Confucianism combine to produce four principles of the Tianxia order, those of linkage, governing, distancing, and virtue. Although Gao, like Fairbank, also conceives of the structure of the Tianxia order as a concentric circle, the idea of the tribute system plays no central role in his theory. Indeed, drawing heavily on Nishijima Sadao, Gao is more influenced by the Japanese investiture theory than by the tribute system theory in the English literature, though, as noted above, the investiture system and the tribute system are two sides of the same coin.

Gao's theory has merits, particularly in terms of its careful examination of the philosophical and institutional basis of the Tianxia order. But this is also the source of its main weakness. His theory takes Confucian principles as both the means and ends of China's foreign relations, but these cannot incorporate all of China's foreign policy motives, strategies, and goals in practice and do not always reflect the nature of Chinese foreign policy. Exacerbating the Confucian bias, Gao takes supporting evidence from dynastic sources and interprets them almost entirely at their face value (that is, in the way that the scholar-officials who compiled these sources had intended

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[41] Li 2004.
[42] Gao 2003.

them), thus committing the "confirmation bias." There is a certain degree of superficiality in both the theory's logic and the evidence supporting it. Further, Gao's theory is heavily biased toward the institutional side of the Tianxia order—issues such as investiture and other kinds of the governance system devised by China—and then only from the Chinese angle. Because Gao draws so heavily on Confucianism, which constituted a great part of the imperial ideology, at times his arguments appear indistinguishable from the stated principles of imperial regimes. The theory, as a whole, is therefore seriously biased and incomplete.

THE TRIBUTE SYSTEM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DISCOURSE

IR scholars, when they discuss the tribute system, have generally followed the Fairbankian paradigm, though couching it with IR terms and concepts. Suisheng Zhao, for example, draws uncritically on Fairbank and asserts that a sinocentric hierarchic order existed for thousands of years in East Asia. According to him, all countries within the tribute system were subservient to China and can be called its "satellites".[43] Yongjin Zhang, writing within the English School, asserts that the Chinese world order "can be counted as one of the greatest institutional innovations and achievements of traditional China. One of the remarkable feats of Pax Sinica, which is also an enduring puzzle, is the longevity and flexibility of its fundamental institution, the tribute system."[44] These scholars regard the analytical category of the "tribute system" as unproblematic and use it to frame their discussions. However, their discussion often stops with the thought of the tribute system as a historical institution without trying to explain it. If the longevity and flexibility of the tribute system is a puzzle, how might one account for it? Answers to this question should have taken us far beyond some existing interpretations and get into the heart of the nature of historical East Asian politics.

Some scholars have sought to apply mainstream IR concepts and theories. Victor Cha, for example, asserts that the predominant security dynamics in historical Asia was

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[43] Zhao 1997, 15-9.
[44] Zhang 2001, 52.

not balancing but bandwagoning by smaller states with the dominant Chinese power.[45] This view, however, stays at the level of an assertion rather than a well-supported argument. Although other countries clearly accommodated China, at times they also sought to resist or at least keep a distance from it. Can bandwagoning along capture the dynamics of the relations between China and its neighbors?

The most notable recent writings have concentrated on structural features of the historical East Asian system and whether international politics here were uniquely "Asian" as opposed to European-style balance of power and hegemonic war. Muthiah Alagappa suggests that the structure of the historical East Asian system should be seen as hierarchy under anarchy: "The deep structure of this system may be characterized as anarchic, for each unit had its own separate territory and government, and the tributaries were not under the direct political control of China. This anarchy, however, permitted hierarchic relations among the units based on the ideas of universal kingship and higher culture."[46] Although this is an interesting hypothesis, it is not tested and Alagappa's brief discussion leaves it unclear why the ideas of universal kingship and higher culture would lead to hierarchic politics.

Samuel Huntington is an early advocate of Asian uniqueness in international politics. He asserts that "Asians generally are willing to 'accept hierarchy' in international relations…Until the arrival of the Western powers in the mid-nineteenth century, East Asian international relations were sinocentric with other societies arranged in varying degrees of subordination to, cooperation with, or autonomy from Beijing…the Asian hierarchy of power model of international politics contrasts dramatically with the European balance of power model."[47] A similar view is held by the Chinese scholar Qin Yaqing, who is even more enthusiastic in arguing for Chinese uniqueness. He asserts that China's Tianxia philosophy and the tribute system contain distinctively Chinese ideas that Western IR perspectives are simply unable to explain. Further, he believes that the structure of the Tianxia order is

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[45] Cha 1998.
[46] Alagappa 1998.
[47] Huntington 1996, 234-5.

hierarchic—and only hierarchy can maintain stability and harmony.[48]

These assertions are often made without the support of historical evidence, but the view of Asian hierarchy as opposed to European anarchy is somehow becoming the received wisdom among many IR scholars. One of the more influential such arguments comes from David Kang, who asserts that "Historically, it has been Chinese weakness that has led to chaos in Asia. When China has been strong and stable, order has been preserved. East Asian regional relations have historically been hierarchic, more peaceful, and more stable than those in the West."[49]

Kang's thesis suffers from a number of weaknesses. Although hierarchy is a key concept in his argument, it is not well defined. Equally problematic is his discussion of hierarchic politics in Asian history without specifying its logic or how it came about in the first place. Moreover, the evidence Kang gives is selective and sporadic. Finally, Kang notes a correlation between Chinese strength and regional peace. But the correlation cannot hold for all periods of Chinese strength: Evidence abounds that powerful Chinese dynasties tried at various times to dominate and even conquer neighboring territories and thus destabilized the region. Yet, even assuming that the correlation holds, Kang has not explained whether this is also a causal relationship. When peace prevailed in East Asia, was this because of Chinese power or something else? What was the relationship between Chinese power and peace and stability in Asian history?[50]

Amitav Acharya's challenge focuses precisely on some of these problems, though he does not answer the question of whether the historical East Asian system is a hierarchy.[51] Moreover, both Acharya and Kang tend to selectively use evidence to support their particular views. Separately, each of their evidence may all make sense. But collectively, what does it tell us about the nature of historical East Asian politics?

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[48] Qin 2006, 10.

[49] Kang 2003, 66. Although arguing from a different perspective, Barry Buzan and Richard Little also believe that hierarchy persisted in East Asia during the ancient and classical era; see Buzan and Little 2000, 232.

[50] In his recent book Kang gives a more solid historical discussion, but still does not solve all the shortcomings in his original argument. See Kang 2007, especially chap 2.

[51] Acharya 2003/04. See Kang's reply in Kang 2003/04.

The exchange between Kang and Acharya has exposed too many unanswered questions, and their debate provides just an entry into this subject.

Historical and Analytical Problems

What, then, is the tribute system in East Asian history? If one sees the term "tribute system" as an analytical category, an intellectual construct invented to shed light on historical events, then the construct has proved problematic. As the preceding section shows, scholars have found various flaws in Fairbank's tribute system model. While many have tried to refine its formulations and delimit its scope and applicability, some have sought to bypass or reject it. This raises the question: Should we do away with the concept of "tribute system" altogether? In analytical terms, what would we lose and what would we gain?

If one sees the tribute system as a historical institution, several problems emerge with regard to extant researches on the various tribute systems in East Asian history. To begin with, historical researches on the tribute system have focused on the widely separated periods of the Han and the Qing dynasties.[52] Yu Yingshi's work explored the origin of the tribute system in the Han, while Fairbank's model developed out of his work on the mid-Qing. Many other works mentioned above also focus on the Qing period. We lack systematic studies of the tribute system in other periods. Particularly puzzling is the neglect of the Ming tribute system, despite the recognition that it is during the Ming that the tribute system was first institutionalized.

Second, few contingent generalizations or models that improve on Fairbank's original one have been developed in the last few decades. The scholarly trend in the history field has been to focus on particular events and develop specific interpretations. This method has proved very useful and offered powerful insights on a number of important events. But the downside is that it tends to lose the big picture.

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[52] Wang 1989, 26.

The method is faithful to the discipline of history, though as Wills has argued, historians should also be more conceptually conscious and intellectually ambitious. For IR scholars, however, an important task is to develop theories that can explain a class of historical events. On the tribute system no such theory has yet been offered. Even though some scholars talk about the tribute system as a fundamental institution, we are still left wondering about its operation and evolution.

Many more specific questions about the tribute system can be raised. Yu Yingshi, Mancall, and many others have noted the variation of the tribute system and its inherent instability. Other polities' reactions to China's tribute-system scheme of relations ranged from complete acceptance, to opportunistic and cynical following, to indifference and even rejection. The variation needs explanation. What are the motives behind China's construction of tributary relations and other countries' participation (or the lack thereof)? Can the tribute-trade duality that has been traditionally identified—China valued tribute for prestige and foreign countries valued trade with China through tribute presentation—capture the motives of all the parties involved? It has also been noted that the tribute system contained a large symbolic dimension: Many "tributaries" acted out of self-interest and only accepted a nominal subordination to China. This begs two questions. What were these self-interests apart from the economic motive? If tributary relations were largely symbolic, what kind of relations were "real" and what does this "symbolic-real" distinction tell us about the nature of historical East Asian politics?

More importantly, the observed variation and instability of the tribute system indicate that the tribute system must not be taken as an "independent variable" to explain historical East Asian politics. Instead, it must be seen as a "dependent variable" and thus something to be explained in the first place. The variation and instability tell us something deeper about historical East Asian politics. We need a further, more enduring set of variables to explain both the tribute system and the larger politics between China and its neighbors of which the tribute system may be only a part. Talking about the "flexibility" of the tribute system may in fact commit

essentialization; we must try to deconstruct specific tribute systems and examine what lies behind their supposed flexibility.

Further, if the "Chinese world order" is to be understood as a Chinese ideal and thus a political myth, what might be a better characterization of the actual historical East Asian order? Fairbank offered his "preliminary framework" to describe the Chinese ideal pattern. We now need new frameworks to account for the workings of the East Asian order. These frameworks should be able to answer the following more IR-related questions.

First, is the structure of the historical East Asian system a sinocentric hierarchy, as is so often claimed? To answer this question one must be able to define hierarchy sensibly, specify how hierarchy is created, and describe the logic of hierarchic politics. The extant literature discussed above is weak on all these points.

Second, what are the main patterns of interaction in the relations between China and its neighbors and the driving forces behind these interactions? This should be a central question in studying the tribute system, yet the answers given so far are inadequate. The tribute-trade duality still largely informs our understanding of the motives, strategies, and goals of both China and its neighbors. Discussions are mostly descriptive without solid conceptual foundations. Moreover, this part of the research suffers from the "sinocentric" bias—too much emphasis has been put on the Chinese side of the story at the expense of that of other polities.

Finally, is historical East Asian politics so unique that the Western experience is of no use here, rendering current IR theories useless, as some seem to believe? Are Asians more willing to accept hierarchy and hegemony? Are hierarchy and hegemony good for peace and stability in this region? These questions will not be answered until we have explored the aforementioned historical and analytical puzzles first.

Methodology

My study is designed to help solve some of these puzzles. The ultimate analytical challenge is to explain both the structural variation of the East Asian system and the variation in the interactions between China and its neighbors. This, in total, would be a too ambitious task. My more limited starting point is, therefore, to examine an essential yet somewhat neglected case of the tribute system—the early Ming (1368-1424) tribute system.

It is during the early Ming period that the tribute system became fully institutionalized for the first time in Chinese history.[53] In terms of its scope, function, and sophistication, the Ming tribute system surpassed that of all previous Chinese dynasties. The subsequent Qing dynasty made some institutional innovations, notably the *Lifanyuan* (理藩院) for Inner Asian affairs.[54] But in other areas of foreign tributary relations they largely inherited the political and institutional legacies of the Ming.[55] Moreover, the Qing lagged far behind the Ming in terms of the scale of tributary relations. Whereas the early Ming had over 100 tributaries according to some Chinese sources, the Qing only managed to obtain 7 regular tributaries during the Qianlong reign (1736-1795), the last era of Qing strength.[56] As a bureaucratic management of China's foreign relations, the tribute system declined and eventually collapsed during the Qing.

Analytically, focusing on the early Ming has driven me to work out a theory to explain historical East Asian politics under the structural condition of Chinese unipolarity. The historical East Asian system might be seen as unipolar when China was unified and strong (what I call "Chinese primacy"). The system during the early Ming can be seen as a good case of unipolarity as this period saw a consolidation and expansion of Chinese power. Developing a theory of Chinese primacy makes sense

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[53] Historians have consensus on this point. See Fairbank and Teng 1941, 137; Mancall 1984, 13; Wills 1984, 14; and Li 2004, 14, 61.
[54] Chia 1993.
[55] This is not to deny the Qing's updating of the terminological template for identifying tributary groups. See Crossley 2002, 333.
[56] Li 2004, 136.

as a first step toward theorizing historical East Asian politics because, as the above discussion shows, political dynamics in East Asian history vary with the power of the Chinese empire. Indeed, the unqualified belief of Chinese strength is the first cause behind confusions on the nature of historical East Asian politics. China was powerful only at times, and the periods of Chinese unification and strength constitute no more than half of its imperial history.[57]

I examine Sino-Korean, Sino-Japanese, and Sino-Mongolian relations during the early Ming to test the theoretical propositions developed in Chapter 2. The early Ming case is further divided into these three relationships because they encompass a wide range of relations between China and its neighbors, from the most cooperative (Sino-Korean relations) to the most difficult (Sino-Mongolian relations), thereby ensuring that I will not miss any significant variation of the political dynamics during this period.

Three general questions are asked to guide the historical analysis in each empirical chapter. What were the Chinese strategies toward Korea/Japan/the Mongols? What were the Korean/Japanese/Mongolian strategies toward Ming China? And what kind of structure formed in Sino-Korean/Japanese/Mongolian relations as a result of their interactions? In contrast to many "sinocentric" and thus ultimately incomplete analyses, I pay as much attention to the Korean/Japanese/Mongolian side of the story as I do to the Chinese side.

I use both primary and secondary sources for the historical analysis. The main primary resources I rely on are the *Mingshilu* (Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty) and the *Mingshi* (Official History of the Ming dynasty).[58] The *Mingshilu*

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[57] Victoria Hui has recently argued that China Proper formed a unified empire for only 980 years from 221 BC to AD 2000 and thus that historical China should be seen as cycles of multistate systems as much as cycles of unified dynasties. Hui 2008b.

[58] For the *Mingshilu* I have used a number of compilations. The most important is MSLLZ, which is a comprehensive compilation of materials on Ming China's foreign relations from the original *Mingshilu*, including those on Sino-Korean, Sino-Japanese, and Sino-Mongolian relations. For Sino-Korean relations I have also used MSLCXZLJL, which is a specific compilation of materials about Korea from the *Mingshilu*; and CXLCSL, which is a compilation of materials regarding China from the *Veritable Records of the Yi Dynasty* in Korea. For the *Mingshi* I have used the 2004 edition of the MS, which is part of a major recent publication project on China's "official histories." This edition contains both the old Chinese originals and mandarin translations.

are the successive reign annals of the emperors of Ming China (1368-1644). They summarize items presented to or issued by the emperor in his daily court sessions and are thus the most authoritative and comprehensive records of the domestic and foreign affairs of the Ming dynasty available in print. They constitute one of the most important primary texts of the Ming and contain a wealth of materials unrecorded in other sources. Most subsequent histories of the Ming have relied directly or indirectly on the *Mingshilu*. The *Mingshi*, issued in 1739, is the official history of the Ming dynasty written by historians of the subsequent Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Regarded as one of the best of the later dynastic histories (there are 24 such "histories" altogether), it uses a wide range of materials produced during the Ming, including the *Mingshilu*. For secondary sources I draw on the best historical scholarship available in the English and Chinese literatures.

The combination of primary and secondary sources allows me to check inconsistencies and disputes regarding interpretations of some historical events. More importantly, the use of primary sources has enabled me to identify events that are highly relevant for my analysis but are obscured or overlooked in the secondary literature. Indeed, it is often necessary for political scientists to do more original research based on primary sources, for at least two reasons. First, because historians and political scientists approach their topics with different sets of questions, secondary historical accounts may not contain the kind of data that political scientists need for theory development and testing. Second, political scientists and historians have different criteria for selecting evidence, which makes it risky for political scientists to rely solely on secondary sources written by historians.[59] In the case of East Asian diplomatic history where so many secondary accounts are written on the basis of a few essential primary documents, it is all the more important to check the primary sources for the original presentations of events.

One problem with primary sources such as the *Mingshilu* and the *Mingshi* is that there are likely to be distortions of facts and biases of interpretations, since these

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[59] Larson 2001.

documents were products of official historiography written by Chinese court officials often through some particular ideological lenses. Since secondary accounts have had to rely on them in varying degrees, misinterpretation is also an inherent problem. On the other hand, however, many secondary works contain careful analyses of the plausibility of events as recorded in the primary documents, thus offering an important check against unnecessary misinterpretation. Careful use of these secondary works can also minimize the risk of overreliance on official Chinese sources.

At the same time, prudent use of traditional Chinese sources can be achieved by generally making use of the occurrence of events as recorded but not necessarily the interpretations of them as offered by the scholar-officials. There is no feasible way of knowing past events other than by carefully utilizing the extant historical sources, but interpretations of these events do not necessarily have to follow the "official view," since they can be arrived at by a careful reconstruction of a sequence of events. I have tried to the extent possible to check back and forth between the primary and secondary materials, grounding my interpretations in ways that seem the most plausible given all the available sources.

Contribution to the Field of IR

This study has a number of implications for East Asian historical scholarship, IR theory, and policy discussion on China's role in East Asia. I hope to simultaneously speak to IR scholars, China specialists, and historians of East Asia by striking a balance between theory, history, and policy analysis. The theory developed in the next chapter is meant to explain some enduring puzzles in East Asian diplomatic history and help one better understand how international politics here might have worked. The historical case studies evaluate the theory while enriching our empirical knowledge of how relations between Ming China and its neighbors were actually carried out. Theory and history then inform our policy discussions on China's evolving roles in East Asia and the likely consequences of its contemporary

reemergence.

HISTORY

The study originates from a historical puzzle: What is the "tribute system" and how might one explain it as a "system" of China's foreign relations? I develop a theory of Chinese primacy that explains more than just the tribute system. The first contribution I hope to make is to help advance our understanding of historical East Asian politics. Over the years various historians have criticized Fairbank's original model, but these criticisms somehow have not accumulated to a critical level where entirely new models or theories might be fashioned. I attempt such a theory-building endeavor, focusing on the condition of Chinese primacy in East Asian history while bringing to light the somewhat neglected case of the early Ming tribute system. The theory, with supporting evidence from the early Ming case, explains some puzzles and anomalies left over from previous scholarship. It is presented as an alternative explanation to models constructed around the central concept of the "tribute system", in an attempt to move beyond this enduring paradigm in the East Asian historical scholarship.

THEORY

There is still a wide gap in theorizing historical East Asian politics by IR scholars. My theory of Chinese primacy, following the pioneering works by Iain Johnston and Victoria Hui, is intended as a small step toward filling that gap. It is hoped that it will provoke new thinking on historical East Asian politics and encourage more scholars to exploit the theory-building potential of the historical Asian field. At the same time, it is also hoped that the theory will add to the IR literature on unipolarity from an East Asian vantage point. Those on imperialism and hegemony aside, theories that directly address unipolarity are still relatively few. Stuart Kaufman observes that "there has been shockingly little theorizing about unipolar systems and how they change."[60] Yet unipolarity has its distinct logics and theorizing it will refine and expand many existing IR theories.

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[60] Kaufman 2008, 8.

The theory proposed in Chapter 2 lays out fully the logic of unipolar politics in a historical East Asian context. It synthesizes the insights of realism and constructivism in a coherent framework developed in terms of the co-constitution of agency and structure and shows how material and cultural factors interact to produce behavioral patterns. Unlike Kang, whose discussion of hierarchy remains vague, I envision historical East Asian politics along a spectrum from the more anarchic to the more hierarchic end, presenting clearly the logics of anarchy and hierarchy as well as the conditions under which anarchic or hierarchic politics may become more likely. Although the theory is grounded in the East Asian context, it will have relevance for unipolar politics in general. It advances our understanding of how unipolarity might operate and expands the existing realist and constructivist theories on the basis of materials from historical East Asia.

POLICY

Many contemporary discussions on China's historical role in East Asia have either implicit or explicit implications for our understanding of its present foreign policy and how this might affect contemporary East Asia politics. The reference to history is inevitable and in some cases also necessary, since, as Gerrit Gong has argued, history not only influences states' identities but also to some extent their strategic alignment in the present era.[61] Yet some of these discussions are based on faulty assumptions and inadequate understandings of historical East Asian politics. I undercut these assumptions through in-depth historical case studies and establish a more solid theoretical and empirical understanding of historical East Asian politics, thus creating a more credible ground for discussion about the relevance of history. In Chapter 7, for example, I bring history and policy together by evaluating the myths of the "Chinese tradition" found in some part of the Chinese literature and consider their consequence for contemporary Chinese foreign policy.

Several misleading interpretations of the contemporary implications of historical East

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[61] Gong 2001.

Asian politics are readily apparent in the extant literature. For example, an emerging trend of research—represented most notably by David Kang—argues that the historical East Asian system is a hierarchy and that hierarchic politics centering on China may return to East Asia. According to this line of argument, hierarchy or hegemony induced by the rising Chinese power may again cement regional peace and stability.

A strong China might indeed contribute to East Asian stability, but the mechanisms that might lead to that happy outcome are far less clear. Kang's assertion that the historical East Asian system is a hierarchy is unfounded. I show that even during periods of Chinese preponderance politics here are more anarchic than hierarchic in many aspects. Historical East Asian politics are also more power-political than many have realized. If the historical East Asian system with Chinese preponderance is not a sinocentric hierarchy, we will have less reason to believe that the contemporary East Asian system will be such a hierarchy when China has to share regional influence with other countries.

Yet Kang is careful in making historical analogies. There are analysts who simply extrapolate China's and East Asia's future from the past. According to some, "China is essentially 'hardwired' by its history and culture to seek domination." [62] Huntington, for example, asserts that "China's history, culture, tradition, size, economic dynamism, and self-image all impel it to assume a hegemonic position in East Asia...History, culture, and the realities of power strongly suggest that Asia will opt for peace and hegemony...China is resuming its place as regional hegemon, and the East is coming into its own." [63] But what are the history, culture, and power realities in East Asia? What has been China's role in this region? Surely, as China regains its power, history and culture will be more important in its foreign relations. But without first understanding what East Asian history and culture might have been, we will have a hard time speaking intelligently about their contemporary

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[62] This is Aaron L. Friedberg's summary of this literature; Friedberg 2005, 21, fn. 39.
[63] Huntington 1996, 229, 238. For a similar line, see Dibb 1995, 13-14. More or less similar views can also be found in Mosher 2000; and Terrill 2004.

implications.

Chapter 2

A Theory of Chinese Primacy

In this chapter I explore how insights from recent developments in realist and constructivist IR theories can be used to explain how Chinese primacy shaped historical East Asian politics when China was unified and strong. No one studying historical East Asian politics will fail to recognize China's material preponderance, nor will anyone fail to appreciate its cultural influence at the same time. Our perception of the reality of historical East Asian politics calls for a synthetic approach that can take into account both material and cultural factors.[1] Theoretical synthesis is a growing trend in the IR literature. As Legro observes, a synthetic framework provides more and better specified explanatory power than theories emphasizing just one dominant factor, by capturing the way different causal forces conjointly shape outcomes.[2] By considering the factors of both relative power and identity, it should be possible to explain the patterns of interaction between China and its neighbors as well as the motivations behind their strategies toward each other.

An Overview

"International primacy" can be taken to mean a system in which there is only one great power, which is called "unipolarity" in realist language.[3] Realists have defined a unipolar system as containing "one state whose share of capabilities places it in a class by itself compared to all other states."[4] Unipolarity should, therefore, naturally fall within the realist research agenda by virtue of its emphasis on polarity as the key

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[1] A direct comparison of realism and constructivism may be problematic since constructivism is not a substantive theory of international politics like realism (Fearon and Wendt 2002, 56). My point of synthesis, however, is not to suggest such a comparison but rather to focus on and take full advantage of the explanatory factors emphasized by each approach—material power in the case of realism and ideas in the case of constructivism. I also take a pragmatic stance toward theoretical synthesis and leave aside the philosophical and ontological debates that are not essential to problem-driven research.

[2] Legro 2005, 46.

[3] I use "primacy" and "unipolarity" interchangeably to refer to a system of only one great power. But because "unipolarity" seems particularly associated with realism, I prefer the term "Chinese primacy" to "Chinese unipolarity" since my theory also takes into account the cultural aspects of the historical East Asian system.

[4] Brooks and Wohlforth 2008, 12-3. See also Ikenberry, Mastanduno, and Wohlforth 2009, 5; Wohlforth 1999, 9; and Jervis 1993, 52.

structural variable. Yet until recently unipolarity has been a neglected subject of realist theorizing. Waltz, as Richard Little has recently pointed out, "might have been more willing to entertain the possibility of an enduring unipolar world."[5] His work has nevertheless consistently maintained that unipolarity is "unusual."[6] Only recently, however, has Waltz begun to confront the logic of the contemporary American unipolarity.[7] The two variants of neorealism—defensive realism and offensive realism—do not seem to offer obvious insights into the workings of unipolarity. Nor do the various hegemonic realist theories provide much of a clue.[8] Although Robert Gilpin discusses hegemonic war and transition, he does not elaborate on how the dominant and secondary powers may interact in a stable system.[9] Power transition theory is mainly concerned with the relationship between power distribution and war.

William Wohlforth is the first realist scholar to have explicitly theorized American unipolarity.[10] He persuasively shows the stability of this unipolar system, but stops short of presenting a full logic of unipolar politics between the U.S. and other major powers. Stephen Walt's recent research on American primacy lays out more clearly the strategies that the U.S. and other states can employ toward each other without, however, developing a full-blown theory of American unipolarity.[11] In a wide-ranging and ambitious book, scholars have tested the systemic balance-of-power theory against an impressive range of premodern and non-European historical evidence and found that both balance and hegemony are equally common structural features of the international system.[12] Yet, although the book gives an outline of a new theoretical framework to account for these alternative outcomes, it does not theorize political dynamics within a unipolar system.

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[5] Little 2007, 189. According to Little (p. 167), Waltz's model "points the way to the emergence of a unipolar system and the absence of any sustained discussion of unipolarity represents, as a consequence, a significant weakness of *Theory of International Politics.*"
[6] See Waltz 1993 and 2000.
[7] Waltz 2008, xii-xiii.
[8] These include hegemonic transition theory, see Gilpin 1981; power transition theory, see Organski 1958, and Organski and Kugler 1980; and leadership long-cycle theory, see Modelski and Thompson 1989. Levy labels these theories "hegemonic realism," see Levy 2002, 354-55.
[9] Gilpin 1981.
[10] Wohlforth 1999.
[11] Walt 2005.
[12] Kaufman, Little, and Wohlforth 2007.

Unipolarity is more explicitly theorized in a recent special issue of the journal *World Politics*, but most articles are centrally concerned with the dynamics of the current American unipolarity.[13] As yet, however, "we have neither a powerful theory nor much evidence about how unipolar systems operate."[14] Moreover, several authors note that we do not possess multiple historical cases for systematic comparisons.[15] Developing a theory of Chinese primacy and then evaluating it against empirical materials from historical East Asia can thus usefully contribute to the emerging research on unipolarity.

While realist theories capture the key factor of power differential and its possible behavioral effects, constructivist frameworks should also contribute to theorizing unipolarity since in such a system the dominant power's beliefs, ideology, and identity might also shape political dynamics. Indeed, in East Asian history, China's cultural influence over its neighbors was profound. I identify one cultural factor pertinent to international relations in this region—sinocentrism—and theorize its causal effects. Taking into account China's preponderant material power as well as its sinocentric cultural assumption yields a synthetic theory with greater explanatory power than theories emphasizing just one dominant factor.

The theory proposed below is a systemic one, taking into account both structural and unit-level factors. Its propositions follow first from assumptions about two kinds of human motives: the need to meet both security and identity requirements. The agents or actors for meeting these requirements are the ruling elites of China and its neighboring states, not these states as unitary actors.[16] As Wight points out, "The

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[13] *World Politics* (January 2009).

[14] Jervis 2009, 188.

[15] Ikenberry, Mastanduno, and Wohlforth 2009, 25. Jervis notes that "examining Rome and ancient China could be illuminating;" Jervis 2009, 200.

[16] "Units" would be a better term than "states" in the context of historical East Asia. For convenience I define states broadly as "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." Tilly 1992, 1-2. Thus political units such as China, Korea, and Japan in historical East Asia qualify as states. In the case studies I also consider the Mongols as political units because of the importance of their interactions with early Ming China.

state cannot exercise power independent of those agents that act on its behalf."[17] These state agents have to meet the security and identity needs, moreover, under structural constraints and incentives, both material and normative.

From these assumptions three propositions about patterns of behavior and interaction can be generated. First, the behavioral tendency of China is political and/or military domination over its neighbors. The urge to dominate grows out of both structural incentives and internal political needs. Second, although accommodation appears the most sensible response from a structural perspective, other states may also resist Chinese demands for internal reasons, suggesting that unit-level factors can at times override structural imperatives. The main pattern of interaction in such a system is therefore Chinese domination versus other states' accommodation and resistance. Third, a variety of state strategies, underpinned by different motivations, can be employed. Chinese rulers have at their disposal the strategies of war, blackmail, inducement, and persuasion, while the rulers of other states may try submission, bandwagoning, defying, balancing, challenging, and isolation.

By adopting these theoretical perspectives, it is possible to contribute to the discussion of the sinocentric system in three ways. First, historical East Asian politics can be analyzed using the idea of unipolarity as found in the IR theoretical literature. This suggests that it is possible to explore the nature of asymmetrical relations between China and its neighbors without a tribute-system perspective. This should become clearer when tributary relations are analyzed from the perspectives of both China and its neighbors. While one can of course conceive of an asymmetrical system as consisting of the parties participating in tributary relations, doing so does not necessarily offer distinctive analytical advantages. In fact, deconstructing the tribute system enables one to see the asymmetrical nature of historical East Asian politics more clearly. By examining the relations between China and its neighbors from a holistic perspective—that is, both the tributary and non-tributary part—it is in fact possible to suggest that there are motives, strategies, and goals for both China

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[17] Wight 2006, 222.

and its neighbors that go beyond the "tribute system" paradigm.

Second, by using realist and constructivist perspectives, it is possible to reveal a more complete logic of Chinese unipolarity than is found in the existing literature, which should add to our understanding of how unipolar politics might operate in general. This also involves connecting previously unconnected insights and expanding existing theories to draw out more clearly their implications for unipolarity. For example, although defensive realism and offensive realism do not deal with unipolarity per se, it can be proposed that they do have implications for such a model and, if extended, actually offer identical predictions for how a dominant power might behave. I present the logic of Chinese unipolarity in terms of a range of strategies that China and its neighbors can employ toward each other. Some of these are familiar in the literature. But others such as inducement, persuasion, balking, defying, challenging, and isolation have not been given much attention in light of unipolarity. These diverse strategies suggest that the dynamics of unipolar politics cannot be captured by the simple dichotomy between balancing and bandwagoning.

Third, the theory seeks to refine some existing concepts and lay out more clearly the logics of anarchy and hierarchy in a historical East Asian context. For example, attention can be drawn to the exploitative nature of bandwagoning in unipolarity—in which secondary states take advantage of the dominant power to enhance their own power as well as their own security. I also show how sinocentrism might lead to hierarchy and specify the kind of evidence that can give us confidence in believing the presence of a sinocentric hierarchy. Finally, the theory is presented in terms of the co-constitution of agency and structure and shows how material and cultural factors interact to produce outcomes.

In the following two main sections, I present the theory's logic, starting with the implications of the security motive followed by a discussion on identity in historical East Asian politics. In the third section I identify five hypotheses about state behavior

to be tested in the case studies.

The Security Motive and Its Implications

To assume that one primary goal of states in the international system is survival is relatively uncontroversial. Security is one of three key goals that realist theories posit states invariably pursue (the other two being wealth and power). Certainly the security assumption is foundational in neorealism.[18] Constructivists criticize the assumption not because they dispute the security motive per se but because they fault the security assumption as being inadequate for theory building.[19] Wendt, for example, argues that in addition to basic needs such as physical security and autonomy, states also have to meet their identity needs.[20]

Taking security as the starting point, one can begin to explain how second-tier states in a unipolar system behave, since one of their greatest worries must be how to deal with the preponderance of the primary state. Such worry is less prevalent for the latter, since the only great power in the system necessarily enjoys a high degree of security. But this does not imply that security can thereby be ignored in foreign policy making. Even the dominant power has to worry about security, because the possibility of relative power shift and challenge from secondary states always remains. Primacy can reduce, but not eliminate, the dominant state's fear of other states. Indeed, the case study of early Ming China shows that having newly acquired primacy did not eliminate its fear of security challenges from the Mongols and other actors in the system.

UNIPOLARITY IN DEFENSIVE REALISM

In an anarchic world of self-help, if both the primary and secondary states, possessing some offensive capabilities, want to survive, yet uncertain about others'

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[18] Waltz 1979.

[19] For example, Martha Finnemore argues that neorealism's and neoliberalism's material and static treatments of interests are not so much wrong as "grossly incomplete;" these theories "can explain only a small amount of what goes on in the world." Finnemore 1996, 27.

[20] Wendt 1999, 132, 241, and 328. See also Wendt 1994, 385.

intentions, how will they rationally behave? As noted, although defensive realism and offensive realism differ on the effects of anarchy on state behavior in more or less balanced systems and although neither of them deals with unipolarity as such, they offer almost identical predictions for the behavior of the primary state in unipolarity.

As is well known, Waltz, usually regarded as a defensive realist, argued that states try internal or external balancing to achieve security.[21] Balancing is the primary strategy for survival. However, although states engage in balancing to increase internal strength or gain external allies, they need only have "an appropriate amount" of power for the sake of security.[22] "They cannot let power, a possibly useful means, become the end they pursue...The first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their positions in the system."[23] For defensive realists, the international structure encourages states to seek and preserve "only the minimum of power needed for security,"[24] not to increase power relentlessly.

Because they emphasize security-seeking rather than power-maximizing, unipolarity appears as "the least stable,"[25] if not an unimaginable, structure for defensive realists. Yet, carrying the defensive realist logic forward, one can in fact derive some important hypotheses. Its argument that "The first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their positions in the system" can still apply. Indeed, if Schweller's criticism of defensive realism that "Only in reference to satisfied countries can it be said that the primary goal is 'to maintain their positions in the system'"[26] is right, then the best application of the defensive realist argument is found in unipolarity because the dominant power in such a system will generally be more satisfied than states in bipolar or multipolar systems.

In unipolarity the position the polar power has to maintain is primacy, not balance;

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[21] Waltz 1979, 118.
[22] Waltz 2008, 57.
[23] Waltz 1979, 126.
[24] Waltz 2008, p. 46.
[25] Ibid., 88.
[26] Schweller 1994, 86.

and its behavior amounts to domination, not balancing. Maintaining primacy means preserving its relative power in the system or preventing the relative power increase of other states. Indeed, balancing, whether internal or external, would have no use for the only great power in the system. Domination, by creating and maintaining a preponderance of power so as to forestall the rise of peer competitors and suppress challenges from other states, becomes feasible—indeed, likely—simply because of the concentration of power in the primary state. If in multipolar and bipolar systems structure is "a set of constraining conditions,"[27] in unipolarity it is more of a disposing and enabling force. Waltz, believing as he does that it is unlikely for a dominant power to "behave with moderation, restraint, and forbearance," argues that unipolarity will be eventually restored into balance.[28] It is unclear, however, how long it will take for that eventuality to arrive. Historically, unipolar systems, from the Roman Empire in the West to the Chinese Empire in the East, have had impressively long life-spans. The distinctiveness of unipolar politics cannot be easily dismissed. ·

OFFENSIVE REALISM AND UNIPOLARITY

Offensive realists, on the other hand, argue that the international system creates powerful incentives for states to look for opportunities to maximize power at the expense of rivals. A state's ultimate goal is to be the hegemon in the system.[29] Since hegemon is defined as the only great power in the system,[30] this amounts to saying that a state's ultimate goal is to create unipolarity or primacy. Indeed, according to Mearsheimer, all states are revisionist power-maximizers except the regional hegemon who will genuinely be satisfied with the status quo. "The pursuit of power stops only when hegemony is achieved" because hegemony will eliminate any possibility of challenge by another great power. A hegemon "would be a status quo power, and it would go to considerable lengths to preserve the existing distribution of power."[31]

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[27] Waltz 1979, 73.
[28] Waltz 2008, 88. See also Layne 1993 and 2006.
[29] See Mearsheimer 2001.
[30] Ibid., 2, 40.
[31] Ibid., 34-35, 42.

The implication of offensive realism for unipolar politics is then straightforward: Satisfied with the unipolar distribution of power, the hegemon, or the primary state, will strive to maintain this power distribution since this will almost guarantee its security. In contrast to defensive realism, offensive realism not only offers a logic of why international primacy is possible but also why it can be worthwhile. It is possible because the international system encourages states to be aggressive power-maximizers for hegemony. It is worthwhile because hegemony, or primacy, is the best guarantee for security.

That both variants of neorealism offer almost identical hypotheses for the behavior of the primary state is not surprising. Neorealism requires only one factor to explain why the primary state will pursue domination, namely, the concern for relative power. What divides defensive realism and offensive realism is whether "structural modifiers"—such as the offense-defense balance and geography—will influence the severity of the security dilemma between states.[32] In a unipolar system, the divide disappears because the effect of these structural modifiers on the security dilemma with regard to the primary state is minimal. The security dilemma does not disappear in unipolarity, but its consequence is more likely to be felt in the future rather than in the present, because in the present the security of the primary state cannot be challenged by other states. Security competition and war, therefore, are least likely to occur in a unipolar system.[33]

THE DRIVE FOR DOMINATION

Both defensive and offensive realism offer the prediction that the primary state will try to maintain its relative power position. But it is not yet clear what precisely the tendency to maintain power preponderance will entail in actual behavior, nor does it tell us how the primary state will respond to power trends in the system. Some neorealists argue that in anarchy "the fundamental goal of states in any relationship is

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[32] Taliaferro 2000/01. On structural modifiers, also see Snyder 1996. On the security dilemma, see Jervis 1978; and Glaser 1997.
[33] This is consistent with Waltz's contention, emphasized by Wohlforth, that systemic stability—defined as the absence of system-wide wars—is greatest when the number of great powers is smallest.

to prevent others from achieving advances in their relative capabilities."[34] This proposition needs some qualification in the case of unipolarity. A unipole still has to consider the *cumulative* increases of the capabilities of the weak and the possibility of conflict *in the future*. Its sensible response, however, is not to prevent *any* such increase, even when it has the capabilities to do so. In a unipolar system the war-causing potential of anarchy is sufficiently attenuated that the primary state need not be concerned with every increase of other states' relative power.

Similarly, if security is the underlying motive, the primary state should not relentless expand whenever it has the capabilities to do so.[35] Rather, expansion, conquest, and preventive war are responses to rising security threats. It is these threats that drive it to try military domination in the periphery. Because the primary state already enjoys a wide margin of security, it will try conquest or preventive war only when this margin of security is threatened by other states' growing power. Such military domination needs to be properly defined as preventing others from achieving *threatening* advances in relative power—"threatening" being ultimately a function of rulers' perceptions.

STRATEGIES OF DOMINATION

What strategies can the primary state employ for domination? Realism dictates that the primary means to obtain desired outcomes are to threaten punishment or offer a side payment.[36] Three strategies therefore appear prominent in a realist world: war, blackmail/threat, and inducement. War and blackmail are coercive means (the use of force and the threat of force) to get another state to change its behavior. War is the most well-known strategy that states have used to acquire power. The primary state can employ war to eliminate existing threats or prevent the rise of challengers. This does not mean, however, that it will start war at every instance of secondary states' resistance or power increase.

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[34] Grieco 1988.
[35] Some defensive realists argue that "states motivated primarily by security should not as a general rule try to maximize their relative power." Glaser 1994/95, 72.
[36] Traditional or classical realism also has room for persuasion and legitimacy in foreign policy. Schweller and Priess 1997.

When other states are weak and vulnerable or when geography inhibits them from posing a serious threat, the primary state may tolerate their resistance for quite a while. Preventive war is most likely to occur when the primary state perceives threat from an emerging power. This, for example, largely explains early Ming China's repeated campaigns into the Mongolian steppe. The likelihood of war will also be influenced by "structural modifiers" such as geography. The frequency of wars between Ming China and the Mongols are partly explained by their proximity. And although early Ming rulers threatened Japan with war, they never executed the threat partly for fear of the unpredictability of warfare across the sea (while certainly remembering the spectacular failures of the Mongol conquest of Japan a century ago).

Blackmail, whereby a state threatens to take some undesirable action unless the target state offers some form of compliance,[37] is also a strategy for domination. The primary state can blackmail other states into accepting its dominance. Although blackmail is often associated with military threats, it can also have an economic dimension. Economic sanction, for example, is a typical form of economic blackmail in the contemporary world. Early Ming China could apply a sort of economic blackmail by closing down border markets or rejecting tributary relations with states that were eager for profit from trade with China.

Inducement is a strategy whereby a state hopes to change another state's behavior by promising political and economic benefits. The primary state can induce other states into accepting its dominance by offering them political and economic rewards. Early Ming rulers, especially the Yongle emperor (1403-1424), frequently bestowed political titles and economic gifts to other rulers to obtain their compliance. Together these three strategies constitute, though not exhaust, the "carrots and sticks" for domination. They are all intended to change secondary states' behavior by altering the costs and benefits of their policies through threats of punishment or promises of

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[37] This definition follows Walt 2005, 24, 152, See also Mearsheimer 2001, 152.

reward.

SECONDARY STATES' RESPONSE

If the behavioral tendency of the primary state in unipolarity is domination, what are the behavioral tendencies of the secondary states? A unipolar system is, by definition, one in which the balance of power fails to work. Secondary states cannot counterbalance the polar power either alone (internal balancing) or in combination (external balancing). As Wohlforth puts it, "A unipolar system is one in which a counterbalance is impossible."[38] This does not mean that balancing as a state strategy does not exist, but only that balancing in unipolarity is usually ineffective and unlikely to bring about balance as a systemic outcome.[39]

Given the power asymmetries, it makes little sense for secondary states to try competing with or challenging the primary state militarily. To ensure their security, they will have to deal with its power through accommodation rather than opposition, that is, to make asymmetrical concessions to the dominant power, reconcile with its strategic preferences, and tolerate its illegitimate actions until they are strong enough to mount a challenge. Accommodation is the behavior induced by the structural imperatives of unipolarity for the secondary states, as is domination for the primary state.

BANDWAGONING IN UNIPOLARITY

In the IR literature, bandwagoning appears as the prime strategy secondary states can employ in their accommodation with the dominant power. Wohlforth, for example, suggests that "The only options available to second-tier states are to bandwagon with the polar power (either explicitly or implicitly) or, at least, to take no action that could incur its focused enmity."[40] Yet, although bandwagoning is frequently discussed, scholars disagree on its precise meaning or its frequency as a strategic

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[38] Wohlforth 1999, 29.
[39] On the distinction between "balancing" as state behavior and "balance" as a systemic outcome, see Elman 2003, 8-9.
[40] Wohlforth 1999, 25.

behavior in international politics.[41] Moreover, it is almost always narrowly conceived of as an alignment decision in conflict situations. Thus, both Waltz and Walt take bandwagoning to be the opposite of balancing, their only difference being the bandwagoning target: allying with the more powerful side or the more threatening side.[42] Walt conceives of bandwagoning as a result of coercion obtained through the threat of military force by the stronger power—"alignment induced at the point of a gun." [43] Criticizing this definition as too narrow, Schweller defines bandwagoning as a strategy whereby an opportunistic state joins forces with the stronger side in the expectation of making gains, usually for profit through aggression or for the spoils of war.[44]

Although Schweller usefully points out profit as an important motive behind bandwagoning, his definition still seems narrow in light of unipolarity. Three problems remain. First, bandwagoning does not just happen in war or through aggression. It can take place in times of peace. Indeed, in unipolarity bandwagoning is often done willingly, though sometimes it can also be a result of the dominant state's coercion. Second, in unipolarity bandwagoning is not only about joining forces with the dominant power to take advantage of a third state. Rather, it is primarily about taking advantage of the dominant power itself. It is this *exploitative* nature of the bandwagoning strategy in unipolarity that deserves the most attention.

Third, bandwagoning in unipolarity is about both power *and* security. It is first and foremost a strategy of the weak for survival in the face of preponderant power. Not an ideal strategy as it leaves the weak to hope for the mercy of the strong, it is more pragmatic and better than other strategies such as balancing and buck-passing at

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[41] Some realists such as Waltz, Stephen Van Evera, and Stephen Walt believe that balancing behavior predominates in international politics, while other scholars, notably Paul Schroeder, Randall Schweller, and Robert Powell, argue that bandwagoning is more common than balancing or at least more common than some realists think. See Waltz 1979; Van Evera 1990/91; Walt 1987; Schroeder 1994; Schweller 1994; and Powell 1999. See also Sweeney and Fritz 2004.
[42] See Waltz 1979, 126; and Walt 1987. Eric J. Labs follows Waltz in defining bandwagoning as "joining up with the aggressive power to appease it or gain favorable treatment from it"; Labs 1992, 409, fn. 2. The majority of the literature on alliance formation defines balancing as joining with the weaker (in terms of military capability) of two alliance choices and bandwagoning as joining with the stronger; Sweeney and Fritz 2004, 429.
[43] Walt 2005, 187.
[44] Schweller 1994.

ensuring survival in a unipolar system. It stands a good chance of avoiding attack from the dominant power by conceding to its demands. Moreover, it may also gain secondary states protection from the dominant power against other states. But security is not the only goal. Bandwagoning is also motivated by the prospect of increasing power—enriching or strengthening oneself by exploiting the economic and military resources of the dominant power. In other words, bandwagoning is a strategy whereby secondary states not only hope to ensure survival but also to gain power and profit by making productive use of their asymmetrical relations with the dominant power. The opportunity of peaceful intercourse with the dominant power creates powerful incentives for secondary states to benefit as much as possible from such a relationship. For states that are especially weak and vulnerable, this might be the best outcome they can get, while hoping that the dominant power will be merciful. For other states that have great power potentials and harbor corresponding ambitions, however, they will aim at increasing their relative power as a hedge against future uncertainties, even though they may not entertain challenging the dominant power in the present.

STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE

Bandwagoning does not exhaust secondary states' strategies toward the primary state. States develop and shape their strategies in interactions with other states. If bandwagoning is insufficient to preclude the primary state's coercion or is unacceptable for internal reasons, secondary states may try various strategies of resistance depending on the severity of the situation. One is balking—either ignoring the dominant power's requests or doing the bare minimum to carry them out, thereby hindering its efforts while attempting to avoid an overt clash.[45] Another strategy is defying—not only rejecting the dominant power's requests but also opposing and even putting up active resistance against its pressure. At this point the strategy of balancing may also be tried—either transforming their latent power into military capabilities (internal balancing) or forming alliances against the dominant power (external balancing). A further strategy is challenging—competing with the dominant

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[45] The discussion of "balking" follows Walt 2005, 141-43.

power politically and militarily if their core interests are in fundamental conflict.

