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**Ji-young Lee. *China's Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination*.** New York: Columbia University Press, 2017. ISBN: 9780231179744 (hardcover, \$60.00/£49.95).

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## Introduction by Seo-Hyun Park, Lafayette College

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Joining the growing list of international relations (IR) scholars who are turning to historical analyses of alternative, non-Westphalian diplomatic systems for insights into the creation and maintenance of political order is Ji-Young Lee, whose book, *China's Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination*, provides an empirically rich and theoretically insightful account of premodern East Asian international relations. The core argument of her book is that China's hegemony was not a direct product of either its material power or its cultural appeal. Rather, Chinese hegemonic authority, measured in terms of compliant tributary practices, was co-constructed by a dominant China *and* its less powerful tribute-paying neighbors via mutual interactions. In particular, the book emphasizes how the domestic legitimation needs of less powerful states, such as Korea and Japan, played a key role in constructing (while sometimes adapting) Chinese hegemony during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and the Qing dynasty (1636-1911).

The combined picture painted by the four reviewers, including both IR scholars and historians, is that Lee masterfully deploys diplomatic history, international relations scholarship, and sociological theory to carefully reexamine the sometimes maligned concept and framework of a China-led tribute system. One major contribution of the book, the reviewers agree, is its commitment to empirically tracing, using Korean-language documents (rather than relying only on Chinese or English sources), the political motivations behind the practices that maintained the tribute system. By examining China's hegemony from the perspectives of China's neighbors, Korea and Japan, Lee not only avoids Sinocentrism but also effectively documents the historically shifting nature of the tribute system. She does this by detailing Korean and Japanese officials' deliberations of the available strategies vis-à-vis China *as well* as the varied behavioral responses—compliance, defiance, and challenge—chosen by rulers in Korea and Japan. Another insight highlighted in the book is that Chinese hegemony, despite its longevity, was never complete, either in concept or in practice. The claim that the hegemon's rules are not always followed is itself not novel, but given how the premodern East Asian order is sometimes described as uniquely stable and legitimate, it is an important point to highlight nonetheless.

The reviewers also collectively raise some questions and offer opportunities for further reflection about the book's theoretical assumptions and analysis. The first issue surrounds the notion of “symbolic domination,” or “the hegemon's ability to establish its own view of the world as the norm” (61). In this framework, compliance takes on a taken-for-granted quality, and yet, as Victoria Hui points out, Lee's own detailed evidence convincingly shows savvy political leaders contemplating and calculating (rather than unthinkingly engaging in) compliance, defiance, or challenge. Yuanchong Wang also questions whether the emphasis on symbolic power, while significant, may provide a misleading picture of the totality of Chinese dominance and authority. Wang contends that while China's power might have been more symbolic than substantial for