Occasionally geography may also give some states the option of isolation. For example, if there are large bodies of water in between, the fortuitous state may simply isolate itself from the dominate power in the hope that "the stopping power of water" can protect it.[46] But such options are only available to the extent that "structural modifiers" like geography can mitigate the effect of the distribution of power. In the case of the historical East Asian system, Japan was able to isolate itself from the continent by taking advantage of its island position.

These strategies of resistance are employed primarily when secondary states face coercion from the primary state that threatens their interests or when there are profound conflicts of interest even without the latter's coercion. That they may be tried does not mean they will be successful. Indeed in unipolarity the failure rate is likely to be high. Balancing, for example, is usually ineffective due to coordination and collective action problems. The most important cause of balancing failure in unipolarity, however, in addition to being "prohibitively costly",[47] is the dominant power's ability to suppress it by, for example, pursuing divide-and-conquer strategies.[48] If internal conditions permit, bandwagoning is a sensible strategy for secondary states to deal with the structural imperative of unipolarity. But if it is ineffective and the dominant power continues to press its demands, they will have no choice but to balk, defy, balance, and challenge, even if doing so may be futile. In the existing literature the strategies of balancing and bandwagoning are frequently discussed, balking has received attention recently, while defying, challenging, and isolation have usually been overlooked. Balancing and bandwagoning alone, however, are unable to capture the dynamics of unipolar politics.

SUMMARY

From a purely structural perspective, the central behavioral tendency in a unipolar

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[46] On the "stopping power of water," see Mearsheimer 2001, 114-19.

[47] Brooks and Wohlforth 2008, 23.

[48] For an excellent discussion on the hurdles to effective balancing, see Hui 2005, 28-34. For a similar argument on obstacles to effective balancing in unipolarity, see Walt 2009, 96.

system should be one between the primary state's domination and secondary states' accommodation. Yet structure does not determine behavior and its effects may be overridden by unit-level factors such as domestic politics and ideology. As Legro notes, "National responses to systemic incentives can rarely be understood by reference to external conditions alone."[49] Secondary states' resistance through balking, defying, balancing, challenging, and isolation should therefore be expected. Such resistance can become more frequent especially when the dominant power applies coercive strategies (war and blackmail). The system then becomes less stable.

Stable or not, there is little variation in the behavior of the primary state, while those of the secondary state vary from accommodation to resistance. That domination is the only expected behavior of the primary state shows how strong an enabling force the unipolar structure is. Victoria Hui argues that international politics can be understood as a competition between the "logic of balancing" and the "logic of domination."[50] A unipolar system is one in which the "logic of domination" prevails over the "logic of balancing."[51]

The Identity Motive and Its Implications

That states also try to meet their identity needs is a key constructivist proposition. Lebow, drawing on Greek philosophy, has recently argued that the "spirit" is an innate human drive, with self-esteem as its goal, and honor, standing, and autonomy the means by which it is achieved. Self-esteem is a critical component of identity, and is maintained through the quest for honor or standing.[52] This insight is relevant for a theory of Chinese primacy. Historically Chinese rulers had a strong conception of their identity and an equally strong concern for their honor and standing among states and peoples in the vicinity of the Chinese empire. China's neighbors, such as

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[49] Legro 2005, 175.

[50] Hui 2005.

[51] This should not be taken to mean, however, that the primary state can always get its way over secondary states. In fact, the overall behavioral pattern of domination versus accommodation *and resistance* shows that the primary state has difficulty in obtaining compliance from secondary states. For an argument that in an asymmetric relationship the stronger cannot always impose its will on the weaker in an East Asian context, see Womack 2006. For a constructivist discussion on this point, see Finnemore 2009.

[52] Lebow 2008. On status competition from a realist perspective, see Wohlforth 2009.

Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, also had conceptions of their own distinct identities. These conceptions provided strong motivational sources for their external behavior. For example, why China tried to establish *tributary* relations with its neighbors would be inexplicable without reference to its identity. The motive for identity needs complements the security assumption just discussed. Both are necessary for building a theory of Chinese primacy.

SINOCENTRISM AS A POSSIBLE NORMATIVE STRUCTURE

To simplify, the literature on the tribute system holds that the rulers of imperial China thought of *Zhongguo* (中国 China, literally "the central state") as the center of the known world and superior to other polities both materially and culturally. They were entitled to tribute-paying from the rulers of other states, while the latter were required to perform their duties as China's tributary or vassal states. This is of course a generalization. In practice the Chinese did not always think this way, especially when dealing with powerful foreign rivals. Some historians, however, tend to reify this belief and argue that in a system of profound Han cultural influence, this sinocentrism is the key to understanding traditional China's foreign relations and the "international politics" of historical East Asia. More importantly, they imply that China's neighbors, especially Korea, internalized sinocentrism and tended to follow China's rules. These include, most importantly, acknowledging its superiority and centrality by paying proper tribute to the Chinese court in the form of local products. The Chinese looked upon the tribute "as an expression of acknowledgement on the part of these peoples of the right of "universal domain" of the Chinese Emperor. The tribute was to serve as a symbol of Chinese ultimate proprietorship and sovereignty and as a reminder to the border peoples of their position as lessees and subjects."[53]

It is frequently asserted that sinocentrism was not only China's private belief but was also to some degree held by other states and thus produced a hierarchic "Chinese world order" in East Asia.[54] Whether this claim is true or not is ultimately an

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[53] Lin 1937, 882.
[54] Fairbank 1968b.

empirical question. A lot of ideological myth-making may be involved in the Chinese assumption of superiority. Whether other states followed China's rule and why they did so also have to be determined empirically. But sinocentrism provides an interesting way to think about the role of identity and culture in historical East Asian politics. It is particularly relevant under conditions of Chinese primacy. Its utility lies in helping one conceive of the normative structure as well as evaluate the empirical claim of a sinocentric, hierarchic East Asian order itself. If sinocentrism is an important structure, it ought to explain state behavior in ways that a theory specifies. If empirical studies show that these effects are missing, then one can question the role of sinocentrism as a normative force and the claim of a China-centered hierarchic East Asian order more broadly.

SINOCENTRISM AND CHINA'S POLITICAL DOMINATION

Sinocentrism leads to a sinocentric identity on the part of the rulers and elites of the Chinese empire—the understanding of *Zhongguo* as the center of the world surrounded by the "four foreigners" (*si yi* 四夷),[55] and as the universal empire and the superior polity that deserves the submission as its vassals from other states. The interests of Chinese rulers lie, therefore, not only in meeting the basic material needs of security and welfare, but also in satisfying China's identity needs as the only central, superior, and sovereign entity in the surrounding world. "Sovereign" here means that China has the right to determine other states' policies toward it. Chinese rulers will then try to install other states as tribute-paying vassals and make them acknowledge Chinese superiority in foreign affairs. This can be seen as a mode of domination through China's political control of other states' policies toward it,[56] to be distinguished from the kind of military domination that prevents others from achieving threatening advances in relative material power.[57] Political domination

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[55] "*Si Yi*" has usually been translated into "four barbarians." But, as Liu (2004) points out, such a translation automatically builds in the sinocentric assumption. The Chinese might have simply used *yi* to mean "foreigners" with no pejorative meaning. Translating *yi* into "foreigners" rather than "barbarians" allows more room for different interpretations of the historical meaning of the term and is thus more useful analytically. Hevia likewise renders *yi* into "the foreign peoples." See Hevia 1995, 120-21.

[56] The historian Gan Huaizhen also thinks that these are relationships of domination and that this domination is above all symbolized by a set of rituals China asked foreigners to perform. Yet behind these ceremonies can also lie more substantive issues and specific requests that China would expect its tributaries to follow. Gan 2003, 490-505.

[57] Domination in both senses used here is broadly consistent with Max Weber's notion that "Domination

will guarantee military domination, because a loyal vassal by definition will not seek to challenge its overlord. It should therefore be the highest end of China's foreign policy. But if that is unachievable, we should expect Chinese rulers to try military domination when security interests are at stake.

Why, one should further ask, would Chinese rulers want to realize their identity through political domination by establishing tributary relations with other states? To say that such a realization is in their interests does not tell us much; we need to know why this constitutes their interests in the first place. One hypothesis is that the desire to do so is rooted in domestic legitimacy. If sinocentrism is entrenched deep enough and becomes a political ideology of some sort, we can expect Chinese rulers to invoke it as the tradition of China's role in the world. This would compel them to realize a sinocentric world order in order to satisfy the ideological requirement of governing China. Its attainment would therefore partly constitute the Mandate of Heaven (*tianming* 天命)[58]—the legitimacy basis of imperial rule.[59] If the rulers want to claim the Mandate of Heaven in governing China, they must be able to demonstrate, among other things, that they are indeed the Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子) and the "ruler of all-under-heaven" (*tianxia zhu* 天下主) or make it seem so. As rulers of the dominant power in historical East Asia, the external interests of Chinese elites are more likely to be constructed by their own historical experiences and political discourses than by interactions with other states. Early Ming emperors' desire to initiate tributary relations with its neighbors, for example, was exactly informed by their own conception of the "traditions"—receiving tribute missions among the most important—in China's foreign relations.

THE STRATEGY OF PERSUASION

In international politics, persuasion can be understood as "the process by which agent action becomes social structure, ideas become norms, and the subjective becomes the

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(*Herrschaft*) is the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons." Weber 1978, 53.
[58] On the Mandate of Heaven, see Loewe 1981.
[59] The doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven, together with the ideal of benevolent rule, provided the basis of legitimation in imperial China. See Chan 1984, 24.

intersubjective."[60] Because Chinese rulers would want to promote the sinocentric norm and convince other states of their centrality and superiority, we need to add another salient Chinese strategy of domination: persuasion. Persuasion is a means for changing others' attitudes in the absence of overt coercion. China may try to persuade other states to accept its superiority, embrace the sinocentric norm, and serve as its vassals through a normative discourse of cultural and ideological attraction. In other words, Chinese rulers may try to construct the identity of other states as their vassals by promulgating the discourse of Chinese superiority. Persuasion is the primary strategy by which China can transform sinocentrism from private meaning held by its elites into shared knowledge in the system.

In all, then, in seeking domination, China can employ four principal strategies: war, blackmail, inducement, and persuasion. Indeed, the manipulation of material incentives (war, blackmail, inducement) and the socialization of leaders in secondary states (persuasion) are two basic ways in which a dominant power can exercise control over other states.[61] Moreover, these four strategies can all find their expressions in traditional Chinese strategic thinking: war corresponds with *fa* (伐), blackmail with *wei* (威), inducement with *li* (利), and persuasion with *wen* (文) or *de* (德). Because persuasion can bring the highest benefits to China (political domination) with the lowest costs, it should be the preferred strategy of domination for Chinese rulers. Yet persuasion may fail to produce its intended outcome. Inducement and coercion will then have to be used. Only persuasion, however, is a means of constructing other states' identities and interests for the purpose of political domination. Inducement may facilitate persuasion through the promise of benefits, but by itself it cannot affect other states' identities and interests.

THE POSSIBILITY OF SUBMISSION

One must now ask how secondary states will respond to Chinese persuasion and political domination. The question is essentially one of how independent their

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[60] Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 914. Also see the discussion in Johnston 2008, 25-6 and 155-60.
[61] Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990, 285.

identities are from sinocentrism. If Chinese persuasion can overcome the identity difference between China and other states and convince them of Chinese superiority, sinocentrism may be internalized by these states. Internalized ideas constitute actor identities and interests.[62] The behavioral implication of such internalization is that these states will take a sinocentric order for granted, and offer submission by serving as China's tribute-paying vassal states voluntarily. They will then regard their identity as China's vassals, and their external interests will lie in maintaining a sinocentric order.

The possibility of submission as a strategy on the part of secondary states depends on how deep their "social learning" about China's superiority has gone and the effect of such learning.[63] Other states may learn while interacting with China that it is indeed the only central, superior, and sovereign polity in the surrounding world. To the extent that they internalize this sinocentric idea, submitting to China and following China's rules become normatively taken for granted. This is when the sinocentric structure becomes substantiated. Learning can be either self-motivated or out of persuasion. Together persuasion by China and learning by secondary states create a process of socialization that may eventually change these states' identity and interests.[64]

What determines the effect of Chinese persuasion and the extent to which other states learn the new sinocentric identity? Although a number of factors may intervene in the socialization process, two are the most important. First, as already mentioned, socialization needs to overcome conflicts between the identity politics that exists within China and inside other polities. That is, its success depends in part on these states' prior identification. In the initial stages of interaction they will resist learning the sinocentric identity if it conflicts with their pre-existing identities. For ruling elites (and by implication, their states) with deep-seated conceptions of independent identities and hence strong concerns for autonomy, learning sinocentrism will be

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[62] Wendt 1999, 259.
[63] On "social learning," see Wendt 1999, 326-35.
[64] On the roles of social learning and persuasion in compliance, see Checkel 2001.

difficult because of its political implications. Second, persuasion is a soft and delicate strategy that requires patience, skill, and forbearance. Its effectiveness can be easily ruined by the heavy-handedness of its user. As a non-coercive strategy, inducement can facilitate persuasion and trigger the socialization process,[65] though by itself inducement is insufficient for socialization to succeed. Coercion (war and blackmail), however, works against socialization because it can quickly change other states' perceptions of China and undermine the claim that a sinocentric order is in their best interests.

SOCIALIZATION, ANARCHY, AND HIERARCHY

Successful socialization can lead to the internalization of sinocentrism by secondary states and their submission to China. Because internalization means that they accept a sinocentric order as legitimate, China will have authority over them and the relationship between them will cease to be anarchic. A hierarchic order with China at the center can be said to have been established. Hierarchy is then the possible result of China's desire to realize its identity in foreign relations. If the key problem in international politics is states' uncertainty regarding one another's intention, then the internalization of sinocentrism and the establishment of a China-centered hierarchy will effectively eliminate this problem.

In international politics, hierarchy can be defined in terms of political authority. Lake posits that "A political relationship is anarchic if the units—in this case, states—possess no authority over one another. It is hierarchic when one unit, the dominant state, possesses authority over a second, subordinate state."[66] Authority, in turn, is the condition in which power is married to legitimacy. Blau writes that "We speak of authority...if the willing unconditional compliance of a group of people rests upon their shared beliefs that it is legitimate for the superior (person or

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[65] Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990, 284.

[66] Lake 2007, 50. Although this definition follows Lake, I differ from him in conceptualizing authority. Lake's idea of authority is based on contractual theories of the state which see authority as resting on a social bargain; I emphasize more perceived legitimacy as a defining criterion of authority. Lake's social-contract based definition of hierarchy has been criticized for being "overly narrow"; see MacDonald and Lake 2008, 171. For recent discussions on Hierarchy in international politics, see also Hobson and Sharman 2005; Keene 2007; Wendt and Friedheim 1995; Donnelly 2006; and Hurd 1999 and 2007.

impersonal agency) to impose his will upon them and that it is illegitimate for them to refuse obedience."[67] In the context of domestic politics, governments that are legitimate "have the 'right to rule', to demand obedience from their citizens or subjects."[68] Political legitimacy can be defined "as the quality of 'oughtness' that is perceived by the public to inhere in a political regime."[69] Interstate hierarchy is then a relationship in which one state's rule over another state is accepted as legitimate by the latter state.[70]

Persuasion is the *only* strategy through which China may shape other states' identities and interests according to the sinocentric norm and thus establish authority or hierarchy over them. When Chinese authority is established, other states will accept a sinocentric order and their places within it not because of Chinese coercion or their self-interest, but because they see them as legitimate. If this happens, China will have the right to control their policies towards it, and they, in turn, will have an obligation (the quality of "oughtness") to obey China's rules and pay proper tribute to the Chinese court. Chinese authority, therefore, arises through the instantiation of the sinocentric normative structure—a shared belief that a sinocentric order is in the collective interests of both China and other states.

This argument has important implications for empirical research. To claim that historical East Asia is a China-centered hierarchy, one must be able to find evidence that other states followed China's rules as their obligation—out of a sense of "oughtness" by virtue of their perception of the legitimacy of these rules. This is what I have defined as their submission to China—willingly paying tributes to the Chinese court, serving as its loyal vassals, and following China's rules voluntarily without calculation of their self-interest. Chinese authority is indicated not by secondary states' behavioral compliance per se, since compliance may arise out of

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[67] Blau 1963, 307.
[68] Flathman 1995, 527. David Beetham writes that "Where power is acquired and exercised according to justifiable rules, and with evidence of consent, we call it rightful or legitimate." See Beetham 1991, 3.
[69] Merelman 1966, 548.
[70] Put slightly differently, hierarchy "is a relationship between two (or more) actors whereby one is entitled to command and the other is obligated to obey, and this relationship is recognized as right and legitimate by each." Hobson and Sharman 2005, 69-70.

China's coercion or these states' self-interest. Instead, it must emerge from other states' perception of the legitimacy in China's rule.[71]

The historical East Asian system is anarchic if China did not possess authority over other states; it is hierarchic if it did. This seems to put the logic of international politics into a sharp dichotomy between anarchy and hierarchy. Indeed this has been the customary understanding among many theorists. Yet, anarchy, as Wohlforth points out, "is a variable, not a constant"; it has to be understood "as a matter of degree."[72] Pure anarchy or hierarchy is an ideal type. In practice, the organizing principle of international politics is a mixture of them.[73] In a system like historical East Asia under Chinese primacy, it is possible that anarchy was attenuated, that China as the preeminent power was able to enforce agreements among its neighbors to some degree, and that secondary states were willing to accept Chinese authority in some areas but not others.

THE CO-CONSTITUTION OF AGENCY AND STRUCTURE

We can now see more clearly the process of the mutual constitution of structure and agency in historical East Asian politics under Chinese primacy. If, through socialization—persuasion on the part of China and social learning on the part of other states—other states internalize sinocentrism, then it becomes the shared idea in the system. A sinocentric normative structure is therefore instantiated as a result of these practices between China and other states.[74] These states will submit to China as its vassals, creating hierarchic relationships between them. Hierarchy as the deep structural level takes causal priority over the "surface-level" structure of the distribution of power.[75] Because this is so, China's preponderant power will no longer be seen as threatening by secondary states, nor will the increases in their

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[71] See Hurd 1999; and Wendt 1999, 268-73.
[72] Wohlforth 2008, 45. See also Lake 2007.
[73] Thus, it is argued that "anarchy and hierarchy have always coexisted." Hobson and Sharman 2005, 92.
[74] The co-constitution of agency and structure occurs in and through practice. Adler 2005, 12.
[75] As Ruggie points out, Waltz conceives of three (or, internationally, two) components of structure to be thought of as existing at successive causal depth levels: ordering principles, differentiation, and distribution of capabilities. Ordering principles constitute the "deep" structure of a system. The impact of the distribution of capabilities, the "surface level" structure, magnifies or modifies the opportunities and constraints generated by the deep level of ordering principles. Ruggie 1998, 141, 152. See also Buzan, Jones, and Little 1993, 37-46.

power be seen as threatening in the eyes of Chinese rulers. It will no longer be necessary for China to apply the strategies of war, blackmail, or inducement, because once authority is established, Chinese domination will be guaranteed. This is the hierarchic end of historical East Asian politics under Chinese primacy.

A hierarchic structure with Chinese authority will be highly stable, though not easily achievable. A clear set of rights and obligations between China and its vassal states will be observed because of their perceived legitimacy and appropriateness. Neither coercion on the part of China nor self-interested strategies on the part of other states will be necessary, because a Chinese hierarchy will be one in which all participating states develop collective identities and common interests among themselves. Specifically, all of them will find a proper place in the sinocentric order and take as their obligations to protect this order. Chinese persuasion will be met by other states' submission in a process of stable interaction. These are the logics of a Chinese hierarchy.

If, however, secondary states have distinctively independent identities and strong concerns for autonomy, sinocentrism may well be successfully resisted. Under such circumstances it is useful to assume that these states will act according to their self-interest to ensure security. States are predisposed to define their objective interests in self-interested terms, as constructivists acknowledge and social identity theory shows.[76] The structure will then primarily be a material one defined by the unipolar distribution of power and will be anarchic because no one state can have authority over others. Chinese rulers will likely employ war, blackmail, or inducement against other states to achieve domination since persuasion has proved ineffective. Because persuasion does not work, other states will not internalize sinocentrism unless they learn about its attractiveness and legitimacy by themselves. When internalization does not occur, the sinocentric structure fails to be instantiated, and other states will try a variety of strategies from bandwagoning to challenging to deal with Chinese power. Anarchy between them is thus reproduced. This is the

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[76] Wendt 1999; and Mercer 1995.

anarchic end of historical East Asian politics under Chinese primacy.

SUMMARY

The theoretical principles explaining the dynamics of Chinese primacy in historical East Asia can now be stated. The central behavioral tendency in the system is one between Chinese domination and other states' accommodation and resistance. Domination includes two salient dimensions: political and military. Politically, Chinese rulers will try to maintain a normative sinocentric order; militarily, they will try to maintain China's relative power position. They will employ the strategies of war, blackmail, inducement, and persuasion to seek such domination. Other states will accommodate China by either submission or bandwagoning. Submission takes place when they internalize sinocentrism as a result of socialization in their interactions with China. By submission they regard it legitimate for them to be China's vassal states and maintain the sovereign-vassal relationship in a sinocentric order. Bandwagoning takes place when they reject the sinocentric idea and instead try to exploit their relationships with China for security and power. They will resist Chinese demands through the strategies of balking, defying, balancing, challenging, and isolation, however, when their interests fundamentally conflict with those of China.

The theory shows patterns of interaction as well as the motivations behind state strategies. From its logic we see more clearly the nature of the system that forms when China and other countries establish tributary relations. Chinese motivation behind tributary relations can be legitimacy and/or security. Recruiting tributaries can enhance rulers' legitimacy, and in some cases might also help solve China's security problems with these countries. This applies, for example, to early Ming China's relations with Korea. Other states' motivation in accepting tributary arrangements may be their internalization of sinocentrism embodied in the strategy of submission or the concern for security, profit, and power embodied in the strategy of bandwagoning. Yet, even while accepting formal tributary relations, these countries may still balk at or defy China's requests. China, while granting them tributary status,

can also persuade, induce, or even blackmail them to comply with more of its wishes. This gives a more sophisticated picture of what may be actually involved in the tribute system, conceived of as a "system" of tributary relations between China and its neighbors.

Yet the theory's logic also shows that much more is going on in the relations between China and its neighbors than the tribute system so conceived. Many of the strategies identified above are employed when no tributary relations are established. Although tributary relations seem distinctive in East Asian history, non-tributary relations may be equally impressive and should not be slighted in our overemphasis on the tribute system. The range and diversity of these strategies deconstruct the tribute system while giving a fuller and more sophisticated picture of historical East Asian politics.

Hypotheses

The above explanation is presented as an alternative to models organized around the central concept of the "tribute system" in explaining historical East Asian politics under the condition of Chinese primacy. Five hypotheses about state behavior can now be generated. Testing these hypotheses is the best way to see whether things work in the way the theory suggests.

Hypothesis 1. Political domination occurs as a result of Chinese rulers' perception of their identity as the overlord of the surrounding world and their perception that such domination will enhance their domestic political legitimacy.

Hypothesis 2. Military domination occurs as a result of the failure of political domination and Chinese rules' recognition of their superior power and their perception of the need for security by conquest or preventive war.

Hypothesis 3. Submission to China on the part of secondary states' rulers occurs as a result of their internalization of sinocentrism through the socialization process

triggered by Chinese persuasion and these rulers' social learning.

Hypothesis 4. Secondary states' bandwagoning toward China occurs as a result of their rulers' recognition of their inferior power and their motivation for buying security, gaining profit, and increasing power by exploiting their cooperative relationships with China.

Hypothesis 5. Secondary states' resistance against China occurs as a result of their rulers' perception that their core interests such as security and autonomy are undermined by Chinese demands and actions.

Testing these hypotheses will also enable us to say whether the historical East Asian system is more anarchic or hierarchic. Following the conceptual discussions above, it is clear that only when secondary states submit to China and follow China's rules out of a sense of perceived legitimacy does the system become hierarchic. Their bandwagoning and resistance indicate the anarchic nature of the system. In practice, however, it may be difficult to ascertain whether the relationships between China and other states are characterized by *either* hierarchy *or* anarchy. Hierarchy is a matter of degree or extent; so necessarily is anarchy. It is entirely possible that secondary states will willingly accept some of the rules laid down by China while rejecting others, and choose between the strategies of submission and bandwagoning. To say with some confidence whether historical East Asian politics is more anarchic or hierarchic, one must carefully examine the motivations behind secondary states' strategies toward China. When they comply with China, it is particularly important to assess whether the compliance is a result of their perception of the legitimacy of China's rule, their self-interest, China's coercion, or some combination of these elements.

Chapter 3

Early Ming China and Korea

Historical Sino-Korean relations have generally been understood as a relationship of remarkable amity and harmony.[1] Korea's alleged submissiveness to China is reflected in the label "model tributary." Chinese historical documents, such as the *Da Ming Hui Dian* (Collected Statutes of the Ming Dynasty), extolled Korea for being the most reverent and careful among Ming China's tributaries.[2] Contemporary international relations scholars often regard Sino-Korean relations as a classic example of hierarchy in international politics. In this chapter, I evaluate these claims while testing the theory developed in the preceding chapter by examining Sino-Korean relations during the early Ming dynasty. Since it has been customary to approach this relationship from the standpoint of China,[3] I shall redress the imbalance by placing equal weight on both the Chinese and Korean sides of the story.

Chinese and Korean policies and strategies toward each other are examined in the first two sections. The third section puts the historical evidence in analytical perspectives. The evidence shows that early Ming emperors tried to control Korea's policy toward the Ming in general and its security policy in Manchuria in particular, while in most cases Korean rulers tried to accommodate Chinese power by bandwagoning with the Ming for buying security, gaining profit, and increasing power. At times they also resisted Chinese wishes when these were seen to undermine their core interests.

That bandwagoning rather than submission should be seen as the primary Korean

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[1] It is said that "Embracing the sinocentric view of the world wholeheartedly, the Koreans historically regarded their country's close ties with China as a mark of distinction and remained loyal and submissive to the Middle Kingdom. Many Chinese rulers considered the peninsular state as their model tributary and traditionally accorded it the foremost place within their empire." Kim 1980, 3.

[2] It praised Korea for the fact that: (1) Chosŏn kings requested investiture regularly; (2) Korean envoys observed proper decorum and ritual; and (3) Korea's tribute was paid promptly. See Walker 1971, 269.

[3] Bruce Cumings said that "non-Koreans have had trouble taking Koreans seriously, in understanding Koreans as actors in history." Cumings 2005, 20.

strategy of accommodation also indicates the more anarchic nature of Sino-Korean relations during this time. Compared with other countries, Chosŏn Korea (1392-1910) was indeed as close to a model tributary state as China ever found. But the label "model tributary" can obscure the real nature of Sino-Korean relations, particularly as it was during and before the early Ming period. At times the Koreans may have felt it appropriate for them to follow China, yet at other times their accommodation was motivated by very pragmatic considerations of power realities.[4] At least in the early Ming, Korean loyalty and submission seemed more fiction than reality.

Chinese Attempts at Domination

THE HONGWU REIGN: INITIATING TRIBUTARY RELATIONS

In January 1369, the Hongwu emperor (r. 1368-1398) dispatched an envoy to Korea to proclaim the founding of his regime. In the rescript the emperor laid claim to authority over all former Yuan (1279-1368) territories and tributaries. The Yuan had lost Heaven's legitimation to rule *Zhongguo*, while he had succeeded in restoring government in accordance with Heaven's Will:

> In the first month of this year, having recovered the former territories of *Zhongguo*, We ascended the imperial throne at the head of Our subjects, calling Our dynasty the Great Ming and taking "Hongwu" as Our reign name. Not yet having let this be known to the Four Foreigners (Si Yi) We have prepared this letter and sent it across the sea to Korea for the King's information. Throughout history the emperor has been associated with your king and ministers by reason of our adjoining territory; and generally your king has submitted (*chen*) to the emperor due to their admiration of Chinese custom. Heaven has taken note of this and you have been blessed with long [years] on the throne. [Now] however much We may fail to come up to the virtue of the sage kings of antiquity so long revered by the Four Foreigners, we cannot fail to make [the founding of the Ming] known throughout the

[4] Larson 2008, 32.

world (*tianxia*).[5]

The central message of this rescript is twofold. First, it emphasizes the transfer of the Mandate of Heaven, the basis of imperial legitimacy, from the Yuan to the Ming. Second, it points out the historical precedent in Sino-Korean relations and implies that Korea should continue the "tradition" of tributary submission to the Chinese emperor.

Clearly, Hongwu wanted to obtain the same submission from Korea as his imperial predecessors had been able to do in the past. This is important because he must substantiate the claim that he had now inherited the Mandate of Heaven to rule *Zhongguo*. The best evidence in the external realm was foreign states' submission, since, according to him, previous dynasties with Heaven's Mandate to rule had all obtained this submission. Submission from foreign regimes would supposedly demonstrate his superiority and authority in the *tianxia*, and confirm that he was indeed the Son of Heaven. Ming investiture of foreign rulers would also show that they were the Ming's vassals and thus part of the Chinese imperial order. At a time when the Ming was still trying to consolidate its imperial gains and when a large swath of territory (including Sichuan, Yunnan, and Liaodong) had yet to be conquered, the legitimacy perceived from foreign submission would be particularly useful.

Indeed, as Huang Zhilian points out, the most urgent task facing Hongwu at this point was how to build up legitimacy for his new rule, having just seized power by force from the Yuan.[6] Having his regime widely acknowledged and supported internally as well as externally thus became the paramount task. Domestically, he had initiated a series of moves to identify himself with the tradition of legitimate Confucian political authority by cultivating the symbols—ceremony, language, and dress—of Confucian rule and by suppressing the remnants of the heterodox origins

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[5] The English translation is adapted from Clark 1978, 36-37. The original text can be found in MSLCXZLJL, 3; MS, 6669; and CXLCSL, 13-14.

[6] Huang 1994, 185.

of the Ming regime.[7] Externally, he wanted from foreign rulers the symbolic acknowledgment of China's cosmological centrality and the legitimacy of his succession to the authority of the great dynasties of China.[8]

Although legitimacy was the main concern behind the first mission,[9] Hongwu's later rescripts revealed an increasing concern with security in the northeast. The rescript for the second mission of September 1369, when the Koryŏ (918-1392) King Kongmin was invested as "King of Gaoli [Koryŏ]," was considerably more specific on Korea's obligations to China. While renouncing any intention of governing Korea directly, Hongwu expected Korea to behave as a submissive tributary (fan 藩) and to help maintain security for the Ming's eastern frontier.[10]

The emperor's concern for security in the northeast was well founded. The Ming was unable to annex the Liaodong region until 1387 when it finally pacified Naghachu, the Mongol chieftain based in the area. Liaodong, therefore, would be a security problem for the Ming for nearly two decades after the fall of the Yuan. Korea's geographical location, meanwhile, means that it always had vital security interests in the region, and had indeed historically played an important role there.[11] Korea could damage Ming's security interest in the region either by directly challenging Ming power in Manchuria or allying with the Mongols or the Jurchens or both to balance against it. After all, in the last days of the Yuan dynasty Naghachu attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to forge an anti-Ming alliance with the Koreans. Fear of such an alliance was surely one motivation behind Hongwu's first few missions toward Korea.[12] He seemed to have hoped that having Korea as a tributary would enable him to divide and conquer the other two threats in the northeast: the Mongols and the Jurchens.

[7] Dreyer 1982, 66.
[8] Wang 1991, 112. See also Wang 1998, 303.
[9] Another task of the first mission was to persuade Korea to sever ties with Naghachu, the Mongol leader in Manchuria. DMB, 1083.
[10] MSLCXZLJL, 4.
[11] For a good discussion on Korea's historical role in Manchuria, see Ledyard 1983.
[12] Clark 1978, 46.

TURNING TO HOSTILITY

Legitimacy as well as security motivated Hongwu's policy toward Korea in 1369-71. He tried to persuade the Koreans—by dispatching envoys, evoking historical precedents, and bestowing Chinese gifts—to submit to his authority, thereby establishing political domination over Korean policies toward the Ming. But the hope was damaged by Koryŏ's 1370-71 campaign into Liaodong. Now perceiving Korea as a potential security threat and apparently having lost faith in persuading it to be a loyal vassal, Hongwu began to extract Korean compliance by repeatedly blackmailing the Koryŏ court. In 1373 he was angry at the poor quality of Korean tribute horses—Korean horses were an important source of the horse supply for the Ming army in their wars against the Mongols. In 1374 he reduced the frequency of Korean missions to once every three years, perhaps as an attempt to gain Korean concession and cooperation in its northeast security.[13]

The relationship worsened when King Kongmin was murdered in 1374 and Hongwu withheld the investiture of the new king U. Hearing the killing of Ming envoys while in Korea, the emperor jailed all the Korean envoys who came to Nanjing (the Ming capital) in 1375-77. After this point, the amount of Koryŏ's tribute apparently fell short of expectation as he repeatedly increased demand for tribute. Yet he rejected Korea's tribute five times in 1373-83 for alleged Korean dishonesty and arrogance. In 1383 he ordered the Ministry of Rites to reprehend the delay of tribute and the lack of humility on the part of Korean envoys, requesting that future tribute would only be accepted with full payment of all the tribute due in the past five years.[14] Hongwu also rejected Koryŏ's request for a posthumous title for King Kongmin in 1377. Because the request came three years after the murder, Hongwu suspected that the new Koryŏ court was trying to use him for domestic political purposes.[15] When in the winter of 1377 another Korean delegation came to congratulate the New Year, the emperor explicitly questioned the legitimacy of King U. He even threatened war

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[13] Langlois 1988, 166.
[14] MS, 6670-71.
[15] MSLCXZLJL, 18.

should the Koryŏ court fail to clarify the matter.[16]

By 1380, Hongwu had become so suspicious that he "was incapable of seeing Korea as anything but a wayward border state which had to be intimidated in an effort to head off trouble."[17] Korea was now regarded as a real security threat in the northeast. Moreover, Hongwu said that Korea had historically been a trouble for Chinese dynasties. Korean rulers had not been grateful to "Chinese benevolence" ever since the Han. Ming generals in Liaodong were ordered to reject Korean tribute after 1380.[18] It was only in 1385 after seeing Korean "sincerity" that the emperor finally accepted Koryŏ's tribute, invested King U, and granted the murdered King Kongmin his posthumous title.[19] He relented in 1385 partly because he had seen the high price the Koryŏ had paid to regain full tributary status and partly because he saw less a danger of a Korean-Mongol alliance as the Koryŏ had been barring incoming Mongol envoys at the border. Moreover, he needed Korean neutrality in his upcoming campaign against Naghachu.[20]

Yet Ming-Koryŏ relations were to have its worst crisis in 1387-88. After pacifying Naghachu in 1387, the Ming laid territorial claims to areas north, east, and west of Tieling. Hongwu claimed that these areas, previously part of the Mongol Kaiyuan district, now belonged to the Ming and began to incorporate it into its Liaodong garrison network.[21] Whether he also claimed territories south of the Yalu River is not clear, and historians disagree on the exact location of Tieling in 1388.[22] The main purpose of incorporating the Tieling areas seemed to pacify the Jurchens and the Mongols rather than to drive back the Koreans.[23] The latter nevertheless interpreted the claim as Chinese demand for the northern third of their peninsular and challenged it accordingly.[24] Hongwu responded by warning that Korea should accept the Yalu

[16] MS, 6671.
[17] Clark 1978, 163.
[18] MS, 6671. See also Huang 1994, 234-8.
[19] MS, 6670-72.
[20] Clark 1978, 82.
[21] MS, 6672; and MSLCXZLJL, 24.
[22] See Clark 1978, 91.
[23] Huang 1994, 244.
[24] Clark 1978, 91.

River as its border and stop molesting the Chinese frontier,[25] indicating that he actually did not want territories south of the Yalu. Yet the Koryŏ court still seemed to have misunderstood this as an attempt to define its northern boarder and decided to send an army into Liaodong. The abortive campaign proved so disastrous that it eventually led to the Koryŏ's downfall by bringing about General Yi Sŏng-gye's coup d'etat in 1388.[26]

When Yi Sŏng-gye formally ascended the throne (King T'aejo of the Chosŏn or Yi Dynasty, r. 1392-98) in 1392 and sent his envoys to Nanjing, Hongwu's first concern was still security in the Ming-Korea frontier.[27] His withholding of Yi's investiture was perhaps an attempt to extract Korea's promise of Ming's security in the northeast. In 1393 he accused the Koreans of spying in the Zhejiang coast, bribing Ming military officers in Liaodong, enticing Jurchen households back over the Yalu into Korea to join an attack on China, continuing to present tribute of poor quality, and failing to offer prompt thanks for his magnanimity in bestowing a new name (Chosŏn) on their kingdom.[28] He was, in effect, requesting proof of total fealty from Korea.[29] This was most likely because of his concern about a potential Korean-Jurchen alliance. Ming officials were convinced that Yi Sŏng-gye was inviting Jurchen settlers to populate the Korean-controlled borderlands and that the settlers were using Korean territory as a staging area for raids into China.[30] Hongwu repeatedly asked Korea to establish a fixed border with walls and fortifications, not only because he wanted to keep the Koreans from threatening Ming emplacements but also because he wanted to reduce or eliminate Korean-Jurchen contacts.[31]

Ming intelligence kept close track of Korean-Jurchen collaboration.[32] In 1393 it was reported that Korea had enticed five hundred Jurchen households to settle in Korea's

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[25] MS, 6672.
[26] For the above chain of events, see also DMB, 1600-1.
[27] MSLCXZLJL, 29-30; and MS, 6673.
[28] These are not empty charges. The *Veritable Records* recorded the Korean piracy problem along the Chinese coast, activities of Korean spies in Liaodong, and Korean enticement of the Jurchens to attack China. See MSLCXZLJL, 31-32; and MS, 6673.
[29] Clark 1978, 136.
[30] Lee 1984, 277. See also Huang 1994, 267-9.
[31] Clark 1978, 134-5.
[32] Lin 1935, 18.

northern reaches in preparation for an attack on Liaodong.[33] Hongwu froze relations with Korea and ordered military preparation.[34] He agreed to restore relations after a successful Korean embassy to Nanjing in 1394, but was soon irritated again—the last time before his death in 1398—by the Koreans' improper use of language in their petitions.

SUMMARY

Hongwu's policies toward Korea show his desire for domination over Korean policy in Manchuria. Initially stimulated by the need for legitimacy, he had grown increasingly obsessed with Korea as a trouble-maker in the northeast security order. Security became the overriding concern because he saw the danger of the Koreans, the Mongols, and the Jurchens colluding together and was therefore determined to divide and rule them. He tried, impatiently, the strategy of persuasion to socialize Korea into a loyal vassal state before 1371. As this failed, he resorted to blackmail in the hope of gaining Korean concessions by manipulating tributary politics. His obstruction of Korean tributary missions and withholding of investiture were two notable examples of this strategy. He was, however, never completely satisfied with the Koreans throughout his reign. His mistrust of them ran deep, and he was always able to find fault in Korea's tributary missions once Korea was implicated in the northeast security order or when its domestic politics became erratic.

Why did Hongwu not try to conquer Korea and eliminate the Korean problem once and for all, as the Han, Sui, and Tang dynasties had tried to do? He declared several times that he had no intention of governing Korea directly, but the military option was not entirely off the table. He indeed threatened war a few times and with increasing intensity when the Jurchen problem became more acute after Yi Sŏng-gye ascended the Chosŏn throne.[35] Thus military domination was an option, though it was not tried. One reason is surely that the empire's resources were already spent in wars against the Mongols, pacifications over domestic rebellions, and coastal defense

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[33] MS, 6673; and Clark 1978, 135.
[34] Clark 1978, 138.
[35] See Huang 1994, 269-70.

against Japanese pirates. Hongwu must also have in mind the historical lessons of the difficulties of projecting Chinese power into the Korean peninsular, as symbolized by the failures of Sui and Tang invasions. Perhaps he also thought of Korea as more of a security nuisance in the northeast rather than a threat for his empire's survival: Given the vast power disparities between the two, the Ming need not be too concerned about Korea's marginal increase in power. He must also have hoped that his blackmail and manipulation could achieve political domination over Korea—indeed he never gave up the goal of influencing Korean policy in the northeast. This proved illusory, but given the more urgent problems of dealing with the Mongols, Korea appeared a bearable irritant.

THE YONGLE REIGN: STABILIZATION AND RAPPROCHEMENT

With the end of the Hongwu reign, a turning point appeared in Ming-Korea relations. Hongwu had frequently tried to pressure and, at times, intimidate the Koreans for security reasons. His successors took a much more favorable and relaxed view toward Korea. The strategy of persuasion rose to prominence and coercive means such as blackmail took a back seat. The Jianwen emperor (r. 1399-1402) invested the Korean King T'aejong in 1401 without much hesitation—the first investiture granted by the Ming to a Chosŏn King. Jianwen praised Korea for being "a country of rites and righteousness" and further affirmed the Ming's principle of non-intervention in Korea's domestic affairs. He made it clear, however, that it was Korea's duty to declare vassalage, present tributes, and follow the Ming calendar.[36]

Jianwen's conciliation can be explained by the precarious domestic political situation he was in. Because of the political crisis triggered by the rebellion of his uncle Zhu Di, the future Yongle emperor (r. 1403-1424), Jianwen needed external legitimation as well as military resources to shore up his regime. The Hongwu emperor needed legitimation only when the Ming dynasty was first established, and he sought that from Korean tributes among other means. With the consolidation of his position, Hongwu no longer valued foreign tributes as much he did in the early years of his

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[36] Ibid., 273-4.

reign. By contrast, the Jianwen emperor ruled the Ming under constant agony in his short reign—above all he had to deal with the military challenge from Zhu Di. In such volatile situations he needed to show that he was still the legitimate Son of Heaven. From Korean tributes he sought both perceived legitimation for his regime and Korean horses for his army. In 1401, for example, he sent an embassy to Korea with an imperial requisition for 10,000 horses.[37]

The Yongle emperor sent an embassy to Korea and readily granted King T'aejong investiture in 1403 shortly after ascending the throne.[38] Thus the Koreans obtained two Ming investitures in two years from two emperors—hardly what they could expect in their troubled relations with the Hongwu emperor. Yongle also treated Korea favorably, sending back Korean envoys detained in Nanjing during the Hongwu reign, bestowing lavish gifts, and even proposing intermarriage between the two dynastic houses.[39]

Yongle was surely pleased by King T'aejong's prompt acknowledgment of his reign and the king's previous refusal to sell horses to the Jianwen court.[40] Because his rule was established through a violent struggle with a legitimate heir to the Ming throne, Yongle had to face some embarrassing moments in the early days of his reign. His paramount task was to build up the legitimacy of his rule, transforming himself from a usurper to the rightful heir. His investiture of the Korean king and enthusiastic reception of Korean missions were meant to be part of the process in achieving that effect. He was not as worried about the Korean threat in Liaodong as Hongwu once was, primarily because he waged a successful campaign of peaceful pacification of the Jurchens in Manchuria, displacing Korean influence along the way.[41]

Korean Accommodation and Resistance

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[37] Clark 1978, 160; and Huang 1994, 277.
[38] MSLCXZLJL, 36.
[39] Huang 1994, 280.
[40] Ibid., 278.
[41] Hongwu was unable to devote much energy and resource to Liaodong because he had been preoccupied with fighting the Mongols in the north beyond the modern Great Wall and in the northwest. He was thus naturally suspicious of events in the northeast.

KORYO POLICIES: ACCOMMODATION BY BANDWAGONING

In June 1369, one month after Ming envoys arrived in Korea, the Koryŏ court stopped using the reign title of the Yuan dynasty and sent a returning mission with congratulation of the new dynasty's founding, tribute, and the request for investiture. In the petition to Hongwu, the Koryŏ court elaborately praised the greatness of the Ming and expressed its reverence.[42] Between 1369 and 1371, it made every effort to placate the emperor with every possible symbolic gesture.[43] It sent three tributary missions in 1369, five in 1370, and three in 1371.

Why did the Koryŏ agreed to the Ming request of a tributary relationship, having just suffered a century of humiliating Mongol rule? What was the nature of this response? Was it submission or bandwagoning? Korean historical sources indicate that a court meeting was called to discuss relations with the Ming,[44] but do not elaborate on why the court decided to accommodate Ming requests. The accommodation was not a result of Ming coercion, since in this case the Ming, unlike the Yuan, did not use force. Two broad explanations are left: either the Koryŏ submitted to the Ming because the court perceived Ming authority or it bandwagoned with the Ming for the fear of the Ming threat and the desire to ensure its survival under changing strategic circumstances.

A careful analysis of the decision-making process and events around 1368 suggests that bandwagoning is a better characterization of Koryŏ's strategy than submission. To begin with, the Koreans had already started to evaluate their relations with the Mongols in the last years of the Yuan dynasty. King Kongmin had decided to break the century of Mongol yoke even before the Ming was founded. While uncertain about the intention of the Ming, he could reason that accommodating it when Mongol power was in precipitous decline and when Ming power had yet to be projected into Manchuria represented a rare opportunity for Korea to reassert its

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[42] CXLCSL, 14.
[43] Clark 1978, 44.
[44] CXLCSL, 13; and Clark 1978, 35.

autonomy and even regain lost territories in the north. The temporary power vacuum in Manchuria could be taken advantage of.

Indeed, this was what Kongmin did. Although his position as Koryŏ's king initially rested on Mongol support, he waged a decisive anti-Mongol campaign between 1352 and 1365 to re-establish Korean autonomy.[45] He terminated Mongol rule by abolishing the use of its reign-title in Korea, driving out Mongol officials, and executing pro-Mongol Koreans.[46] Most significant of all, he dispatched a military force to re-occupy the northwestern part of Korea as far as the Yalu and ordered his generals to secure the Hamgyŏng region against further Mongol and Jurchen inroads.[47]

Kongmin's anti-Mongol policy was also a result of the changing factional politics in the Koryŏ court. At one end of the political spectrum was the old landowning aristocracy who had wielded real power in Korea through private links with the Yuan regime and upheld Buddhism as a political ideology. Often tied to the Mongols by blood or livelihood, they would prefer continued Mongol influence in Korea. At the other end was an emerging minority of Confucian officials who had become increasingly dissatisfied with the existing landowning system and the dominance of Buddhism in state affairs. The new Confucian elites were proto-nationalists and anti-Yuan, and after 1368, became pro-Ming. Influenced by this emerging Confucian group, Kongmin took as his mission to assert his authority and Koryŏ's status as an independent kingdom.[48] Koryŏ's break with the Yuan, therefore, had little to do with their perception of the rising Ming but everything to do with maximizing their interests at a time of Yuan decline.

Accommodating the Ming was strategically imperative. Rejecting Ming request and continuing support for the Yuan would put Korea's own survival in jeopardy, as the Ming would probably attack Korea if this was necessary for its conquest of the

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[45] Clark 1978, 22.
[46] Walker 1971, 161.
[47] Clark 1978, 26; and DMB, 1598-9.
[48] Clark 1978, 19-20.

Mongols. In any case, it would not make sense for Korea to support the collapsing Yuan from which it had decided to break away for years.

Accommodation could also enhance Korea's security, though it could not solve all problems. For twenty years after its founding, the Ming was preoccupied with subduing the Mongols in its northern and northwestern frontiers, leaving breathing time for the Mongols led by Naghachu in the northeast to reorganize themselves. This posed a serious threat to Koryŏ security. Naghachu raided the Korean border in 1362. Although he later offered tribute to the Koryŏ in 1369-70, the Koreans never trusted him. Early in 1368, upon the impending collapse of the Yuan, Naghachu sent a delegation to negotiate with King Kongmin for a joint defense agreement against the Ming. Part of the mission of the Ming envoy in 1369 was to persuade King Kongmin to sever ties with Naghachu.[49] Fear of Naghachu was another reason why the king decided to accommodate the Ming.[50] It would make sense to have some kind of Ming protection.

Even so, the Koryŏ could not entirely ignore the Mongol presence in Liaodong. For this reason, it tried to maintain contacts with Naghachu while conducting normal tributary relations with the Ming.[51] Nor did it completely sever relations with the Northern Yuan court in exile. Even in 1369 after its first mission to the Ming was sent, King Kongmin still sent envoys to the Yuan.[52] This clearly demonstrates that Koryŏ's accommodation with the Ming, as well as its residual relations with the Mongols, was a result of its self-interest in maintaining security. Kongmin acted largely in response to the strategic imperatives of a changing environment in Manchuria.

Did the Koreans also feel legitimacy in Ming rule? The historical record does not

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[49] DMB, 1083.
[50] Clark 1978, 46.
[51] Even in 1369 and 1370 when Koryŏ sought to accommodate the Ming with all the tributary formalities, it maintained regular contacts with Naghachu. See CXLCSL, 13, 15.
[52] Huang 1994, 207.

give one much confidence in the legitimacy explanation.[53] The only evidence favoring this explanation is Koryŏ's calling itself the Ming's "vassal" and the lavish praise of the Ming in formal petitions. Yet petitions to the Chinese emperor are a poor indicator of Korean decision makers' real motives. Languages of such officialese as in these petitions were most likely the routine products of scholar-officials, not a true reflection of reality.[54] Behavioral patterns are a better indicator as they enable one to assess alternative explanations. In any case, what the Koreans wrote cannot be squared with how they acted. Subsequent events further demonstrate Koryŏ's bandwagoning with, rather than submission to, the Ming.

KOREAN MOTIVES BEHIND TRIBUTARY RELATIONS

The Koryŏ wanted not merely autonomy or security; it wanted power and prestige as well. By the end of 1369, the court had decided to take advantage of the temporary power vacuum in Liaodong caused by the northward withdrawal of the Mongols. Their 1370 campaign into Liaodong was a war of territorial expansion—to extend the borders of the Koryŏ into Manchuria to the limits formally held by Koguryŏ (37 BC-AD 668) at the height of its power. And it was the Koreans' long wish to recreate the great empire in the north.[55]

However, although the campaign seriously damaged its relations with the Ming, Korea continued to send regular tributary missions to Nanjing, far exceeding the frequency of once every three years stipulated by the Hongwu emperor. The *Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty* relates that during the Hongwu reign Korea sent a total of 73 missions between 1369 and 1397, averaging 2.5 missions per year. Actual missions had surely exceeded that number since Chinese sources only recorded those missions that had actually reached the Ming court. Why were the Koreans still so enthusiastic about tributary missions even though they were not well

[53] Walker argues that "Korea's recognition of the Ming Empire in 1369 resulted from the weakness and indecision of the Koryŏ court under King Kongmin, rather than from acceptance of any inherent legitimacy in Chinese imperial claims that Korean dependency was part of the natural political order in the world." Walker 1971, 168.
[54] Huang 1994, 215. For a good discussion on the varied nature of foreign petitions to the Chinese court, see He 2007b, 223-41.
[55] Lee 1997, 76.

received?

Belief in Ming's authority does not explain because, first of all, if this was the case, the Koryŏ court would have followed Ming instructions. Moreover, if the Koreans really believed in the Ming's legitimacy in deciding security affairs in Liaodong, it would have severed relations with Naghachu and helped the Ming pacify the region. The fact, however, is that the Koryŏ had kept relations with the Mongols while conducting tributary relations with the Ming ever since 1369. And after King Kongmin was assassinated in 1374 and the new king U ascended the throne, the Koryŏ explicitly adopted a "two-China policy" in the pursuit of an uneasy neutrality between Chinese and Mongol power centers in Manchuria. In the early months of King U's reign, the court actually feared Ming intervention. The difficulty of gaining the Ming's favor forced King U's government to adopt a more conciliatory policy toward the Mongols in order to keep Korea secure. It even received investiture from the Northern Yuan and adopted its reign-title in 1376,[56] an act indicating a tilt away from the Ming once more, and suggesting that U needed external symbols of legitimacy rather badly to keep his house in order.[57]

The primary reason for the King U government's unwavering attempts to make good relations with the Ming was to obtain investiture from the Ming in order to boost the king's domestic legitimacy.[58] Because of the controversies surrounding King Kongmin's murder and King U's accession to the throne, the new government had a particularly weak political base and authority. As just mentioned, it tried to obtain the perceived legitimacy from the Mongols when the Ming's offer was not forthcoming, but the political reality made it clear that the real source of its legitimacy lies with the Ming. Between 1379 and 1385 eighteen Korean embassies went to Nanjing in attempts to gain favor of the Hongwu emperor and facilitate trade and cultural interchanges with the Ming.

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[56] After a mission to Nanjing in 1378 which saw Ming attitudes softening, the Koryŏ dropped the Yuan calendar and adopted the Ming reign-title Hongwu once again.

[57] Clark 1978, 68-70.

[58] It is worth pointing out that imperial sanction from China through investiture was an important factor in propping up Koryŏ's weak kingship throughout its dynastic history. See Duncan 2000, 51.

Why was Chinese investiture able to shore up the legitimacy of Korean regimes? Why did King U's government want the Ming's investiture even while it was adopting a "two-China policy"? That it was courting favor with both the Ming and the Mongols demonstrates that it did not believe in Ming authority over its foreign policy. And yet it greatly valued and tried hard to obtain Ming investiture. It clearly realized the decline of the Northern Yuan, yet it took the latter's investiture as a substitute for that of the Ming, indicating that Yuan investiture was still regarded useful even though Mongol power was in rapid decline.

These apparent paradoxes cannot be explained unless one realizes that the historical East Asian system is a cultural as well as a material one. Chinese investiture could confer legitimacy on foreign regimes because political names and symbols of the Chinese style were seen as universal, not just Chinese, concepts in political processes. Such perception was fundamentally a result of the influence of Chinese culture. Because China was the only source of a highly developed set of political ideas and institutions in East Asia, especially before the tenth century, having Chinese acknowledgment would boost the legitimacy of foreign regimes. On the other hand, Chinese investiture of other regimes could at the same time support the truth claim of Chinese rulers as universal emperors and demonstrate their legitimacy to rule the *tianxia* as the Son of Heaven. As the historian Gan Huaizhen points out, investiture thus symbolizes a political relationship of ritual exchange.[59]

Because investiture is fundamentally a cultural phenomenon, the more states were influenced by Chinese culture, the more they would value Chinese investiture. Conversely, the more they developed their own identities and cultural awareness, the less they would appreciate the usefulness of Chinese investiture. Koreans valued Chinese investiture because they perceived their politics as embedded in a larger political development in East Asia defined by Chinese precepts. As Key-Hiuk Kim puts it, "Lacking the cosmic symbols and attributes that made the Chinese emperor

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[59] Gan 2003, 490-505.

the Son of Heaven, the Korean ruler needed investiture from the former as the ultimate symbol of legitimacy. Although his power as ruler was neither derived from nor materially enhanced by the Chinese investiture, the lack of it could not but adversely affect his prestige in the eyes of his officials and subjects in a Confucian society such as Yi Korea."[60] This shows China's profound cultural influence, and in this area China indeed possessed authority over Korea since the Koreans believed in the legitimacy as well as the usefulness of Chinese investiture. Thus, in terms of investiture (not necessarily in other areas), Sino-Korean relations can be regarded as hierarchic.

More generally, the Koreans had an important economic motive for tributary relations with the Ming. Envoys en route to and from Nanjing had opportunities to trade along the way and they carried with them trading goods in addition to tributary items. Both the Koryŏ envoys and the court profited as a result. This was revealed in a memorial the Imperial Secretariat wrote for the Hongwu emperor in 1370: "The Korean tribute envoys are bringing much private merchandise with them when they come. They should pay tax on these commodities. Moreover they are carrying back with them Chinese goods. We recommend that this stop."[61] Even more illustrative is a comment from the Korean historical source on a Korean envoy's mission in 1386:

> In this period, whenever envoys returned [from Ming], the people in power took bribes from them and promoted or demoted them in the bureaucracy according to the amount. Accordingly, in order to avoid [damage to their careers] the envoys were obliged to engage in private trade [along the way]. An Ik [the Korean envoy] lamented, with tears flowing, "As a young man I believed that ambassadors went on tribute missions to China for the good of the country; but now I know that the rulers send them in order to reap riches for themselves."[62]

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[60] Kim 1980, 12.
[61] Clark 1978, 55; and MSLCXZLJL, 9.
[62] Cited in Clark 1978, 85.

As Donald Clark put it, "the key to understanding the dogged determination of the Korean court to continue tributary travel surely lies in profit, at least for the courtiers at Kaegyŏng [Koryŏ's capital] who received the imperial gifts and a good share of the proceeds from the envoys' private trade along the way."[63] He further speculates that "embassies were so profitable to the decision-making ranks of officials in the Korean capital that even when the political—and sometimes personal—risks were very high the Korean court continued to prize the benefits of the trade and pressed on with it despite formidable obstacles."[64]

According to accusations made by the Hongwu emperor and his officials, the Koreans had another important objective behind their frequent missions to the Ming—spying Ming military deployments to prepare for possible conflicts. When relations deteriorated, the Koreans were simply using their tributary missions to display alleged loyalty and delay any potential conflict. Hongwu believed that frequent missions were not a demonstration of Korea's "serving the great with sincerity" but a betrayal of their dishonesty and ambition.[65] While the Chinese accusations may not be entirely valid, there is little doubt that the Koreans were mistrustful and suspicious of the Ming, as the Ming was of them. They were particularly worried about Ming deployments in Liaodong, as these could be used against them as well as the Mongols. Believing that Hongwu could not be trusted and that their relations with the Ming were impossible to improve, they upgraded their military deployments to prepare for possible clashes after 1381, even while they were still requesting for Ming investiture.[66] Spying by way of tributary missions was an important means of obtaining military intelligence.

The economic, political, and security motivations behind Koryŏ's missions amply demonstrate that the Koreans were mostly bandwagoning with the Ming for security, profit, and power. Their initiatives in trying to obtain Ming investiture show their belief in Chinese authority in this area, though such investiture was also useful in

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[63] Ibid., 86.
[64] Ibid., 164.
[65] Huang 1994, 226.
[66] Ibid., 241.

serving their domestic political needs. Self-interest and legitimacy were therefore both at play. In general, Korean loyalty to the Ming was very much a fiction as they simultaneously maintained relations with the Ming's enemy, the Mongols, thus undermining a Ming-centered order. In all, then, Sino-Korean relations during this period were more anarchic than hierarchic.

Koryŏ's relationship with the Ming was brought to an end in 1388 when its court decided to wage an expeditionary campaign into Liaodong as a response to the Ming's territorial claim north of Tieling. The Koreans perceived, whether correctly or incorrectly, that the Ming was about to invade their territory. This was unacceptable even for a "model tributary" like Korea. The Koreans were determined to preserve their independence militarily. Even though being a Ming tributary had important political and economic benefits, at crucial moments the Koreans valued their autonomy and security even more.[67]

CHOSON'S ACCOMMODATIONIST POLICIES

The establishment of the Chosŏn dynasty ushered in a new era in Korean history and represented a turning point in Sino-Korean relations. Of the most interest is the new dynasty's policy towards the Ming: King T'aejo and his successors sought to rectify Korea's relationship with China through the so-called policy of *sadae*, or Serve the Great.[68] As early as when he was asked by King U to lead the Korean army into Liaodong, Yi Sŏng-gye believed that it was wrong for a small state to oppose a large one.[69] And as he again reasoned before turning his troops back to Kaegyŏng, the way for a small country to protect itself was to serve the great.[70] After founding the new dynasty in 1392, he sent three consecutive embassies to Nanjing to lay the groundwork for obtaining Ming investiture.[71] The Hongwu emperor, as noted above,

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[67] As Clark writes, "...after years and years of Chinese extortion and abuse the Koreans recognized the desperation of their political position vis-à-vis the continent, and perhaps the only way they saw to break out of the long-established pattern of relations with Ming T'ai Tsu [Ming Taizu, the Hongwu emperor] was to demonstrate, even at horrendous cost, that there were limits which they could not exceed in attempting to find peace with the Ming." Clark 1978, 99-100.
[68] Clark 1998, 276; Lee 1984, 189.
[69] CXLCSL, 106; Clark 1978, 95; and DMB, 1601.
[70] CXLCSL, 107; Clark 1978, 97; and Huang 1994, 261.
[71] MSLCXZLJL, 29-30.

could not dissipate his mistrust of Korea and reprimanded it again in a 1393 rescript.

This time, even a *sadae* King T'aejo "was mightily offended by the emperor's sanctimonious attitude." As he explained to his aids:

> The emperor, by having many soldiers and by being strict in his
> administration of punishments at last has succeeded in establishing his rule
> over the world. But he has overdone the killing and many of his best
> statesmen and counselors have lost their lives. In his frequent admonitions to
> our little country he has imposed demands without limit upon us. And now he
> is reproving me even though I have done nothing wrong, threatening me with
> his armies...[72]

This interesting revelation of the Korean King's attitudes toward the Hongwu emperor clearly demonstrates that he did not believe in the legitimacy of Ming rule over Korea. Indeed, he even criticized the emperor's domestic policy, referring to the massive political purges that Hongwu had undertaken since the 1380s. Yet, although King T'aejo personally resented Hongwu's overweening attitudes and demands, he nevertheless felt compelled to answer the charges in a defensive manner.

As noted above, Hongwu soon found fault in Korea's petitions to the Ming court and demanded that Korea send over the writers of these petitions. This time Korea balked at the request. The writer of the first petition was King T'aejo's closest advisor. The king decided to send two others instead of him. The Koreans were eventually so irritated by Ming demands that in 1398 they held a court debate over the efficacy of their China policy. A stream of memorials criticized the *sadae* policy. *The Veritable Records of the Yi Dynasty* indicates that the court may have decided on a campaign to attack Liaodong, exactly in the same way Koryŏ government in its last days responded to the Ming's territorial claims. Were it not for the subsequent coup in 1398 led by Yi Pang-wŏn, King T'aejo's ambitious fifth son and the future King

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[72] Clark 1978, 136-7.

T'aejong, Korea may have again attempted to strike China.

When King T'aejong ascended the Chosŏn throne in 1400, he continued his father's policy and sent an embassy to Nanjing in 1401 to request investiture. Fortunately for him, a cordial relationship between the Chosŏn and the Ming was about to develop with the coming of the Jianwen and Yongle reigns. As noted, Jianwen and Yongle granted the king investitures in 1401 and 1403 respectively. Yet, although the king clearly held the *sadae* principle in his accommodation with the Ming, he tried to keep a certain distance from, and limit his relations with, the latter. For example, he rejected Yongle's suggestion of intermarriage between the two dynastic houses. He believed that a certain distance would better enable Korea to preserve its autonomy, as he learned from Korea's previous troubled relations with Chinese dynasties. It was for his regime's security and autonomy that he tried to establish a close tributary relations with the Ming. Yet he was well aware of the historical lessons for Korea's relations with China: A sensible China policy should eschew the extremes of either unconditional dependence or irrational provocation. The Koryŏ court had gone from one extreme to the other in its relations with the Yuan and the Ming. King T'aejong was determined to follow a middle course: to accommodate based on *sadae* yet also to maintain a flexible distance so as to avoid unnecessary involvement and conflict.[73]

King T'aejong, moreover, was not completely free of the suspicion of the Ming. When in 1413 he learned that Yongle was hoping to invade Japan, he ordered his ministers to prepare a low-key defense for possible Ming invasion of Korea.[74] Thus, although in the Yongle reign Sino-Korean relations were generally amicable, a certain suspicion was still present. Moreover, the Ming court's often exorbitant demands on the Koreans—demands such as large numbers of tributary horses and oxen for military use, and even Korean virgins for the imperial harem—irritated the Koreans. They bore a heavy financial burden and suffered some humiliation to meet

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[73] See Huang 1994, 280-4. It might be noted that the Koryŏ dynasty also tried to keep a distance from Song China (960-1279). Their "officials made it clear that, rather than expressing Korean subjection, participation in tribute missions was intended to *limit* relations with China." Larson 2008, 27 (emphasis in original).

[74] Huang 1994, 292-7.

these demands. Their king reluctantly complied only for pressing political reasons.[75] Finally, one should not lose sight of the element of competition in this relationship, as demonstrated by the Jurchen problem. Before discussing Ming-Chosŏn competition over the Jurchens, it is worth considering the nature of the Chosŏn dynasty's *sadae* toward the Ming.

THE NATURE OF *SADAE*

Confusions arise partly because scholars disagree on the meaning of *sadae*. For this, we need to go into the original sources. According to the *Veritable Records of the Yi Dynasty*, Yi Sŏng-gye turned his troops back from Liaodong because he believed that "*yi xiao shi da, bao guo zhi dao* (以小事大, 保国之道)."[76] In many existing writings the first phrase is often cited, while the second is usually omitted. Having them together will enable one to see the nature of *sadae* more clearly. The controversy is around the meaning of *shi*, commonly translated as "serve." Translated literally, "*yi xiao shi da*" is "the small to serve the big." Yet, what exactly does "serve" mean here? Many scholars believe that it means submission in the sense of becoming China's vassal state and observing its tributary obligations. The problem with this interpretation becomes clear when one takes "*bao guo zhi dao*"—literally, "the way to preserve the country"—into consideration.

In this case, what Yi Sŏng-gye meant is that the way for the small (Korea) to preserve itself was to "serve" the big (China). Put it in the context, he was arguing that to ensure Korea's survival, it should not challenge the Ming militarily. To "serve" the big was to offer deference rather than to offend China. It means that Korea must realize the limit of its power and develop appropriate strategies to reflect the power disparities between itself and China. *Sadae*, then, should better be seen as a *principle* in Korea's relations with China rather than a concrete policy. The principle should be reflected in accommodationist strategies, but whether they are of a submission or bandwagoning nature have to be decided case by case. The Chosŏn

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[75] Chan 1988, 268-9.
[76] CXLCSL, 107.

dynasty's *sadae* after 1388 arose more as a means to preserve the state of Korea than out of a perception of Chinese authority over Korean policy. As Park Choong-Seok argues, the term *sadae* "actually referred to the diplomatic means a small nation employed vis-à-vis a big power within the context of the military dynamics of East Asia...Underlying the concept was the objective of national self-preservation in foreign relations."[77] An effective policy based on the *sadae* principle would also lessen the fear of a Chinese invasion or intervention in Korea's domestic affairs.[78] It is likely that Yi Sŏng-gye also found the Ming's territorial claim excessive, but he was well aware that going to war with China would almost certainly mean disaster for Korea.[79] Deference to China was therefore perceived as essential for Korea's survival. Yi Sŏng-gye, one may think, was "informed above all by a timely realpolitik."[80] His *sadae* is a better reflection of bandwagoning for security than submission out of Chinese authority.

This interpretation of *sadae*—as a policy principle meant to ensure the survival of the Korean state—has larger historical relevance. It may not be correct to say that Korea's *sadae* policies were always out of the fear of the Chinese colossus, but surely in many cases it was this fear that compelled its policymakers to adopt *sadae* so as to guarantee the survival of Korea. This way of interpreting the *sadae* principle is nicely demonstrated by a 1554 entry in the *Veritable Records of the Yi Dynasty* in which the Koreans said that "Mencius said that when the small serves the big it is because of fear of heaven. What is meant by fear is nothing other than fearing the power of a big country in order to preserve one's own people, so serving the big country is only to serve the people."[81] At least to those Koreans, *sadae* was motivated by "a quite pragmatic assessment of the best way to guarantee both security and autonomy for Korea."[82]

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[77] Park 1978, 18.

[78] Robinson 1992, 96.

[79] As he said to his aides when forced to go along with King U's order, "This is the start of a great disaster for our people." He later said to his unit commands before turning his troops back, "If we venture across the [Ming] border, the Son of Heaven will regard it as a crime and it will spell catastrophe for our royal house and the people." Clark 1978, 95, 98.

[80] Deuchler 1992, 91.

[81] Larson 2008, 28.

[82] Ibid., 33.

In the case of Yi Sŏng-gye, *sadae* would serve his new regime more than buying security. Another benefit is much needed Chinese legitimation for his regime. As a dynastic founder and, more importantly, as a usurper, King T'aejo particularly needed legitimation. Indeed, since he lacked royal lineage, Chinese investiture was doubly important as a legitimating symbol.[83] He in fact tried to make political use of the Ming to obtain authoritative sanction for his regime.[84] His ultimate failure to obtain Ming investiture resulted not from his lack of efforts, but the Hongwu emperor's personal suspicion. It must also be noted that Chinese investiture had preserved the status and power of the rulers and upper class of Korea at least since the Koryŏ dynasty. Its attainment would appear as a political necessity for any Korean ruler.

Moreover, *sadae* would facilitate the Koreans to gain economic benefits from their tributary relations with the Ming. Indeed, one can argue that profit was among the driving forces that sustained Korea's enthusiasm in tributary relations with China historically. The travel to and from China was a huge opportunity for trade. Between 1392 and 1450, the Chosŏn court dispatched 391 envoys to the Ming: on average, about seven each year. Not all went to the Ming capital; some went only to Liaoyang to conduct business relating to border affairs.[85] Although tributary trade was not part of the Korean economy, it was indispensable to Korea's overall social and cultural life, particularly when such Chinese products as books, medicines, and textiles are concerned.[86] This explains in an important part Koreans' desire for more missions to the Ming (and, in the Hongwu reign, despite Chinese complaints), many of which were surely private trading trips rather than official tributary missions sent by the court. The Chinese were clearly aware of this profit motive, so much so that, according to Korean ministers, Chinese officials in the Jiajing period (1522-1566) scolded Korean envoys for "coming only for trade."[87]

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[83] Clark 1978, 130; and Clark 1998, 276.
[84] Lee 1984, 189.
[85] Clark 1998, 280.
[86] Huang 1994, 384.
[87] Ibid., 392.

THE NATURE OF CONFUCIANIZATION IN KOREA

Hugh Walker suggests that Chosŏn's *sadae* was a result of the confucianization of Korea, and it constituted a radical departure from the actual nature of Sino-Korean relations under previous Korean dynasties.[88] According to him, the *sadae* thought was "an inevitable by-product of Korea's Confucianization", with its obvious corollary of King T'aejo's "policy of deference" toward Ming China.[89] I shall briefly evaluate the claim.

There is little doubt that Chosŏn Korea underwent a process of confucianization, which was an epochal change in Korean history. In fact, Neo-Confucianism had become the major intellectual force in Korea since the late Koryŏ, ushering in the "Confucian transformation of Korea."[90] But one must ask what had caused this transformation. Was it due to Ming China's socialization efforts through persuasion and cultural influence, or Korea's domestic political impulse? The evidence points to the latter answer.

As we have seen, throughout his entire reign, the Hongwu emperor was never enthusiastic about relations with Korea except for the first two years. He showed interest in Korea, but that was mainly limited to security issues in the northeast frontier. Most importantly, he used a great deal more blackmail than persuasion, repeatedly intimidating and threatening the Koreans with economic and military sanctions. The Koreans would hardly find this heartening. Chinese cultural attractions could surely be displayed through gifts to Korea such as books, silks, and musical instruments. But these were marginal compared with Koreans' own efforts to emulate Chinese culture and institutions. And for the most part, Hongwu took a passive attitude toward spreading Chinese culture in Korea. The frequency of Chinese embassies to Korea was far less than that of Korean embassies to China. Thus the Ming, as Hae-Jong Chun wrote with regard to Sino-Korean relations during

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[88] Walker 1971, 204-5.
[89] Ibid., 217.
[90] Deuchler 1992.

the Qing, did not intentionally exercise any purely cultural influence on Korea.[91]

The confucianization of Chosŏn Korea was therefore principally an effort by the reformed-minded Koreans to transform the eight-hundred-year old Buddhist order in their society.[92] John Duncan argues that their objective was to create a centralized bureaucratic polity in Korea.[93] Walk himself hints that it was not confucianization *per se* that led to Chosŏn's *sadae* but rather the complex conditions of the late Koryŏ period that had led to both the confucianization of the Chosŏn and the explicit *sadae* principle in its policies toward the Ming. Indeed, the adoption of Neo-Confucianism in Korea was largely intended to rectify the evils of Koryŏ society[94]—a very pragmatic domestic political objective on the minds of the Korean reformers that had little to do with foreign relations with Ming China.

No clear causal link exists between Korea's adoption of Neo-Confucianism and its *sadae* toward the Ming. Even the correlation is imperfect. When one realizes that the *sadae* principle had been present at least since the times of the United Silla (668-935), the link between Neo-Confucianism and the Chosŏn court's *sadae* policy further weakens. This is not to deny that ideological affinity would make it easier for Korea to adopt *sadae* toward China. Korea's perception of China as the source of higher civilization made *sadae* justifiable in cultural terms. Confucianization would also make Koreans comfortable to offer ceremonial obligations to China as its tributary. Yet it would be a mistake to believe that this is the whole story while ignoring the fact that *sadae* is simply the most sensible policy principle for Korea under Chinese primacy. The longevity of the *sadae* idea shows Korea's historical recognition that accommodation with China was the best guarantee for its security and autonomy.

Moreover, the Koreans adapted the Chinese doctrine to suit their own needs.[95]

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[91] Moreover, "It may be said that the tributary system was not designed for direct cultural influence, although one should not disregard the fact that tribute missions played an important role in Korea's cultural development." Chun 1968, 110.
[92] Concurring is Huang 1994, 317.
[93] Duncan 2000.
[94] Deuchler 1992, 26.
[95] As Bruce Cumings puts it, "Koreans made Confucius their own just as Renaissance thinkers made Plato and Aristotle their own…The real story is indigenous Korea and the unstinting Koreanization of foreign influence, not

Confucianism would provide the ideological foundation for the Chosŏn regime because it was the only viable alternative for the new ruling elites to reform Korea domestically. Yi Sŏng-gye took a personal interest in importing Confucianism not because he was a fervent Confucian believer, but because he knew that the confucianization of Korea was necessary for legitimizing his usurpation and his new regime's rule.[96] Indeed, the adoption of Neo-Confucianism as official philosophy gave Chosŏn Korea a metaphysical justification for kingship and for society organized in a pattern of well-defined social positions. The new rulers also brought in the Confucian idea of "heavenly mandate" as a means of emphasizing its legitimacy.[97]

What was the consequence of Korea's confucianization for Sino-Korean relations? Because of the confucianization of Korea, which had led to similar values between Korea and China, the Chosŏn must have created common foreign policy interests with the Ming and their relations must therefore be very harmonious. The statement is false, for common values do not automatically translate into common interests, though the former may make the latter easier to emerge. From King T'aejo to King T'aejong, Korean rulers wanted to make their regime a "Confucian dynasty," yet this was to be something different from Ming China. The Koreans learned their Confucianism from Confucius to Zhu Xi, not from Hongwu or Yongle. From the early Ming emperors they had little to learn. In fact, they criticized their policies in private. Hongwu was criticized for his massive political purges and was regarded as untrustworthy; Yongle was criticized for his usurpation and his worship of Buddhism. Indeed, at times the Koreans considered their regime, not Ming China, as the model of Confucian virtue. On these occasions, they hardly perceived any legitimacy in Chinese rule over them. A real consequence of the confucianization of Korea is that, for the Ming to have authority over Korea, its rulers must exemplify Confucian virtues as understood by the Koreans and must act in Korean as well as Chinese

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vice versa." Cumings 2005, 20. See also Huang 1994, 321.
[96] Huang 1994, 321-2.
[97] DMB, 1601.

interests.[98] Since this was often not the case during the early Ming, we should expect *sadae* to be mainly Koreans' self-interested principle in dealing with Chinese power, rather than a reflection of their real submission due to Chinese authority.

MING-KOREA COMPETITION OVER THE JURCHENS

Although the amity of Sino-Korean relations during the Yongle reign was unprecedented in all previous history, the two had not yet reached common interests in areas of major importance. Indeed in Manchuria where both the Ming and the Chosŏn had important foreign policy objectives, their interests diverged sharply. The triangular relationship among the Ming, the Chosŏn, and the Jurchens during the Yongle reign nicely illustrates the conflict of interests between Ming China and Chosŏn Korea. For most of their histories the Koryŏ and the Chosŏn bandwagoned with the Ming. At times, however, they also tried to oppose Ming demands. The competition for influence over the Jurchens is one prominent example of this resistance and challenge.

The Jurchens were a tribal people living in Manchuria. Ming China wanted to control them for security in the northeast, but it was unable to do so militarily. Ming rulers usually sought through peaceful means to initiate diplomatic and economic contacts with them, since their preoccupation with the Mongol threat precluded the possibility of military conquest. The Hongwu emperor did not take consistent efforts to pacify the Jurchens. He in fact feared competition from Korea for influence and control of the Jurchens.[99] By the end of his reign, the Ming had failed to inaugurate relations with Menggetimur and Ahachu, the two most powerful chieftains among the Jurchens.

Korea also wanted to control the Jurchens for the same reason—security on its northern border.[100] The Koreans and the Jurchens were in regular conflict when the Yuan dynasty declined. Jurchen tribes frequently raided Korean territory. Meanwhile

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[98] Huang 1994, 300-3.
[99] Rossabi 1975, 52.
[100] Robinson 1992.

the Koreans had another long-held goal—to expand their power and territory in the north. They had tried for about thirty years since the reign of King Kongmin to recover territories that the Koryŏ had previously lost to Chinese dynasties such as the Liao (907-1125), Jin (1115-1234), and Yuan. They were therefore always looking for opportunities to pressure the Mongolian and Jurchen tribes in Manchuria.

The Koreans began to seriously consider the Jurchen problem after the Chosŏn dynasty was established. During the 1390s, most of the Jurchen tribes or subtribes along the Korean borders had in an ever increasing degree come under the influence of the Koreans. But Korea's fortune was soon reversed by the Yongle emperor, who was determined to undermine Korean influence over the Jurchens and to bring the latter firmly under Ming control.[101] Yongle first courted the Jianzhou Jurchens, the most congenial of the various tribes. He used people of Jurchen origin and recently surrendered Jurchens as envoys in his missions. In 1403 he dispatched an embassy to Ahachu, who responded favorably to Ming overture. The Jianzhou commandery was then established in the same year. In early 1405 the emperor sent a second mission to Menggetimur. But the Jurchen chieftain rejected the Chinese proposal at first on the grounds that he was invested by Korea as "myriarch of Odoli" in 1404.

The Chinese penetration into Jurchen territories set off alarm bells in Korea. The Koreans mounted a serious challenge to Chinese encroachment on what was believed to be Korea's "sphere of influence." As Menggetimur refused to acknowledge Chinese authority, the Koreans at short interval sent three missions with instructions and presents for him and other Jurchen tribal leaders. Meanwhile another Chinese mission arrived in April 1405 to invite Menggetimur to go to Nanjing with presents and promise of Chinese ranks and rewards. The Koreans immediately sent an official to persuade him not to yield to Chinese pressure, and the Korean king spoke of Menggetimur as "a bulwark in the northeast." A Korean mission also went to Nanjing in June 1405 to inform the Ming court that Menggetimur had declared that he was not able to leave his territory and that he and other Jurchen chieftains whom

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[101] Clark 1998, 286.

the Chinese envoys had tried to win over lived on Korean territory, in effect asking the Ming to leave Menggetimur alone. Meanwhile the Koreans tried to forestall the Ming's invitation to Menggetimur with a mission in August 1405. Yet all of these intensive efforts were eventually to prove futile: Menggetimur finally went to the Ming capital in October 1405 and was rewarded with the Left Jianzhou commandery under his direction. By 1406 it seemed that the Ming had won the competition with the Chosŏn over the Jurchens.[102]

Given the vast power disparities between Korea and China, Korea's failure is not surprising. What is most interesting, however, is that the Koreans, despite their alleged *sadae* toward the Ming, displayed an impressive determination to counter Chinese penetration into Manchuria. One must wonder what "vassal" or "tributary" status actually entailed in Korea's relations the Ming. As Henry Serruys wrote, what the Chinese did with regard to the Jurchens (such as taking them into their service, receiving tribute and giving presents and rewards for the tribute and for the service rendered) the Koreans did too.[103] The Koreans considered the Jurchens as living on their soil. Their border officials saw Chinese penetration as a threat.[104] In July 1407 a Korean statesman even spoke of "the threat from Jianzhou in the north."[105] How much Korea resented Chinese advance into Jurchen land, so close to its borders, was expressed by a Korean official in a report to the king in October 1406:

> The King has done his utmost to serve the Ming faithfully, but when the emperor founded Jianzhou in the eastern corner (of the Ming empire), this amounted to strangling our throat and holding our right arm; outside (of Korea the emperor) establishes vassal states to entice our people, and inside (of Korea) favors us with special gifts to make us relax our watchfulness![106]

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[102] One important consequence of this competition is that it helped to regularize Sino-Korean relations in the Yalu-Tumen border. Although China displaced Korea as the dominant influence in Manchuria, it "abandoned forever any scheme to penetrate south of the Tumen. At the same time, Korea's effort to assert its influence north of the river was nipped in the bud." Lin 1935, 19.
[103] Serruys 1955, 50-58.
[104] Ibid., 47.
[105] Ibid., 56.
[106] Quoted in ibid.

How well does the theory developed in the preceding chapter perform against evidence of Sino-Korean relations during the early Ming? Three questions must be answered. First, does the relationship display a behavioral tendency between Chinese domination and Korean accommodation? Second, what are the respective Chinese and Korean strategies toward each other? Third, what are the motivations behind these strategies?

CHINESE STRATEGIES OF DOMINATION

The idea that China tried domination over its neighbors, especially over a "model tributary" like Korea, might seem counterintuitive to those who believe that China has always been a peaceful country. The historical evidence, however, suggests that political domination was indeed the Ming's objective in its Korea policy. Indeed, the tributary relations it tried to establish with Korea and other polities are themselves evidence of Chinese desire to control these polities' foreign policies in areas where Chinese interests were at stake. The Ming wanted to have Korean acknowledgment of Chinese suzerainty, that is, its right to form a sovereign-vassal relationship with Korea and have Korea observe its obligations as a Ming vassal or tributary state. It did not want control in Korea's internal affairs, as the Hongwu, Jianwen, and Yongle emperors made clear. The Ming emperors primarily wanted two things from Korea: observance of its tributary obligations (in most cases, regular tribute presentations according to Ming regulations), and Chinese control over Korean security policy in Manchuria. Surely the Ming did not try to dominate Korea by conquering it, but these two aspects of Ming policy toward Korea are political domination nonetheless. In effect, what it sought were superiority and authority in foreign affairs.

Two motivations underpinned early Ming emperors' attempts at political domination in this form. First, having Korea submit as a tributary state and thereby creating a sinocentric relationship was useful for meeting their identity needs as the Son of Heaven and the "ruler of the *tianxia*" and buttressing their claim of legitimacy to rule

Zhongguo. Second, the Hongwu emperor's concern for security in the northeast first prompted him to obtain Korean loyalty so as to divide and rule the other two threats in the region, the Mongols and the Jurchens, and then to blackmail Korea in the hope of extracting Korean security cooperation in the northeast when persuasion failed to bring about Korean loyalty. Legitimacy and security were therefore two primary motivations behind Chinese efforts to obtain Korean compliance, whether in terms of meeting tributary obligations or offering security cooperation. Chinese emperors' identity as well as security needs imply that with a strong China in place, some form of Chinese domination was almost inevitable.[107]

The early Ming emperors employed two primary strategies for domination toward Korea: persuasion and blackmail. The Yongle emperor also used the strategy of inducement to create political domination over the Jurchens. All three emperors tried to persuade the Koreans to accept Chinese superiority. Hongwu, however, used a great deal more blackmail than persuasion—he liked coercive threats (including the threat of force) and intimidation if these could help obtain desired compliance from Korea. He tried to politically and economically coerce the Koreans into accepting his demands by manipulating tributary politics and downgrading Korea's tributary status. At various times he withheld the investitures of both King U of the Koryŏ and King T'aejo of the Chosŏn, reduced the frequency of Korean missions, increased his demand for Korean tribute, jailed Korean envoys, rejected Korean tribute, accused Korea of wrongdoings, and threatened the use of force.

It is worth noting that Hongwu was far more interested in coercing the Koreans into accepting his demands regarding security in the northeast than converting Korea culturally into "a little China." Chinese embassies went much less frequently to Korea than Korean embassies to China. The available evidence indicates that Korea's large-scale adoption of Neo-Confucianism and Chinese institutions from the last decade of the fourteenth century was primarily due to Korea's own efforts. Ming

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[107] For an argument that the late Qing (1850-1910), an empire already in decline in the face of Western encroachment, tried to aggressively project its interests into Korea, see Larson 2008.

China did not actively promote the confucianization of Korea or exercise pure cultural influence. Quite on the contrary: Assuming their cultural superiority, the Chinese took a passive attitude and waited for the Koreans to come and submit.

KOREAN STRATEGIES OF ACCOMMODATION AND RESISTANCE

That the main behavioral pattern in Korea's relations with Ming China is accommodation is amply demonstrated by the prominence of the idea of *sadae* during this period. Both King Kongmin and King T'aejo (Yi Sŏng-gye) refer to *sadae* as their foreign policy principle toward Ming China. The notion of *sadae* indicates that Korean rulers understood the strategic reality they had to face and came to the conclusion that the best way to ensure Korea's security and autonomy is to accommodate China's demands. When these demands became too excessive, however, they chose to ignore, resist, or even oppose them.

The principle of *sadae* can be embodied in two strategies: submission and bandwagoning. This chapter argues that Korean accommodation generally reflects more bandwagoning for buying security, gaining profit, and increasing power than submission out of a perception of the legitimacy in Chinese rule over them. King Kongmin's decision to comply with Hongwu's wish by sending tributary missions, for example, reflects his appreciation of the strategic environment. Compliance was a political necessity. To preserve Korean independence under the shadow of the rising Ming power, it made sense to offer tribute. Yet because security could not be entirely guaranteed by the Ming as the Mongols were still active in Liaodong, the Koreans maintained contacts with the Mongols as a cushion. In this case, accommodation was a means of self-preservation and ensuring security. It could also afford Korea the opportunity to expand its own power and territory in the north, as demonstrated by its 1370 campaign into Liaodong. Moreover, it was essential for Korea to gain economically from tributary missions to the Ming.

Many scholars routinely assert that Korea accepted Chinese suzerainty especially

during Ming times.[108] A real Chinese suzerainty, rigorously defined, would mean Korean perception of Chinese authority at least over certain aspects of their foreign policy. Yet, in all the cases of Korea's response to the Ming, evidence showing Korean belief in Ming authority is surprisingly limited. There are few cases in which the Koreans felt that they "ought to obey" instructions from the Ming. This is, however, not surprising. The theory developed in Chapter 2 suggests that the emergence of authority requires China's persistent and patient use of persuasion as well as Korea's learning of Chinese superiority. The emergence of Chinese authority depends on two crucial Korean perceptions. First, Chinese rulers were the true upholder of the highest Confucian virtue. Second, they acted for Korean as well as Chinese interests.

Yet the early Ming emperors could not be the sources from which the Koreans learn about the Confucian virtue. Hongwu blackmailed Korea more than he tried to persuade it. Yongle's aggressive efforts to displace Korea as the dominant force in Manchuria could only feed Korea's resentment. Indeed, mutual suspicion characterized Sino-Korean relations during the Hongwu reign. How could Chinese persuasion work and the Koreans learn of Chinese superiority under such circumstances? The Koryŏ court's fear and suspicion of Hongwu and the Chosŏn court's disapproval of Yongle's usurpation and Buddhist worship are, of course, themselves a demonstration of the lack of Chinese authority over Korea. The Koreans' learning of Chinese superiority had hardly taken place. Accommodationist policies based on the *sadae* principle would be the most likely case for the claim of Ming authority over Korea. Yet in *sadae* one finds essentially self-interested motives for survival, profit, and power. Even in the one area where the Koreans genuinely perceived Ming authority—investiture, self-interest was by no means absent as Ming investiture was a hugely useful legitimating symbol in Korean politics.

Indeed, if the Ming had unproblematic authority over Korea, the Koryŏ would not have sent an army into Liaodong in 1370 to compete with the Ming for influence

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[108] A recent example is ibid., 31.

over the Mongols. It would not have kept relations with the Mongols while conducting normal tributary relations with the Ming ever since 1369 or adopted a "two-China" policy after 1374. Korea would not have decided twice in 1388 and 1398 to attack Liaodong which was by then under Chinese control. It would not have continued to send missions frequently to China despite the Ming's displeasure. It would not have tried to compete with the Ming for influence over the Jurchens. It would not have felt fear and suspicion of China. In short, if Sino-Korean relationship during the early Ming was largely an authority relationship, it would not have been so unstable.

The claim that Ming China constructed a hierarchical relationship with Korea therefore cannot be sustained. Apart from investiture, Ming China in fact only had limited control over Korean policy in the area of tributary formalities. But even here the control was not absolute, as the Koreans frequently ignored Chinese demands in the frequency of tributary missions. Many missions were sent out of Korea's own initiatives rather than Chinese requests. Of course, one cannot claim with absolute confidence that Korean responses to China were all motivated by self-interest rather than Chinese authority. States seldom choose a strategy unconditionally or without mixed motives. The Koreans may on occasions have felt the weight of Chinese authority. They regarded China as the most powerful country and Chinese culture the embodiment of higher civilization. In terms of their respective places in the world, they would also, unlike the Japanese, put China at the center and Korea in the periphery. Yet this belief in Chinese centrality did not always translate into the belief in Chinese authority over their foreign affairs.

As far as the early Ming evidence indicates, Korean elites had only partially internalized sinocentrism identified in the previous chapter—the idea that China was the only central, superior, and sovereign entity with a right to determine other countries' policies toward it. They believed in Chinese centrality in the world, but not always its superiority and authority in foreign affairs. The historical record indicates the *relative* importance of self-interest over perceived legitimacy in Korean policies

toward early Ming China. If China were the international sovereign, the system would be hierarchic. In general, however, Chinese "sovereignty" over Korea was very limited and anarchy was more impressive than hierarchy in Sino-Korean relations during this period.

This is further demonstrated by the fact that accommodation was not the only Korean response to Ming China. Korean rulers also resisted Chinese demands when they perceived that these were too excessive or that these would undermine their core interests such as security. Their strategies of resistance fall into two categories: balking and challenging. Balking occurred when Korea ignored Chinese requests and instead pursued policies in its own best interests. For example, King T'aejo decided to ignore the Hongwu emperor's demand of sending the writer of the first "insulting" petition and sent two other writers instead. The Koreans consistently ignored the Ming's request for reducing the frequency of its tributary missions. They also balked at Hongwu's repeated requests for selling horses to the Ming army, perhaps attempting to preserve their own horse supply for use in possible future conflicts in Manchuria.[109] More generally, the Koryŏ court had chosen to ignore the Ming's security demand in the northeast. In each of these examples, the Koreans balked at Chinese requests because they decided that this would best serve their interests, whether in terms of retaining their most valued statesman, maximizing economic profit and obtaining military intelligence, or maintaining security in the north.

Korea challenged Ming China when the latter's demands impinged on its crucial interests, usually survival and independence. Thus, believing that the Hongwu emperor was demanding Korean territory and that a Ming invasion was imminent, King U's government decided to wage a preemptive strike against the Ming in 1388. The Chosŏn court decided to attack Liaodong in 1398 in the face of China's unrelenting demands. Finally, the Koreans waged a spirited challenge to Chinese penetration into Jurchen lands because these were believed to be Korea's sphere of influence that would closely affect its security interests. The Koreans probably

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[109] Huang 1994, 373-5.

realized that challenging China would be counter-productive and even disastrous. They nevertheless endeavored to do so because doing otherwise would signal subservience in fundamental conflict with an independent Korean identity and incur even greater political costs in the domestic front.

Conclusion

The Sino-Korean relationship in the early Ming is a highly asymmetric one with disproportionate power concentration in Ming China. Early Ming emperors tried to politically dominate Korea's foreign policy to demonstrate their legitimacy to rule *Zhongguo* and to obtain Korea's security cooperation in Manchuria. The Koreans accommodated yet at times also challenged Chinese power. They valued their independence, security, and power, but it made little sense to challenge China unless vital interests were at stake. Their bandwagoning with China was meant to preserve independence, achieve security, and occasionally expand power under Chinese primacy.

The evidence also shows that Sino-Korean relations during this period were more anarchic than hierarchic. This is not to assert that the structure of this relationship is an unproblematic anarchy any more than that it is an unproblematic hierarchy. China possessed authority, for example, in terms of investiture in Korea's domestic political process. Elements conducive to Chinese authority, particularly Chinese culture, were always present in the relationship and arguably became stronger after the Yongle reign when Korea became thoroughly Neo-Confucian and the acrimony and hostility between China and Korea were finally left behind. It is possible that the relationship would become more hierarchic in later periods. During the early Ming, however, the evidence points to the more anarchic nature of this relationship.

Chapter 4

Early Ming China and Japan

In this chapter I examine Sino-Japanese relations in the early Ming dynasty to further evaluate the theory of Chinese primacy. It should be recognized, however, that neither China nor Japan were unified political systems at the start of the Ming. Rulers on both sides were trying to consolidate their regimes; and in the case of Japan, a single ruler did not emerge until 1400. The relationship is not one between two "unitary actors" but is part of the way in which the two political systems have mutually constructed each other in the process of becoming unified states. I therefore focus on individual political leaders on both sides, as I have done with regard to Chinese emperors and Korean kings in the preceding chapter on Sino-Korean relations. This is also consistent with the theoretical proposition that the real agents in international politics are not states, but leaders and decision makers of these states.

The patterns of Sino-Japanese interactions are broadly similar to those of Sino-Korean relations. Early Ming emperors tried to politically dominate Japanese foreign policy in areas of tributary relations as well as policies regarding Japanese piracy for essentially the same reasons: the need to demonstrate legitimacy in order to consolidate their political regime and a concern with security along the Chinese coast. To this end, they employed the strategies of persuasion, inducement, and blackmail. The Japanese accommodated the Ming, but also resisted Chinese wishes with more frequency than the Koreans. In Ashikaga Yoshimitsu's accommodation with the Yongle emperor, the concern for legitimacy to consolidate the Muromachi bakufu also appeared as an important motive. Yet the evidence does not enable one to claim for sure whether Yoshimitsu's accommodation was more of the nature of submission or bandwagoning. Japanese rulers' frequent resistance against the Ming, however, further discredits the view of a hierarchic East Asian order centering on China.

When the Ming dynasty was founded in 1368, China and Japan had lost official contact for about five hundred years. The Heian court (794-1185) in Japan ceased to send official missions to China in 894, ending a two-hundred-year period of remarkable cultural borrowing and institutional imitation from Tang China.[1] Song China had neither the will nor the means to bring Japan under Chinese influence. Although the following Mongol Yuan dynasty did possess a strong will and a remarkable military machine—demonstrated by its historically unprecedented conquest of the Eurasian landmass, both of its invasions of Japan (in 1274 and 1281) failed. These invasions, however, affected Sino-Japanese relations in ways more subtle and consequential than the Chinese and Japanese at the time could appreciate. They deeply affected subsequent Japanese perceptions of China. If previously China was the source of higher civilization to be emulated, it was now seen as a strong power to be feared as well. But perhaps more importantly, because Japan had repelled the mightiest army in the world, the fear would also stir a sense of Japanese myth and pride, and would develop into something akin to "nationalism" during Ming times. Historically the Japanese had been reluctant to show subservience towards China. The failure of the Mongol coercion in the thirteenth century gave them even less reason to do so afterwards. This is the immediate political context of Sino-Japanese relations during the Ming dynasty.

THE FAILURE OF THE HONGWU EMPEROR

The Hongwu emperor probably sent his first mission to Japan in February 1369, and a second one a month later.[2] Announcing the founding of the Ming, Hongwu wanted to command Japan's respect for his enthronement.[3] According to his rescript, Chinese emperors had benevolently ruled the *tianxia* in the past. With *Zhongguo* and the "four foreigners" (*si yi* 四夷) each occupying their proper places in the world, peace and order had been maintained. Now that the Great Ming had swept away the

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[1] Borgen 1982, 1-2.

[2] Historians disagree on the exact timing. For the original historical source, see MSLLZ, 419. For historians' interpretations, see Wang 1953, 26, fn. 2; and Cheng 1981, 149.

[3] Cheng 1981, 149.

foreign Yuan dynasty, peace could again be enjoyed—provided that the rulers of the "four foreigners" could understand the historical precedent and offer proper tribute to the Ming. The emperor was in effect asking for Japan's acknowledgment of his superiority and tribute to his court. Thus, this rescript to Japan, like those to Korea, was an attempt to revive the sinocentric order believed to have been created by such great dynasties as the Han and the Tang in the past. And essentially for the same reason: Making Japan a tributary state of the Ming would help demonstrate his legitimacy to rule China.

The Japanese never replied to Hongwu's first mission. This was probably because the mission failed to reach Japan.[4] In the same month, news of Japanese pirates (Wako) pillaging China's Shandong peninsula reached the Ming court.[5] The second rescript of March 1369 was far harsher in tone and the Wako problem now occupied a central place.[6] Hongwu demanded that Japan offer a proper petition to the Ming court and that the Japanese authorities rein in the Wako. To that end, Hongwu threatened Japan with invasion—"to bind their kings with ropes," as he vividly described. He tried to blackmail Japan into accepting his demands so as to control the Japanese pirates who were beginning to create massive security problems in his coasts.[7] Thus, although it is not entirely correct to say that Sino-Japanese relations were established as a result of the Wako problem,[8] that problem did critically affect the development of the relationship during the Ming dynasty.[9] Hongwu's subsequent Japan policy would stem more from this security concern than his desire to demonstrate legitimacy from Japanese submission.

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[4] Wang 1953, 10. Kawazoe Shōji writes that the Chinese envoys were killed en route by pirates. Shōji 1990, 425. Cheng Liang-Sheng, however, believes this mission was never sent. According to him, this was only the decision, rather than the actual mission, to send envoys to Japan. The first mission therefore only started in the second moon of 1369. Yet it would be odd for the Hongwu emperor not to first send an edict proclaiming the founding of the Ming to Japan, as he did to Korea and Annam. Cheng 1981, 150.

[5] MSLLZ, 419; and MS, 6725.

[6] MSLLZ, 419.

[7] On this point, see also Sansom 1961, 167; and Cheng 1985, 142.

[8] Shōji 1990, 398.

[9] The Wako problem started in the 1220s. Since the 1350s, Japanese pirates pillaged the littoral of East Asia with renewed intensity and frequency, first engulfing Korea then overflowing into China. China's Shandong Peninsula was the most severely affected. But the Wako also struck further south, at Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong. They caused considerable damage and instability in the Chinese coast during the Ming dynasty. For brief accounts of the Wako problems, see Takeo 1977, 161-2; Elisonas 1991, 239-45; and Hazard 1967.

Carrying this rescript, the envoy Yang Zai and his mission arrived at Dazaifu in northern Kyushu. Since Nara times (710-784), Dazaifu had been an office of the Japanese central government with authority over foreign relations and trade.[10] It would thus be the natural place to start Sino-Japanese relations under normal circumstances. But in 1369 the political situation in Japan was anything but normal. The country was in the middle of a bitter struggle between two imperial houses, the so-called Northern Court at Kyoto buttressed by the newly established Muromachi bakufu (Ashikaga shogunate, 1338-1573) and the Southern Court at Yoshino supported by regional barons. The sixty-year civil war, known as the Nambokuchō period (1333-92) in Japanese history, means the lack of central authority in Japan. For a long time Kyushu was under the control of Prince Kanenaga (1329-83), the Southern Court's Seisei Daishōgun (Generalissimo for the Subjugation of Western Japan) in western Japan, who made Dazaifu his headquarter in the struggle against the Northern Court. Rather than represent the central government, Dazaifu had instead become the personal power base of Prince Kanenaga.[11] Ignorant of the real situation in Japan probably because of the lack of official intercourse, Yang Zai approached Dazaifu and handed in Hongwu's rescript to Prince Kanenaga, mistaking him as "king of Japan."[12] This was to be a disastrous mission. Yang Zai was imprisoned for three months and five other envoys were even executed.[13]

Hongwu was nevertheless willing to try diplomacy once more. In April 1370, he sent Zhao Zhi to Japan with a new and longer rescript. The rescript recounts the events surrounding the emperor's enthronement—how he had, in accordance with Heaven's will, successfully displaced the previous Mongol Yuan dynasty, pacified the northern frontier, and managed to obtain tributes from various polities. With "carrots and sticks", the emperor at the same time advised the desirability of peaceful Sino-Japanese relations and warned about the serious consequence should Japan fail to comply with his requests. At first he admonished that a unified China had abundant resources to punish Japan. In fact, he mentioned that the Ming was about to

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[10] Hall 1990, 205.
[11] For Japan's political situation at the time of Yang Zai's mission, see Hall 1990; and Sansom 1961.
[12] Cheng 1981, 151-2.
[13] Wang 1953, 11; Cheng 1981, 152; and Takeo 1977, 163.

construct invasion ships. Then, after this intimidation, he adopted a softer tone, saying that he had ordered to halt the construction of ships upon hearing that the pirates were not sent by the Japanese king. He wanted to get across the message that he was willing to give Japan one more chance of peaceful relations.[14] Meanwhile, he again sent Yang Zai to Japan with fifteen Japanese pirates captured in China.[15] The good gesture was meant to persuade the Japanese to become a loyal tributary by showing his benevolence. This time Kanenaga responded favorably and sent a return mission in 1371. The Chinese documents record that Kanenaga's envoys paid tribute to the Ming court.[16]

Hongwu must have been pleased somewhat, though he was more impressed by the priestly nature of the first Japanese mission to his court. Kanenaga's mission was composed of Buddhist monks. The emperor apparently concluded from this that he could influence—or "seduce" (*you* 诱), to use the word in the *Official History of the Ming Dynasty*—Japanese rulers by sending Chinese monks in return. Religious persuasion might be more effective than either coercive threats or symbolic gestures such as returning Japanese pirates. He thus ordered Zuchan and Keqin, two prominent Buddhist priests in China, to head another mission with an Imperial Calendar and silk fabrics as gifts for Kanenaga in 1372.[17] Buddhist monks had thus become official ambassadors for Sino-Japanese relations on both sides. The Japanese sent monks probably because they were among Japan's most knowledgeable people about China at the time. Ming rulers did so primarily because they wanted to carry out an effective strategy of persuasion toward Japan. As we shall see later, monks played their most critical part in Sino-Japanese relations under the Yongle emperor and Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358-1408), the third shogun (1368-94) of the Muromachi bakufu.

Zuchan and Keqin were, however, detained by Kanenaga for one year after arriving at Hakata in northern Kyushu in July 1372. While there, they gradually learned of

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[14] MSLLZ, 419-20.
[15] Wang 1953, 11.
[16] MS, 6726; and MSLLZ, 421.
[17] MS, 6726; and MSLLZ, 421.

Japan's real political situation. Clearly Kanenaga was never the "king of Japan" and, after 1372, he even had difficulty holding ground in Kyushu. Keqin then wrote a letter to the Tendai zasu in Kyoto, claiming that Ming China had been attempting to establish contact with "Emperor Jimyō" of the Northern Court from the start and that they were kept from going to Kyoto by Kanenaga in Kyushu.[18] Yoshimitsu was surprised and immediately sent envoys to receive them. Zuchan and Keqin eventually reached Kyoto in July 1373. This was the first time that a Ming mission had had direct communication with the Ashikaga shogunate.

Yoshimitsu then sent three Japanese monks to the Ming court in 1374, but the Hongwu emperor refused to receive them on the grounds that they bore only a letter to the Grand Secretariat but no petition to the emperor.[19] This was a violation of Chinese tributary norms, which required above all a proper petition to the emperor with accompanying tributary goods. Moreover, the emperor was confused by Japanese politics. He wanted to deal with the legitimate ruler of Japan, yet quite unable to tell which one was. In any case such a ruler had not yet emerged in Japan, as it was not until 1392 that the Ashikaga shogunate finally ended the civil war between the two imperial houses. For the moment Hongwu was content in dealing with Kanenaga until events proved it otherwise.[20] He therefore reprimanded "illegitimate" missions from all other political actors in Japan, including one from the powerful Shimazu Ujihisa of southern Kyushu in 1374.[21]

Meanwhile, the emperor's attitude towards Japan steadily soured. As a result of continuing Japanese piracy along the Ming coast,[22] several "improper" or "illegitimate" Japanese missions to his court, and the perception of the political chaos in Japan, what little favor Kanenaga had gained in the eyes of Hongwu for his brief "submission" in 1371 was completely lost. After receiving an "insincere"

[18] Wang 1953, 13; and Cheng 1981, 161.
[19] MS, 6726; and MSLLZ, 422.
[20] Wang 1953, 15.
[21] MS, 6726; and MSLLZ, 422.
[22] MS records Wako activities every year from 1371-74. MS, 6726.

mission in 1376,[23] the emperor threatened Kanenaga with possible invasions, implying that Japan could not rely on its unassailable position because it would only take five days for the Ming army to reach Japan.[24]

In 1379 the emperor received a mission from Kanenaga, but refused to receive a following one in 1380 on the grounds that it lacked a petition. He also rejected a mission from Yoshimitsu in 1380 because the shogun's envoys bore not a petition to the emperor but a letter to the Prime Minister.[25] Then, in January 1381, he became so annoyed by erratic Japanese missions and the worsening Wako problem that he felt obliged to draft a letter of reprimand for the "king of Japan." The letter called the Japanese "stupid eastern foreigners," and warned them against inevitable disaster if they continued to act improperly and disturb neighboring countries.[26] After rejecting another mission in 1381, the emperor ordered the Ministry of Rites to draft two strong letters of reprimand, one for Kanenaga and the other for Yoshimitsu. The letter to Kanenaga asked the Japanese prince to examine Sino-Japanese relations in history and to understand that a Japan not submissive to China would inevitably court disaster. The letter to Yoshimitsu asked the shogun to examine who was the stronger side between the Ming and Japan. In both letters, the threat of war was explicit.[27]

But Hongwu did not execute his threat. Kanenaga replied with an extraordinarily provocative document that challenged the fundamental assumptions of Ming foreign policy (see below). Statements such as "the world is the world's world; it does not belong to a single person" were surely the best kind of insult to the emperor. Even so, Hongwu did not attack Japan, primarily because the Mongol experience just a century ago still remained alive.[28] If he ever had to invade Japan, it would probably not be so much due to Japan's intransigence as because of the threat to the empire's security posed by the Wako. But during the entire Hongwu reign, the emperor was preoccupied with pacifying the north and the west, rather than the south and the east.

[23] Ibid.
[24] MSLLZ, 424.
[25] MS, 6726; and MSLLZ, 425.
[26] MSLLZ, 425-6; and Wang 1953, 17.
[27] MSLLZ, 426-7; and Wang 1953, 18.
[28] MS, 6727.

At times Korea and Japan frustrated him, but it was the Mongols that posed the real threat to his empire and drained much of its resource. After abolishing the Office of Merchant Ships in 1374, he increasingly resorted to coastal defense against the Wako, adopting an increasingly defensive policy of *haijin*, or maritime prohibition.[29]

After 1381 Sino-Japanese relations were beyond repair. The Ming court treated Japanese missions badly in 1382, 1384, and 1386. Hongwu's antipathy toward Japan finally turned into outrage after the discovery of Prime Minister Hu Weiyong's alleged conspiracy to kill him. The *Official History of the Ming Dynasty* relates that Hu had sought the help of Japan for his attempted coup. The emperor was furious upon learning the plot and, after executing Hu and his followers, decided to completely break off relations with Japan in 1387.[30] The Hu Weiyong case was quite probably a fabricated one, and Japan might have been used in elite Ming politics to discredit possible rivals to the emperor. Hongwu had a long-time distrust of Japan; this case provided the final catalyst as he now had reason to fear the domestic linkage of the Wako problem. Long before the case, the surviving forces of his erstwhile rivals Fang Guozhen and Zhang Shicheng had linked up with the Wako along the coast in an attempt to revive their influence. Hongwu thus had a powerful domestic political motive to enforce maritime prohibition and cut off relations with Japan.[31]

HARMONY AND DISCORD DURING THE YONGLE REIGN

Although he had to deal with a precarious and ultimately destructive domestic political situation, the Jianwen emperor was fortunate at least with regard to Japan. In 1401 Ashikaga Yoshimitsu sent a mission to his court with a proper petition. This mission signified the beginning of official Sino-Japanese relations during the Ming dynasty. Jianwen sent a return mission in 1402. His rescript called Yoshimitsu "king of Japan," stipulated the relationship between China and Japan as that between the

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[29] The Hongwu emperor issued his first order of *haijin* in February 1372. A more stringent *haijin* edict was issued in 1394. The Wako pillage also forced the Ming government to move the most vulnerable coastal residents to inland areas. In order to prevent the intermingling of merchants with pirates in an effort to stamp out the Wako, the emperor decided to abolish maritime commerce altogether. The only form of trade that was officially allowed was that under the tributary framework. Cheng 1985, 21.
[30] MS, 6728.
[31] Shōji 1990, 430.

ruler and the subject, and asked Yoshimitsu to adopt the Chinese imperial calendar and keep his mind on obedience and loyalty.[32] Having the "king of Japan" as his vassal would be a boost, however trivial, to his already besieged domestic rule.

Within a year Jianwen was dethroned by the Yongle emperor, having lost the civil war to his uncle. But before the Yongle emperor even sent out his envoys to announce his victory, a Japanese mission arrived in Nanjing in November 1403. What is more, the envoys carried a petition written in perfect Chinese literary style in which Yoshimitsu explicitly called him a "vassal" of the Chinese emperor. This extraordinary and yet unexpected mission pleased Yongle greatly. As a usurper of the Ming throne through an internecine civil war, Yongle needed external legitimation as much as Hongwu or Jianwen. He sent a return mission headed by Zhao Juren one month later. This ended more than thirty years of discord and enmity in Sino-Japanese relations. Under the Yongle emperor and Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, Sino-Japanese relations entered a short period of unprecedented harmony.

During this mission, Zhao completed a novel commercial agreement with the Ashikaga shogunate in 1404. This is the so-called official "tally" (Chinese: *Kanhe*; Japanese: *Kangō*) trade between China and Japan. The Japanese were permitted to send periodic trading ventures to China under the guise of tribute-bearing missions. Tallies were used to verify the legitimacy of the missions going both ways between the two countries. By establishing such an elaborate system, the Chinese could be sure that they received only bona fide representatives of the Ashikaga, thus contributing to its aim of suppressing the Wako; and the shogunate, for its part, could monopolize or at least control all trade ventures to China. The system therefore temporarily satisfied the Japanese desire for trade with China and the Chinese desire that its superiority over Japan should be recognized and the Wako problem managed. The agreement stipulated that Japan was permitted to present tribute only once every ten years. But in practice this limitation was completely ignored during the first

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[32] Cheng 1981, 244-5; and Wang 1953, 22-23.

several years of the successful operation of the agreement.[33] The tally system worked remarkably well between 1404 and 1410. In fact, for almost a century and a half—from 1404, when the first official tally mission departed for China, to 1549, when the seventeenth and last returned to Japan—the system provided the framework for largely peaceful relations between the two countries.[34]

The Yongle emperor was surely primarily motivated by his desire to control Japanese piracy in extending tally trade privileges to Japan, as the use of tallies gave him a system whereby official Japanese envoys could be readily distinguished from unauthorized traders and pirates.[35] But it must also be said that he was much more active and flexible in maritime policy than the Hongwu emperor had ever been, though he also continued his father's *haijin*. He was willing to meet the Japanese halfway. One example will help to illustrate this. When a Japanese mission arrived in 1403, the Minister of Rites memorialized the emperor that the Japanese had brought with them not just tributary goods for the court but also articles of a commercial nature and therefore recommended that these be confiscated according to Ming regulations. Yongle, however, clearly aware of the Japanese profit motive, nevertheless allowed them to do so on the grounds that they came a long way to China at a great expense and therefore must be treated benevolently.[36] This is quintessentially what the Chinese mean by "tenderly cherishing men from afar" (*huai rou yuan ren* 怀柔远人). In short, Yongle was willing to use material incentives to win over foreign countries. His objectives with regard to Japan were no different from his father's: both wanted to make Japan a tributary state and control Japanese piracy. The difference lies in their strategies. Yongle's flexible approach, particularly his political and economic inducements, must have contributed to the initial success of his Japan policy.

This remarkable harmony in Sino-Japanese relations ended in 1408 with the death of Yoshimitsu. Yongle was particularly concerned whether Yoshimitsu's successor and

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[33] On the tally trade, see Wang 1953, 37; Sansom 1961, 170; and Takeo 1977, 165-167.
[34] Elisonas 1991, 236-7.
[35] Wang 1953, 38-9.
[36] MS, 6728; and MSLLZ, 438.

son Yoshimochi would be as loyal and cooperative. For a short while Yoshimochi played the role due a Chinese vassal. But in 1411 when a Ming envoy arrived in Japan, Yoshimochi not only declined to give him an audience but also blocked his return to China. This was the end of Sino-Japanese cordiality during the early Ming period. The *Official History of the Ming Dynasty* relates that Japanese tribute failed to come for a long time afterwards.[37] In fact, it was not until twenty years later when the Xuande emperor and Ashikaga Yoshinori resumed the tally trade in 1432 that Sino-Japanese relations normalized.

For the next six years between 1411 and 1417, official contact between China and Japan was nonexistent. Then in 1417, Chinese troops captured a number of Japanese pirates and brought them to the capital. Yongle's courtiers, indignant at the interruption of Japanese tributary missions, demanded their execution. The emperor, however, still hoping to win Japan over by generous treatment, decided to send the captured pirates back to Japan. He then dispatched a mission condemning Yoshimochi for failing to restrain the pirates and asking him to repent and change his attitude. He further ordered Yoshimochi to release those Chinese who had been captured and imprisoned in Japan. Six years of waiting had made Yongle impatient with the Japanese detachment from the Ming court. Now like his father, he warned Japan to change its policies and rein in the Wako. In December 1418 he prepared a severe rescript for Yoshimochi. This rescript was in fact the longest one ever sent by a Ming ruler to Japan, demonstrating Yongle's increasing frustration with the Japanese isolation from China. It read in part:

> You have not sent tribute, and from time to time you have dispatched persons
> to invade and pillage our borderland. Is this the way to serve one's superior?...
> We will instruct you plainly. Your land is very close to the Middle Kingdom.
> As for our forces, on the sea they are masters of ships and oars; on land they
> are skilled at riding and shooting. Nothing is too strong to be broken; no
> place is too unassailable to be entered. They are not like the forces of the

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[37] MS, 6729.

Yuan in the past, which were strong in riding and shooting but weak in seamanship. The reason why we have been so patient and have not been aroused at you is because we are so magnanimous...Recently pirates came again to raid our coast...Should you continue to create disturbances, you will inevitably call forth upon yourself our expeditionary forces...If you reform your former behavior and dispatch persons, together with our envoy, to repatriate [those Chinese who] have been captured on our coast...; if you let envoys pass back and forth; if you keep within your borders and give peace to your people and banish calamities so that you may succeed to the grandeur of your late king, then the spirit of Heaven will look on you with satisfaction and will enable your sons and grandsons to enjoy boundless good fortunes...If you are unable to reform your behaviour, then, when our envoy arrives in your country, either arrest him or execute him just as you please, and do not send envoys to us...[38]

The rescript, as Wang Yi-T'ung put it, is "a mixed product of harsh and mild tones, of threats and cajolery, of praise for the noble deeds of Yoshimitsu and condemnation of the acts of Yoshimochi."[39] As such it perfectly illustrates the dilemma of Yongle's policy towards Japan. On the one hand, he was still hoping to resume normal tributary relations with Japan so long as the latter complied with his requests. On the other hand, he threatened to invade Japan with an "expeditionary force" should it continue to tolerate the pirates. His boast about the superiority of the Ming navy over the Mongol navy had some credibility, especially in light of Zheng He's overseas voyages that he was sponsoring at the time. Yet in the end he was, like the Hongwu emperor in the 1380s, prepared to break off relations and adopt a defensive policy. These options show the rescript's contradiction, beneath which lies Yongle's frustration.

Japanese Accommodation and Resistance

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[38] Wang 1953, 49-51.
[39] Ibid., 51.

DISCORD AND ENMITY BEFORE 1400

When Prince Kanenaga met Yang Zai's mission in 1369, he was greatly annoyed at the Hongwu emperor's rescript. As noted above, he imprisoned Yang and executed five other envoys. Wang Yi-T'ung speculates that because Kanenaga had never seen the first rescript sent by Hongwu a month earlier, he was consequently offended by the harsh tone of the second one.[40] Cheng Liang-Sheng believes that Kanenaga's harsh reaction only demonstrated his inability to control the pirates. He might have felt humiliated by the Ming request to control the Wako, whose existence simply exposed his impotence.[41] The *Official History of the Ming Dynasty* records a new wave of Wako activities along China's coast shortly after Kanenaga's mistreatment of Ming envoys, linking the resurgence of Japanese piracy with Kanenaga's non-compliance.[42] Yet Kanenaga was merely a warlord fighting for his survival against the encroaching Ashikaga forces and had no control over the pirates. Even the Muromachi bakufu at the time could do little to influence them. In serious military actions, or the staffing of important bakufu offices, the Ashikaga relied heavily on provincial constables (*shugo*) to whom they delegated much local authority.[43] Action against pirates therefore depended on the bakufu's control over the western warlords, and before 1400 Yoshimitsu had not yet consolidated his power in western Japan.[44] In any case, Kanenaga had no particular reason to follow Chinese requests. Hongwu's conception of world order failed to appeal to him.

The Prince, however, changed his attitude during Zhao Zhi's mission in 1370 and sent a return mission to China in 1371. This might seem surprising since the rescript of this mission was more threatening in tone than the 1369 one. Chinese documents attributed Kanenaga's about-face to the brilliance of the envoy Zhao Zhi. Zhao was trying to simultaneously threaten and seduce Kanenaga by describing Ming military prowess and contrasting Ming benevolence with Mongol aggressiveness. To the

[40] Wang 1953, 11.
[41] Cheng 1981, 152.
[42] MS, 6725.
[43] Hall 1990, 189.
[44] Sansom 1961, 178.

extent that he tried to persuade Kanenaga with Ming benevolence, he succeeded more in demonstrating Ming prowess. Thus, one cannot attribute Kanenaga's about-face to Ming authority or his perception of legitimacy in Ming instructions if he was merely compelled by Ming military capabilities. Some historians even doubt whether Kanenaga would assume such a grave diplomatic responsibility of sending tribute to China.[45] But given that by 1371 the Prince was under attack by Imagawa Ryōshun of the Northern Court and was already hard put to maintain himself in Kyushu, it might indeed make sense for him to turn to the Ming.[46] Contact with China would strengthen his position in western Japan, thus increasing his odds in the increasingly hopeless struggle against the Northern Court.[47]

Whatever motives might lie behind his tribute to the Ming, Kanenaga soon found reason to change his attitude again. In 1372 he detained Chinese envoys for one year in Kyushu. His swift violation of "tributary" obligations was probably due to his desire to prevent contact between the Ming and the Northern Court. At the time the political situation was becoming desperate for the Southern Court. By 1372 the commanding position Kanenaga held in Kyushu had been lost. He was driven out of the Dazaifu region by Imagawa Ryōshun, and the latter was to eventually conquer Kyushu in 1381.[48] Kanenaga wanted to monopolize Japan's relations with Ming China, if that could help his struggle against the Ashikaga. Concern for his own political survival thus lied at the heart of his opposing attitudes toward China. The Ming's lack of authority over him was further demonstrated by his frequently defiant letters to the Ming court in later years.

Kanenaga sent another mission to the Ming court in 1376 to apologize for frequent Wako raids along China's coast.[49] But the Hongwu emperor regarded this mission as "insincere" and issued a stern warning. This must have angered Kanenaga, as he

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[45] Elisonas 1991, 241.
[46] Shōji 1990, 425.
[47] Cheng 1981, 158.
[48] Hall 1990, 206; and Sansom 1961, 109-13.
[49] MS, 6276.

ceased to send missions for three years.[50] Then he sent three missions to the Ming court in 1379, 1380, and 1381 respectively.[51] But Hongwu was greatly annoyed by the failure of these missions to observe Ming tributary regulations. After rejecting the 1381 mission, he ordered the Ministry of Rites to draft a strong letter of reprimand for Kanenaga with an explicit threat of war. Yet much to his frustration, Kanenaga replied with an extraordinarily provocative document no later than 1382. The letter perhaps shows the deep-rooted Japanese attitude towards China when threatened. It is thus worth quoting in length:

> I have heard that the Three Emperors established order and the Five Emperors came to the throne each in turn. How should only the Middle Kingdom (*Zhonghua*) have her master while the barbarians did not have their rulers? Heaven and Earth are vast; they are not monopolized by one ruler. The universe is great and wide, and various countries are created each to have a share in its rule. Now the world (*tianxia*) is the world's world; it does not belong to a single person...

> I have heard that the Celestial Court is making plans for war. This small country too has a plan for meeting the enemy...I have also heard that Your Majesty has selected your best generals and called forth your crack soldiers to invade my territory...We shall meet them with our troops. How could we be willing to kneel down on the road and pay respect to them?[52]

This is an extremely defiant reply. George Sansom notes that "the Japanese, despite their respect for Chinese culture, had a fierce national pride, stiffened by their defeat of the Mongols. They were not likely to submit to Chinese pressure."[53] In this letter, however, the Japanese not just refused to give in; they went on to challenge the very notion of the Chinese conception of world order. They asserted that the world could not be sinocentric, monopolized by the Middle Kingdom. On the contrary, the world

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[50] Sansom 1961, 168.
[51] MS, 6726; and MSLLZ, 424-6.
[52] The original text can be found in MS, 6727; the English translation follows Wang 1953, 18-9.
[53] Sansom 1961, 167.

needed to be shared by countries large and small. The idea looks intriguingly "modern," yet it was neither idiosyncratic nor unique in Japanese history. It in fact reflects a larger historical pattern of Japanese attitude toward China.

The provocation of this letter effectively ended Sino-Japanese relations during the Hongwu reign. But the Japanese, though adamantly defiant of the Chinese demand for submission, nevertheless continued to send envoys to the Ming court in 1382, 1384, and 1386.[54] The most plausible explanation seems to lie in their motive for commerce with China. This interpretation can be strengthened by the fact that even after 1387 when the Hongwu emperor broke off relations with Japan, Ouchi Yoshihiro of western Honshū, who was in control of much of the Inland Sea and the sea-routes to China and Korea before 1400, still sent envoys to China.[55] Since official relations were impossible, one can only surmise that these missions were sent primarily for the purpose of trade.

UNPRECEDENTED HARMONY, 1401-1408

In 1400 Ashikaga Yoshimitsu crushed his last powerful rival Yoshihiro in western Japan. Eight years earlier he had ended the civil war between the Northern and Southern courts. Now he was in firm control of Japanese politics and ready to assume responsibility of foreign policy. Indeed, Yoshimitsu was to preside over "the most flourishing era of the Muromachi bakufu."[56] With the political consolidation in Japan, Sino-Japanese relations also entered a remarkable though brief period of harmony. Good bilateral relations depended on having a stable domestic political situation on *both* sides.

In 1401, Yoshimitsu sent a mission led by the monk Soa and the merchant Koetomi to the court of the Jianwen emperor. He had apparently learnt lessons from his failed attempts to open relations with the Ming in 1374 and 1380. This time the envoys

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[54] MS, 6727; MSLLZ, 429; and Wang 1953, 19-20.
[55] Wang 1953, 21-22.
[56] Hall 1990, 189.

bore a deferential petition appropriately addressed to the Ming emperor.[57] Yet more dramatic gestures of loyalty were still to come. When the Jianwen emperor's envoys arrived in Japan in September 1402, Yoshimitsu went to Hyōgo, the present Kobe, to visit the ship that carried them. Moreover, when he received the envoys in his Kitayama Residence in Kyoto, he placed in front of the main hall a high table on which the imperial rescript was placed beside a container of burning incense, and bowed three times before he took the rescript and read while still kneeling.[58] When Jianwen's embassy left Japan in 1403, Yoshimitsu ordered Kenchū Keimi of the Tenryūji and two other monks to accompany them to China. When the Yongle emperor's first mission to Japan arrived in 1404 and a later mission came in 1406, Yoshimitsu went to Hyōgo to meet the envoys on both occasions. When another Ming embassy came in 1407, Yoshimitsu, dressed in a Chinese costume and seated in a palanquin carried by several Chinese, accompanied the envoys to a maple-viewing party at the Jōzaikōin near Kyoto. When the envoys left Japan the next spring, he went to Hyōgo to see them off.[59] Yoshimitsu's exceptional treatment of Chinese envoys was quite unusual in Japanese history.

The shogun's most dramatic show was his 1403 memorial to the Yongle emperor. The memorial opened with the declaration: "Your vassal (chen 臣), the King of Japan (riben guowang 日本国王), petitions (biao 表)."[60] It was the first document in which a Japanese shogun had called himself a "vassal" of the Chinese emperor. Indeed, never before had the expressions "King of Japan" and "Your vassal" been used in Japan's foreign documents. Their use in this case deviated from the country's customary diplomatic practice.[61]

Yoshimitsu kept his words of obedience very well. When the Chinese envoy Zhao

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[57] Cheng 1981, 233-4; and Wang 1953, 22.
[58] Cheng 1981, 239; and Wang 1953, 22-3, 62.
[59] Wang 1953, 41-2; and Cheng 1981, 334-5.
[60] Cheng 1981, 250-1. Wang (1953, 24) translated chen as "subject" and biao as "submit". This is misleading especially in our context. Biao is better translated as "petition" or "memorialize" to retain its original meaning. Since I reserve the term submission for special use in cases where other states have internalized the sinocentric norm and voluntarily become China's vassal states, I prefer "petition" to "submit" in translating biao. Moreover, whether the fact that Yoshimitsu petitioned also means he submitted still has to be empirically examined.
[61] Takeo 1977, 165.

Juren left Japan in August 1404, he sent the monk Meishitsu Bonryō to accompany him to China. Four months later, another mission led by Eishun reached the Ming court to extend congratulations on the investiture of the Crown Prince of the Ming ruler.[62] In December 1405, a delegation led by Minamoto Michiyoshi arrived at the Chinese court with twenty Japanese pirates.[63] Yoshimitsu was thus the first Japanese ruler, perhaps the only one in a substantial way, to have met the Chinese request of suppressing the Wako. Indeed, he may have taken steps to suppress piracy before the dispatch of the 1401 mission or at least have shown readiness to take action. In any case he issued his first recorded order in 1402 to the Constables of the western provinces, instructing them to inflict drastic punishment upon the raiders.[64] In 1406 Yoshimitsu sent a mission headed by Kenchū Keimi to China to give thanks for the Ming emperor's generosity. He sent two further missions, both headed by Kenchū Keimi, along with captured pirates, in 1407 and 1408 respectively.[65] Thus in the eight years between 1401 and 1408, Yoshimitsu sent at least eight missions to the Ming court, all of which were well received by the Chinese. It is no wonder then that his death in 1408 should have greatly concerned the Yongle emperor.

THE NATURE OF YOSHIMITSU'S ACCOMMODATION

Yoshimitsu was a colorful figure in Japanese history. With regard to China, the puzzle historians have tried to answer is: Why was he so seemingly loyal to Ming China in the last eight years of his life? Was his accommodation with the Ming submission or bandwagoning? His obedience was all the more puzzling when one considers the fact that Japan was invaded by the Mongol Yuan dynasty just over a century before. If the defeat of the Mongols had stiffened Japan's national pride, why would this pride fail to impact on Yoshimitsu's policy toward China? After all, this pride was part of what stimulated Kanenaga and Yoshimochi's hardline policies towards China before and after Yoshimitsu's rule. One must also note that Yoshimitsu's opening to China in 1401 was purely his own initiative, not compelled by Chinese threat, lured by Chinese inducements, or persuaded by Chinese diplomats.

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[62] MS, 6728; and MSLLZ, 440.
[63] MS, 6729; and MSLLZ, 441.
[64] Sansom 1961, 169.
[65] MS, 6729; and MSLLZ, 443-5.

The answer, therefore, must be sought in Japan's domestic and international environments at the time.

The most frequently cited cause behind Yoshimitsu's accommodation is his motive for trade and profit. The Ashikaga shogunate's domestic economic base was shaky. According to Cheng Liang-Sheng, the bakufu only owned landholdings around Kyoto, though in practice it may have had a wider resource base.[66] Maintaining a balance of payments was hard for the bakufu, yet Yoshimitsu lived a life of extravagance far surpassing that of any shogun of the previous Kamakura bakufu (1185-1333).[67] His most well-known personal project is the Kitayama villa and its centerpiece, the Golden Pavilion, built between 1397 and 1407. Logically, the bakufu would need overseas source of revenue to compensate its domestic financial weakness.

Moreover, the fact that Koetomi, a Hakata merchant who had just returned from China, was deputy envoy of the first mission in 1401 demonstrates the commercial nature of the mission.[68] The demand for trade from merchants in western Japan was strong. Koetomi had advised Yoshimitsu on the desirability of commercial relations with China. The shogun must have found the suggestion very appealing. The bakufu's treasury was almost empty. According to Sansom, Yoshimitsu was in such financial difficulty that he would sink his pride for a handsome cash revenue from trade. "[I]n all likelihood he had learned from monks and traders thirsty for renewed intercourse that the way to get concessions from Chinese dignitaries was to pour out supplications and flattery."[69] Sansom thus concludes that Yoshimitsu's humble style does not mean he regarded himself as a tributary of China. He might have simply thought that "a little polite fiction was a fair price to pay for the benefits of peaceful trade."[70] As for wearing Chinese dress and lighting incense before an imperial rescript from China, it was the kind of theatrical performance that Yoshimitsu

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[66] Cheng 1981, 355; and Hall 1990, 219-225.
[67] Sansom 1961, 151-3.
[68] Grossberg 2001,.35-6.
[69] Sansom 1961, 172.
[70] Ibid., 173.

enjoyed.[71]

Indeed, Japan could gain considerably from "tributary" trade with China. The terms of tally trade China and Japan concluded in 1404 were very favourable to Japan. It could take to the continent various tributary and "supplementary" articles. In return for bringing tribute, Yoshimitsu received from the Chinese emperor such valuable gifts as silver, copper coins, silk fabrics, household utensils, and bedding.[72] The "supplementary" articles were the real substance of trade. They were sold to Chinese buyers by merchants and also by officials who travelled in the ships. The most important item was sulphur, the remainder consisting of the products of Japanese craftsmanship, such as swords, lacquer chests, bronze vessels, and fans. These were purchased by Chinese merchants and private persons, payment being either in kind or in copper coin. Certain Chinese goods, especially silk fabrics, books, drugs, and porcelain, brought an especially good profit when sold in Japan.

The Japanese particularly welcomed Chinese copper coin. Japan had not minted its own currency since 958, but from the twelfth century, with the growth of the economy, Chinese money started to circulate in Japan. From the thirteenth century onwards it was used increasingly in domestic tax payments. Japanese merchants had started to import Chinese coins since the 1170s.[73] Thus, in addition to the enormous profits derived from it, the tally trade gave the bakufu monopoly control over the Chinese coins imported into Japan and thereby a status equivalent to that of a central mint.[74]

The benefits of the tally trade were not just economic, but also political. Ronald Toby observes that Yoshimitsu's control of the tally trade "gave him a powerful tool with which to control recalcitrant *shugo* and religious institutions."[75] Above all, this means reining in the recalcitrant local power houses in Kyushu. This is in turn related

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[71] Ibid., 172.
[72] Wang 1953, 35.
[73] Verschuer 2002, 419. On Japan's importation of Chinese coins, see also Shōji 1990, 408-9; Yamamura 1990, 358-60; Totman 2005, 109, 155; and Hurst 1999, 836-7.
[74] Hall 1990, 223.
[75] Toby 1977, 331-2; see also Grossberg 2001, 36-7.

to the second major cause behind Yoshimitsu's accommodation, namely, his need for legitimacy in Japanese politics.

Although by 1400 Yoshimitsu was clearly the dominant figure in Japan and had overcome all major oppositions, he was not able to reconcile every regional force. He needed to convince the *shugo* of the legitimacy of his position and the benefits he could bring to them. Kenneth Alan Grossberg argues that Yoshimitsu's main objective was "the establishment of his family's dynastic power on the basis of a legitimacy far broader than the one he had inherited."[76] To this end, he "adroitly balanced the society's conflicting forces to his own advantage by pitting *shugo* against *shugo*, Northern against Southern Court, and new mercantile elements eager for trade against hardline conservatives who took umbrage at Japan's new status as a tributary of the Ming empire."[77]

Relationship with China would enhance his prestige and boost his legitimacy in Japanese politics. As Bruce Batten argues, Chinese goods were desired not just for their economic value but also because they conferred prestige on those who had access to them. Differential access to foreign goods could improve Yoshimitsu's position vis-à-vis his domestic rivals. Batten claims that "the desire for prestige and/or political legitimacy was the primary motivation for *most* foreign relations—diplomatic, military, and commercial—initiated by Japanese leaders during premodern times."[78] Surely monopolization of the relations with China itself would be a sign of authority in a decentralized political system, not to mention investiture by the Chinese emperor as "king of Japan."

Yoshimitsu may have also sought legitimation from China for a more intriguing reason. Sansom suggests that the title "king of Japan" would be a major step for Yoshimitsu to depose the Japanese emperor and usurp the Japanese throne for

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[76] Grossberg 2001, 28.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Batten 2003, 147 (emphasis in original).

himself.[79] This did not happen, not for his lack of effort, but for his lack of luck. Some Japanese scholars have argued that "Yoshimitsu endeavoured to mobilize all of his power, will, and wile to supplant the imperial lineage so that a new Ashikaga dynasty could be begun. His grand design was foiled only by his death."[80] If this was his plan, then his opening to China may indeed have been a well-intended design to obtain external legitimation for his future emperorship. Yoshimitsu reached the end of the domestic legitimation process when he became Chancellor in 1394, having appropriated imperial prestige and the remaining vestiges of court authority. But as Grossberg observes, "the more he adopted traditional imperial authority, the less effective was the puppet emperor as guarantor of shogunal legitimacy, until eventually Yoshimitsu found it expedient to seek other sources of legitimation. Foreign relations between the Muromachi Bakufu and the Ming empire should initially be viewed in this domestic context."[81] To be called "king of Japan" may be exactly what Yoshimitsu had wanted. He could at least demonstrate that "the shogun was to be Japan's head of state and could rule in his own name if he so desired."[82]

Historians have speculated a third cause, related to Japan's international standing, behind Yoshimitsu's accommodation. Since the 1220s, Japanese pirates had pillaged the littoral of East Asia. The Wako problem not only destabilized the coasts of Korea and China, but affected Japan's international position as well. In effect it contributed to Japan's political isolation in the region, making it the "orphan of East Asia." To be a legitimate and effective ruler, Yoshimitsu needed to do something about this. Tanaka Takeo believes that Yoshimitsu's investiture as "king of Japan" was "not simply a whimsical or wilful act by an upstart military dictator, but rather an important step in the establishment of Japan's position in East Asia."[83] John Whitney Hall and Jurgis Elisonas concur. Trade with China was a conscious effort by Yoshimitsu to project Japan into the mainstream of East Asian affairs, an effort to gain recognition as a member of the wider East Asian community. Within Japan, the

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[79] Sansom 1961, 172.
[80] Akira and Yamamura 1992, 48.
[81] Grossberg 2001, 34.
[82] Ibid., 36.
[83] Takeo 1977, 177.

relationship with China was meant to demonstrate that the shogun, as chief of the military estate, also had full control of Japan's foreign affairs.[84]

Strikingly, all of the three explanations above demonstrate Yoshimitsu's self-interest in accommodating the Ming; none of them shows any perception of Chinese authority on the part of the shogun and his bakufu. If they are valid, then Yoshimitsu's strategy should be more properly characterized as bandwagoning for economic profit, political legitimacy, and international status. Can we then conclude that even having a ruler as cooperative as Yoshimitsu failed to bring Chinese authority over Japan? Not yet. Yoshimitsu's obedience, particularly his prompt missions to China and suppression of Japanese piracy, could just as well result from his perception of legitimacy in Ming overlordship. Since he was so consistent in accommodating China, and since his real motive cannot be known for sure, one cannot easily tell whether this was a result of his self-interest or Ming authority.

I shall suggest, however, that even if Yoshimitsu acted out of self-interest, that self-interest would be heavily diluted by his real admiration of Chinese culture. He may not have found that he "ought to obey" Chinese instructions, but equally he could not have felt repulsion against China. His admiration of, or at least remarkable respect for, China can be seen from his exceptional treatment of Chinese envoys in Japan. He usually went as far as Hyōgo to greet and to bid farewell to them, on which occasion he dressed himself in a Chinese costume and, seated in a palanquin, was carried by several Chinese bearers. The admiration was a direct result of the influence of Buddhist monks in Japan. Yoshimitsu even studied certain Chinese classics under the monk Gidō.[85] These monks were not just ambassadors between China and Japan, but also architects of the relationship itself. Monks on both sides strongly desired a normal relationship between the two countries that they could enjoy to the advantage of their faith. Many Japanese monks, like Kenchū Keimi, had made three or four visits to China, dominating and carrying out indispensable work

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[84] Hall 1990, 193; and Elisonas 1991, 242.
[85] Sansom 1961, 160-1.

in Japan's communication with China.

Many scholars have noted the ubiquity of Buddhism in medieval Japan.[86] Since the introduction of Buddhism into Japan in the sixth century, Buddhist monks had been key figures in the importation of Chinese culture to Japan. After the introduction of the Zen sect in the second half of the twelfth century, Buddhists became increasingly the men of letters of Japan, and their monasteries the sole centers of learning.[87] In Yoshimitsu's time, Buddhist monks, especially those of the Zen sect, exercised an immense influence over Japanese society and culture in general and the shogunate in particular. Some of Yoshimitsu's closest advisors were monks.[88] Thus it is not surprising at all that monks should be Japan's ambassadors to China. One Japanese author even goes so far as to suggest that the correspondence between Japan and China was all entrusted to monks because Japanese generals of Yoshimitsu's time were all unlettered and could not understand the Chinese language.[89]

The origin of Zen's great success in Japan lied of course in its role as a carrier of Chinese culture. It was perfectly suited for this role because since Song times, it had been intimately associated with Chinese court life and with its elite scholarship and arts. Upon the decline of the Southern Song and its overthrow by the Mongols in the late thirteenth century, Zen masters willingly traveled to Japan in the quest for more favorable conditions to work and propagate their faith.[90] Eventually they created a remarkable Buddhist culture in Japan. Because they were all well versed in Chinese, and many of them were ardent admirers of the Chinese civilization, this culture was also very much "Chinese". Cheng Liang-Sheng even assertsa that in Yoshimitsu's time the Japanese court was brimming with a kind of "China worship."[91]

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[86] For general discussions, see Kazuo 1990; and Collcutt 1990.

[87] Wang 1953, 3.

[88] This phenomenon was not limited to the Muromachi bakufu. In fact, the Ashikaga merely continued and extended a pattern started in the Kamakura bakufu. During the Kamakura period, a great number of priests from both Japan and China crossed the sea to stay in the other country. Approximately eighty Japanese priests studied in China in the period between 1168 and 1280, and more than thirty Chinese priests arrived in Japan between 1250 and 1350. The major Kamakura leaders each had their favourite Chinese adviser. See Verschuer 2002, 421.

[89] See Wang 1953, 34.

[90] Varley 1981, 465.

[91] Cheng 1981, 240.

That Yoshimitsu believed in Chinese cultural superiority was in little doubt. To what extent his learning of it was able to socialize him into accepting Chinese overlordship and eventually believing in the legitimacy of this overlordship is a more contentious question. After all, early Ming rulers did not spend a great amount of time sending envoys to carry out a persuasion strategy towards the Japanese shogun. The work was instead done largely by Japanese monks, who injected Chinese culture into Japan, and persuaded Yoshimitsu, together with merchants, of the desirability of opening tributary relations with China. Since the issue of how much authority Ming China possessed over Yoshimitsu's Japan cannot be settled definitively, we may simply leave at the thought that Sino-Japanese relations under the Yongle emperor and Ashikaga Yoshimitsu were more hierarchic than any other period in the early Ming.

ISOLATION AFTER 1411

Yet the goodwill Yoshimitsu gained from the Ming was quickly squandered by his son Yoshimochi. At first, Yoshimochi followed the tradition set by his father. He sent a mission to the Ming court to announce Yoshimitsu's death in January 1409.[92] When the Chinese envoy sent by Yongle arrived to offer consolation and investiture, he went to Hyōgo to meet him. In 1410, he sent Kenchū Keimi to the Ming court with tribute of native products and a petition expressing his gratitude for the posthumous name given his father and Chinese imperial approval of his own succession to the Japanese "throne." He also turned over to the court pirates captured by the Japanese.[93] Yet this mission proved to be the end of Sino-Japanese harmony in the early Ming period, probably also the last official Japanese mission during the Yongle reign. When Yongle sent Wang Jin to Japan in 1411, Yoshimochi not only declined to give him an audience but also blocked his return to China. His change of attitude toward the Ming was abrupt yet firm. The shogun ceased to send tribute for the remaining years of the Yongle reign.

[92] MS, 6729; and MSLLZ, 445.
[93] MS, 6729; and MSLLZ, 446.

No official contact existed between China and Japan for the next six years. In 1418, it is recorded in Chinese sources that an envoy sent by Yoshimochi appeared at the Ming court. The envoy was the governor of Hyūga, Ōsumi, and Satsuma, Shimazu Hisatoyo. Asking the Yongle emperor to pardon Yoshimochi, Hisatoyo bore a petition couched in most humble terms. In it Yoshimochi explicitly called himself a vassal of the Ming, attributed Japan's failure to pay tribute to the excessive activities of the pirates, and asked for permission to present tribute as before.[94]

It is, however, quite doubtful whether Hisatoyo could have been sent by Yoshimochi. To begin with, given Yoshimochi's strong attitude toward China in the past six years, it would be improbable for him to send such a humble embassy to China all of a sudden. Second, Hisatoyo was in firm control of the three south Kyushu provinces of Hyūga, Ōsumi, and Satsuma at the time. Such a powerful *shugo* would not have gone as Yoshimochi's envoy to China. The Ashikaga had trouble controlling regional barons, a difficulty compounded in Kyushu by the fact that the region had a historical separatist tendency and that the dominant military houses there tended to form local coalitions to ward off outside interference.[95] The mission, therefore, most likely came from Hisatoyo himself. The *shugo* and merchants in Kyushu had long sought to trade with China thanks to geographical convenience. The humble memorial may have been written at the instigation of the Chinese envoy Lü Yuan in a desperate effort to minimize the gravity of the failure of his 1417 mission.[96] That the Wako activities in no case abated and that Yoshimochi never sent a tributary mission afterwards give further credence to this interpretation.

Yoshimochi did send a reply to the Yongle emperor's frustrated reprimand of him in 1418. In it he refused to open relations with the Ming, and denied all responsibility for Japanese piracy. While preferring an isolationist strategy toward the Ming, he also challenged Chinese superiority by articulating Japan's national myth and a kind of proto-nationalism. It read in part:

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[94] MS, 6729; and MSLLZ, 452-3.
[95] Hall 1990, 201.
[96] Wang 1953, 49. Cheng Liang-Sheng concurs; Cheng 1981, 353.

When my late father was sick, the fortuneteller said: "The gods have cursed him...At that time sacred gods said through the agency of a man: "Ever since antiquity our country has never called itself a vassal of a foreign land. Of late, you have changed the way of the former sage sovereigns; you have accepted the [Chinese] calendar and [Chinese] seal and have not declined them. This is why you have incurred illness." Thereupon, my late father was greatly frightened and vowed to the bright gods that henceforth he would never receive envoys or orders from foreign countries. Accordingly, he passed on to his sons and grandsons this admonishment to be strictly observed and never to be forgotten.

That I neither received the envoys nor sent a single person is not because I dare rely on the unassailable [position of this country] to refuse submission. I am doing this merely in conformity with the will of the bright gods and in respect of the instructions of my late father. Of old, when the Mongol forces came a second time with one million soldiers aboard their ships, they were entirely without success and drowned in the sea. What was the reason for this? It was not only human strength; in reality the divine soldiers invisibly helped us in our defense. Those who have heard of this afar must deem it incredible. Yet how could we not be in awe of this manifestation of the divine spirits of our country since antiquity. These matters are detailed in our national histories.

Now we hear that [the Chinese] are going to send troops to smite us on the pretext that envoys have not been coming. They have told us to heighten our walls and deepen our moats. We do not need to heighten our walls or to deepen our moats; we will merely open our roads and meet them.

We do not intend to execute their [the Ming's] envoy; we only want him not

to come, and ours not to go and each of us to preserve our fixed territory.[97]

This is a clear policy statement toward China, outlining both its strategy and motives. The strategy is isolation, the suspension of communication with the Ming. The motivation is Japanese pride, expressed as a belief in the country's divinity. The Japanese had long asserted the divinity of their country in the expression that "Japan is the land of the gods." The rejection in 1270 of Khubilai Khan's demand that Japan submit to Mongol overlordship, for example, was predicated on it. They further attributed the defeat of the Mongol invasions to the aid of the "wind of the gods" (kamikaze).[98] The successful resistance against the Mongols had stimulated a sense of Japanese nationalism. Now the Japanese were no longer ready to submit to China, if they ever were.

There is a remarkable contrast in Japanese policies toward the Ming from 1400 to 1424. Between 1401 and 1408, Yoshimitsu not only accommodated the Chinese, but also acted like a loyal vassal of the Ming. At least on the surface, he dutifully performed his obligations as the ruler of a Chinese tributary state. In contrast, between 1411 and 1424, Yoshimochi firmly resisted Chinese wishes by adopting an isolationist strategy toward the Ming, all the while challenging Chinese superiority by evoking Japanese divinity. Clearly rulers' personalities played a great role in these contrasting strategies. Japan's option of isolation, however, was also offered by its felicitous geographical position vis-à-vis the continent.

Strategies and Structure in Sino-Japanese Relations

The same questions can be asked to evaluate the theory developed in Chapter 2 against evidence from Sino-Japanese relations during the early Ming. Does the relationship display a behavioral tendency between Chinese domination and Japanese accommodation and resistance? What are the respective Chinese and Japanese

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[97] Wang 1953, 52-3.
[98] Toby 1984, 213-5.

strategies toward each other? What are the motivations behind these strategies? The answers broadly support the theory's propositions. Japanese resistance, however, appears as a more prominent response to the Ming than in the case of Sino-Korean relations. The difference is largely explained by the factor of geography as well as Japanese rulers' national pride and historical memory.

CHINESE STRATEGIES OF DOMINATION

Early Ming China's strategies toward Japan as well as the motivations behind them were remarkably similar to those toward Korea. As in the case of Korea, Ming rulers wanted to control Japanese policies in two areas: tributary relations with the Ming and policies toward the Wako. And for the same reasons: legitimacy and security. Japan's submission as a tributary state would help demonstrate the emperors' legitimacy as the Son of Heaven and thus help consolidate their regime. Control over its Wako policy would help maintain security and stability in the Ming's east coast. Of course, obtaining Japanese loyalty as a vassal state would guarantee the solution of the Wako problem (provided that Japanese rulers were able to suppress piracy), since a loyal vassal had to perform its obligations toward the superior.

As with Korea, the Hongwu emperor adopted two primary strategies toward Japan: persuasion and blackmail. Each corresponded roughly to the early and late periods of his reign. In his first few rescripts, he hoped to persuade Japan to enter tributary relations with the Ming and, by extension, to place upon it a normative obligation of suppressing piracy. Thus, in his February 1369 rescript, he evoked historical precedents to remind Japan of the historical pattern in East Asian politics. He tried to emphasize the benevolence of China, and the benefits his empire could bring if other countries willingly submitted. In his 1370 rescript, he recounted his success in creating a new Chinese dynasty and obtaining tributes from other countries, all in an effort to persuade Japan that submitting to China was both morally correct and practically imperative. In a show of benevolence, he sent some captured pirates back to Japan in 1370. The most conspicuous act of his persuasion strategy was the decision to send the monks Zuchan and Keqin to Japan in 1372 after receiving a

Buddhist mission from Prince Kanenaga one year earlier.

But the emperor grew steadily impatient with Japan's "intransigence." As early as in March 1369, after hearing news of Japanese piracy, he sent a threatening rescript to command Japan's obedience. In the 1370 rescript, he warned the Japanese "king" to be cautious so as to "prolong the line of succession." In 1376 he threatened with an invasion. In 1380 he started calling the Japanese "stupid eastern foreigners." Finally, in 1381, he issued his last threat of war to Kanenaga as well as one to Yoshimitsu. These were all instances of his blackmailing Japan to force it to suppress piracy. In these years he seemed to have become disillusioned with bringing Japan into tributary relations and did not even bother to try persuasion anymore.

In his later years, Hongwu apparently realized that the Japanese were either too "stupid" or too recalcitrant to be transformed. He could manipulate tributary politics to extract concessions from Korea as the Koreans valued tributary relations with the Ming greatly. But he lacked any effective leverage over the Japanese because Japan was not in proper tributary relations with the Ming in the first place. Partly for reasons of geography, Japan, unlike Korea, had no distinct idea of *sadae*. Cultural borrowing had not produced a truly deferential view toward China. On the contrary, the Mongol invasions increased Japanese hostility toward the continent. Moreover, Japanese rulers did not perceive as much usefulness from Chinese investiture as their Korean counterparts did. In the early Ming, the leverage of investiture was completely lacking because Japan was in a civil war and had no single ruler in need of external legitimation.

Persuasion may create Chinese authority over Japan, but again, Hongwu was less enthusiastic with persuasion than he was with blackmail. Interestingly, he failed to use another conceivable strategy—inducement by granting Japan favorable material benefits—to win it over. He had a particular antipathy towards trade, or anything with a commercial nature in relations between China and other countries. Trade was regarded as an annoying aspect of tributary relations, to be limited as much as

possible. His son, the Yongle emperor, however, willingly adopted the strategy of inducement, which made a difference in subsequent Sino-Japanese relations.

Because Yoshimitsu actively sought tributary relations with the Ming and was very loyal, Yongle did not need to persuade him to accept Chinese overlordship. He needed only to induce the Japanese with material benefits in the early years of this reign. This he readily did with the installation of the tally trade in 1404. He also allowed Japanese missions to carry both tributary and trading goods to China, well aware of their profit motive. Moreover, he either gave a great amount of money and other gifts to Japanese envoys bearing tribute to his court or asked his own envoys to carry these to Japan, gifts whose lavishness often amazed the Japanese.

But when Yoshimitsu died in 1408, Yongle felt obliged to persuade the shogun's successor and son Yoshimochi to accept the same role Yoshimitsu had played. That was most often done by evoking the model behavior of Yoshimitsu. In his three main rescripts to Yoshimochi in 1408, 1417, and 1418, he praised the deceased shogun's great virtue and asked Yoshimochi to follow his father's example. When Chinese troops captured some pirates in 1417, Yongle, like Hongwu in 1370, decided to return them to Japan. He was hoping that his benevolence might move Japan's stubbornness.

In the face of Japan's continued isolation, however, Yongle also resorted to Hongwu's favorite strategy: blackmail. Coercive threats were obvious in his 1417 and 1418 rescripts. He may indeed have had the idea of attacking Japan. In a 1413 rescript to Korea, for example, Yongle said that he wanted to punish the Japanese by a military campaign.[99] But like his father, he could not really execute the threat. In the end, he had to accept Japanese isolation.

JAPANESE STRATEGIES OF ACCOMMODATION AND RESISTANCE

As with the Koreans, the Japanese accommodated as well as resisted Chinese wishes.

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[99] Huang 1994, 292.

What distinguishes the Japanese response from the Korean one, however, is that the former more readily resisted the Ming than the latter, partly due to the opportunity afforded by Japan's geographical position but also because Japan had a more distinctive sense of national identify and pride. Their strategies of resistance include balking, defying, and isolation.

The Japanese balked at Ming requests and ignored Chinese tributary norms, but nevertheless continued to send missions to the Ming in order to make full use of such an intercourse. They frequently exploited the Hongwu emperor's desire to establish tributary relations with Japan. This can be seen from Hongwu's complaint and reprimand of many "improper" or "illegitimate" missions from Japan. Kanenaga exploited "tributary" relations, in his five or six missions to China after 1376. So did Yoshimitsu in 1374 and 1380, Yoshihiro after 1387, and Shimazu Hisatoyo in 1418. These were not instances of bandwagoning, as the Japanese were not accommodating the Ming but rather seeking profit from trade by violating Ming regulations.

Defying is a strategy whereby Japan not only refused to accommodate Chinese wishes, but also opposed or resisted them with boldness.[100] Conceptually, it falls between the strategies of balking and challenging.[101] When Kanenaga imprisoned and executed Chinese envoys in 1369 and detained them in 1372, he was openly defying the wishes of China. His most defiant act was his 1382 reply to the Hongwu emperor, in which he challenged the Chinese notion of a sinocentric world order. Similarly, Yoshimochi defied the Yongle emperor's assertions in a 1418 letter, refusing submission by evoking Japanese divinity. He further warned the Ming that Japan would be ready to meet Chinese invasion by force.

Isolation is a strategy whereby Japan tried to break off relations with China. Most clearly this was the policy of Yoshimochi. It was tried, however, both before and

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[100] Lake notes that "Defy is an interesting word to use within the context of international relations. It implies an inequality in status between actors and that the subordinate is renouncing the authority of the dominant party." Lake 2003, 318.

[101] In balking, states would not be bold enough to openly oppose the wishes of the strong. They just try to ignore what the strong tells them to do. In challenging, states go beyond mere opposition or resistance, and take up arms against the strong.

after Yoshimochi's time. Isolationism was evident after 894 when Heian Japan ceased formal relations with China, though private trading with the continent intensified and generated a wealth of revenues for the Heian court.[102] To some degree, it was also the conscious policy of Tokugawa Japan after the 1620s. Japan's geographical position, separated from the Asian continent by the sea, made such a strategy possible in the first place.

These strategies of resistance demonstrate the Ming's lack of authority over Japan. Sinocentrism met stiff resistance from the Japanese. What about the Japanese accommodation with the Ming? Kanenaga briefly paid tribute to the Ming court in 1371, if we can believe the accounts in Chinese sources. But even so, his accommodation was instrumental, as he swiftly changed his position afterwards. Yoshimitsu's accommodation between 1401 and 1408 is a much more complicated and interesting story. Even though I have listed all the major reasons historians have contemplated for Yoshimitsu's obedience, it is not clear whether the shogun was socialized into believing Chinese superiority. It seems, however, that a certain degree of authoritative politics was at work in Sino-Japanese relations during this short period.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter shows that the behavioral pattern in Sino-Japanese relations in the early Ming dynasty is one of Chinese domination vis-à-vis Japanese accommodation and resistance. Early Ming rulers tried political domination for broadly the same reasons in their attempts at domination over Korea: the need to demonstrate legitimacy and maintain security along the Chinese coast. Japanese rulers tried resistance more than their Korean counterparts, thanks primarily to Japan's island position as well as its national identity and pride.

For a short period between 1401 and 1408, Yoshimitsu may have submitted to the

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[102] Hurst 1999, 632-3.

Ming. The mechanism of socialization suggested by the theory of Chinese primacy—Chinese persuasion and Japanese learning—were both present in this case. Indeed, Yoshimitsu, in addition to being influenced by his Buddhist advisors who were true believers of the superiority of the Chinese civilization, also learned Chinese culture himself. The question is whether his learning was deep enough to produce a perception of the legitimacy in Chinese rule over him. The answers given by historians tend to be "no," and they have identified Yoshimitsu's self-interested motives in opening tributary relations with the Ming. If they are right, then Yoshimitsu's accommodation with the Ming should also be seen as bandwagoning for profit, legitimacy, and status. This controversy aside, the Japanese strategies of balking, defying, and isolation show that Sino-Japanese relations during this period were much more anarchic than hierarchic.

Chapter 5

Early Ming China and the Mongols

This chapter further evaluates the theory of Chinese primacy by examining Sino-Mongol relations in the early Ming dynasty. As with Sino-Korean and Sino-Japanese relations, this relationship cannot be viewed as a relationship between two unitary states or political entities with fixed boundaries. Both the early Ming and the Mongols were "moving": The Ming was expanding and consolidating its empire not only in the north, but also in the south and the west; the Mongols, needless to say, were again on the march as nomads since they had by then been ejected from China proper.

The evidence shows that domination over the Mongols was the Ming's strategic objective in the north, an objective necessitated by, in the minds of early Ming emperors, consolidating the legitimacy of their rule and achieving security on the northern frontier. To this end, they practiced the classic Chinese grand strategy of "wei de jianshi" (威德兼施) or "gang rou bingji" (刚柔并济), that is, "might combined with virtue". War, blackmail, inducement, and persuasion were the embodiment of this grand strategy. The Mongol objectives, on the other hand, ranged from mere survival to steppe hegemony. For a variety of purposes, they defied, bandwagoned, and challenged the Ming. These strategies demonstrate the more anarchic nature of Sino-Mongol relations in the early Ming.

Chinese Attempts at Domination

THE HONGWU REIGN: EXPANSION AND CONSOLIDATION

When Zhu Yuanzhang enthroned himself as the Hongwu emperor of the Ming dynasty in Nanjing on 23 January 1368, his regime had only consolidated its base in the lower Yangtze. The vast territories to the north and south had yet to be incorporated. The year 1368 saw intensive Ming campaigns against Yuan loyalists

and regional rebels in both the South China coast and the North China plain. Naturally, Hongwu sent his best generals—among them the celebrated Xu Da and Chang Yuchun—to wage the northern campaign (*beifa* 北伐) and deal a final blow to the crumbling Yuan dynasty.[1] Only after the Yuan was overthrown could Hongwu claim the Mandate of Heaven to rule *Zhongguo*. Xu Da took the Yuan capital Dadu (the present Beijing) on 14 September. The Yuan emperor, Toghon Temür (r. 1332-70), and the crown prince, Ayushiridara (r. 1370-8), escaped with some of the court barely in advance of the Ming armies and fled first into Shangdu (Kaiping) and then into Yingchang in Inner Mongolia.[2] The Yuan dynasty remained only in name, later to be called the Northern Yuan as it was in exile in Mongolia.

Yet the security threat from the Mongols was a paramount concern for the early Ming rulers. Although the capture of the Yuan capital symbolized the transfer of the Mandate of Heaven to the Ming, it failed to eliminate the Mongol threat. The Yuan emperor fled north, with a sizeable number of his officials and soldiers. Toghon Temür's temporary court at Yingchang became a natural center of attraction for Mongol refugees and other Yuan loyalists. Yuan rule certainly had not ended as Toghon Temür and his successors continued to proclaim their own reign titles and pose a rival legitimacy claim to Ming rule. More ominously, Kökö Temür, the best Yuan general at the time, and lesser Yuan regionalists like Li Siqi controlled all of Shanxi and Shaanxi upon the fall of Beijing. They thus had a common frontier with Ming Sheng, the ruler of Sichuan, another important region yet to be conquered. The Ming's northern campaign of 1368 achieved more at driving out the Mongols than at eliminating or incorporating them.

To further expand and consolidate the empire, Ming generals conquered Shanxi and Shaanxi by 1370. Hongwu, now determined to eliminate the Mongols, ordered a two-pronged offensive against them. Li Wenzhong and Feng Sheng would attack the Yuan emperor at Yingchang through the Juyong Pass, while Xu Da would march

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[1] MS, 14-5.
[2] MS, 18, 6831; Dreyer 1982, 63; and Dreyer 1988, 97.

from Xi'an in search of Kökö Temür.[3] This was an offensive strategy of conquest driven by security considerations in the north.[4] Chinese sources explicitly single out the elimination of the "frontier worry" (*bianhuan* 边患) as the motive behind the 1370 campaigns.[5] The success of these campaigns established Ming rule in eastern Inner Mongolia and the Gansu corridor.

Defeating the recalcitrant Mongols with military might, Hongwu wasted no time in showing his benevolence to the captured and surrendered. While seizing power from the Mongols, Hongwu acknowledged the legitimacy of the Yuan, announced that "no difference exists between the Chinese and foreigners" (*Hua yi wu jian* 华夷无间), and promised favorable treatment of those who came to surrender.[6] After the 1370 campaigns, Hongwu granted Maidiribala, Ayushiridara's young son captured by Li Wenzhong, the title "Marquis of Chongli," gave the deceased Yuan emperor the posthumous title of "Shundi," and drew up a eulogy himself. The strategy worked up to a point, as several Yuan generals came to offer submission to the Ming.[7] Towards its primary targets, however, it had little effect. In July and November 1370 Hongwu twice sent a rescript urging Ayushiridara to submit. Late in December he sent another rescript, this one addressed to the remaining Mongol leaders as well as to Ayushiridara himself.[8] In the rescripts Hongwu also threatened them with war if they did not comply.[9] Although many lesser Mongol princes defected to the Ming, Kökö Temür and Ayushiridara remained adamant.

This compelled Hongwu to continue both war and diplomacy. The Mongols remained a serious threat to the Ming in two ways. First, their incursions into the Ming frontier constituted a physical security threat. In the 1370s the Northern Yuan still vaguely hoped to restore dynastic rule in the south. Second, the Mongol pretension to continuing Yuan rule posed a legitimacy threat to the Ming regime.

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[3] MS, p. 6831; and Dreyer 1982, 72.
[4] The Ming might also have wanted to deprive the Sichuan regime of any hope of Mongol assistance, as it made diplomatic efforts to induce the Sichuan government to surrender without fighting in 1369-70. Dreyer 1982, 72.
[5] MS, 6831.
[6] Mao and Li 1994, 91-2.
[7] MS, 6831.
[8] DMB, 16.
[9] MS, 6831; Dreyer 1982, 74; and Pokotilov 1976, 7.

Thus, although the Yuan had been overthrown, the transfer of the Mandate of Heaven—the basis of imperial legitimacy—had not been completed, at least not voluntarily on the part of Yuan dynasts. As long as the Northern Yuan existed, Hongwu's claim to the Mandate of Heaven could be potentially challenged.

Hongwu thus hoped for a formal acknowledgment of Ming superiority from Ayushiridara and a renunciation of the latter's claim to the imperial throne.[10] This would not only further fragment the Mongol tribes, help bring them under Ming control, and thus alleviate the burden of frontier defense, but also eliminate the Mongol threat to the legitimacy of Ming rule. But since Ayushiridara was unwilling to surrender, only conquest and domination in the steppe could achieve Hongwu's objectives.

In 1372 the emperor ordered a massive campaign to conquer all three Mongol strongholds in Karakorum, the rest of the Gansu corridor, and Inner Mongolia. The fact that he ordered Xu Da to attack the traditional Mongol capital Karakorum, as Arthur Waldron points out, "suggests that he may have hoped to take that city, win submission from the remaining nomads, and thereafter to govern the Mongol steppe as part of his empire, just as his Yuan predecessors had."[11] In 1372 the Mongols did not pose a visible threat, having just been defeated by the Ming two years earlier. Rather, Hongwu was encouraged by the 1370 victory and the 1371 conquest of Sichuan, further offended by Ayushiridara's and Kökö Temür's refusal to submit, to attempt a complete conquest of Mongolia and thus eliminate the Mongol threat once and for all.

The campaign, however, ended in a major failure for the Ming, and put it on the defensive for the next fifteen years. Between 1368 and 1372, the Ming scored every major victory against the Mongols, all the while conquering and incorporating Shanxi, Shaanxi (including the Gansu corridor), Sichuan, and Liaodong into the

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[10] Dreyer 1982, 74.
[11] Waldron 1990, 74.

empire. Edward Dreyer argues that in 1372 Hongwu "was attempting to establish himself as the heir to the whole Yuan political tradition, in the nomadic areas as well as in the areas of Chinese habitation."[12] Between 1372 and 1387, in contrast, the Ming adopted a largely defensive posture, establishing a frontier garrison system to gain a foothold in the conquered territories north of Beijing. Military expeditions were taken primarily to repel Mongol raids.

What drove Hongwu to moderate his ambitions? Certainly the defeat of 1372 was crucial, and Kökö Temür's victory over Xu Da, the Ming's most talented and hitherto invincible general, might have daunted the Ming military establishment. A more important cause, however, is found in the inadequacy of Ming resources to sustain further attacks on the Mongols. By 1372, barely four years had passed since the Ming's founding. Hongwu had to spend resources elsewhere consolidating his expanding empire. Rebellions were mounting in newly conquered areas such as Guangxi, Huguang, Sichuan, and Shaanxi. Yunnan, ruled by the Yuan Prince of Liang, and the far southwest were still unconquered. Japanese piracy was growing into serious proportions that required troops to strengthen coastal defenses.[13] Even if Hongwu had wished to subjugate the Mongols by force after 1372, his military muscle would have fallen short as a result of continuous warfare throughout the founding of his empire.

For the next several years Hongwu intensified his efforts to win over the Mongols. In January 1373 he sent an envoy to the Northern Yuan emperor Ayushiridara. In October 1374 he sent Maidiribala back to Mongolia. Dispatching the return of Maidiribala with heavy gifts, Hongwu also gave Ayushiridara silk fabric clothes along with another summons to him to accept his authority.[14] Hongwu probably believed that four years of life in the Ming capital would have instilled a pro-Ming inclination into the heir to the Mongol throne and hoped that he would persuade his people to submit. Ayushiridara, however, once more ignored the Ming offer.

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[12] Dreyer 1988, 103, 106.
[13] Dreyer 1982, 75.
[14] MS, 6832; and DMB, 16.

Hongwu saw another chance of diplomatic settlement when Ayushiridara died in 1378. The hope, however, was a false one. The Ming's bet on the successor was Maidiribala, but in fact Ayushiridara was succeeded by his younger brother Toghus Temür (r. 1378-88/89), presumably because Maidiribala was discredited by his stay in Nanjing. Hongwu nevertheless took the chance to show new courtesy to the Mongols. He sent a special envoy to attend the mourning ceremonies and deliver his personal eulogy.[15]

The Mongols were unimpressed and the Ming had to resume military expeditions. In 1379-81, the Ming's successful expeditions alleviated the Mongol threat in the north. In 1387 Hongwu managed to receive the surrender of Naghachu in Manchuria.[16] The whole of Liaodong was now secure, and Hongwu was finally able to sever Korea's relations with the Mongols, a relationship the Koreans had ambiguously maintained since 1369. The Northern Yuan's base in Manchuria and its hope of using the Koreans against the Ming were thus completely lost.

Success invites the expansion of war aims. Encouraged by the surrender of Naghachu, Hongwu decided to take on the remaining Mongol resistance—that of the Northern Yuan emperor Toghus Temür in the Mongolian steppe, the focal point of Mongol loyalties. He ordered Lan Yu to take 150,000 men across the Gobi to crush the Yuan remnants. The goal was to eliminate the Mongol "frontier worry" once and for all, to "exterminate the remaining enemies of the north" and complete the failed missions of the 1372 campaigns.[17] With perseverance and luck, Lan Yu's army took the Mongol camp near Buyur Lake completely by surprise on the morning of 18 May 1388. The Yuan emperor escaped and fled into Outer Mongolia, only to be assassinated within a year. His death disrupted the always fragile succession practices of the Mongol royal house, fragmenting Mongol tribes without effective

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[15] MS, 6832; and DMB, 1293.
[16] MS, 6832-3.
[17] MS, 6833.

leadership for over a generation thereafter.[18] The campaigns in 1387-88 destroyed the unity of the Yuan dynasty in exile. Thereafter and especially during the Yongle reign, the Ming had to contend with a number of Mongol chieftains jostling for influence in the steppe.

During the remaining years of his reign, Hongwu sought to prevent the rise of Mongol power in the steppe. Hearing that formerly scattered Mongols after Toghus Temür's death were gathering around Nayur Buqa, Hongwu first tried to induce Nayur Buqa and his followers and then to attack them. Following their victory, Hongwu placed his two sons Prince of Yan and Prince of Jin to manage frontier affairs in the north, while sending generals to supervise frontier defense and military farming every year.[19] Apparently Hongwu wanted to have an enduring foothold in the steppe to ward off Mongol raids and destroy any dangerous concentration of Mongol power. At least two more campaigns were waged in the remainder of the Hongwu reign.

THE YONGLE REIGN: VIGOUR WITHOUT VISION

In the beginning of the Yongle reign, the Mongol world was divided into two rival groups competing for power. The Eastern Mongols (dada 韃靼), led by their powerful chieftain Arughtai, dominated central and southern Mongolia. The area of the Altai Mountains was the home of the Western Mongols, or Oirats (wala 瓦剌), led by their three chieftains Mahmud, Taiping, and Batu Bolod.[20] The Eastern Mongols posed the greater threat because of their geographical proximity to the Ming frontier. Holding the legitimate heir of Chinggis Khan, they claimed to rule the whole of the Mongolian steppe. Although they had by now abandoned the Yuan reign title, their refusal to acknowledge Ming superiority nevertheless posed a problem for the Ming. The Oirats, though farther west, were a potential threat as they wanted to establish their hegemony in the steppe from the west and were in frequent conflicts with the Eastern Mongols throughout the Yongle reign.

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[18] MS, 6833-4; and Dreyer 1982, 143.
[19] MS, 6834.
[20] MS, 6861.

Upon his enthronement, the Yongle emperor sent envoys to both the Eastern Mongols and the Oirats with gifts to notify them of his accession. Yongle, like Hongwu, claimed that as the "ruler of the *tianxia*" (*tianxia zhu* 天下主), he would make no distinction between the Chinese and foreigners (*bu fen hua yi* 不分华夷).[21] So long as the Mongols could come to submit, both would be regarded as his proper subjects. He also allowed trade to flourish freely along the frontier and particularly encouraged the trade of Chinese goods for Mongol horses.[22] Several missions were sent to both the Eastern Mongols and the Oirats, exhorting them to sent tribute and open "friendly relations" (*tonghao* 通好). The relationship between the Ming and the Mongols during the Hongwu reign was far from "friendly." Yongle was showing courtesies to his former adversaries in the hope of winning them over through inducement and persuasion. One of these missions was, however, detained by Guilichi, the khan of the Eastern Mongols.[23] Earlier Guilichi had earned Yongle's wrath by poisoning the prince of Hami whom the Ming court had enfeoffed.[24] But the emperor remained patient. While continuing diplomacy, he also ordered his generals to tighten frontier defense as the fighting between the Eastern Mongols and the Oirats often extended into the frontier region.[25]

In 1407, an Eastern Mongol envoy named Eryichi came to the Ming court. This was probably not a "tribute mission" as the *Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty* failed to mention any tribute (*gong* 贡) on the part of the Mongols and the *Official History of the Ming Dynasty* even omitted this mission entirely. Yongle nevertheless regarded it as important and ordered his troops to accompany the envoys on their way back to Mongolia. He seemed to be well aware of the nature of Eryichi's mission. As he told his generals in a secret edict: "Eryichi is the master (*shi* 师) of Guilichi and is possibly sent by him. As Guilichi wants to fight the *Wala* (the Oirats) westward, he

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[21] Mao and Li 1994, 92. It should be noted, however, that both emperors made contradictory statements about the nature of *Yi*. Announcing there was no difference between *Hua* and *Yi* was primarily intended to persuade the Mongols to submit. At times Hongwu and Yongle also regarded the *Yi* as having a different nature from Han Chinese and compared them to "birds and beasts." See Johnston 1995, 187.
[22] Mao and Li 1994, 100.
[23] MSLLZ, 4; and MS, 6834-5, 6861.
[24] DMB, 12.
[25] MS, 6835.

will have to move his families southward but fears the attack of our troops. So he has sent Eryichi to delay the march of our troops. It is also possible that Guilichi wants to submit but has not yet decided. So he has first sent the envoy to probe our intentions. It is also heard that the Mongols would soon raid the frontiers; you should carefully prepare for that."[26]

This analysis may not be correct, but Yongle demonstrated a certain understanding of steppe politics at the time. His acceptance of a non-tribute mission from a rival would surely challenge the "tribute system" framework in understanding China's foreign relations. Yet it may not be all that surprising. Because he was still hoping to win over the Eastern Mongols by diplomacy, Yongle might have thought that the acceptance of Eryichi's ambiguous mission could be one step toward establishing his eventual supremacy over them. After all, the emperor was noted for his flexibility in foreign affairs. According to Joseph Fletcher, Yongle was even willing to abandon his claim of superiority and address the ruler of the Timurid empire in Central Asia as an equal in a 1418 letter.[27]

Perhaps in an attempt to ascertain his conjectures, in November 1407, Yongle sent a rescript to Guilichi seven months after Eryichi's mission to the Ming. Formally, the emperor asked for an explanation of the detention of his envoy. Substantively, he was really pressuring the Mongol khan to make a decision about his attitude toward the Ming.[28] Guilichi, however, was murdered by Arughtai in 1408. The latter quickly started installing a new puppet, a descendant of Chinggis Khan named Bunyashiri as khan.[29] Yongle dispatched an envoy in February 1408 to explore Bunyashiri's intentions and sent a long rescript to apply more pressure two months later. In it he first tried to persuade Bunyashiri of Ming benevolence and how accepting Ming rule conforms to the "Way of Heaven." He next tried to induce Bunyashiri with political and economic benefits that would come with his submission. Finally he warned him

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[26] MSLLZ, 4-5.
[27] Fletcher 1968, 206-24.
[28] MSLLZ, 5.
[29] MS, 6835.

of the consequence of non-compliance.[30] But Bunyashiri sent no reply. The Ming was defied by the Yuan royal house, in the Hongwu as well as the Yongle reign.

Good news then came from the Oirats in the west. Yongle's first envoy to the Oirat camp was sent in 1403 but was briefly detained by the Oirat leader Mahmud. The emperor, undeterred, again dispatched embassies in 1404 and 1407 with usual gifts.[31] Finally, in October 1408, Mahmud sent tribute horses to the Ming court and asked for investiture. Yongle was pleased and in the summer of 1409 granted the titles of Shunning Wang to Mahmud, Xianyi Wang to Taiping, and Anle Wang to Batu Bolod.[32]

The timing of this investiture was important. Just days before it, Yongle heard that his envoy to the Eastern Mongols was killed by Bunyashiri.[33] Such defiance called for retaliation and the furious emperor ordered to intensify frontier defense and prepare expeditions against the Eastern Mongols. His investiture of the Oirats was most probably meant to keep them on his side so that they could check further Eastern Mongol expansion before his upcoming campaign against Bunyashiri and Arughtai. In fact, even without Ming efforts reconciliation or even alliance between the Eastern Mongols and the Oirats against the Ming were extremely difficult to contrive. But the Ming investiture of the Oirats precluded any possibility of the two bitter rivals' uniting themselves and enabled the Ming to deal with the Eastern Mongols separately. The Oirats, for their part, quickly defeated the encroaching Bunyashiri and Arughtai and drove them to the Kerülen River area. With this opportunity in sight, Yongle commissioned Qiu Fu one month later as grand general to conquer the Eastern Mongols.[34]

But Qiu Fu's defeat incensed Yongle. A month later he was determined to personally lead an expedition. In an edict to the crown prince, he said Qiu Fu's defeat had

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[30] MSLLZ, 5-6; and MS, 6835.
[31] DMB, 1036.
[32] MSLLZ, 6; and MS, 6861.
[33] MSLLZ, 6.
[34] Ibid., 7.

humiliated Ming authority. Unless the Eastern Mongols were exterminated, their aggressiveness will not bring fortune to the frontier.[35] He therefore wanted to restore Ming military prestige and alleviate the security threat on the frontier by conquering Bunyashiri and Arughtai. Meanwhile he bestowed gifts on the Oirats and reminded them of the Eastern Mongols' treacherousness.[36] Presumably this was meant to remind them of the need to stand firm against the Eastern Mongols. Thus securing the western front, Yongle began his first Mongolian campaign in March 1410. His objective, as stated in the campaign edict, was to "clear up the desert" (saoqing shamo 扫清沙漠), that is, to wipe out enemies in the Mongolian steppe.[37] This campaign split and weakened the Eastern Mongols for a time, but it failed to capture either Bunyashiri or Arughtai, allowing the latter to soon reassemble a large horde.

The defeated Arughtai then sent an envoy to present tribute horses to the Ming court in January 1411. The envoy tried to alienate the Ming and the Oirats by pointing out that the Oirats' submission was not "sincere".[38] Interestingly, two months later when Mahmud sent tribute to the Ming, he too tried to persuade Yongle of the untrustworthiness of Arughtai.[39]

It is not clear whether Yongle agreed with either of these men's assessment of the other, but he was surely aware of the Mongols' varied motives behind their tribute missions. From Yongle's reply to Arughtai's first mission we know that the emperor knew of the Oirats' "insincerity."[40] In the case of Arughtai, Yongle later said that Arughtai's coming to the court was due to his "lack of strength" (shiqiong 势穷), not out of his "true heart" (benxin 本心).[41] Does it matter whether the Mongols' "submission" was real or pretended? The Yongle emperor did not seem to care much. He was more concerned with demonstrating his legitimacy to rule "ten thousand directions" and his superiority over the "four foreigners." And that could be shown,

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[35] MSLLZ, 9.
[36] Ibid., 11.
[37] Ibid, 10.
[38] MSLLZ, 17.
[39] Ibid., 18.
[40] Ibid., 17.
[41] Ibid., 32.

at least on the surface, by Mongol tribute missions to his court. For the moment, therefore, he preferred the status quo of receiving tribute missions, pretended or otherwise, from both the Eastern Mongols and the Oirats since this would signal his superiority over them. From 1411 until his next campaign against Mahmud in 1414, then, Yongle could feel that his rule had extended to the entire Mongolian steppe.

Although Arughtai now sent regular tribute missions to the Ming, Mahmud, benefited from years of tributary relations with the Ming and the defeat of Arughtai, became restless. In 1412-13, his relations with the Ming court deteriorated. Confronted with Mahmud's increasingly defiant moves such as detaining his envoys and sending "arrogant" petitions, Yongle warned in early 1413: "If you can repent and apologize, I will treat you as before. Otherwise, I would assemble an army to punish your crime."[42] In the same year, both Arughtai's envoy and a certain Boyan Buqa came to the court to complain about Mahmud's wrongdoings. Yongle decided to give Mahmud one more chance, saying that if the Oirat leader did not send envoys to apologize in that autumn, he would march against him before it was too late.[43]

Knowing that a war with the Oirats was probably inevitable—he was not so much concerned with Mahmud's "insincerity", which he knew all along, as with the Oirats' increasing defiance, growing power, and their capability to do damage to the northern frontier—Yongle granted Arughtai the title of Hening Wang in August 1413, with additional titles for his mother and wife.[44] This was clearly intended to have Arughtai on his side in the upcoming campaign against Mahmud, just as he did when he invested Mahmud in 1409 before Qiu Fu's disastrous expedition against Arughtai. Finally, when in December 1413 the Ming garrison commander of Kaiping reported that Mahmud had led his horde near the Kerülen River preparing to raid the Ming frontier, Yongle decided to take a personal campaign against Mahmud.[45]

He left Beijing in April 1414. The campaign edict reads in part: "Now the four

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[42] MSLLZ, 19; and MS, 6862.
[43] MSLLZ, 20.
[44] MSLLZ, 20; and MS, 6836.
[45] MSLLZ, 21.

corners are trouble-free. Only the remaining caitiffs constitute a worry (*huan* 患), particularly the *Wala* (the Oirats). Repelling them and *Zhongguo* will be secure."[46] The rising power of the Oirats had begun to challenge Chinese dominance in the steppe and created a security threat for the northern frontier, which was further exacerbated by Mahmud's defiance. This defiance, of course, challenged Yongle's superiority in the steppe. It is essentially for these reasons that Yongle decided to conquer the Oirat Mongols. In June the Ming army defeated but failed to capture Mahmud.[47]

For the next few years Yongle could feel that he succeeded in re-establishing his dominance in the steppe. In early 1415, the three Oirat chieftains Mahmud, Taiping, and Batu Bolod sent envoys to present tribute horses and offered an "apology."[48] Although Yongle was not deceived—he called the Oirats' "apology" "cunning language to cover up wrongdoings" (*qiao yan wen guo* 巧言文过)—he nevertheless accepted the mission mindful of the need to show benevolence to his defeated enemy and, perhaps more importantly, to demonstrate that he again obtained submission from the Oirats.[49] Meanwhile Arughtai continued to present uninterrupted tribute until 1421. In 1415-21, then, Yongle could again claim to be the overlord of Mongolia.

But the emperor soon found himself having to deal with the rise of the Eastern Mongol power. The defeat of the Oirats again disrupted the balance of power in the steppe. To keep a balance of power among the Mongols was hard enough. To keep both of them weak and balanced against each other was even harder. Every time when one fell, the other soon rose. The stronger party, whoever it was, would then attempt to dominate the other, harass the Chinese, and establish hegemony in the steppe.

This was in fact what Arughtai tried to do after 1416. Yongle announced a campaign

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[46] Ibid., 22.
[47] MSLLZ, 22-5; MS, 6862; and Dreyer 1982, 179.
[48] MSLLZ, 26.
[49] MSLLZ, 26; and MS, 6862.

to chastise Arughtai in the autumn of 1421. Arughtai's raids into Xinghe in the spring of 1422 strengthened his determination. Between April 1422 and May 1424, Yongle launched three campaigns against Arughtai, all without capturing the Eastern Mongol chieftain. On 12 August 1424, before reaching the modern Great Wall line from the steppe, Yongle, perhaps China's most famous "emperor on horseback," died in camp.[50]

Mongol Resistance and Accommodation

The larger picture of Sino-Mongol relations during the Hongwu reign is of gradual Chinese advance into the steppe, and Mongol retreat and resistance against Chinese encroachment. Hongwu, as well as Yongle after him, aimed to establish his superiority over the Mongols by both offensive wars and diplomacy. Large numbers of Mongols surrendered. According to one account, over 800,000 Mongols surrendered to the Ming during the Hongwu and Yongle reigns.[51] Most of them were ordinary men and, with the exception of Naghachu, petty chieftains, the lesser kinds among the Mongol ruling elite. The most prominent ones and surely the primary targets of Hongwu's Mongolian strategies, such as the Yuan royal house and Kökö Temür, stood firm in defiance of the Ming's sustained military and diplomatic pressures. The Hongwu emperor could claim to have established Chinese hegemony in the steppe. Hegemony, however, is not the same as authority. A Ming authority or hierarchy in Mongolia can only be said to have been achieved over petty chieftains and their followers. It simply eluded Hongwu when it came to the Yuan royal house or its chief ministers and generals.

THE YONGLE REIGN: BETWEEN BANDWAGONING AND CHALLENGING

In the beginning of the Yongle reign, a rough bipolar order emerged in the steppe. Despite frequent fighting, some of which were carried out near the Ming frontier,[52] neither the Eastern Mongols under Arughtai nor the Oirats under Mahmud were able

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[50] MSLLZ, 37-9; MS, 6837; and Dreyer 1982, 182. For an introduction to Ming military campaigns, including the ones during the Hongwu and Yongle reigns mentioned in this chapter, see Mao and Wang 1994.
[51] Ma 2003, 225.
[52] MS, 6835.

to destroy the other. Because of the dearth of Mongol sources, we lack details about the struggles in this steppe bipolarity. We know, however, from the Chinese sources, that in the early years of the Yongle reign the Eastern Mongols were on the offensive against the Oirats. The *Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty* records, for example, a secret edict Yongle sent to his frontier generals in 1407 in which the emperor said that Guilichi, khan of the Eastern Mongols at the time, were about to move westward and fight the Oirats.[53]

The Eastern Mongol offensive would explain the Oirats' decision in 1408 to send tribute to the Ming court. Few historians have explained adequately why Mahmud, after five years (1403-08) of refusal, finally decided to send tribute and ask for Ming titles in October 1408. His change of attitude would need a reason. What reason could be more powerful than that of ensuring his survival and preserving his power against the encroaching Eastern Mongols? Bandwagoning with the Ming by sending it tribute would bring more valuable Chinese goods, such as paper money, silver, silk, etc., in return. It was therefore first and foremost a self-strengthening move. In the volatile nomadic world, Chinese wealth could buy tribesmen's obedience in times of conflict. According to Henry Serruys, Ming titles could also enhance the chieftains' prestige among the Mongols,[54] thus giving them a better chance to control their own followers in the struggle against the enemy.

That the Oirats were on the defensive is given further credence in an entry in the *Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty* which relates that in the summer of 1409 the Eastern Mongols indeed invaded the Oirat tribes. But by then the Oirats had apparently been strengthened or encouraged by their tributary relations with the Ming, for they defeated the Eastern Mongols and captured their livestock.[55] This would also challenge the existing interpretation among many historians that Mahmud repaid Yongle's investiture by attacking Arughtai or that Yongle encouraged him to

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[53] MSLLZ, 4.
[54] Serruys 1967, 99.
[55] MSLLZ, 7.

do so.[56] Mahmud was in fact on the defensive, and only defeated Arughtai when the latter invaded. His victory served Yongle's purpose of supporting the Oirats to weaken the Eastern Mongols, but this was first of all a result of his own defense and expansion against Arughtai.

Arughtai defied the Ming until his defeat by the Ming army in 1410. In January 1411 he sent tribute horses to the Ming court. His motive is easy to think of, and quickly confirmed by subsequent events leading up to Yongle's 1422 campaign against him. Severely defeated by the Ming, he now lacked necessary military capability to further his defiance. Assembling another horde from the scattered Mongols would take some time. Conciliation, or pretended submission, was thus necessary for the recovery of his strength. His coming to the Ming court, therefore, was a self-strengthening move just like that adopted by Mahmud a little over two years ago. Moreover, he was conscious of the consequence of his defeat for the balance of power in the steppe. Fearful of Oirat hegemony, he tried to alienate the quasi-alliance between his Oirat rivals and the Ming. Thus, his envoy told Yongle that the Oirats' submission was not "sincere," as they had not handed over the imperial seal of the Yuan dynasty to the Ming.[57] Indeed, if Arughtai had not sought some kind of rapprochement with the Ming, his tribe would probably have been displaced by a now much stronger Mahmud eager to establish Oirat hegemony in the steppe. Tribute to the Ming therefore served another crucial purpose: It could potentially bring Ming protection since he was now nominally Yongle's vassal, though that protection was unreliable. This motive could not escape the attention of Chinese scholar-officials, who pointed out that Arughtai "submitted" to the court because he was pressed by the Oirats to move southward and needed a breathing time near the Ming frontier.[58]

Arughtai's tribute missions to the Ming court continued in earnest, and the benefits he and his tribesmen accrued from this relationship justified his accommodation with the Ming. Between 1411 and 1424, according to Hok-Lam Chan, Arughtai sent

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[56] Pokotilov 1976, 28; Barfield 1989, 236; and Perdue 2005, 55.
[57] MSLLZ, 17.
[58] MSLLZ, 32; and MS, 6836.

twenty-seven missions to the Ming court, more than the court's normal regulation (once every year) allowed; in 1413 and 1414, he sent a total of eleven missions.[59] His tribute consisted mostly of horses. In return, the Ming court rewarded him and his envoys with paper money, silver, silk textiles, and supplies, gave them official titles, and paid handsomely for the tribute products as well.

In 1413 Arughtai was given the title of Hening Wang by the Yongle emperor. Ming titles were useful for the Mongols for both prestige and wealth. As Henry Serruys has pointed out, Ming titles or ranks were themselves a matter of prestige, but also of material interest, since the higher the Mongols' ranks the richer also the return presents they received for the tribute.[60] At the end of the year 1413, Arughtai sent a mission to request Ming titles for his 2962 subordinates. Early in 1414, he again requested Ming titles for his 129 subordinates; twice in the second half of 1414 he made the same requests. On all these occasions Yongle satisfied Arughtai's needs and bestowed titles as well as lavish gifts.[61] Apparently Arughtai was helping his subordinates and relatives share in the benefits of tributary relations with the Ming, thus strengthening the Eastern Mongols' position in the steppe.

Arughtai, however, revealed his strategic intentions both in the steppe and in his relations with the Ming at an early stage. His January 1411 mission with the purpose to alienate the Ming and the Oirats from each other has already been mentioned. One year later, Arughtai requested that the Ming accept him as overlord of the Jurchens and Tibetans,[62] thus clearly, though carelessly, exposing his intention to dominate the steppe. In a 1413 mission, his envoys asked Yongle to send an expedition against Mahmud and even offered his men as the Ming army's vanguard.[63] Arughtai was not only exploiting tributary relations with the Ming for material benefits, but also trying to exploit Ming power to weaken his rival and enhance his own position in Mongolia.

[59] Chan 1988, 265.
[60] Serruys 1967, 99.
[61] MSLLZ, 21, 25.
[62] Mao and Li 1994, 176, 182; and DMB, 13.
[63] MSLLZ, 20.

Yet the Oirats were also deft at exploiting relations with the Ming. Arughtai's fear of Oirat hegemony after his 1410 defeat by the Ming was well founded: Mahmud soon moved into the power vacuum in the steppe. To see how the Oirats tried to take advantage of the Eastern Mongols' defeat and exploit their warm relations with the Ming, one need only examine the nature of Mahmud's March 1411 mission, barely two months after Arughtai's first tribute mission to the Ming court. Mahmud's envoy reminded Yongle that Arughtai was obstinate and unruly. Regaining strength he would harm the frontier again, and envoys from countries in the northwest would not dare to go south. He hoped that the emperor could "plot" (tu 图) actions against Arughtai soon.[64]

Two observations should be made. First, by persuading the emperor of Arughtai's deception and the necessity of further actions against him, the Oirats were hoping that the Ming might hand them a cheap steppe hegemony by eliminating Arughtai. Second, one Mongol tribe's accusation of the other reveals an important aspect of Mongol relations with the Chinese, namely, powerful Mongol tribes would try to monopolize their relations with the Ming and eliminate rivals and potential enemies in order to control all tributary and trade relations with the Chinese for their own benefits. Intercepting other tribes' tribute missions, robbing their goods, or preventing them altogether from traveling to China: These were the means by which powerful chieftains sought to maintain their monopoly of relations with the Ming.

This further reveals why both the Eastern Mongols and the Oirats were so eager to establish hegemony in the steppe. Hegemony was, of course, itself desirable as it could reduce inter-tribe hostility and instability and demonstrate a chieftain's power. But steppe hegemony would also put the chieftain in a favorable position to benefit from China's immense economic resources, benefits that would not only help the nomads to develop a more secure economic base but also enable the ruler to deal more effectively with Chinese power and pursue more grandiose adventures. Thus,

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[64] Ibid., 18.

the Oirats spoke of the fear of Eastern Mongol control of the steppe's relations with the Ming once Arughtai regained his strength. But, would this not also be the preferred action of the Oirats when they were strong?

Indeed it was. Seeing no further Ming action against the Eastern Mongols, Mahmud in 1412 moved to kill their khan Bunyashiri, who had been in flight westward as a result of Yongle's 1410 campaign. Installing Delbek as new khan in the old Mongol capital Karakorum, Mahmud began to move east against Arughtai, with the obvious intent of uniting the Mongols and achieving hegemony in the steppe.[65] Then in the summer of 1412 he asked Yongle to destroy Arughtai. The ostensible reason given was that he had recovered the Yuan imperial seal from Bunyashiri and wanted to present it to the Ming but feared Arughtai's interception—another good indication of intra-Mongol politics in relation with the Ming. Further, Mahmud asked Ming rewards and even weapons for his tribesmen.[66]

Such requests are easily understandable as the Oirat leader was preparing to unite the steppe and thus needed Ming resources. Mahmud's ambition was further revealed in the complaint that Boyan Buqa, a certain Mongol who apparently came to submit, made to the Ming court in the summer of 1413: "Since murdering Bunyashiri, Mahmud has been arrogant and without restraint. He wanted to resist and compete with *Zhongguo*. It is not out of sincerity but for valuable goods such as gold and silk that he has sent envoys to the court. He frequently led his warriors into the frontier region and intercepted other tribute envoys, thus obstructing the passage in the north. It is better to exterminate him by force."[67]

Still, this question remains: If Mahmud had been benefiting handsomely from tributary relations with the Ming, why should he begin to offend the Ming directly even to the point of detaining Ming envoys sent by the Yongle emperor? His 1413 tribute mission to the Ming court was accompanied by an "arrogant" petition and

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[65] Chan 1988, 226.
[66] MSLLZ, 19; and MS, 6861.
[67] MSLLZ, 20.

requests for many rewards from the Ming. He further asserted that many of those who submitted to the Eastern Mongols in Gansu and Ningxia were his relatives and asked the emperor to return these to him.[68] Obviously this request was intended to expand the manpower of his horde. Finally in December 1413 the garrison commander of Kaiping reported that with the pretext of attacking Arughtai, Mahmud had led his horde near the Kerülen River and prepared to raid the Ming frontier. In the same month Arughtai also reported that the Oirats were preparing to pry into Kaiping, Xinghe, and Datong.[69]

Given that tributary relations with the Ming was a lucrative business for Mahmud and given that Mahmud's strategic priority was to crush the Eastern Mongols and establish Oirat hegemony in the steppe, the prudent course for him would be to attack Arughtai while continuing good relations with the Ming. Yet he decided to raid the Ming frontier while preparing to eliminate Arughtai. The Chinese may be wrong about Mahmud's intention: He was really trying to attack Arughtai rather than the Ming; and Arughtai's report was simply trying to mislead the Ming into war with Mahmud. Even so, we still need an explanation for the Oirats' growing hostility toward the Ming.

There are several hypotheses about nomadic responses to sedentary societies available in the literature, but they have various problems when applied to this case.[70] I suggest that Mahmud challenged the Ming because he believed Yongle's Mongolian polices undermined his objective of establishing steppe hegemony. Around 1413 was the crucial moment for this objective. Internally, five years of tributary intercourse with the Ming had enriched the Oirats. Externally, the Eastern Mongols were at their lowest moments. Arughtai in fact had to nestle under the protection of the Ming. But ominously for the Oirats, Yongle gradually increased his bestowals on Arughtai, making him Hening Wang in 1413. Should the emperor's favor continue, Arughtai would almost certainly regain his strengthen and pose a new

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[68] MSLLZ, 19; and MS, 6862.
[69] MSLLZ, 21.
[70] See, for example, Khazanov 1984; Jagchid and Symons 1989; Cosmo 1994 and 2002; and Barfield 1989.

threat to the Oirats. This was a development that Mahmud was unwilling to tolerate.

Thus, the time around 1413 was really the optimal moment for Mahmud to start an offensive against Arughtai—afterwards his relative power over the Eastern Mongols would gradually slip away. Yet, his drive for hegemony conflicted sharply with Yongle's objective of preventing any Mongol hegemony in the steppe. Earlier Yongle had rejected both Mahmud's plea for the Ming to eliminate Arughtai and his requests for more rewards to strengthen his tribe. Mahmud must have felt that the Ming, as well as Arughtai, was an obstacle for him to achieve hegemony in the steppe. In fact, eliminating Arughtai while maintaining good relations with the Ming was an impossible task. From Yongle's perspective, Mahmud's hegemonic intention was reflected in his "arrogant" missions, something he was unwilling to ignore. From Mahmud's perspective, the Ming was determined to prevent Oirat hegemony in the steppe by protecting and rewarding Arughtai. Hostility or even conflict between the two was therefore almost inevitable if neither side was willing to modify their objectives. Mahmud turned hostile because he felt that the Ming was not offering enough for him to destroy Arughtai and establish hegemony in the steppe. As we will see, this hypothesis can also explain Arughtai's hostility toward the Ming later.

Defeated, the Oirats sent envoys to present tribute horses to the Ming court in early 1415 to request reopening tributary relations.[71] Apparently, they realized the difficulty of achieving steppe hegemony in the presence of a strong Ming in the south. More urgently, badly weakened by the Ming army, they now had to worry about their survival in the face of a reviving Arughtai. Just like Arughtai before them, the Oirats had to bandwagon with the Ming and exploit the latter's economic resources and military power to hold their position in the steppe.

With the Oirats defeated and weak, troubles then arose with the Eastern Mongols. Arughtai had been waiting quietly to feed his cattle and gather his strength. He avoided participating in Yongle's 1414 campaign against Mahmud, instead preferring

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[71] MSLLZ, 26.

to see the Oirats and the Ming weaken each other. Early in 1416 he took advantage of the Oirat weakness to plunder their territory. Starting from 1419, Arughtai's relations with the Ming deteriorated. In that year a Ming official reported that Arughtai's envoys in the Ming capital were unruly and even publicly seized Chinese goods by force. Meanwhile reports came that Arughtai had attacked and defeated the Oirats. On this occasion Yongle remarked that Arughtai was just as cunning as the Oirats.[72] Extending his influence westward to the Oirat tribes, Arughtai began to dispute with the Ming court about the reception of his envoys and the amount of his rewards. Meanwhile his envoys and followers began pillaging even when they were just given gifts from the Ming court. A Ming senior official also accused Arughtai of spying, presumably with the intention of selecting the best time and place for an invasion.[73] His tribesmen frequently came close to the northern frontier to probe into Ming military defense.

After February 1421 Arughtai simply stopped sending tribute to the Ming.[74] Meanwhile he sought to expand his influence in eastern Inner Mongolia, subjugating the Uriyangqad at this time. The Uriyangqad Mongols had supported Yongle during the civil war, and to reward them the emperor had moved the Ming garrison away from Daning in the heart of their grazing lands. This left the Uriyangqad in control of a large portion of the Inner Mongolian steppe. Overcoming the strategically located Uriyangqad territory, Arughtai plundered into Xinghe in the spring of 1422.

The same questions asked of Mahmud can be asked of Arughtai. Why did he abandon accommodation with the Ming and turn hostile? Could he not simply concentrate on crushing the Oirats without offending the Ming? The same hypothesis given above to explain Mahmud's hostility toward the Ming can also be used to explain Arughtai's. Hostility broke out between Arughtai and the Ming because the two sides' strategies toward the steppe were in fundamental conflict. A strong Arughtai bent on hegemony in the steppe was bound to find rewards and profits from

[72] MSLLZ, 29-30
[73] DMB, 14.
[74] MSLLZ, 29-30.

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the Ming insufficient for his cause, while a confident Yongle determined to prevent Mongol hegemony in the steppe was bound to find Arughtai's increasing defiance insulting and growing power menacing to his interest in the north.

Strategies and Structure in Sino-Mongol Relations

The theory of Chinese primacy developed in chapter 2 suggests that China would employ the strategies of war, blackmail, inducement, and persuasion for domination while other polities would accommodate as well as resist Chinese power. These hypotheses are borne out in Sino-Mongol relations in the early Ming. One discrepancy should be noted, however. Because the Chinese and the Mongols were bitter enemies, the Mongols resisted the Ming more than they accommodated it. But their resistance is consistent with the hypothesis: Resistance occurred as a result of the Mongol perception that their core interests were undermined by Chinese policies.

CHINESE STRATEGIES OF DOMINATION

The policies of the Hongwu and Yongle emperors make it abundantly clear that Chinese dominance was their strategic objective in the Mongolian steppe.[75] Dominance for both emperors meant the reception of Mongol acknowledgement of Chinese superiority and legitimacy to rule over them politically and maintaining Chinese preponderance in the steppe by preventing and destroying the rise of Mongol power militarily. In fact, both emperors tried to achieve both political and military dominance for the need to demonstrate legitimacy of their rule and to maintain security on the northern frontier.

Both Hongwu and Yongle repeatedly tried to receive acknowledgement of their rule from the Mongols. They were, however, aware that such acknowledgement was often a cover for more self-interested ends such as gaining economic benefits and security protection from the Ming. Yongle, in particular, knew full well that Arughtai's and

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[75] As Johnston observes, the primary concern of Hongwu and Yongle "was to cripple a still-potent Mongol military capability, divide and conquer the numerous Mongol tribes that occupied the areas along the northern border, and push the Ming's boundary of control as far north as possible, even into the inner Mongolian steppe lands." Johnston 1995, 184.

Mahmud's tributary missions to his court were due to their lack of strength and need for self-strengthening. He nevertheless allowed the Mongol pretension to continue, because the scene of Mongols' flocking to the capital to honor him was useful for demonstrating his prestige and superiority, and, by extension, his legitimacy to rule the *tianxia*.

The Ming strategies of domination fall into four categories: war, blackmail, inducement, and persuasion. In his attempts to divide and rule the Mongols, for example, Yongle employed all these strategies. These four strategies, however, can be subsumed in one grand strategy, the reference to which can be easily found in traditional Chinese strategic thinking. The expression "*wei de jianshi*", or "might combined with virtue", for example, nicely conveys the Chinese approach to dominate others. *Wei* is awesomeness or military power, embodied in the strategies of war and blackmail; *De* is virtue, embodied in the strategies of inducement and persuasion. The Chinese have another apt expression for this grand strategic thinking: "*gang rou bingji*" or hard power combined with soft power.

The early Ming dynasty fought numerous wars with the Mongols. To give just a few salient examples: The Hongwu emperor drove the Mongols away from China proper and sought to eliminate them until the failure of the 1372 campaigns; in 1387 he sought to conquer Naghachu in Manchuria and in 1388 he succeeded in destroying Mongol unity; the Yongle emperor personally led five Mongolian campaigns. These wars cannot all be regarded as defensive measures intended to ward off Mongol attack. On the contrary, they were designed to achieve and maintain Chinese military dominance in the steppe by preventing the unity and rise of Mongol power that would challenge that dominance. In other words, most wars the early Ming fought with the Mongols were either wars of conquest or preventive wars.

The majority of Ming campaigns followed the strategy of blackmail, intended to threaten the Mongols into surrender. Blackmail had both military and economic dimensions. Militarily, the Ming employed the threat of the use of force to compel

the Mongols to accede to a desired outcome; economically, the Ming threatened the cutting off of tributary relations and the shutting down of border markets to deprive the Mongols of their desired Chinese goods. Hongwu particularly liked warning the Mongols of the consequence of non-compliance at the end of his rescripts. Yongle could be quite threatening as well when he felt insulted or frustrated by Mongol defiance.

Before blackmail, the strategies of inducement and persuasion were also used. Inducement had both political and economic components. Politically, the Ming tried to induce the Mongols with noble titles and promised positions in the Ming official hierarchy; economically, the Ming tried to induce the Mongols with lavish gifts and elaborate Chinese products through embassies to Mongolia, tributary intercourse, or the establishment of horse markets and trade in the frontier region. The Chinese expression "*zhaoxiang* (招降)"—inducing someone to surrender—conveys the essence of the inducement strategy. Persuasion is the strategy by which the Ming tried to convince the Mongols of the necessity to submit by ideological discourse, that is, the moral superiority of Chinese rule. Theoretically, inducement and persuasion are easy to distinguish. Empirically, their boundaries are often blurred. We can be sure, however, that in the many rescripts Hongwu and Yongle sent to the Mongols both elements were present, because we know that the main task of Chinese envoys was to offer gifts while injecting a sense of Chinese superiority into the Mongols. We can know, furthermore, that since most Mongol chieftains only offered sham submission, economic interests rather than a perception of Ming legitimacy must lie at the heart of their tribute and thus that the strategy of inducement had more success than that of persuasion.

MONGOL STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE AND ACCOMMODATION

The Mongols, like the Koreans and the Japanese, both resisted as well as accommodated Chinese power. Their resistance appeared more prominent than accommodation. This is not surprising, since the Chinese were their bitter enemies in the early Ming. For the Mongols in the Hongwu reign, survival was the more urgent

goal than anything else. The Eastern Mongols and the Oirats in the Yongle reign had the luxury to think about hegemony, but in crucial moments they too had to ensure survival first. In terms of the principal Mongol leaders, their strategies toward the Ming fall into three categories: defying, bandwagoning, and challenging. They were used to serve their objectives ranging from merely ensuring their survival to attempting the establishment of steppe hegemony.

In Defying, the Mongols not only refused to acknowledge Ming superiority, but also put up active resistance against Chinese pressure. This was essentially what the Northern Yuan court had done since their ejection by the Ming army from Dadu in 1368. Balking at Chinese requests while maintaining friendly relations with them is not a good description of their response to the Ming. They went beyond that to defy the Ming by openly rejecting its requests or offers, detaining or killing Ming envoys, putting up active defense, and meeting and on several occasions defeating Ming invasions. The Eastern Mongols and the Oirats in the first few years of the Yongle reign also defied the Ming. The former detained Ming envoys and even poisoned a nominal Ming vassal, the Prince of Hami, while the latter detained Ming envoys sent to request their submission. The defiance of both tribes was further shown at a later stage when they became stronger as a result of tributary relations with Ming. They not only ignored Yongle's order that they restrain themselves, but also started to detain Ming envoys and bargain with the Ming regarding tributary payments.

In bandwagoning, the Mongols tried to take advantage of tributary relations with the Ming in order to enrich, strengthen, or protect themselves, all the while pursuing other self-interested goals. Indeed, pursuing such goals was the main rationale behind their exploiting China's economic and military resources. Bandwagoning by other states means making productive use of their tributary relations with the Ming for self-interested ends, in a range from survival, economic self-strengthening, political legitimation, military protection, to hegemony. Because the exploitative nature of bandwagoning can be most clearly seen in Sino-Mongol relations, I shall discuss it here with a little more detail.

The first question to consider is this: What were the motivations behind Mongol tribute to the Ming court? The answer of course varies with specific tribute missions. On the whole, however, scholars have reached a consensus that it was not so much China's culture or moral superiority as its economic resources that had attracted the Mongols to the Chinese court. Henry Serruys, a leading authority on Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming, said this:

If in the minds of the Chinese cultural superiority was enough to draw the Barbarians within the Chinese orbit, on the part of the foreigners the reason for coming to China was quite different. There is not doubt that cultural and material superiority was evident to the Barbarians, and that Chinese culture always had a certain appeal for them, stronger or weaker according to circumstances, but cultural appeal never was the decisive factor for them. Profit was. Tribute presented to the Chinese court was always liberally paid for, and thus essentially constituted a form of exchange, or trade. Moreover, all tribute missions were also trade missions in the more ordinary sense of the word, that is, in addition to tribute articles to be presented to the Court, every tribute mission carried goods to be sold along the road to Peking or in the capital itself...[76]

Tribute was in reality a particular form of trade no matter how the Chinese traditionally stressed its ceremonial aspect.[77] As Morris Rossabi points out with reference to the Ming's tributary relations with Inner Asia, Chinese "gifts in reply" were simply a euphemism for trade. The Chinese and the peoples of Inner Asia had in practice negotiated an exact rate of exchange before engaging in tribute and "gifts in reply" transactions.[78]

Because tribute presentation was a lucrative business, the Mongols came more and

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[76] Serruys 1967, 19. For similar views, see also Barfield 1989; Rossabi 1975; and Jagchid and Symons 1989.
[77] Serruys 1975, 9.
[78] Rossabi 1975, 71.

more frequently to benefit from it, even to the point of forcing the Chinese court to regulate and limit both the frequency of the tribute and the size of their tribute missions.[79] Sometimes Mongol princes were excluded from the tribute because it was feared that they might derive too much profit and become too strong! With the passage of time, even the Uriyangqad in the northeast, regarded as "friendly" Mongols by the Chinese, increased the size of their embassies, demanded additional gifts, and staged frequent border raids.[80] A tribute mission arriving from Mongolia or Central Asia comprised, besides the regular envoys, traders and an assortment of followers often totaling hundreds of men. They were entitled to trade not only at the borders when they first crossed into China, but all along the road to the capital, at the capital itself after the official presentation of the tribute, and finally on their way back. Some Central Asian traders even deliberately slowed down the pace of travel in order to trade more. Some envoys travelled so slowly (to and from Beijing) that it took them more than a year to compete the trip![81]

One marvel during the Yongle reign was that as soon as war ended, the Mongols swiftly came to the Ming court to present tribute, as Arughtai did in 1411 and 1424 and Mahmud did in 1415.[82] The interruption was never more than a few months at a time. The theory developed in Chapter 2 shows that authority or legitimacy cannot arise purely out of the use of force. If Chinese authority was not the cause behind the Mongol tribute after wars, the real cause must be sought in the benefits that the Mongols could derive from sending tribute to the Ming court. From the Mongol point of view, they may have simply regarded tribute to the Ming as the routine confirmation of a customary right to trade. Indeed, the Mongol chronicles "reflect a tradition among the Mongols that return gifts for their tribute were a tribute paid to them, non-payment of which was apt to trigger instant retaliation."[83] Serruys further remarks that for other nomads as well, "there is no basis to think that they considered

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[79] A similar pattern can be found in Sino-Jurchen relations during the Ming. For a brief discussion on the Jurchens' abuse of their tribute missions for profit from the Ming, see Crossley 2002, 72-3.

[80] Serruys 1967, 6-7, 20, 43.

[81] Serruys 1975, 15, 20, 22.

[82] This was not a unique phenomenon in Sino-Mongol relations. Tribute missions also came when the Ming was in open hostility with some other peoples, such as the oasis state of Turfan. See Rossabi 1972, 206-25.

[83] Serruys 1967, 25.

themselves in any way obligated to send tribute as an expression of submission or vassality."[84]

Although Serruys and many others have pointed out that profit was the overriding concern of the Mongols coming to China, they have not specified for exactly what ends they were seeking it. Profit might be sought for two reasons. At the most basic level, Chinese goods were desired because they were essential for the livelihood of the Mongols. This level of economic explanation, however, cannot explain the Mongols' coming to the Chinese court regularly, that is, their exploitative bandwagoning. If their wish was simply to obtain essential Chinese goods to meet their livelihood requirements, they did not need to send tribute too frequently. But we have abundant evidence that the Eastern Mongols and the Oirats during the Yongle reign were eager to present tribute.[85] According to the Chinese regulation, Arughtai was allowed one mission a year only. In practice, he sent more than two missions every year between 1411 and 1424. When Mahmud presented his first tribute in 1408, he was living well economically though threatened by the Eastern Mongols militarily. Both Arughtai and Mahmud continued to send tribute when they grew considerably stronger after several years of tributary relations with the Ming. Sustenance needs are more powerful in explaining the Mongols' repeated requests for the late Ming to allow tributary relations as well as their raids when the requests were not met. In the early Ming, however, since tributary relations were encouraged, it cannot adequately explain the Mongols' exploitative bandwagoning with the Ming.

A higher level of explanation can be found in the Mongols' intention to use Ming wealth for self-strengthening. Chinese goods were not just used for sustenance, but also, and more importantly, for strengthening their tribes economically, politically, and militarily. Here one finds again the inadequacy of a pure economic explanation for Mongol motivations behind their tribute missions. Political and strategic considerations have to be brought in. Economic benefits were the foundation for

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[84] Ibid.
[85] For a full list of Mongol tribute missions to the Ming from 1403, see Serruys 1966.

building political and military power. Because the Mongols wanted to grow strong so as to attempt steppe hegemony, they simply ignored Chinese regulations for the frequency and size of their tribute missions. In other words, they wanted to gain more than "normal" tributary relations allowed by violating Ming regulations.

Chinese wealth was useful for the Mongols for an important reason only found in the nomadic world. The Mongols themselves rested on animal wealth, which had to be pastured extensively and could not be concentrated in a governmental center of power; but Chinese wealth, in the forms of gifts and goods such as paper money (which, among other things, could be used in trade with Chinese merchants), silver, textiles, grain, etc., could be stored. This wealth, which the Mongols could not obtain by themselves, could moreover enable the tribal ruler to buy his followers' obedience, which was critical for the tribe's overall power.[86] Chinese goods, therefore, had direct economic and political functions for ambitious chieftains.

Tribute to the Ming court could, in addition, bring not only Chinese goods, but also political prestige and military advantage. Ming official titles, for example, could enhance a tribal ruler's prestige among his followers and other tribes. Being a nominal Ming vassal could in principle bring Ming military protection. In fact, this was what Arughtai came close to achieve around 1413. Although the Ming was unwilling to provide direct military support, it was unwilling to see him destroyed by Mahmud either. Moreover, Ming power could be used to play inter-tribe politics. Both Arughtai and Mahmud tried to take advantage of their relations with the Ming to harm the other. Finally, it is important to note that Mahmud explicitly requested weapons from the Ming. This might be due to his lack of ironware for producing sufficient numbers of weapons for military expansion. All these illustrate that the purpose for which Ming power was used was hardly only economic: It was to eventually destroy the rival and establish steppe hegemony.

Such use of their tributary relations broke away sharply from Yongle's original

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[86] Fletcher 1986, 14-5.

intention of encouraging Mongols to present tribute. By initiating tributary relations, Yongle intended to have the Mongols as vassals to observe Chinese orders and serve Chinese interests while showing his superiority over them; by presenting tribute, the Mongols tried to take advantage of their relations with Yongle to pursue self-interested ends other than loyally serving their supposed overlord. In the beginning of their relations with the Ming, sustenance needs might be a concern in their tribute. As time went by, their ambitions grew with their strength. More strength led to greater ambitions; greater ambitions created further needs to use and abuse the Chinese. These factors demonstrate the prominence of the Mongols' bandwagoning strategy toward the Ming. It can in fact subsume what Barfield has identified as the strategy of extortion while conveying the meaning of both the Mongols' use and abuse of Ming power.[87] At its core, this is a self-strengthening strategy for self-interested ends. It shows the real nature of Mongol tribute and "submission" to the Ming court, all the while demolishing the notion of Chinese authority over the Mongols.

Finally, in addition to defying and bandwagoning, the Mongols also challenged the Ming by competing with it politically and militarily. In an important sense and in many cases, the strategy of challenging was a logical corollary of the strategy of bandwagoning. Strengthened by exploiting Ming power, the Mongols next tried to expand their own power at the expense of the Ming. In 1413 Mahmud led his horde near the Kerülen River preparing, most likely, to attack both the Ming and Arughtai. Between 1422 and 1424, Arughtai raided the Ming frontier. These raids, as I have explained, were intended to finance his expansion in the steppe and challenge Chinese dominance there. Before then, he had subjugated the Uriyangqad Mongols who were nominally Ming's vassals, thus openly challenging Ming rule in eastern Inner Mongolia. And his followers had begun pillaging Ming frontier even before 1421. These were challenges when the Mongols were regaining their strength. Yet, even during the Hongwu reign when they were chastised by the Ming army, they had challenged the Ming claim of superiority already. Militarily, the Northern Yuan court

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[87] Barfield 1989.

reassembled Mongol hordes to renew strength and organized frequent raids into the Ming frontier. Politically, they proclaimed their own reign titles as a rival claim to Ming rule, even pressing the Koreans to accept their rather than the Ming's reign title. Because defying, bandwagoning, and challenging were the primary strategies that the Mongols employed toward the Ming, one can safely conclude that the structure of Sino-Mongol relations during the early Ming was more anarchic than hierarchic.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter gives further support to the theory of Chinese primacy by showing that the main pattern of interaction in Sino-Mongol relations is Chinese domination, both political and military, vis-à-vis Mongol resistance and accommodation. Together with the preceding two chapters on Sino-Korean and Sino-Japanese relations, these case studies support the key propositions of the theory. We can now explore the implications of these findings for some contemporary perspectives on historical East Asian politics. Chapter 6 will draw on the analysis of East Asian politics during the early Ming to examine the analytical utility of existing models built around the concept of the "tribute system" for understanding and explaining historical East Asian politics. Chapter 7 will turn to the relevance of history for contemporary Chinese foreign policy thinking.

Chapter 6

Rethinking the "Tribute System"

One central question animating this study is to explore the meanings and uses of the "tribute system" as an analytical category employed by various scholars. The introductory chapter has given a brief review of the extant writings on the tribute system. Extending and further refining that preliminary critique, this chapter seeks to thoroughly evaluate the major works on the tribute system by drawing on the preceding theoretical and empirical chapters. The purpose is to assess, in light of the nature of historical East Asian Politics during the early Ming, the analytical utility of tribute-system-centered perspectives for understanding China's foreign relations and the larger political dynamics between China and its neighbors.

There are three interrelated ways in which the concept "tribute system" has been used in a large and venerable literature. I discuss them in turn but focus on Fairbank's interpretive model since this has been the most influential and has really established the tribute system paradigm in the study of East Asian diplomatic history.[1] Each of the three views of the tribute system has limitations for explaining historical East Asian politics. It then makes sense to ask whether we should strive for alternative theoretical frameworks that might produce greater explanatory power. The "tribute system" is, of course, a concept before it is a fact; it is first of all "a Western invention for descriptive purposes."[2] As such one can legitimately ask how useful the invention has been. Although the concept clearly captures a key feature of historical East Asian politics, an overemphasis on it over the years has also created biases in our conceptual and empirical enquiries. Yet, a pure tribute-system perspective, however well developed, is ultimately inadequate, because historical East Asian politics were not all about "tribute" and its associated practices.

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[1] By the "tribute system paradigm" I mean a research tradition that has the "tribute system" as the central organizing concept for conceptual and empirical analysis.

[2] Mancall 1968, 63.

Given the inadequacies of the extant literature, I consider the necessity and possibility of moving beyond the tribute system paradigm if we want to establish a more solid conceptual basis for advancing our understanding of historical East Asian politics. Indeed, although the starting point of this study is the early Ming tribute system, it has been a conscious attempt to explain the larger political dynamics between Ming China and its neighbors without recourse to the "tribute system." The theory developed in Chapter 2 covers what the extant models claim to explain, but also explains additional phenomena that these models do not cover. After critiquing the extant tribute-system perspectives and models, I give some preliminary suggestions on moving beyond the tribute system paradigm.

The Tribute System: Three Views

Associating the "tribute system" with traditional China's foreign relations has become a standard practice since the nineteenth century when it was thought that China's peculiar notions of foreign relations were one of the underlying causes behind its failure to deal adequately with the Western challenge. That unique institutional and textual complex of traditional Chinese foreign policy was referred to as the "tribute system." But it was not until Fairbank's immensely influential elaboration of it from the 1940s through the 1960s that the "tribute system" really became the master organizing concept in the study of East Asian diplomatic history.

Since the main features of Fairbank's model have already been outlined in the introductory chapter, a repetition will not be necessary. It is important, however, to keep two additional observations in mind when evaluating the model. First, the model was meant to describe and interpret the official relations between China and its neighbors by employing a sinocentric framework. Its scope seems to cover the whole period of East Asian history from virtually the dawn of the Chinese civilization until the nineteenth century.

Second, it needs to be noted that Fairbank, as a historian, did not mean to apply his

"tribute system" notion to the "international politics" of East Asia, as a political scientist would probably do. Fairbank "has made no pretense of establishing a general theory of Chinese history and has stated his distaste for abstract theorizing in many places."[3] For him the main question was how to understand and define the "Chinese world order." It is for the purpose of defining the scope and essence of such an order that he highlighted the sinocentric vision held by Chinese rulers and elites. He probably never assigned himself the task of providing an overall framework of interpretation for East Asian international relations. He was rather laying out some big ideas as organizing concepts that might be refined and developed in further research. His model therefore should be properly evaluated against the question of how accurately the "tribute system" notion and the "Chinese world order" scheme capture the nature of the historical East Asian order. Its inadequacies can then suggest areas of improvement needed to advance our understanding of historical East Asian politics.

Although Fairbank's model has been the most well-known, it is not the only conceptualization of the tribute system. There are two additional, though interrelated, views of the tribute system in the scholarly literature.

The second view, found most frequently among Chinese historians and with a distinguished pedigree in Chinese scholarly discourse, sees the tribute system as China's bureaucratic management of foreign relations.[4] The focus has been on the organizational and functional development of a complex set of principles, rules, and procedures that were developed by China's scholar-officials to deal with foreigners. This research tradition has been centrally concerned with the historical development of ritual practices and the bureaucratic institutions and cultural assumptions behind such ritualistic expressions of foreign relations. Thus, for example, a study of the Ming tribute system would include the organization of the bureaucracies of the Ming dynasty that dealt with foreign relations, the elaborate set of ritual practices for

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[3] Evans 1988, 5.
[4] This is the clearest in Li 2004. See also Yu 2000.

foreign envoys to observe while in the Chinese capital, details on the composition of foreign tributes and Chinese return gifts, tribute frequency and routes, and so on.

Because the tribute system is conceived of as China's bureaucratic innovation for foreign affairs, this perspective sheds little light on the dynamic interaction between China and its neighbors. The tribute system is viewed strictly on the Chinese side and from the Chinese perspective. Because this is so, this perspective cannot serve as an adequate basis for our understanding of the overall relations between China and its neighbors. It deals mostly with the bureaucratic aspects of Chinese foreign policy, not the larger East Asian order. In terms of Chinese foreign policy, scholars writing from this perspective tend to emphasize its ritualistic and symbolic elements associated with tributary relations. For example, Li Yunquan, in a thorough examination of the bureaucratic development of the tribute system in Chinese history, argues that Chinese rulers valued not so much the substance of tributary relations as the appearance of tribute missions and their function in demonstrating the superiority of Chinese rule.[5] While this is true in many cases regarding the tributary part of China's foreign relations, it cannot be a valid generalization for traditional Chinese foreign policy as a whole.

The third view, found among IR scholars writing from an English School perspective, sees the tribute system as an institution of the historical East Asian international society. According to a classic English School definition, institution refers to "a set of habits and practices shaped towards the realization of common goals."[6] Neoliberal institutionalists define institutions as "persistent and connected sets of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations."[7] These definitions overlap somewhat; both view institutions as coherent sets of principles and practices that structure and organize relations.

Following this perspective, Yongjin Zhang argues that "the tribute system is the

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[5] Li 2004.
[6] Bull 1977, 74.
[7] Keohane 1989, 3.

fundamental institution that embodies both philosophical assumptions and institutional practices within the Chinese world order and that structures relations and ensures co-operation between China and other participants in *Pax Sinica*."[8] It was through the tribute system that China and other countries conducted meaningful relations with one another. The tribute system in this sense embodies cultural assumptions such as sinocentrism and describes rules and practices such as foreigners' paying tributes to the Chinese court and the latter's bestowal of gifts and investiture to the former.

Conceived of as an institution in this sense, the tribute system becomes a central interpretive factor for historical East Asian politics. However, although viewing the tribute system as an institution is apparently appropriate from a theoretical standpoint, it also entails some analytical problems. First, the tribute system is only one—though perhaps the more prominent—among several institutions in the historical East Asian system. By itself it cannot capture the whole picture of China's foreign relations, as these were only partly expressed through institutional practices of the tribute system. Other institutions identified by the English School, such as war and even the balance of power, can also be found in East Asian history. Many analysts tend to overemphasize the significance of the tribute system at the expense of due attention to other institutions that have also played important roles.

Second, one problem with the institutionalist perspective is that these institutions often themselves require explanation.[9] Thus, in our case, if we are to understand the motives, strategies, and interests behind China's construction of, and other countries' participation in, the tribute system, we will have to deconstruct and explain the tribute system in the first place. The question is not whether the tribute system can be seen as an institution, as it surely can be, but how much interpretive or explanatory power such a perspective can generate.

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[8] Zhang 2001, 57.
[9] For an attempt in the European context, see Reus-Smit 1999.

Third, seeing the tribute system as an institution without paying adequate attention to its historical evolution will give the misleading impression that the tribute system was somehow static and unchanging throughout history. In practice, however, the characteristics and nature of the tribute system varied considerably in different historical periods. We will therefore have to speak about different tribute systems rather than a single tribute system in history. The changing nature of historical East Asian politics will be missed unless the changing characteristics of different tribute systems are examined, even though the tribute system itself is far from the totality of international politics in this region. This also suggests the inadequacy of an institutionalist perspective of the tribute system for understanding historical East Asian politics.

The following two sections attempt a focused evaluation of Fairbank's model while further developing the above criticisms. The purpose is to discover its inadequacies, suggest areas for improvement, and use it as a heuristic device for thinking about new conceptualizations about historical East Asian politics. Although I draw on historians' criticisms briefly mentioned in the introductory chapter, this evaluation is not a repetition of the points already made. The critique developed below connects and expands these points in a systematic way while offering new perspectives by drawing on the substantive work of this thesis.

The Inherent Weakness of the Fairbank Model

This section evaluates the model in its own terms. The question asked is not how well it can stand against historical evidence—the task for the next section—but how logically consistent the model itself is. Evaluating it as an interpretive model, three questions can be asked. First, how useful are the assumptions underlying the model? Interpretive propositions often follow from assumptions; the more useful the assumptions are, the better these propositions will be. Second, how clear and coherent is its internal logic? Ambiguous models with inconsistent logic obfuscate more than they clarify. Third, how much interpretive power does it seem to offer?

ASSUMPTIONS

The underlying assumption behind Fairbank's model is sinocentrism, the idea that Chinese rulers believed themselves to be central and superior to other peoples in the known world. It follows from this assumption that they would try to get foreign rulers to acknowledge their superiority by presenting tributes and accepting vassal status.

It should be noted, however, that by claiming to be the "ruler of the *tianxia*," the Chinese did not intend to rule the entire known world.[10] Rather, the *tianxia* was limited to the surrounding areas of the Chinese empire, roughly corresponding to what we today know as Northeast and Southeast Asia and parts of Central Asia. Gao Mingshi has recently argued that according to the Chinese conception, the world might be divided into three areas with diminishing Chinese influence: inner vassal area, outer vassal area, and temporary non-vassal area.[11] The Chinese did not expect the extension of their authority over states of the last category; in fact, they often treated them as equals. For example, before the Chinese were able to subject the Turkic, Uighur, and Tibetan states, the Sui and Tang dynasties maintained "brotherly" relations with them; so were the Han with the Xiongnu. And when these tribal states grew powerful and posed security threats, they were regarded as enemies—far from tributaries as the sinocentric assumption would suggest.

The first problem with the sinocentric assumption is that its usefulness varies with the historical periods that one examines.[12] True, at least in terms of rhetoric as recorded in the Chinese historical sources, Chinese rulers seemed to have held the notion of superiority since pre-Qin times. Yet the apparent constancy of perceived superiority is deceptive, made all the more so by "a respectable tradition of dealing with reality separately so that there was no need to change the rhetoric"[13] developed by Chinese scholar-officials as they contemplated their theory of imperial foreign

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[10] Gan 2003, 508.
[11] Gao 2003.
[12] For a masterful discussion on the evolution of the Chinese idea of superiority, see Wang 1968.
[13] Wang 1983, 62.

relations. Did the rulers of China throughout its two-thousand-year dynastic history make foreign policy decisions on the basis of Chinese superiority most of the time? At least one has to make a distinction between periods when China was unified and strong and when it was divided and weak, because material power and external environment can often decisively shape rulers' perceptions and decision making. As Wang Gungwu pointed out, the rhetoric of superiority "was based on strength and was meaningless during periods of weakness and disorder."[14] The effect of the sinocentric assumption on actual policymaking had to be conditioned by power realities. Chinese rulers' "actions and policies may have been shaped more by the logic of the situation than by the distinctive world-views and values of the Sinocentric tribute ideology."[15] The founder of the Southern Song dynasty, for example, found himself compelled to accept the status of a vassal of the Jin dynasty—his powerful northern rival—in 1138.[16] Less dramatically, rulers of various Chinese dynasties such as the Han, Sui, and Tang had to accept "brotherly" or equal relations with their powerful northern and western nomadic neighbors.

Sinocentrism can be a useful assumption in times of Chinese strength when the belief of superiority was more or less matched by reality. But even here one has to examine its exact effect on policymaking. Many believe that sinocentrism had led to a foreign policy of rigidity and inflexibility. But this need not be the case. The Han, Tang, Ming, and Qing all in different periods displayed a flexible and extroverted pattern of foreign relations.[17] Moreover, sinocentrism did not always lead to the demand for the submission of foreign rulers as China's vassals even during periods of Chinese strength. The Tang, for example, did not insist on the declaration of vassalage from Japan.[18] From another perspective, if sinocentrism was such an important motivational force, one might indeed be puzzled by "its relatively weak translation into impulses to conquer and physically dominate "inferior" peoples."[19] Yet the early Ming cases in the preceding chapters show that Chinese rulers would attempt

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[14] Ibid., 57.
[15] Wills 1988, 226.
[16] Yang 1968, 20. See also Rossabi 1983a.
[17] Hunt 1984, 6-7.
[18] Song 2002, 41.
[19] Wills 1988, 226.

military domination only when they faced security threats and only after political domination had failed. The underlying motivation for physical domination was not sinocentrism, but security. These examples demonstrate not only that the importance of sinocentrism in Chinese foreign policy making cannot be exaggerated but also that the effect of sinocentrism on policy varies in different cases and needs to be empirically determined.

In times of Chinese weakness, sinocentrism's dubious utility suggests that the assumption of Chinese superiority alone is insufficient and bound to be misleading. A weak China must also worry about its survival. At least this was what the Song experienced with its powerful northern rivals. For those periods we need an assumption of Chinese rulers' motivation for the security of their regime. Wills reflected this thinking when he emphasized the concept of "defensiveness."[20] Fairbank recognized that for Chinese rulers "the chief political problem was how to maintain Chinese superiority in situations of military weakness." He then outlined the "aims and means in China's foreign relations."[21] He did not, however, integrate these thoughts into his model. The model thus mirrored the ideal pattern of the official Chinese view, despite Fairbank's full awareness of the historical exceptions to sinocentrism on the part of the Chinese rulers themselves.[22] The model thus seems to have given an essentialized view of Chinese culture with respect to foreign relations, leaving the impression that the Chinese were somehow only capable of seeing their superiority.

Assumptions are only useful to the extent that they can facilitate model building. Although sinocentrism seems a useful and even indispensable part of these assumptions, it cannot be the only or even the primary one. Indeed, Wills believes that sinocentrism may be the "wrong place to begin" the analysis of Chinese foreign policy because it "short-circuits the necessity of paying attention to all the evidence, to all institutions and patterns of action" and serves to "cut short an interpretive

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[20] Wills 1984 and 1988.
[21] Fairbank 1968a, 11.
[22] See Fairbank 1969, 459.

process that ought to begin by assuming broad similarities of human needs and motives."[23]

The second flaw with the assumption of Chinese superiority is its one-sidedness or incompleteness. Recall that the model also deals with foreign rulers' motivations in accepting tributary relations; it is not a model only for the Chinese side of the story, though it is highly biased toward it. And yet the model only contains an assumption on the part of the Chinese rulers without a proper one for that of foreign countries as if the latter were only passive respondents to Chinese initiatives. Thus, although Chinese rulers are said to hold their superiority in conducting foreign relations, did the rulers of other polities believe in Chinese superiority when considering relations with China? What were their perceptions of China and of foreign relations more generally? From the model one can only infer that they conformed to the Chinese view.[24]

Finally, sinocentrism is fundamentally a cultural assumption. This reflected the tendency in the American historical scholarship of the 1950s and 1960s to invest enormous explanatory power in the nature of China's "traditional" society or culture.[25] But as pointed out above, cultural assumptions alone cannot be adequate even for Chinese foreign policy during periods of Chinese strength. Socio-cultural explanations are not problematic in themselves; they just need to be supplemented by explanations drawing on other factors and at other levels.

Sometimes one can find in cultural analysis another implicit assumption that "traditional China's foreign relations" are somehow radically different from the foreign policies of other great powers in history and therefore we need a unique set of languages and tools to interpret them. This need not be the case. How, for example, can the considerations of power and interest, in addition to culture, not important in

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[23] Wills 1988, 226.

[24] As Fairbank says, drawing again on sinocentrism, that "the uncultivated alien, however crass and stupid, could not but appreciate the superiority of Chinese civilization and would naturally seek to 'come and be transformed' (lai-hua) and so participate in its benefits." Fairbank 1942, 132.

[25] Cohen 1984, 189.

any state's foreign policy making? Admittedly, concepts such as "power," "security," and "interest" may have to be defined and applied differently across time and space, but these concepts are not always reducible to culture. Progress in theorizing historical East Asian politics will require turning away from the assumption of Chinese or Asian uniqueness and instead looking for patterns of similarities as well as differences in political dynamics across different regions.

Logic aside, these three problems regarding the assumptions behind the model—the failure to deconstruct sinocentrism, to deal squarely with other countries' foreign policy assumptions, and to move beyond cultural stereotypes—will compromise the value of its interpretive propositions.

LOGIC

The logic of the model is not quite clear cut. Fairbank emphasized that Chinese rulers used tributary relations mainly for the purpose of self-defense. Yet he also said that they could be used for aggression as well. "Broadly speaking under the Sung [Song] it [tribute] appears to have been used mainly on the defensive, while under the Mongols it served for expansion and under the Ch'ing [Qing] it promoted stability in foreign affairs."[26] What accounted for these dramatic differences? Moreover, how is the assumption of Chinese superiority related with Chinese rulers' use of tribute for defense, aggression, or stability? These puzzles expose a key problem in Fairbank's thinking about the tribute system. It was perhaps believed that the model could be generalized across Chinese history, but in fact its power fell short of this ambitious goal. Fairbank could have limited the scope of the model to a specific period (e.g., the mid-late Qing) and then dealt with other tribute systems in other periods separately and in their own right.

The model says that the relationships between China and other states were hierarchic. Although this hierarchy is easy to understand from the Chinese point of view since Chinese rulers believed in their superiority, one still wonders how they could in fact

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[26] Fairbank 1942, 137.

achieve this hierarchy and make foreign rulers submit. Was Confucian cultural attraction as emphasized by the model sufficient for this purpose? On the part of foreign rulers, was their motivation for trade with China as identified by the model powerful enough for them to accept inferiority? It must also be noted that the rulers of China's close neighbors, from Vietnam to Japan, had their own self-centered conceptions of world order. Indeed, different self-centered views of superiority existed side by side.[27] It is not clear whether, when, and how sinocentrism successfully overcame the self-centeredness of other rulers. Analytically, we lack a mechanism that can explain how sinocentrism might create a genuine hierarchy between China and its neighbors. Also puzzling is the fact that in his "Aims and Means" table Fairbank in fact pointed out the varied aims and means in Chinese foreign policy.[28] How do these fit within the model? That the model was underdeveloped is apparent enough.

POWER

On the surface, the model claims to explain everything in China's foreign relations, since the tribute system was said to be "a scheme of things entire." In substance, what have been written about are often the ceremonial aspects of the tributary relations between China and its neighbors. It would also appear that the model was primarily meant to deal with relationships within the so-called sinic zone, that is, those among China, Korea, Vietnam, Japan, and Liuqiu. Yet we know that China's relations with its northern neighbors constituted the core of a large part of its political history. Although these relations were frequently violent, peaceful tributary intercourse was not absent. Moreover, discussion of the nature of tributary relations has seldom moved beyond the meaning of "tribute" and the relationship between tribute and trade. But tribute and trade are not all or even the most important of what was going on between China and other states. There is a critical failure to take into account the multiplicity of their relationships. The motivations behind their policies, the means and strategies they employed, and the patterns of their interactions: These

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[27] Wang 1968, 60.
[28] Fairbank 1968a, 13.

important questions are at best inadequately addressed. It seems that although the model presents the tribute system as a world order in itself, its central questions are limited to a narrow range of issues in tributary relations.

The model is also a heavily biased one. It pays far more attention to the Chinese side of the story than that of other states. Its interpretive power with regard to the latter is therefore very limited.[29] Moreover, heavily influenced by sinocentric perspectives, the model tends to portray historical East Asian politics from an idealized Chinese view. This surely has something to do with Fairbank's heavy reliance on Chinese sources. These sources tend to facilitate the reification of the tribute system since they almost universally describe any foreign envoy coming to the Chinese capital as paying tribute to the emperor.

Viewed as a whole, the biggest problem with the model is that it is "a static framework, which lacks any sense of change and reflects mainly the world order the Chinese court preferred to perceive."[30] It seems to have regarded the ritualistic aspects of tributary relations as having central importance: granting of patents of appointment and official seals, presentation of tribute memorials and local products, performance of the *koutou*, receipt of imperial gifts in return, trade privileges at the frontier and in the capital, and so on. The heavy emphasis on these issues makes one wonder whether the Chinese and their neighbors were only capable of repeating these formalities in their interactions. No room was allowed for the flexibility of their relations, no change for their attitudes and policies toward each other, and no variations in their underlying motivations and strategies.

The Model and the Early Ming Case

The tribute system, whether viewed as China's bureaucratic management of foreign relations or as an institution for interstate relations, found its sophistication and

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[29] This "China bias" is, however, a common problem in the literature.
[30] Wang 1989, 15. See also Perdue 2003, 66.

expansion during the Ming dynasty.[31] It therefore makes good sense to see how Fairbank's model works against events in the early Ming period. In political science terms, this period provides an "easy test" for the model. If it fails here, then its general validity will be strongly questioned. In this section I draw on the three case studies of Sino-Korean, Sino-Japanese, and Sino-Mongolian relations to evaluate the empirical validity of the model. Three questions are asked: How useful is the sinocentric assumption when applied to this period of Chinese primacy? How closely does the model catch the "appearances" of the interactions between China and its neighbors? How well does it capture the underlying motivations, strategies, and aims in their policies toward one another, that is, the nature of East Asian politics during this period?

SINOCENTRIC ASSUMPTION

Sinocentrism is a useful assumption in periods when China was unified and strong, such as the early Ming. As we have seen in the preceding three chapters, early Ming emperors generally approached foreign rulers from a position of superiority and demanded their acknowledgement of this superiority and their acceptance of tributary status. There are notable exceptions, however. Joseph Fletcher long ago pointed out that the Yongle emperor addressed the ruler of the Timurid Empire as a fellow monarch in a 1418 letter, in effect renouncing his claim to superiority.[32] I have shown that Yongle received a non-submissive envoy from his adversary the Eastern Mongols in 1407 and treated him like a diplomat, even ordering troops to guard him back to his own territory as the emperor was trying to manage relations with the still hostile Eastern Mongols.

These examples show that at times the Chinese could be uninhibited by sinocentrism and instead pursue pragmatic policies for practical objectives. Thus, even under the condition of Chinese primacy, it is not always true to say that "Outside countries, if they were to have contact with China at all, were expected and when possible obliged

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[31] Fairbank and Teng 1941, 137; Mancall 1984, 13; and Wills 1984, 14.
[32] Fletcher 1968.

to do so as tributaries."[33] Because the model only stipulates a rigid set of Chinese attitudes toward foreigners, it naturally missed this pragmatism. The deeper problem underlying this neglect is the failure to appreciate the fact that imperial China, like every other state, also had to deal with a variety of security problems that might affect its survival. Under such circumstances, pragmatism would work much better than sinocentrism. Because China had to ensure security as much as it had to promote superiority, we should expect flexibility in Chinese foreign policy. Indeed, early Ming China's foreign policy exhibited a great deal of flexibility and pragmatism.[34]

DESCRIPTIVE ACCURACY

The model posits that all foreign rulers who wanted to have relations with China must do so as China's tributaries and describes a set of ritual practices that are believed to be an integral part of these tributary relations. How accurate is such a picture for East Asian politics in the early Ming?

It may be an accurate description of Sino-Korean relations, but it fails to capture major aspects of Sino-Japanese and Sino-Mongolian relations. As I have shown in detail, the Japanese and the Mongols refused to pay tribute to the Ming for a long period of time. The Japanese shogun Yoshimochi isolated Japan from China in 1411-24. Prince Kanenaga had earlier on executed Chinese envoys and challenged sinocentrism in his letter to the Hongwu emperor. The Mongol royal house consistently rejected Ming tributary offers during the Hongwu reign. During the Yongle reign Mahmud and Arughtai only intermittently accepted tributary status. For quite some time, therefore, the Japanese and the Mongols were not in the early Ming tribute system, however conceived.

It may be said that their "absence" in the Ming tribute system does no harm to the model, the logic being that if they did not accept tributary status then they had no

[33] Fairbank 1968a, 4.
[34] In various periods of its history China had "an utterly pragmatic and flexible approach toward foreign countries." Wang 1968, 43.

relations with China. If all "relations" had to be "official" relations sanctioned by the Chinese, then such a defense would be justifiable.[35] It would, however, strip the model of much of its interpretive value. For, even when the Japanese and the Mongols were outside the early Ming tribute system, their interactions with Ming China—often the more interesting aspects—continued nonetheless. Can we say that Yoshimochi's 1418 letter to Yongle denying responsibility for Japanese piracy is not an instance of interactions between Japan and China, Kanenaga's execution of Chinese envoys and his defiant letters to the Ming court not part of the larger Sino-Japanese relations, or Mongol resistance and challenge against Ming China, often characterized by wars, not emblematic of the nature of Sino-Mongol relations during the early Ming?

The relations between China and other countries need to be conceived of broadly beyond those of a tributary nature. This is because international relations in historical East Asia were not all tributary. Fairbank would certainly not assert that China's foreign relations were all tributary, but his focus on "tribute" gives the impression that tributary relations were ubiquitous and even the only important thing going on. As it stands, the model misses a large and important part of the political dynamics in China's foreign relations. The tribute system cannot be regarded as the only medium or institution for interstate relations, much less "a scheme of things entire." As Wills puts it, "the tribute system was not all of traditional Chinese foreign relations, and may not be the best key to a comprehensive understanding of these relations. The Western literature on early Sino-Western relations may have given excessive emphasis to tribute embassies."[36]

Insofar as China's relations with Korea, Japan, and the Mongols are concerned, the early Ming tribute system, as a mechanism or institution for China's foreign relations, encompasses only Sino-Korean relations and a small part of Sino-Japanese and Sino-Mongolian relations. Quite a bit of the interesting interactions between China

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[35] It needs to be noted, however, that there are important exceptions to the assertion that all *official* relations must be tribute-based. Tribute, for example, was not the only way for the Manchu Qing court to arrange official relationships with the nomadic peoples in Inner Asia. Chia 1993, 80.

[36] Wills 1984, 4.

and its neighbors lay outside it. How then can one claim that between 1368 and 1842 "China's foreign political, economic, and cultural relations were conducted in a world ordered by, and experienced through, the tribute system"?[37]

INTERPRETIVE POWER

It is in terms of interpretive power that the model confronts the greatest difficulties. According to the model, Chinese rulers wanted to construct hierarchic relations with foreign countries for reasons of prestige and political defense; foreign rulers paid tribute to China because they desired trade and profit; and with a large ideological component in their relationships, Chinese rulers relied chiefly on Confucian culture and the rule of virtue to win foreigners over while foreign rulers acceded to Chinese demands and observed prescribed rituals perhaps because of their desire for trade.

Yet we have seen that early Ming rulers demanded tributary relations not just for prestige or legitimation, but also, and in many cases more importantly, for security at the frontier; foreign rulers paid tribute to China not just for trade, but for a variety of purposes ranging from survival, legitimacy, economic self-strengthening, political legitimation, military protection, to hegemony; Chinese rulers not just relied on Confucianism to extend their influence—they in fact used a great deal more "hard power" than "soft power" to obtain compliance from other states; and foreign rulers not just obediently observed Chinese regulations—at times they violated these norms to pursue their self-interested objectives. The model is incapable of capturing the multiplicity of the relations between China and its neighbors.

At times Fairbank recognized the complexity of these relations. In various places and especially in his "Aims and Means" table as pointed out by James Millward, he indirectly acknowledged that Qing relations with Inner Asia involved something other than the tribute system.[38] Yet, although among various types of relations he identified—military conquest, administrative control, cultural-ideological attraction,

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[37] Mancall 1984, 13.
[38] Millward 1998, 9.

diplomatic manipulation—only cultural-ideological attraction can fit within his model, Fairbank did not take the next step of reformulating it on the basis of these complexities. And although he pointed out that "the Chinese world order was a unified concept only at the Chinese end and only on the normative level, as an ideal pattern,"[39] he did not further explore the implication of his own caveat.

The biggest problem of the model, however, is its inability to capture the nature of historical East Asian politics. Part of the problem is its scope. It is believed to be applicable throughout China's dynastic history. Yet such a wide scope has stripped it of specification and precision. Thus the model appears at once too general and not general enough—too general because it cannot capture the great variations in China's foreign relations, and not general enough because it cannot incorporate the varied motives and strategies behind China's and other countries' policies toward one another.[40]

To understand the nature of historical East Asian politics, one must have an idea of the motives, aims, and strategies underlying the relations between China and other states. The model talks of Chinese motives as mainly prestige, aims as mainly defense, and strategies as mainly persuasion. Yet we have seen that Chinese motives, aims, and strategies are much more varied than these. Early Ming emperors wanted political or military domination over foreign rulers for both legitimation and security, and they employed the strategies of war, blackmail, and inducement in addition to persuasion to achieve these objectives. The flexibility and pragmatism displayed in these strategies contrast sharply with the rigidity and unitary nature of Chinese foreign policy that the model implies. Even on the motive of prestige, one can argue that Fairbank did not give enough attention to tributary practice as a way to legitimate the rulership of Chinese emperors.

The model talks of foreign rulers' motives as mainly trade and strategies as mainly

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[39] Fairbank 1968a, 12.
[40] A similar point is made in Wang 1989, 19, 21.

accommodation. Yet the motives of the Korean, Japanese, and Mongol rulers during the early Ming ranged from mere survival, through profit, to hegemony, while their strategies varied from accommodationist ones (when they paid tribute) such as submission and bandwagoning to non-accommodationist ones (when they refused to establish proper tributary relations) such as balking, defying, and challenging. Because the model focuses too much on the ritualistic aspects of tributary relations, it has naturally missed that part of relations outside of normal tributary politics. Even in tributary relations where the model supposedly finds its best application, it is incapable of seeing the varied motivations and strategies behind tribute missions.

Fairbank of course recognized these variations, as did Mancall when he wrote about "the extraordinary variety of Chinese political strategies." Yet these variations were attributed to the "genius" of the tribute system.[41] But, one must ask, where did the "genius" come from in the first place? The "genius" of specific tribute systems in history is something to be explained. By themselves these tribute systems as historical institutions tell us little about the nature of China's relations with other countries. The tendency to attribute every variation in the relations between China and other countries to a monolithic and omnipotent tribute system impedes, rather than facilitates, further enquiry into the nature of historical East Asian politics.

"Tribute" and the accompanying rituals are almost the exclusive focus of Fairbank's model. But does it really capture the varied meanings of tribute? If the "moral value of tribute" and the "material value of trade" are all what the model has to say on this question, then it will again fail this critical test. We know that Chinese rulers demanded tributary relations for the purpose of domestic political legitimation[42] and for security at the frontier. We also know that the nature of tribute varies with the tribute-bearer. Tribute embassies did not always imply submission to the Chinese emperor nor can they all be explained by the trade motive. The Mongols' varied motives behind their tribute to the Ming court, for example, include

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[41] Mancall 1984, 30.
[42] On this also see Wills 1984, 177-8, in which Wills notes the "primacy of domestic audiences."

self-strengthening economically from Chinese gifts and goods, benefiting politically and militarily from Chinese prestige and protection, and taking advantage of Ming power strategically for their own expansion. A number of scholars have recently argued, mostly in the case of the Qing, that "tribute" encompassed many different kinds of trading and power relationships.[43] Peter Perdue points out that Qing relations with the Dutch, Russians, Kazakhs, Mongols, Koreans, Ryukyus, and later British all fit into the tribute system, but each had a separate political and commercial relationship to the Qing empire.[44] The model as it stands cannot incorporate these varied relationships. Its utility is limited even in areas where it is meant to apply the best.

The inadequacy of the model in the early Ming puts its usefulness for the larger East Asian history into serious doubt. That the model is incapable of interpreting major events in the early Ming when China was unified and powerful and when sinocentrism found a strong expression makes one wonder how well it can perform in periods when China was divided and weak. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Rossabi and his collaborators found that the "Chinese world order" did not persist for the entire period from the secondary century B.C. to the Opium War. During the weak Song dynasty, Chinese foreign policy displayed a great deal of flexibility and pragmatism. Chinese rulers could not demand that foreigners adhere to the "tribute system" scheme of conducting foreign relations. The Song's military weakness compelled its officials to treat its neighbors as equals, and a true multi-state system operated during this time.[45] Wang Gungwu puts it nicely that "When all you could do was to try to hold the line, there was obviously no Chinese world order."[46]

The difficulty the model has encountered in interpreting major events in East Asian history has a simple explanation. The model was mainly based on the experiences of the late Qing and was believed to be able to account for the Qing's failure to adequately meet the Western challenge. Yet there are assumptions unique to the late

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[43] Perdue 2005; Millward 1992, 1998; and Cosmo 2003.
[44] Perdue 2003, 66.
[45] Rossabi 1983a.
[46] Wang 1983, 62.

Qing period behind the model which may not apply to other periods of Chinese history. As Wills observes,

> Ch'ing [Qing] policy toward maritime Europeans drifted toward the great confrontation of the nineteenth century isolationist, preoccupied with issues of ceremonial and documentary precedence, seemingly unable to focus on the realities of the intrusion into its world of great powers that did not accept or even tolerate Chinese practices in foreign relations. Isolationism, ceremonialism, and a focus on appearances rather than on realities outside China also were characteristic of the institutions and regulations of the tribute system. The ceremonial core of that system assaulted by Macartney in the kowtow controversy and the request for a resident minister were even more vehemently defended after 1842. Thus it is not hard to see why, especially when looking back from the nineteenth century, it has seemed to make such good sense to refer to the whole pattern of isolationist, appearance-obsessed, Sinocentric foreign policy as a "tribute system."[47]

But not all of "traditional China's foreign relations" are isolationist, appearance-obsessed, or sinocentric.[48] That part of the model which may make good sense with respect to the late Qing's policies toward the Europeans might well be out of touch with Chinese foreign policies in other periods. It is then not surprising that the model has encountered so many difficulties when applied to other periods.

Beyond the Tribute System

The many problems discussed above at least suggest the need to move beyond the original framework established by Fairbank. Although many scholars have already been doing this for a long time, their critiques, while insightful about the inadequacies of the model, do not suggest abandoning the "tribute system" as an

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[47] Wills 1984, 187.
[48] Such a characterization may not be accurate even for the mid-late Qing period. Qing policies during this period were not always rigid and sinocentric. Hunt 1996, 31.

analytical category. Only James Hevia has really set out to bypass it and construct his own analysis from a postmodern perspective.[49] Yet recent writings on the tribute system do in fact suggest the need to deconstruct the tribute system as a monolithic entity. Perdue, for example, observes that "This 'system' was constantly under challenge, breaking down, being reconfigured and rebuilt. It was never stable, fixed, nor uniform. In regard to some regions, like Korea, relations were fairly stable; elsewhere, particularly in the northwest, wide fluctuations occurred."[50] This clearly implies the need to deconstruct the tribute system and explain the varied degrees of stability in China's foreign relations.

Every tribute system has its own content and specificity as an institutional feature of historical East Asian politics. If we take the Han as the first historical period when the tribute system began to take shape,[51] the system must have evolved with its changing characteristics reflecting the changing nature of the relations between China and other countries. There cannot be one single, unchanging tribute system throughout Chinese history—even ritual practices accompanying tribute missions had changed as different dynasties had their own tributary regulations. One thus needs to recognize the evolutionary nature of the tribute system as a historical institution. The evolution "was determined by past traditions as well as by contemporary conditions" that Chinese rulers perceived and confronted.[52] The Han tribute system, for example, must be different from the Ming or Qing tribute system. These tribute systems must be differentiated on the basis of historical realities. They are different systems because the underlying power realities, motives, and aims of China and other countries were differently related in their respective periods. The institution of the tribute system is therefore the phenomenon or the dependent variable *to be explained.*

Yet, there is a deeper problem when discussing the tribute system in relation to the nature of historical East Asian politics. Explaining the tribute system in a historical

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[49] Hevia 1995.
[50] Perdue 2003, 67.
[51] Yü 1967.
[52] Wang 1968, 62.

period hardly means explaining East Asian politics of that period. As noted above, the tribute system, if viewed as an institution for interstate relations, is only one among several institutions in East Asian history. An analysis framed around the tribute system is therefore necessarily incomplete for the larger political dynamics between China and its neighbors. This can be clearly seen from the early Ming case discussed above. While some strategies of Ming China and its neighbors such as persuasion and submission can be seen from a tribute-system perspective, other strategies such as war, threat, defying, and challenging cannot be neatly put into a tribute-system framework. Of course, no scholar has claimed that the tribute system is everything in East Asian international relations. Their overemphasis on it has nevertheless slighted the importance of other institutions and political dynamics.

These two points suggest the need to develop concepts and frameworks that will be able to explain both the tributary and non-tributary part of historical East Asian politics. For example, we need to move beyond traditional concepts such as "hierarchy" in understanding the nature of China's foreign relations. As Wang Gungwu pointed out a long time ago:

> Traditional Chinese dealings with non-Chinese peoples are often described as having been based on hierarchical principles. This I believe to be inadequate for an understanding of the tributary system. More important is the principle of superiority together with that of security or inviolability. From this, it should become clear that Chinese institutions were not as inflexible as they have often been made out to be by students of nineteenth-century history.[53]

In moving beyond the tribute system paradigm, one can ask a number of questions derived from the discussions of the preceding sections. How useful is sinocentrism as an analytical assumption for foreign policy making in imperial China? What were the precise effects of sinocentrism on traditional China's foreign relations? What other assumptions do we need? Why were Chinese foreign policies characterized by

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[53] Ibid., 61.

rigidity sometimes yet pragmatism and flexibility at other times? How can one explain the extraordinary range of variations, whether in terms of motives, strategies, or degrees of stability, in China's foreign relations? What were the motives and strategies in other countries' relations with China? In what sense can one say that a hierarchy between China and these countries were established? What were the meanings of tribute presentation and its associated ritual practices? What lay behind tribute and ritual? Finally and more generally, what were the patterns of interaction between China and its neighbors?

Answering these questions satisfactorily will move one big step forward toward identifying the multiplicity of the relations between China and its neighbors as well as broadening our conceptual horizon of historical East Asian politics. Once this multiplicity is shown, the inadequacy of tribute-system-centred models will become apparent.

From a political science perspective, we need more enduring concepts about international politics than merely the supposedly omnipotent "tribute system." As I have emphasized, the tribute system itself needs to be explained. We need more fundamental concepts that can lead to deeper levels of explanations for historical East Asian politics. These concepts, whether time-honored ones such as power, security, or culture, or entirely new ones to be developed, should be relevant for understanding both tributary and non-tributary politics between China and its neighbors and should be able to cross the analytical divide created by the tribute system paradigm. Following a tribute-system perspective, one would also have to construct a complementary framework for non-tributary relations in order to explain the overall relations between China and its neighbors. Clearly, a model that is able to account for both the tributary and non-tributary part of China's foreign relations would be superior to one that can only account for one aspect.

One approach is to focus on the varied political, military, and economic conditions in different historical periods and examine how these affected the relations between

China and its neighbors. If patterns of interaction emerge in relation to specific conditions, new models or theories might be developed. This is the approach I have taken in building the theory of Chinese primacy in Chapter 2. It focuses on one structural condition (Chinese unipolarity) and theorizes how power realities and cultural assumptions might lead to varied interests and strategies on the part of China and its neighbors.

One final question remains: Can we do away with the "tribute system" concept altogether? Obviously the answer depends on the intellectual payoffs that can be generated by the retaining or abandoning of the concept. I shall only suggest that one can describe and analyze the relations between China and its neighbors without adhering to the "tribute system" language. I have done so in the preceding four chapters. One may be able to do so not only for East Asian politics during the early Ming but also for regional politics in other periods. The "tribute system," after all, is an intellectual invention. One may not be able to get away with using the term "tribute" since it appears so prominently in Chinese sources, but one can talk about tributary *relations* without feeling simultaneously obliged to stick to the tribute *system*. What is important is to understand what actually lay behind these *relations*. This can also serve as an important reminder that the actual "international system" of historical East Asian politics is much broader than the "tribute system."

Conclusion

This chapter has identified three ways in which the term "tribute system" has been used in the extant literature—as the bureaucratic management of foreign relations on the Chinese side, as an institution for interstate relations from an English School perspective, and as the medium for China's foreign relations as developed in Fairbank's interpretive model. I have focused on Fairbank's model and found it problematic for a number of reasons. Not only is it internally flawed, but it is also incapable of interpreting major events in East Asian history. It tries to account for some very long continuities in the relations between China and its neighbors, yet

variations and changes in these relations were as impressive as continuities. The utility of the model is limited, and we have to agree with Wills that "we could not keep in focus all aspects of the Chinese diplomatic tradition, all sources of conflict, if we began by calling all of the Chinese diplomatic tradition the "tribute system."[54] One might add that the model is even less useful when dealing with regional politics as a whole, since it is heavily biased toward the Chinese side.

Fairbank, it must be emphasized, recognized various anomalies and offered caveats regarding his framework. He did not, however, systematically refine his model on the basis of these anomalies. It is clear that the model, as Fairbank put it, is a "preliminary framework," laying out some central ideas and themes for possible further development. It is not my intention to oversimplify or caricature it. Rather, I have wanted to identify its inadequacies and suggest ways that we might move beyond this "preliminary" stage of conceptualizing historical East Asian politics. I have also been concerned with how IR scholars can produce better theoretical and empirical work on historical East Asian politics by critically drawing on the foundation so prominently laid by Fairbank and others. At least in the field of historical East Asian politics, we need a fruitful dialogue between political scientists and historians.

What of the idea of the "tribute system" then? Wills suggested that "It would be conceptually clearer if the term 'tribute system' were used only for this systematic complex of bureaucratic regulation developed around A.D. 1400."[55] This conception of the tribute system might be too restrictive. But at the very least scholars need to make clear *which* tribute system is being discussed. It does not even make much sense to speak of the Ming tribute system or the Qing tribute system as a whole, since we know that early Ming foreign policy differed from that of the mid-late Ming, as did early Qing foreign policy from that of the mid-late Qing. The more important task then is to *explain* these tribute systems by developing a further set of conceptual

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[54] Wills 1984, 172.
[55] Wills 1988, 225.

frameworks. Enquiry into the nature of historical East Asian politics cannot stop at the tribute system.

Yet taking a historical tribute system as the object of analysis in understanding the relations between China and other countries during a specific period is also inadequate, since this will ignore the relations outside of normal tributary politics. Ultimately, we may ask a question similar to what Hevia has posed: If the "tribute system" is removed, what do the relations between China and other polities look like?[56] For too long discussions about East Asian international relations have almost invariably come down to discussions about the tribute system. It is time to think about ways to move beyond this paradigm.

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[56] Hevia 1995, xi.

Chapter 7

Myths of the "Chinese Tradition"

Chinese intellectuals have long thought of China as having a unique historical experience dramatically different from that of other great powers in history. The preferred narrative of China as a benevolent power seeking peace and harmony when it was strong and as an easy victim of foreign exploitation and predation when it was weak has become entrenched in Chinese political culture since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Chinese weakness during the "century of humiliation" has produced the so-called "victim mentality" among Chinese elites.[1] After three decades of unparalleled economic growth, however, some Chinese analysts are now trying to get rid of this "victim mentality" by creating a new discourse of "great power mentality" or even a new mentality of "Chinese superiority" in international affairs. Along the process they seem to have constructed and reconstructed a "Chinese tradition" that is believed to be characterized above all by peace, harmony, defensiveness, and non-coercion in its foreign relations. To be sure, very few scholars would think that they were making myths about China's past with practical implications for the present and future. The cumulative consequences of their writings about "China's tradition," however, have produced precisely this effect.[2]

The belief that there is *one* clear tradition of Chinese pacifism, benevolence, and magnanimity demonstrated by the benign role that the Chinese empire is believed to have played in East Asia is deep-rooted among many Chinese analysts. Essentializing Chinese traditions of statecraft along this line is, however, a parochial and misleading interpretation of Chinese history. There are, in fact, several, rather than just one, traditions in imperial Chinese foreign policy. The nature of historical East Asian politics is also much more complicated than these analysts suggest. Yet,

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[1] On the theme of national humiliation, see Cohen 2003, chap. 6; and Gries, chap 3.

[2] By "tradition" I mean a set of principles and practices in traditional China's foreign relations that might influence contemporary Chinese foreign policy as a coherent body of precedents. By "myth" I mean a belief that has no foundation in fact but is given a special meaning and significance for some present purpose. For a theoretical discussion on myth, see Tudor 1972.

although this supposed "Chinese tradition" is a myth to varying degrees, the myth itself can have a profound impact on the contemporary discourse of Chinese foreign policy.

This chapter draws out the policy implications of this study by critiquing the proposition that a single, persistent tradition of Chinese pacifism and benevolence can be used to construct a contemporary model of Chinese foreign policy and international relations. Its objective is two fold. First, drawing on the case studies in this thesis, I examine the traditions of imperial Chinese statecraft by critiquing the three dominant myths of Chinese and East Asian history that can be found in some part of the Chinese literature. It must be said at the outset that these views do not exhaust the diversity of scholarly arguments on the subject. I focus on them because they constitute a noteworthy part of the literature with important implications for the future thinking of Chinese foreign policy.

Second, I explore the changing role of history in the discussion and formulation of contemporary Chinese foreign policy. Significantly, more and more Chinese analysts are now harking back to China's "glory" during ancient and imperial times, rather than dwelling on the "century of humiliation," for inspirations about China's future roles in the world. An important question to ask now is how, as the memory of the "century of humiliation" recedes in prominence, the more distant past of "imperial glory" might influence Chinese foreign policy thinking. Over twenty years ago when China had just started the reform and opening process, the historian Michael Hunt speculated that "The rise in appeal of the imperial past seems likely to happen in any case, for it offers the only indigenous benchmark for measuring progress toward a position of restored national power and pride."[3] As China now rises to reclaim its great power status, it is time to examine Hunt's hypothesis.

History can influence foreign policy in a number of ways. I identify myth—the construction and reconstruction of the Chinese past and the creation of a mythology

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[3] Hunt 1984, 38.

about a supposed "Chinese tradition" at the level of academic and popular discourse—as an important mechanism through which China's formidable historical experiences become a key source for ideational change in foreign policy. After identifying three myths of the "Chinese tradition" and critiquing them in detail, I discuss the consequences of these myths and their implications for future Chinese foreign policy.

Constructing the Myths of the "Chinese Tradition"

The myths of the supposed "Chinese tradition" are the widespread views that traditional China was a peaceful power, that it provided peace and stability in East Asia, and that as such it is an ideal model and superior source for constructing the future world order.

MYTH 1: IMPERIAL CHINA WAS PEACEFUL

One of the persistent and profound myths in the Chinese literature is the deep-rooted view that China is a peaceful power and the Chinese nation a peace-loving people. The idea of "Chinese pacifism" that imperial China was peaceful and that its wars were basically defensive and viewed as a last resort has also become the conventional wisdom among some Western observers.[4] But it is among the Chinese themselves—from the general public through commentators and scholars all the way up to the government—that this argument finds its most passionate expression and vehement defense. At its core is the idea that peace (*he* 和) is the essence of imperial Chinese foreign policy and, as a result of its peaceful nature, imperial China created and maintained a harmonious world in East Asia. China is believed to have created a historical trajectory—symbolized above all by peace and harmony in its internal and external relations—dramatically different from those of other states.

This "Chinese pacifism" has received strong support from both historians and IR scholars inside China, with occasional echoes from scholars of Chinese origin

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[4] Hu 2006, 256.

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working outside China. He Fangchuan, a prominent historian, declares that peace is the "gene" of the Chinese civilization. In a famous essay on the historical East Asian system, He argues that the distinguishing character of what he calls the "Huayi order" is its peacefulness. He is struck by the "peace, friendship, and harmony" in the relations between China and other countries. The sharp contrasts of these "Chinese characteristics" with the frequently violent historical orders established by other great powers, such as the Roman, Ottoman, British empires and the contemporary United States, amply demonstrate the superiority of the "Huayi order." He suggests that the "essence of peace" of the historical East Asian order must be inherited in building new regional and international orders today.[5]

Many IR scholars concur. One author asserts that traditional China's foreign policy was characterized by peace, benevolence, tolerance, and limited war of a non-utilitarian nature. Imperial China did not use its strength to bully the weak; contemporary China will keep this peaceful tradition during its rise.[6] Another author writes that the desire for peace and harmony is "engrained in the Chinese blood" and claims that during its five-thousand-year history, the "Chinese nation" have never fought wars with other peoples and countries unless "ethnic survival" and "national security" were threatened.[7] Huiyun Feng likewise asserts that the Chinese empire "seldom displayed aggressive intentions toward other countries nor made any attempts at expansion despite the capability to do so. In China's 5,000 years of history, there were only two large-scale military expansionist movements carried out by the nomadic minorities of Mongolian and Manchurian people."[8] Similarly, Shaohua Hu argues that under all circumstances "Imperial China was far from militaristic, but rather revealed a consistent pattern of pacifism." "No matter if it was strong or weak, Imperial China seemed reluctant to initiate the use of force in its foreign relations for both moralistic and pragmatic reasons."[9]

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[5] He 2007a.
[6] Zhang 1998.
[7] Wang 2006, 12, 16.
[8] Feng 2007, 26.
[9] Hu 2006, 270, 275.

These sweeping generalizations show how deep-seated the belief of "Chinese pacifism" has been. But if traditional China was peaceful, what accounted for this supposedly "Chinese characteristic"? The answer commonly given is Chinese culture. Thus Li Shaojun comments that the development of the Chinese civilization has been determined by traditional Chinese culture with the distinguishing idea of *he-he* (和合). In its emphasis on peace, cooperation, and integration, *he-he* is uniquely Chinese and demonstrates the Chinese desire for harmony in the world. According to Li, traditional culture stabilized China's internal and external relations through assimilation and integration of different peoples and cultures. He then contrasts Chinese culture with Western culture, claiming, reflecting another stereotype, that the former has contributed to ethnic integration inside China while the latter has given rise to numerous wars and conflicts in the global expansion of capitalism.[10] China's alternative to the Western model of historical development is thus effortlessly created.

Confucianism is held to be the key to China's alleged peaceful nature. Conventional wisdom has it that Confucianism renounces war as a legitimate means of statecraft. Instead it emphasizes the limitation and regulation of force by benevolence (*ren* 仁), virtue (*de* 德), and propriety (*li* 礼). Moreover, Confucianism distinguishes two types of rule and promotes the *wangdao* (王道 kingly way) of transforming people by virtue over the *badao* (霸道 the way of rule by might) of compelling people by force.[11] And not only Confucianism: According to Hu, almost all major Chinese schools of thought detest the use of force.[12]

MYTH 2: IMPERIAL CHINA PROVIDED PEACE AND STABILITY IN EAST ASIA

The second myth, increasingly heard among China's IR scholars, naturally follows from the first. Because traditional China is seen as a peaceful power and because Chinese culture (Confucianism to be precise) emphasizes virtue, it is argued that a

[10] Li 1999.
[11] Hu 2006, 259; and Zhang 1998, 7.
[12] Hu 2006, 258.

benevolent and magnanimous Chinese empire provided peace and stability in historical East Asia. One author writes that China's traditional "Tianxia view"—vaguely referring to any idea imperial China held about the world—privileged benevolence and virtue and China sought harmonious coexistence with its neighbors. Peace was the paramount goal in the Chinese conception and pursuit of order.[13]

According to Qin Yaqing, the historical East Asian order defies Western conceptions of international relations. First, the order was maintained not by the "culture of anarchy" but by China's unique historical experience and cultural construction—so unique that they cannot be described in Western languages. Second, although China used force many times for pacification and conquest, force was not the ideal of the "Tianxia view;" the highest stage of "force" (wu 武) was to "stop using force" (zhige 止戈). Third, since the ideal of the "Tianxia view" was world harmony, the means of order maintenance is ritual governance—a kind of institutional and normative governance model. Finally, the foundation of ritual governance is virtue; therefore the order was maintained above all by China's virtuous rule—a practice that is believed to be fundamentally different from the Western, especially realist, understanding of international order.[14]

Such understandings of the historical East Asian order seem to be prevalent in the Chinese literature. The belief is widespread that this order was maintained by culture and morality for the sake of peace and mutual benefit between China and other countries. In writing about the tribute system, one author argues that China's purpose in establishing such a system was peace; whether or not to join the system was entirely up to other countries, and China would not compel them to pay tribute if they did not want to.[15] What China demonstrated was "ideational" rather than "material" power, and its influences over its neighbors were primarily political and

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[13] Du 2006.
[14] Qin 2007, 14-5. See also Qin 2006, 10.
[15] Song 1998, 40-43.

cultural.[16] The image of China as a benevolent and magnanimous power seeking mostly peace, harmony, and mutual benefit for East Asian countries is thus well established.

MYTH 3: TRADITIONAL CHINA PROVIDES SUPERIOR SOURCES FOR CONSTRUCTING THE FUTURE WORLD ORDER

If the first two myths have a long tradition in Chinese thinking, a third myth is now rapidly emerging to catch the imagination of Chinese elites. This myth grows out of the latest reconstruction of the "Chinese tradition", and has pushed the first two myths to their extremes. At its core are two messages, exemplified by two recent studies on China's political and diplomatic traditions.[17] First, the historical East Asian order centering on China—part of what the philosopher Zhao Tingyang calls the "Tianxia system"—provides an almost perfect model for the future world order.[18] Second, compared with Western ideas, traditional Chinese thought is a superior source for thinking about the future world order. In asserting that traditional China provides superior sources for constructing the future world order, some scholars are now calling for the Chinese to "rethink China," to start an ideological debate with the West, and to think about how China can contribute to the making of the future world order.

Perhaps no one advocates "rethinking China" better than Zhao Tingyang. Zhao begins his popular book[19] with a discussion on "why we need to discuss the Chinese worldview," explicitly advocating that we now have to "rethink China" or "reconstruct China." As he asserts, "When China becomes an important part of the world, we must discuss the significance of Chinese culture and thought for the world. If China's knowledge system is unable to participate in the construction of the world's knowledge system so as to create a new world knowledge system, and if China cannot become a great power of knowledge production, it will still be a small power even if it is a big power of material production with a huge economic scale.

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[16] Zhang (Xiaoming) 2006.
[17] Zhao 2005; and Xiang 2007.
[18] Zhao 2005.
[19] For reviews, see: Zhang (Shuguang) 2006; Xu 2007; and Callahan 2008.

When China has to think about problems of the whole world and be responsible for the world, it must say something to the world and offer thoughts about the world. China's worldview thus becomes the foremost problem."[20]

Zhao thinks that China can become a new kind of great power, one that is responsible for the world and different from historical empires in world history. In constructing a new kind of "Chinese exceptionalism," he aims to "create new world concepts and world institutions." He advocates taking "Tianxia"—vaguely understood as the "world"—as the foremost unit of analysis. This is believed to be able to surpass the Western mode of thinking in terms of the "nation-state."[21] He declares, "The historical significance of 'rethinking China' lies at recovering China's own ability to think, reconstructing its own worldviews, values and methodologies, and thinking about China's future, Chinese concepts about the future and China's roles and responsibilities in the world."[22]

Zhao argues that China's political philosophy based on the "Tianxia theory" is the best theoretical preparation for the construction of a world institution.[23] What is China's unique political philosophy? According to him, first, Western thoughts are all about conflict; only Chinese thought is capable of thinking about harmony.[24] Second, Chinese philosophy seeks to revise the Hobbesian logic of the "state of nature" and to create a new interpersonal logic such as one defined by Chinese concepts like virtue and ritual.[25] Third, while Western philosophy can only explain the preservation of individual rights and national interests, Chinese philosophy, because it is based on the holistic "Tianxia view," can explain the "political system and governance of the world" and the preservation of the values of mankind and the interests of the world.[26]

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[20] Zhao 2005, 2.
[21] Ibid., 3.
[22] Ibid., 7.
[23] Ibid., 160.
[24] Ibid., 15.
[25] Ibid., 23.
[26] Ibid., 24.

What is Zhao's "Tianxia system" then? Although his writings appear ambiguous and even contradictory at times, several features of his model can be identified. First, in his view, the relationship between China and "others" was not confrontational in nature; other peoples were not the objects of Chinese conquest. Where there were conflicts between China and other groups, they were "utilitarian conflicts" for local interests, not "absolute conflicts" to deny "others" in terms of "spirit" or "knowledge." Second, the idea of the "Tianxia" as one big family limited the tendency for it to develop into a military empire. "Tianxia" was not a conquest empire, but rather a cultural empire. But this was not a cultural empire of domination in terms of universalizing Chinese values; domination was not sought because the basic principle of *li* created self-restraint. *Li* was the universal principle in managing interpersonal and "international" relations in the "Tianxia system." Third, "Tianxia" was defined by *li* and *ren* (benevolence), creating a world cultural institution that minimized cultural conflicts which in turn gave rise to a world political institution based on the principle of *he* (和 peace/harmony). China's historical "Tianxia empire" is therefore a "peaceful empire."[27] Finally, because China's Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子) took the "Tianxia" as his family, there was "no outsiders" (*wuwai* 无外). Based on the principle of *wuwai*, other countries or regions were only unknown or far-away from the imperial core; they did not stand in relations of opposition or in need of imperial conquest.

Although Zhao has excited many eager to present a "China model" during China's rise, he is not without critics. One criticism comes from Xiang Lanxin, who faults Zhao for using a dualistic perspective in interpreting traditional Chinese thought and for misunderstanding the essence of traditional Chinese culture.[28] Yet, although Xiang criticizes Zhao's interpretation of traditional China, he in fact shares a fundamental similarity with Zhao—both champion the superiority of Chinese ideas in understanding and practicing world politics. Their books are different in terms of style and argumentation. Substantive arguments aside, they can be put together both

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[27] Ibid., 84, 169.
[28] Xiang 2007, 14, 38.

as advocates of the superiority of Chinese ideas in managing international affairs. Xiang argues, in particular, that China needs to start an ideological debate with the West on the management of international affairs, with the goal of discrediting Eurocentrism as the dominant narrative of historical development and perhaps replacing it with a new China-centered model.

A further similarity is found in the premises behind their projects. Like Zhao, Xiang asserts that "If the historical significance of China's integration into the world is far beyond conforming to the existing international rules and norms, then it must make an ideological contribution to the world in the area of international politics...When the world urgently needs new thinking on international relations, China cannot focus only on international economics without offering its own political ideology."[29]

Xiang wants to construct a Chinese ideology able to stand up against Eurocentrism in framing world politics. At a time of growing Chinese power and, as a result, increasing confidence in Chinese culture, the Chinese should no longer uncritically accept Westerns ideas and ways of thinking. They need to rediscover the essence of Chinese culture and refine it to suit contemporary circumstances. This will be the ultimate source of Xiang's proposed new ideology. Reading Xiang one is given the impression that the contemporary international order somehow waits for China to rescue. At least, Xiang suggests, the Chinese should take as their responsibility to develop a new ideology and a whole new set of ideas and theories to save the world. His similarity with Zhao in stating China's grand international mission is impressive indeed.

Thus Xiang sets out to reclaim the value and superiority of Chinese thought and revive the tradition of Chinese culture. Why then does he think Chinese ideas are superior to Western ones in managing international affairs? No systematic answer is given to this question, but two points are worth noting. First, drawing on Confucianism, he emphasizes that in contrast to the West, China is not a "violent

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[29] Ibid., 2.

civilization." According to him, Western thought emphasizes confrontation and struggle, a mode of thinking perhaps with origins in the dualism of the Christian culture. In contrast, Chinese thought does not take struggle as a motivation; between opposites there is always integration or mutual accommodation. The differences between Western and Chinese ways of thinking are repeatedly stressed: While the West thinks in terms of dualism and antagonism, China thinks in terms of holism and harmony. Second, Xiang argues that imperial China's governance system is superior to the feudalism of Western Europe. Traditional Chinese politics is more reasonable and humane because it was "based on the people" (*yi ren wei ben* 以人为本). This ensured that the legitimacy of China's imperial government was based on "benevolence to the people" (*qin min* 亲民).[30]

Evaluating the myths of the "Chinese Tradition"

The three views just outlined are myths because they are distorted representations of the Chinese past. This can be shown by asking a few obvious questions.

THE EVIDENCE

The assertions of Chinese pacifism often fly in the face of historical realities. Shaohua Hu asks a good question: "If China was peaceful, how can one explain the great expansion of the Chinese territory? After all, Imperial China at its inception occupied a territory only about a quarter of the size of today's China."[31] In arguing for Chinese pacifism, however, Hu fails to provide a satisfactory answer. The standard answer given in the Chinese literature is invariably a cultural explanation—China expanded not by war and conquest but by cultural assimilation. If this was the case, how did the Qin emerge from the crucible of interstate competition in the Warring States period and create the first empire in Chinese history? How did the Han expand into the Western Regions and the Korean Peninsula? How did the Tang extend its empire into Central Asia? How did the Ming

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[30] Ibid, 92, 94, 102.
[31] Hu 2006, 258.

reclaim territories in the north that the Song failed to recover? How did the Qing create a vast continental empire stretching over Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang, territories over which no previous Han Chinese dynasty had effective control? When these questions are asked, it becomes apparent that "War, not Confucian ideals, explains how China expanded from the Yellow River valley in the Warring States era to the continental empire in the Qing dynasty."[32] One historian believes that "China's history has in fact been at least as violent as Europe's."[33] Indeed, according to a chronology compiled by China's military historians, a total of 3,131 wars occurred during China's imperial history from the Qin to the Qing, averaging almost 1.5 wars each year.[34]

The argument that it is culture rather than war that explains Chinese expansion is often based on the frequently made assertion of the amazing power of Chinese culture in ethnic integration and political unity. Yet, speaking of the relations between the Tang and its neighbors, Denis Twitchett observes that

> The neighbouring states, even those which had adopted Chinese as their literary language and administrative lingua franca, were not inexorably drawn to adopt Chinese culture and political models wholesale, 'transformed by culture' as orthodox Chinese political theory would express it. They adopted from Tang China only what seemed to them useful and appropriate...The stable states of the eighth century each had its own powerful cultural identity as well as a fierce sense of political independence. Buddhism was a far more widespread influence in all these cultures [e.g., Tibet, Nanzhao] than Chinese models, and transformed them at a deeper level.[35]

The case of the Tang is crucial because it is during this period that other polities' extensive borrowing from Chinese culture and institutions took place. Yet culture alone was unable to transform enemies into friends or even further bring them into

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[32] Hui 2008a, 58. On the importance of the military and war in Chinese history, see van de Ven 2000.
[33] van de Ven 1996, 737.
[34] "Zhongguo Junshishi" bianxiezu 2002.
[35] Twitchett 2000, 147.

the fold of "China." What have been believed to be the effects of culture were very often the effects of war. Indeed Peter Lorge argues that "There was no 'China' without war:"[36]

> [A]ll of the successful imperial Chinese dynasties were extremely skilled in the use of war in state formation and maintenance. Chinese empires were not created by the cultivation of virtue, a fundamentally cultural orientation to political order, or ideological pleas for ethnic unity; they were created by decades of war and political strife...Although this has been most apparent during the rule of "alien" conquerors like the Mongols or Manchus, it has been equally true of the Han Chinese dynasty as well. All imperial dynasties were conquest dynasties.[37]

One of the myths regarding Chinese history is the view that military expansions were carried out only by non-Han Chinese dynasties such as the Yuan and the Qing; Han Chinese dynasties were almost always defensive and inward-looking.[38] Yet this can be easily challenged by evidence from the Qin, the Han, the Tang, the Ming, or even the Song. Everyone seems to agree that the Song was especially weak and civil-focused among all Chinese dynasties. Yet it is this supposedly civil-oriented dynasty that sent a successful expedition to conquer the West River region in the early 1070s as a first step in a larger strategy to destroy the Tanguts. The campaign, moreover, "was clearly expansionistic and assuaged the injured military feelings the court had been nursing for decades."[39] Indeed, Yuan-Kang Wang shows that the Song behaved aggressively at the first sight of opportunity.[40] So was the Ming, a regime that emerged from rebellions of the 1350s to become a regional power in the Yangtze River valley and then a force capable of expelling the Mongols from north China. In the end, as Crossley points out, the "monolithic assumption that there were 'Chinese' dynasties that were somehow not conquest dynasties, contrasted to

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[36] Lorge 2005, 178.
[37] Ibid., 2.
[38] See, for example, Feng 2007, 26.
[39] Lorge 2005, 179.
[40] Wang 2001.

'conquest' dynasties, all of which had been perpetrated by foreign (barbarian, non-Han, alien) dynasties, was not credible. All empires in China, from that of the Qin in 221 BCE, are manifestly conquest empires, regardless of the origins of the ruling house."[41]

Yet some may not be very much troubled by such evidence. Sometimes it is asserted that these belong to China's "internal politics," not "external relations." The Tanguts, so the argument goes, were eventually brought into China, as were the peoples of Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang. Such a retrospective methodology is a major impediment to a sound understanding of Chinese history. But let us try the hard test and see whether China displayed consistent pacifism toward "other countries" such as Korea and Japan in its "proper foreign relations." Chinese aggressions are easy to find during the Han and Tang dynasties. I shall make the test even harder by looking at the foreign policies of the early Ming (1368-1424), since the Ming, as He Fangchuan argues, is the foremost case of Chinese pacifism.

Leaving aside its repeated campaigns into Mongolia which He and many others overlook (I have argued in the case studies that most of these campaigns were more offensively than defensively oriented), did the early Ming behave aggressively toward its neighbors such as Korea and Japan? Yes, more than has usually been realized. Although force was not used, the threat of force was frequent. I have identified four salient strategies that early Ming rulers had employed toward their neighbors. Many analysts have for long emphasized just one of these: persuasion. Yet the other three—war, blackmail, and inducement—are just as important in telling us about the nature of Ming foreign policy as persuasion. Early Ming rulers threatened Korea and Japan because they perceived security threats from Japanese pirates and Korean collaboration with the Mongols and Jurchens. Were their threats in the form of "I'll punish and even invade you if you don't comply with my requests" indications of China's peaceful intention? One may wonder how the Korean and Japanese rulers might have thought about China's "peaceful nature" given the threats

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[41] Crossley 2002, 29-30.

they had received. The Japanese decided to meet the Chinese with arms on several occasions at least. The mere fact of threat itself would cast doubt on the "peaceful nature" of Chinese foreign policy. Certainly it shows that China's relations with other countries were not that harmonious after all.

CULTURE AND FOREIGN POLICY

Many Chinese analysts seem to believe that culture has a major causal impact on foreign policy. As we have seen, their favorite explanation of the supposed peace in Chinese foreign policy is Chinese culture. The literature on "Chinese strategic culture" has blossomed, along with the revival of interest in traditional culture in China in general. Some analysts, however, go further than simply claiming an "impact" of culture on foreign policy. They believe that culture can *determine* foreign policy without fully explaining why. Li Shaojun asserts that the development of the Chinese civilization, a model believed to be fundamentally different from that of the West, determines that China will be a factor for peace in the twenty-first century.[42] He Fangchuan argues that China's rise in the contemporary world will again be peaceful partly because of the tradition and "gene" of peace in the Chinese civilization.[43]

Assuming for the moment that culture determines foreign policy, can the conclusion that Chinese foreign policy is peaceful follow? A "yes" answer often follows from equating "Chinese culture" with "Confucianism" while overlooking what the Chinese cultural tradition might have actually been. Since Confucianism advocates benevolence and virtue, a Confucian foreign policy would supposedly rest on persuasion rather than coercion. And since Confucianism was the official ideology of the imperial Chinese state, the conclusion that traditional Chinese foreign policy was peaceful follows naturally.

But Confucianism is *not* all of what Chinese culture is about. It does not monopolize

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[42] Li 1999, 30.
[43] He 2007b, 392.

the Chinese cultural tradition. What about Legalism—a school of thought that emphasizes the maximization of power and the utility of force and punishment—and its influence on Chinese political development and foreign policy? If one wants to take a cultural approach, the first proper question should be "Which Chinese culture?" and then determine the relative causal weight of different cultures on behavior.

In fact, Chinese strategic culture is considerably more varied than a simple Confucian paradigm suggests. Iain Johnston, for example, finds two competing paradigms, with the parabellum paradigm playing a major role in the strategies of the Ming dynasty than the Confucian-Mencian paradigm.[44] Critiquing this, Huiyun Feng argues that the Confucian defensive strategic culture trumps the offensive realist one.[45] Andrew Scobell contends that neither the Confucian-Mencian nor the parabellum paradigm is sufficient to encompass the richness of China's strategic tradition. Rather, the two strands interact to produce the paradoxical outcome of idealist logic (the Confucian school) combined with hard realpolitik security policies (the realpolitik school). China thus has a "dualistic" strategic culture.[46] Another author identifies three paradigms, adding that of the "realistic kingly way" to the Confucian and parabellum paradigms.[47]

Still, others find a great many "diplomatic schools" in the Warring States period each with implications for China's strategic culture. Ye Zicheng, for example, argues that ancient China had both the "realist" and "idealist" schools of thought on foreign relations, each with its own variants. These different "diplomatic schools" share many similarities with Western perspectives on international relations.[48] More recently, Yan Xuetong has shown that ancient Chinese thoughts on foreign relations share many characteristics with modern IR theories. Elements of realism, liberalism,

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[44] Johnston 1995.
[45] Feng 2007.
[46] Scobell 2003.
[47] Chen 2004, 24-27.
[48] Ye 2003; and Ye and Pang 2001.

and constructivism can all be found in the writings of pre-Qin thinkers.[49] These researches show that it is ultimately mistaken to infer the peaceful nature of Chinese foreign policy from the peaceful nature of Chinese culture—neither was by nature peaceful. They also show that, since Chinese culture shares so many similarities with Western ideas, it is not that unique after all.

Indeed, even though Confucianism was the official ideology since the Han, its role in Chinese politics and foreign policy may not be that consequential in reality. Chinese rulers might have in fact followed "Legalism with a Confucian facade," as Victoria Hui emphasizes. Hui further argues that the actual Chinese tradition is better characterized by Legalism than by Confucianism; Confucian moral restraints had only shaky foundations in ancient and imperial China.[50] Peter Lorge even suggests that "traditional Chinese culture was partly a martial culture."[51]

Is Chinese culture pacifistic? The question does not permit a simple "yes" or "no" answer. Chinese culture contains both "idealpolitik" and "realpolitik" elements and which element played a more profound role in Chinese history is still an open question.[52] The evidence presented so far, however, has cast strong doubt on a direct casual link between a peaceful Chinese culture and a peaceful Chinese foreign policy. History suggests that just as different streams of Chinese culture emphasizes peace as well as force, so actual Chinese foreign policy has been both peaceful and conflictual. The challenge is to explain the variation and specify the causal chain between culture and foreign policy if such a chain can be identified.

But cultural explanation must face another analytical challenge: Foreign policy is *not* determined by culture alone. Cultural explanation is ultimately incomplete, and a host of other internal and external factors may influence foreign policymaking. Even

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[49] Yan and Xu 2008.
[50] Hui 2005, 2008a.
[51] Lorge 2005, 3.
[52] It would be interesting to examine the origins of the various myths of Chinese history. In terms of culture, Hans Van de Ven writes that "The idea that Chinese culture was one of peace is partly a Confucian aspiration, partly an Enlightenment image produced when dynastic wars ravaged Europe, and finally partly a notion that was given new life after World War I by those in the East and West who wrote about pacifistic Eastern Cultures as an alternative to violent Western ones." van de Ven 1996, 737.

if Chinese culture was peaceful, it does not follow that Chinese foreign policy would also be peaceful. And peace in Chinese foreign policy was not a necessary result of its peaceful culture. Just as the cause of war is found at the level of the individual, the state, and the state system, so the conditions of peace rest on a delicate balance between internal and external factors.[53] Adding to the task of weighing the causal importance of different cultures, analysts must also determine the causal weight of culture as opposed to "material factors," to use the somewhat clumsy language in IR. Because factors other than culture can influence foreign policy, it is ultimately misleading to claim the "peaceful nature" of China or Chinese foreign policy. Can something be peaceful or violent by nature? Peace and war are as much determined by circumstances as they are by culture. The Chinese, it has been said, "are capable of peace as well as war, and cultural precedent does not tell us which they will prefer."[54]

MEANS AND ENDS

The emphasis on peace and harmony characterizes neither traditional Chinese foreign policy nor Chinese culture. Some Chinese analysts seem oblivious to the wars during Chinese unification and expansion, mistake the effect of war for the effect of culture, fail to identify and weigh the causal importance of different streams of Chinese culture, and overlook a variety of factors other than culture that can influence foreign policy. Another problem in their analyses is the confusion of means and ends of traditional Chinese foreign policy.

Many have thought that peace and harmony were the goals of traditional Chinese foreign policy. They very often were not. The quick belief that they were may partly stem from analysts' taking the official statements of the imperial Chinese state at face value. What were in fact ideological expressions have sometimes been taken as evidence supporting China's pursuit of peace and harmony by means of culture and virtue. But, as Wang Gungwu pointed out long ago, statements of virtue were often

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[53] See in particular, Waltz 1959.
[54] Nathan and Ross 1997, 21.

ideological; actual policy had to be determined by a more realistic appraisal of the facts.[55] The memorials penned by Confucian scholar-officials have to be examined against events and alternative accounts rather than simply taken for granted. If one reads these official statements, it indeed appears that China was an all benevolent power acting only for the peace and prosperity of all countries. The reality, however, was often very different. I shall only use the case of the early Ming to illustrate the importance of distinguishing means and ends of its foreign policy.

Early Ming rulers had two primary concerns in their foreign policies: ensure security at the frontier and enhance domestic legitimacy by gaining foreign recognitions of their superiority. These twin objectives, combined with early Ming's superior power and the rulers' conception of their sinocentric identity, led to a grand strategy of political and/or military domination toward neighboring countries. What were the primary means used for domination? So long as the ends could be achieved, the particular means did not very much bother either the Hongwu or Yongle emperor. The ends justified the means. Thus, they tried four principal strategies toward their neighbors: persuasion, inducement, threat, and war. Persuasion and inducement were peaceful means, while threat and war were coercive strategies. Where did peace and harmony fall in early Ming's strategic design? Nowhere except in the stated ideal—and this only after Chinese domination was achieved.

Ensuring security and gaining foreign recognitions of their superiority were the concrete ends of early Ming foreign policy. Whether peace and harmony would follow is an entirely different matter. They may or may not. Because peace and benevolence were the expressions of Chinese means to specific ends, as were war and threat, one cannot tell whether early Ming foreign policy was *either* peaceful *or* aggressive. The nature of early Ming foreign policy cannot be put in terms of simple dichotomies between peace and war, harmony and violence. The early Ming in fact

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[55] Wang 1968, 43. Wang further pointed out that although Tang and Song historians believed that it was China's possession of virtue that led to successful foreign policy, it was in fact through the skilled use of force that the Sui and Tang rulers brought power and glory to the empire. Indeed, Chinese ministers would later find out that there was no real contradiction between virtue and force so long as the force was applied by a ruler possessing virtue. The argument about virtue vs. force then easily becomes tautological, i.e., ideological. Wang 1968, 46, 49.

experienced peace as well as war, harmony as well as violence. Rather, one must distinguish the means and ends of its foreign policy and show how they were given practical expressions in specific cases. For example, even if early Ming emperors' initial concern in the north was security, their superior power would propel them to adopt offensive means—conquest and preventive war—to achieve it.

THE NATURE OF CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

What then is the nature of traditional Chinese foreign policy? The question is too big and I will not attempt even a partial answer. I shall suggest, however, that the ends in rulers' view and the capabilities at their disposal can explain a big part of their foreign policies. Thus, early Ming rulers' need for security and legitimacy, combined with the power and vigor following dynastic founding, led to a grand strategy of domination through the means of persuasion, inducement, threat, and war. One can ask three questions when thinking about the nature of Chinese foreign policy in specific periods: What were the rulers' objectives and why? What means did they use to achieve these objectives? Why those means but not others?

The example of Zheng He's overseas voyages in the early fifteenth century illustrates nicely the utility of such an approach. This example has added significance because Zheng He's voyages have been seen as the clearest yet proof of China's peaceful foreign policy. The seven voyages between 1405 and 1433 have been invariably interpreted by Chinese analysts as demonstrating Ming China's wish to conduct peaceful cultural and economic exchanges with foreign countries. Their favorite argument, in a long tradition of sentimentalizing Chinese history to create a preferred alternative to European history, is that in contrast to the Europeans, Zheng He tried no conquest or colonization but instead focused on exploration and friendly exchange. He Fangchuan, for example, believes that Zheng He's voyages showed the Chinese desire to share peace with other peoples and to enhance their civilizations by spreading Chinese culture.[56]

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[56] He 2007b, 308-9.

Yet, if my argument about early Ming foreign policy is right, Zheng He's voyages should be more properly seen as an attempt to meet the objectives of either security maintenance or identity recognition. Since security was not an issue when it comes to the polities in maritime Southeast Asia and beyond, foreign recognitions of the Yongle emperor's superiority must be the paramount goal. Zheng He's voyages, therefore, can be seen together with Yongle's other grandiose projects, such as the Mongolian campaigns, the construction of the imperial palace in Beijing, and the conquest of Vietnam, as one of his several major attempts to buttress his legitimacy by gaining tributary states beyond the immediate vicinity of the Ming empire.

Indeed, in a recent study Edward Dreyer argues that the purpose of Zheng He's voyages was "to force the states of Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean to acknowledge the power and majesty of Ming China and its emperor" and "to enforce outward compliance with the forms of the Chinese tributary system by the show of an overwhelming armed force."[57] In fact, the *Mingshi* (Official History of the Ming Dynasty) has explicitly stated these objectives. Zheng He's biography states that Yongle "wanted to display his soldiers in strange lands in order to make manifest the wealth and power of the Middle Kingdom."[58]

What about the means to this end? Was Zheng He prepared to try all the four strategies of persuasion, inducement, threat, and war? Apparently he was. The *Mingshi* says that Zheng He's fleet "went in succession to the various foreign countries, proclaiming the edicts of the Son of Heaven and giving gifts to their rulers and chieftains. Those who did not submit were pacified by force."[59] Zheng He was well prepared to fight and in fact did fight on at least three occasions. Moreover, Dreyer points out that "the Chinese saw the three battles as major accomplishments of Zheng He's fleet, rather than as incidental exceptions to a career of peaceful exploration." One must think that peace was never the main objective of Zheng He's voyages; showcasing Chinese power and superiority and winning Yongle more

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[57] Dreyer 2007, xii, 163. For another recent work which argues that "the voyages constituted a maritime proto-colonialism," see Wade 2005.
[58] Dreyer 2007, 33.
[59] Ibid.

tributary states were.

One must also think that the fact that the voyages were largely peaceful should be explained by the power asymmetry between Zheng He's fleet and the political units he visited, rather than by the alleged peaceful intentions of the voyages. Faced with "several myriads of government troops and over a hundred big ships" (as Zheng He bragged about the power of his fleet),[60] except for the most recalcitrant, who would want to fight such an overwhelming force that emerged out of the blue? Again as Dreyer puts it, "Zheng He's armada was frightening enough that it seldom needed to fight, but being *able* to fight was its primary mission."[61] Zheng He's voyages, then, insofar as its purpose was concerned, were not so different from Yongle's other foreign policy actions. Although the voyages were largely harmonious, their purpose was to impress or even overpower other countries so as to demonstrate Chinese superiority.

Chinese pacifism a myth if one believes that it trumped other intellectual and political traditions in historical China. The claim that China was a peaceful power and the Chinese nation a peace-loving people is in fact extremely flawed and shallow. The point is not to go to the other extreme—the equally untenable view that traditional China was an inherently aggressive power. The preceding discussion should not be seen as arguing for Chinese militarism. I have tried to show that apart from the image of a peaceful China, there is another China—militarized, power-political, and aggressive at times—that one must not lose sight of. The "two faces" of China warn strongly against essentializing the Chinese tradition, for there is simply no single tradition to speak of.

THE NATURE OF HISTORICAL EAST ASIAN POLITICS

Having deconstructed the myths about imperial Chinese foreign policy, it will now be easy to evaluate corresponding myths on the nature of the historical East Asian

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[60] Ibid., 29.
[61] Ibid., xii (emphasis in original).

order. Again the question centers on the understanding of ends and means. Many Chinese analysts believe that in constructing the tribute system, China wanted to achieve peace, harmony, and mutual benefit with other countries. And China maintained the system through "ideational" rather than "material" power, that is, a kind of normative governance supported by China's virtuous rule.

Virtuous rule, however, often reflected Chinese rulers' wish to dominate their neighbors by moral force. Such political domination entailed that these countries had to act correctly according to the Chinese conception—not to interfere in their neighbors' affairs nor to invade adjoining territory; to maintain their dynastic affairs in proper form; and to be open and sincere in their dealings with the Chinese emperor. Only when such a moral order was maintained can peace and harmony be expected.[62] Yet, beneath the niceties of such an order, one finds that peace and harmony were not the immediate goals of the early Ming's effort to establish tributary relations with its neighbors. Tributary politics were rather underpinned by the twin motives of security and legitimacy. Did early Ming China consistently apply the rule of virtue toward its neighbors? Hardly. Although initially the Hongwu and Yongle emperors tried to persuade and induce foreign rulers to accept their superiority, they soon resorted to threat and even war when compliance was not forthcoming. The more troublesome the relations became, the less "virtuous" China's policies followed. It would appear that Chinese benevolence was often only possible when foreign rulers complied with Chinese wishes.

Historical East Asia during the early Ming is not just a normative order, although it no doubt contains some such elements. A careful examination of dynastic records will show that coercion was a prominent element in Chinese policies toward its neighbors. Some IR scholars believe that historical East Asia was unique in that it was not characterized by power politics, as in modern Europe, but by virtue and ritual. They conclude that realism cannot be applied to this part of·the world. Are war and threat not part of power politics? Historical East Asian politics were more

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[62] Whitmore 1977, 51.

power-political than they have realized. The attempt to pit East Asia against Western Europe, virtuous rule against power politics, peace and harmony against war and instability as if these rigid dichotomies could be sustained, is misguided and untenable. A more fruitful comparison of the international politics of the two regions in history will have to first get rid of these superficialities.

The question of whether China was a benevolent empire that provided peace and stability in East Asia has to be answered on a case-by-case basis. In the case of the early Ming dynasty, China was at times benevolent, yet was equally if not more often demanding and even aggressive. Peace and stability in foreign relations were seldom the primary goals. Beyond the Ming, the relations between China and its neighbors cannot be characterized by peace or stability even though during various periods the system did appear to be stable. The analytical challenge is to explain the variation in system stability.

TRADITIONAL CHINA AS A MODEL FOR WORLD ORDER?

We will now be able to evaluate Zhao Tingyang's and Xiang Lanxin's arguments for the superiority of Chinese ideas and models. Both praise Chinese culture for being able to think about peace and harmony and think in terms of holism and integration. This is contrasted with Western philosophy which both Zhao and Xiang criticize as being able to think only in terms of dualism, antagonism, and individual interest. Such interpretations are an important basis upon which they champion the superiority of Chinese ideas and the necessity for China to offer new ideas for international affairs.

Yet such interpretations of Chinese and Western cultures are simplistic and mistaken. True, Confucianism emphasizes peace and harmony. But so did liberal thinkers such as Grotius and Kant in the West. To claim that Western philosophy is incapable of thinking seriously about peace is to discount its entire liberal tradition. Moreover, Zhao and Xiang write as though Chinese culture were all for peace and harmony, while Western culture were all for conflict and struggle. Yet there are important

Chinese schools of thought that emphasize struggle and force, just as there are important Western schools of thought that emphasize peace and harmony. While their differences are undeniable, one should not overlook important similarities.[63] If imperial China was indeed ruled by "Legalism with a Confucian facade," one must acknowledge the central role Legalism—which above all emphasized the utility of power and punishment—played in Chinese history. As one commentator has pointed out, the conclusion of the alleged Chinese superiority can only be reached by comparing the "best" Chinese ideas (e.g., Confucianism) with the "worst" Western ideas (e.g., Hobbes).[64]

The belief in imperial China's ability to think about and act for peace and harmony unites Zhao and Xiang despite their substantive differences. They seem to have assumed that because Confucianism advocated benevolence and peace, imperial China had pursued them and realized them. Thus, Zhao, following the stereotypical interpretation in the Chinese literature, thinks that China was able to transform enemies into friends by attracting them rather than conquering them. The assumption is unwarranted, as I have shown above. Chinese pacifism is often a myth, as is the image of a benevolent China acting for the common good of other countries.

In the writings of many Chinese, traditional China appears to have always acted for the sake of common interests, defying what (Western) realism says about the nature of international politics. It is Zhao's central argument that the Chinese in imperial times were able to think in terms of the "Tianxia" (never mind whether this means the Chinese empire, the entire world, or the "international system" of which China was a part, for its meaning shifts as the text goes) rather than the "nation-state." This is believed to be good because it shows that Chinese rulers were taking into account other countries' interests in addition to their own. Yet "thinking in terms of the 'Tianxia'" often also implied sinocentrism and the desire to impose a Chinese conception of international order onto others. Zhao fails to explicitly acknowledge

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[63] For a brief note on the similarities as well as differences between Chinese and Western thoughts in international relations, see Bleiker 2001, 195-6.
[64] Xu 2007, 137.

the inequality in such a "Chinese world order." Did Chinese rulers act for the interests of other countries? What I have found among early Ming emperors are instead the concerns for the security of their empire and the legitimacy of their rule. Toward these ends they tried to dominate their neighbors—hardly what one would call "altruism".

Can the Chinese empire and the historical East Asian order that was more or less centered on it be models for the future world order? Since one has to make so many qualifications on the superiority of the "Tianxia system," the answer cannot be quick and firm. Certainly the model represented by traditional China is not as perfect as Zhao believes. The belief rests on the alleged superiority and advantages of the historical East Asian order which frequently turn out to be myths while discounting elements of power politics and inequality which were also an integral part of the system. One must also recognize that modeling something on the basis of something else requires comparability and similarity between the two, at least structurally. Can the world be remade to conform to the historical East Asian model? Can China's and East Asian's past be the world's future? Essentially, this is what Zhao advocates. But he has shown neither how his "Tianxia" utopia might be realized in practice nor how the modeling can be done.

Historical Myths and Contemporary Chinese Foreign Policy

Because they are distorted representations of the Chinese past, the three beliefs just evaluated are better called myths. But that they are myths does not imply their unimportance or incredibility. Nor, as a practical matter, do myths always entail harmful effects on policy discussions. In this section, I explore the role of myth as a mechanism through which history becomes the source of ideational change and examine the practical implications of the myths of the "Chinese tradition" for the evolution of Chinese foreign policy.

Henry Tudor wrote that myths are "believed to be true, not because the historical

evidence is compelling, but because they make sense of men's present experience."[65]

Paul Cohen points out that myths may or may not be part of the actual historical past;

but in order to work effectively, they must "possess a degree of plausibility. They

must be believable, even if not true."[66] The myths of the "Chinese tradition" just

discussed possess more than a degree of plausibility. Indeed, the first and second

myths have been believed to be true ever since the imperial era. Expanding the first

two, the third myth has quickly found a large number of followers. Such myths,

because they speak to the enduring mindset of Chinese pacifism, can in fact be far

more persuasive and influential in intellectual debates and everyday discourse than

more accurate presentations of the Chinese past, which necessarily have to be more

nuanced, complicated, and even uncomfortable in terms of substantive arguments.

The power of myths lies in their attraction through simplification and magnification

at the same time.

In this sense, the realities of the Chinese and East Asian past may not be that

consequential when it comes to current debates about China's future roles in the

world. What is important may not be what actually happened in the past, but what is

now *believed* to have happened. And the myths of a pacifistic Chinese tradition are

not intrinsically bad. Myths are necessary condensations of historical traditions that

form a useful shorthand for debate.[67] In fact, the myth of Chinese pacifism can quite

possibly have beneficial effects on contemporary Chinese foreign policy, if Chinese

elites and policymakers can privilege the idealpolitik tradition over the realpolitik

tradition and consistently translate the themes of peace and harmony into behavior.

But this is not the only implication of these myths. The emergence of a particular

myth is always intended to meet the needs of a particular time. "A myth is a story

told with a view to promote some practical purpose."[68] Myths represent "a pressing

of the past into the service of a particular reading of the present... a dynamic

interaction is set up between present and past, in which the past is continually being

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[65] Tudor 1972, 124.
[66] Cohen 2003, 213.
[67] Kammen 1991.
[68] Tudor 1972, 125.

reshaped, either consciously or unconsciously, in accordance with the diverse and shifting preoccupations of people in the present."[69] Consider the myth of Chinese pacifism as an example. For imperial Chinese government, de-militarization was an important part of imperial ideology to hide the value or coercive effectiveness of war as a political, cultural or social tool.[70] For the Chinese of post-imperial China, it has been equally important to establish the historical reality of a weak or fragmented China that was subject to foreign exploitation and conquest. Further, the "victim mentality" following the "century of humiliation" has created a powerful need to present Chinese history as a preferred alternative to the Western experience.

But now, after three decades of phenomenal economic growth, Chinese elites are confronting another pressing need—to find an appropriate ideology or guiding principle for China's expanding role in international affairs and to show, as a result, that China will be a different kind of great power from those of the West. Importantly, this need has stimulated intellectuals to look farther back into imperial Chinese history rather than the more recent past of the "century of humiliation." If narratives about the "century of humiliation" have framed the ways in which China has interacted with the West since the founding of the People's Republic of China,[71] it will be less consequential as an ideational source for Chinese foreign policy thinking in the twenty-first century, even though these narratives will continue to remain an important background reminder of China's past sufferings (and thus the need to be wealthy and powerful). The myth of Chinese pacifism still serves a useful purpose, as it is believed to be able to distinguish Chinese ways of international relations from the West. But the distinguishing feature of the new myth, as exemplified in the writings of Zhao, Xiang, and others, is how it has moved significantly beyond pacifism into an explicit discourse of Chinese superiority over the West in managing international affairs.[72] The myth of Chinese superiority is being given further

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[69] Cohen 2003, 201.
[70] Lorge 2005, 2.
[71] Gries 2004, 46.
[72] Of course, "Chinese superiority" associated with Confucianism has appeared at least since the 1990s in Chinese nationalist discourse, but in recent years the discourse of "Chinese superiority" in international affairs has gained increasing momentum and become popular among prominent intellectuals. On the "superiority" discourse in Chinese nationalism, see Zheng 1999, chap. 4.

plausibility by the increasingly popular discourse about "China models" among prominent Chinese intellectuals. Indeed, the myth of Chinese superiority in managing international affairs and the arguments of "China models" that advocate China's uniqueness in politics, economics, and foreign policy are mutually reinforcing, creating a powerful call for a distinctive Chinese model of international relations during China's rise.

The straightforward implication of the myth of Chinese superiority is thus the likely emergence of an important line of discourse on Chinese uniqueness and superiority in managing international affairs. If the impressively enduring myth of Chinese pacifism has given rise to a "peace discourse" on the part of the Chinese government to dissipate the fear of Chinese power among neighboring countries, the new myth of Chinese superiority promises to offer grand Chinese visions of international relations. In a review of Zhao's book, William Callahan thinks that Zhao has proposed a new Chinese hegemony for the twenty-first century. The success of the book "shows that there is a thirst in China for 'Chinese solutions' to world problems, and a hunger for nationalist solutions to global issues, especially when they promote a patriotic form of cosmopolitanism. This is the main significance of *The Tianxia System* in China's foreign policy-making. Indeed, it is not an isolated example but the sign of a broader trend where China's imperial mode of governance is increasingly revived for the twenty-first century."[73]

There is every possibility that the discourse of Chinese uniqueness will continue to rise in prominence, resulting in an ideological clash between Chinese and Western approaches to international affairs, at least at the level of elite discourse. This should especially be true if China manages to maintain an environmentally and socially sustainable economic growth in the next few decades. The "superiority mentality" will be further agitated if the West is perceived to further decline in political and economic terms and fail to resolve pressing global issues such as international instability and climate change. One must wonder what a difference the three decades

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[73] Callahan 2008.

of China's rise has made in transforming Chinese elite mindset from the "victim mentality," to the "great power mentality," and even to a kind of "superiority mentality."

Three caveats, however, must be added. First, the impact of the myth of Chinese superiority has not yet had an observable impact on official policy behavior, though the influence of traditional ideas such as the "harmonious world" is apparent in China's new policy discourse. Second, among the many Chinese intellectuals looking into the ancient and imperial past, not all of them have indulged in mythical arguments as defined and evaluated here. There is likely to be a debate among the Chinese themselves about how to interpret China's past. Scholars with a more balanced understanding of Chinese history will appreciate the multiplicity of China's traditions and the folly of championing Chinese superiority, whether in terms of ideas or behaviors. As more and more scholars begin to "rethink China," new interpretations of Chinese history will continue to be put forward with an eye to their utility for solving contemporary problems. It is their relative prominence in a discursive network of knowledge production that will determine which sorts of ideas can have the greatest impact on actual foreign policy. Third, myths and their impact on policy are not unique to the Chinese case. In fact, myth is a prevalent phenomenon in all societies. American foreign policy, for example, has also been profoundly influenced by historical myths.[74] And, as already mentioned, myths are not intrinsically "good" or "bad." Myths are even needed to initiate intellectual debates. The important question, then, is to examine the source and content of myths and their practical consequences in actual cases.

The key point of this section is that myths arise when there is a practical need for them at a particular time. This can be clearly seen in the above discussion about the myths of the "Chinese tradition," especially in the rise of the myth of Chinese superiority in managing international affairs during the present period when China's rise has created a strong need for new thinking on Chinese foreign policy. But

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[74] See Hixson 2008; and Mead 2001.

whether myth or not, a general note on the influence of history on future Chinese foreign policy can be added. With the more distant history of "imperial glory" coming to the fore as the source of inspiration for new thinking, there will be a new Chinese articulation about how the world should be run, presented as distinct from Western approaches to international affairs. Scholars with a more balanced view of Chinese history are also likely to come up with distinctively Chinese ideas about international relations and how China might contribute to shaping the future world order, even if their arguments are not as one-sided and sweeping as those identified above. The influence of traditional ideas such as "harmony" is already present in official policy statements. In an important sense, the "ideological debate" between China and the West, which Xiang eagerly advocates, has already started. The material rise of Chinese power has finally triggered a cultural and ideological rise of Chinese visions of world order, with China's long and rich history, subject to multiple interpretations, serving as a vast reservoir for new ideas.

There is a further possibility that, as Chinese elites increasingly see China as possessing a distinctive, if not always superior, set of history, culture, and value for the management of international affairs, and as they start to perform China's role as a "responsible great power," they will likely try to socialize other countries about Chinese approaches in international politics. So far scholars have typically focused on how China has been socialized by international norms and institutions.[75] Yet, as Chinese diplomats become defter in international institutional settings, and as China's traditions continue to be discovered and developed into new ideas for foreign policy, it is not unreasonable to think that they will try to socialize their foreign counterparts about international issues by employing a distinctive Chinese set of values and models. We have to pay more attention to the changing role of history as a source for ideational change in Chinese foreign policy and how this might in turn influence its behavioral patterns.

Conclusion

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[75] Johnston 2008.

I have pursued two interrelated objectives in this chapter. First, I ask whether there is a clear Chinese tradition of benevolence, peace, and harmony in foreign relations. Instead of one such tradition, however, historical China in fact displayed several traditions simultaneously.[76] The variety of Chinese thought and behavior makes one wonder whether any persistent tradition can be identified in its history. Confucianism promotes morality and benevolence, yet Legalism emphasizes the importance of power and punishment, and these are just two among China's many schools of thoughts developed in the Warring States period. Sometimes China displayed a pacifistic approach in foreign affairs, yet during other periods China appeared highly opportunistic in realizing its self-interest through power politics. At times China appeared to be a factor for peace in East Asia, yet often it also disrupted regional stability. The dynamics and multiplicity of the relations between China and other countries are puzzles to be explained.

Yet the myths of the supposed "Chinese tradition" have practical consequences for contemporary thinking about Chinese foreign policy. Prior to the 1990s the effect of the myth of Chinese pacifism mainly lies in providing an intellectual background for the "peace discourse" intended to dissipate the suspicion and fear of Chinese power among other countries. More recently, however, a new myth of Chinese superiority in international affairs, based on a simplistic and biased reading of Chinese history, has emerged with a clear view of Chinese uniqueness in foreign policy thinking and behavior. This should not be surprising in itself—growing power will almost always lead to expanding interests and new thinking about international politics. The noteworthy part is the shift of the historical focus from the recent history of the so-called "century of humiliation" to the more distant past of "imperial glory." But even this is not surprising. As Chinese elites look for inspirations for China's new roles in the international system, returning to that part of the history when China was indisputably the preeminent power in East Asia is entirely natural. Whatever they

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[76] From a different perspective, Michael Hunt also argued that historical Chinese foreign relations had "multiple traditions"; Hunt 1984, 4-10. Waldron has also argued that there was no consistent "traditional" Chinese approach to strategy and that "the real Chinese past is not a single tradition, but rather several different and competing ones"; Waldron 1994, 88, 113.

may find in the process of rediscovering history, new Chinese articulations of world order in the twenty-first century is almost certain to emerge. An important agenda on the analysis of Chinese foreign policy, therefore, is to examine Chinese interpretations of their history, the effect of these interpretations on ideational change in foreign policy, and what kind of "ideological debates" with the West might result as a consequence.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

The tribute system has been an indispensable reference point in the study of historical East Asian politics. The starting point of this study has been to examine how it is used by scholars. This exploration has led to a number of other questions, touching on how various aspects of the nature of historical East Asian politics have been presented in the academic literature. The central analytical task of the study is to explain East Asian politics during China's early Ming dynasty. It becomes evident that existing models constructed around the concept of the "tribute system" cannot fully interpret or explain the relations between China and its neighbors, nor can a dogmatic application of existing realist and constructivist theories of IR yield much explanatory power. It is thus necessary to develop an alternative model with greater explanatory power for historical East Asian politics during this period. The theory of Chinese primacy that I have attempted to build expands and synthesizes elements of realism and constructivism by drawing on the historical material from the region.

Although the empirical material of the study is historical, its implications go beyond historical accuracy. By developing a theory of Chinese primacy and evaluating it with in-depth historical case studies, I show that the international politics of East Asia can be better explained without adhering to the tribute system framework. The thesis then explains the possibility of formulating better explanatory frameworks for historical East Asian politics. The study also evaluates a number of myths about East Asian history, such as the persistence of a sinocentric, hierarchic order, the willingness of other polities to accept Chinese hegemony, and a harmonious and stable order maintained by the Chinese empire. That these were myths even during the early Ming should encourage more research on the variety of international relations in East Asian history. In this concluding chapter I summarize these findings, highlight the implications, and suggest avenues for further research.

The thesis is organized around the central concern of evaluating the utility of the tribute system paradigm and how one can develop better frameworks to explain historical East Asian politics. Several arguments have followed from this concern with implications for theory and policy.

CONCEPTUALIZING A CHINESE UNIPOLARITY

At the core of these arguments is the proposition that historical East Asian politics should not be represented in terms of the tribute system as an unchanging institution of the international system/society. Instead, it has to be understood as constantly changing in reaction to the structure of the East Asian system. In the early Ming, when the tribute system was supposed to be at its height, it is possible to understand the structure of East Asian politics as unipolar. The theory of this unipolar politics developed in Chapter 2 avoids prioritizing cultural superiority as the main defining factor of this system, in favor of positing the political dynamics of Chinese political and/or military domination versus other countries' accommodation and resistance. Tributary relations are brought into the framework without any reference to the "tribute system." This offers a new conceptualization of historical East Asian politics and paves the way for some evaluation of the tribute system paradigm.

THE TRIBUTE SYSTEM RECONCEIVED

The term "tribute system" has been used in three ways in the scholarly literature. First, it refers to the interpretive model developed by Fairbank and followed on by many other scholars. I see this prominent line of research as having constituted a tribute system paradigm in the study of East Asian diplomatic history. The significance of this paradigm deserves a systematic evaluation. The thesis critiques Fairbank's model and argues that it is internally flawed and incapable of interpreting major events in East Asian history. It therefore suggests that scholars look for new analytical categories and models with greater interpretive and explanatory power.

Second, scholars have conceived of the tribute system as a historical institution for interstate relations and studied specific tribute systems in history. Although my empirical focus is not the early Ming tribute system per se but the larger relations between China and its neighbors, I have also paid attention to what such a system might tell us about the nature of East Asian politics during the early Ming period. Yet, the empirical chapters clearly show that the tribute system, if we conceive of one in the sense of regular practices embodied in tributary relations, cannot encompass the multiplicity of regional politics.

Finally, the tribute system has also been referred to as China's bureaucratic management of foreign relations. Because this perspective is centrally concerned with the development of China's bureaucratic tools and assumptions for dealing with foreign affairs, it does not account for the larger political dynamics between China and its neighbors and is therefore of limited value for understanding the international politics of this region.

BEYOND THE TRIBUTE SYSTEM

We therefore have to move beyond the tribute system perspective. In Sino-Korean, Sino-Japanese, and Sino-Mongolian relations during the early Ming, Chinese rulers tried to initiate tributary relations for essentially two reasons—buttressing their legitimacy as Chinese emperors by showing their ability to gain foreign tributaries as well as achieving frontier security of the empire. Ultimately, they wanted superiority and authority over other countries' foreign policies toward China. Tributary politics on the Chinese side was therefore a form of political domination.[1] There were variations in this part of tributary politics. For example, China had more room to manipulate the Koreans by putting various requirements on their tribute missions than they did regarding the Japanese and the Mongols, because the Koreans valued tributary relations with the Ming much more highly than the Japanese or the Mongols. Manipulation or not, China's desire to impose a set of tributary obligations on its

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[1] Although this study has not examined Sino-Vietnamese relations in the early Ming, John K. Whitmore concluded in a study on the Ming conquest of Vietnam that the Ming "wished to dominate the varied nations of the world by moral force...rather than physical power." Whitmore 1977, 51.

neighbors demonstrated the nature of political domination in its foreign relations. However, when it faced pressing military threats but was unable to eliminate them through tributary politics, as in the case of its relations with the Mongols, it resorted to military domination. This was possible because of its military strength in the first place.

Faced with the Chinese request for establishing tributary relations, Korean, Japanese, and Mongol rulers acted in a variety of different ways. The Koreans accommodated China in most cases, but their accommodation generally reflected more bandwagoning for ensuring security and autonomy, gaining profit, and increasing power than submission out of a perception of Chinese authority over their policies. One surprising finding is that there were relatively few instances of Korean submission in the sense of voluntarily following Chinese instructions during the early Ming period. The Koreans, moreover, also sought to resist Chinese demands when they became too excessive.

Resistance was more prominent in Japanese and Mongol responses to China, though at times these two peoples also accommodated China. For the Japanese, resistance was more frequent because of the protection offered by Japan's island position as well as the rulers' sense of their emerging national identity and pride. When Japan accommodated China, as in the case of Yoshimitsu, the likely motives were economic profit (which also underpinned Japan's other "improper" tributary missions) and domestic prestige and legitimation, though Yoshimitsu may have also genuinely admired Chinese culture and thus perceived a certain degree of Chinese authority.

The Mongol resistance to the Ming was the most impressive. This is unsurprising given the fundamental conflict of their interests with those of the Ming, especially during the Hongwu reign. When the Mongol chieftains bandwagoned during the Yongle reign, their motives ranged from mere regime survival to steppe hegemony.

Such a picture of the multiplicity of the relations between China and its neighbors

not only demonstrates the inadequacies of Fairbank's original model, but also suggests the *relative unimportance* of the tribute system as a historical institution in regional politics during this time, particularly with regard to Sino-Japanese and Sino-Mongolian relations. Even when tributary relations were more prominent and thus the tribute system more important, as in Sino-Korean relations during this period or in China's relations with its neighbors during other periods, examining the nature of these relations would require a systematic deconstruction of the tribute system. Thus, we will gain much and lose little by moving beyond the tribute system paradigm. The theory developed in Chapter 2 is a small step toward this direction.

SINOCENTRIC HIERARCHY CHALLENGED

Finally, it is widely held in the literature that the historical East Asian order is a sinocentric hierarchy, more likely so with regard to unified and powerful dynasties such as the Han, Tang, Ming, and Qing. Yet my study of East Asian politics during the early Ming shows that if we define hierarchy in terms of relational authority, the system was actually more anarchic than hierarchic in many respects. Foreign rulers, including the Koreans, generally did not feel the authority or legitimacy in Chinese rule over them. In most cases they did not feel that they "ought to obey" instructions from China, but rather acted according to self-interested calculations. Because Chinese authority was usually absent, the system belonged to the more anarchic end of the anarchy-hierarchy spectrum. The anarchic nature of this period is also indicated by the instability in China's relations with Korea, Japan, and the Mongols.

Of course, elements of hierarchy were also there, as in the cases of investiture in Sino-Korean relations and Yoshimitsu's exceptional accommodation with the Ming in Sino-Japanese relations. In general, however, anarchy-induced, self-interest motivated politics were more impressive than hierarchic politics underpinned by the principle of sinocentrism. It was very hard for foreign rulers to fully internalize sinocentrism and act as China's loyal tributaries. It would be interesting for future studies to examine whether East Asian politics before and after the early Ming period were more anarchic or hierarchic.

Although the thesis aims to solve a historical puzzle about the tribute system, it also has implications for international relations theory and policy discussions on contemporary East Asian politics.

THEORY

Some Chinese scholars believe that historical East Asian politics is so unique that it completely defies Western IR theories.[2] The belief is misguided and simplistic, based on a dubious understanding of the nature of theory and a shaky understanding of the reality of historical East Asian politics. Since my empirical focus is only the early Ming period, my claim should be limited. But evidence from this period clearly shows that, to varying degrees, Western IR theories are useful in illuminating politics between China and its neighbors. Recent realist researches on the behavioral logic of unipolarity are relevant, as are the constructivist focus on ideas, identity, and the normative structure. Although I have not explicitly drawn on the English School, its analytical focus on institutions and norms are surely also relevant and useful. Although a general theory of international relations that are able to explain international politics across time and space may not be possible, some enduring concepts such as power and culture and hypotheses about their behavioral effects will have relevance beyond the somewhat artificial "East-West" divide.

That Western IR theories are useful does not, however, mean that they are unproblematic. It is not the purpose of this study to "confirm" these theories. Rather, one purpose is to show how they perform against historical material from East Asia and how they might be refined, improved, or rejected. Viewed in these terms, it is apparent that several existing theories must confront the empirical anomalies from historical East Asia. The biggest problem is with balance-of-power theory, as has

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[2] Qin 2007, 14-5; and Qin 2006, 10.

been variously pointed out in the general IR literature.[3] The problem with this theory, however, says little about the merit of realism as a research program, since the realist tradition contains many other theories. Hegemonic stability theory, for example, might be more useful. The concept of "unipolarity" seems to be particularly useful in light of the endurance of American supremacy in the present era. Yet even in the case of the United States, the logic of unipolar politics is not fully presented. In the case of historical East Asian politics it often does not measure up against the available evidence.

The theory of Chinese primacy builds on existing concepts and theories while attempting some expansion and refinement. It suggests, among other things, that the dichotomy between balancing and bandwagoning cannot capture the full dynamics of unipolar politics. We need to conceive of a range of different strategies that the dominant and secondary powers can employ toward each other. The theory also emphasizes the exploitative nature of the bandwagoning strategy and the self-strengthening motive behind such a strategy. It also develops a synthetic explanation by building the factors of both power and identity into a coherent framework in terms of the co-constitution of agency and structure in the historical East Asian system.

POLICY

The findings cast strong doubt on the beliefs that the historical East Asian order was a sinocentric hierarchy and that countries in this region were willing to accept a Chinese hegemony or hierarchy. That the Koreans, Japans, and Mongols at various times tried the strategies of balking, defying, challenging, and isolation is sufficient to show this. Of course, it is tricky to derive any straightforward implication of historical East Asian politics for regional politics in the present era. Much change and even transformation have occurred in terms of the structure and agency of the East Asian system. The political, economic, social, and cultural conditions underpinning regional politics have also undergone major transformations. I shall

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[3] A recent wide-ranging work is Kaufman, Little, and Wohlforth 2007.

nevertheless suggest two thoughts relevant for policy discussion. First, it is now being argued that hierarchic politics might return to East Asia. But, if the historical East Asian system with China's material preponderance and cultural preeminence was not an unproblematic hierarchy, what are the grounds for believing that a hierarchy centering on China will emerge when it is unlikely for China to re-command its premodern position in structural terms?

Second, the patterns of interaction between imperial China and its neighbors were domination versus accommodation and resistance. Given the changed conditions on both sides, what might new patterns of interaction in contemporary East Asia look like? Particularly relevant is the argument that some countries are now increasingly bandwagoning with a rising China. Historically, bandwagoning behavior was encouraged by China's economic resources and cultural influence. Might a stronger China no longer bent on domination encourage bandwagoning and thus in some way contribute to regional stability? These questions could well be topics for new research.

Further Research

As noted at the beginning of this thesis, the historical East Asian field is a fertile ground for theoretical innovation. IR study in this field has begun only recently. A vast number of empirical puzzles are still waiting to be solved, out of which theoretical developments might emerge. Three areas appear particularly interesting in light of this study.

STRUCTURAL VARIATION OF THE EAST ASIAN SYSTEM

This study only examines one structural feature of the historical East Asian system—unipolarity—and then only theorizes patterns of interaction within this system. It says little about the origin and transformation of such a unipolar system. This is the limitation of the study, but it also points to avenues for further research. A key task will be to look at periods of both Chinese strength and weakness and explain

the structural variation of the East Asian system. Unipolarity could not be the only structure of this system, since Chinese power did not remain a constant. The challenge is to explain how, why, and how frequently alternative structural forms have emerged. A theory so developed will truly be a theory of historical East Asian politics. It may complement theories developed out of the European experience and thus advance the IR theoretical agenda.

Within this broad avenue of the structural change of the historical East Asian system, many more specific topics and puzzles can be discovered and studied. For example, Wang Gungwu points out that historically China had risen three times in its imperial history—during the Qin-Han, Sui-Tang, and Ming-Qing periods respectively. Contemporary China is thus undergoing a fourth rise from a historical perspective.[4] A comparison of these four cases of China's rise and their consequences will be very interesting. It will also be promising for theory development on the important question of power rise and its implications for international order, and will not only add to our empirical knowledge of the historical experience of China's rise in Asia but also enrich existing theories on power rise developed out of the modern European context.

THE NATURE OF CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

A second area is the foreign policy of imperial China. Traditionally, this has been the focus of historians. But as has been pointed out, the field of East Asian diplomatic history has become unfashionable and underpopulated among historians since the 1970s. With a few notable exceptions, IR scholars have not made major advance into this field. As a result, our understanding of traditional China's foreign policy still remains largely descriptive, crippled moreover by some persistent stereotypes. This study has shown the dynamics and multiplicity of China's foreign relations and these are the puzzles to be explained.

As Chapter 7 has illustrated, imperial Chinese foreign policy in fact displayed a wide

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[4] Wang 2009.

range of behavioral patterns, and peace and war were just two extremes along a continuum of behavioral variation. The puzzle is obviously to explain this variation. Although studies on the foreign policies of single dynasties can be useful, it will be more fruitful to design comparative case studies across several dynasties for more generalizable findings. This will pave the way for further studies on the overall foreign policy patterns or grand strategies of the Chinese empire. Future studies in this area will also require more solid conceptual foundations and more explicit theorizing. On the other hand, studying the historical puzzles of Chinese foreign policy will not only advance our empirical knowledge, but also stimulate theory development in foreign policy analysis.

THE NATURE OF OTHER COUNTRIES' POLICY TOWARD CHINA

A third area of research is the foreign policies of other East Asian countries. It is unfortunate that when discussing historical East Asian politics, we have focused so much on China to the detriment of our understanding of its neighbors, who are of course an indispensable part of the larger political dynamics. More theoretically conscious studies are needed to examine the nature of their initiatives and responses toward China.

This study has focused on the policies of Korea, Japan, and the Mongol tribes during the early Ming when China was relatively open and powerful. What were the policies of China's neighbors when China was divided and weak? How did they view their own positions in the region? It will also be interesting to document their evolving perceptions of and changing attitudes toward China historically. Although China as the preeminent power in East Asian history has naturally attracted much scholarly attention, a complete understanding of the nature and dynamics of East Asian politics will elude us until other East Asian countries are given due analytical attention in our studies.

Appendix I

Major Periods in Imperial China

Eastern Zhou	771 – 256 BC
Warring States	403 – 221 BC
Qin	221 – 206 BC
Earlier Han	206 BC – AD 8
Later Han	25 – 220
Period of North-South disunion	220 – 589
Northern Wei	386 – 535
Sui	589 – 618
Tang	618 – 907
Northern Song	960-1125
Southern Song	1127-1279
Yuan (Mongols)	1279-1368
Ming	1368-1644
Qing (Manchus)	1644-1912

Source: Fairbank and Goldman 2006, 24.

badao 霸道

beifa 北伐

benxin 本心

bianhuan 边患

biao 表

bu fen hua yi 不分华夷

chen 臣

dada 鞑靼

de 德

fa 伐

fan 藩

gang rou bingji 刚柔并济

gong 贡

he 和

he-he 和合

huan 患

huayi 华夷

hua yi wu jian 华夷无间

li 礼

li 利

Lifanyuan 理藩院

qiao yan wen guo 巧言文过

qin min 亲民

ren 仁

riben guowang 日本国王

saoqing shamo 扫清沙漠

shi 师

shiqiong 势穷

si yi 四夷

tianming 天命

tianxia 天下

tianxia zhu 天下主

tianzi 天子

tonghao 通好

tu 图

wala 瓦剌

wangdao 王道

wei 威

wei de jianshi 威德兼施

wen 文

wu 武

wuwai 无外

xing 刑

yi ren wei ben 以人为本

you 诱

Zhaoxiang 招降

zheng 政

zhige 止戈

Zhongguo 中国

yi xiao shi da, bao guo zhi dao 以小事大，保国之道

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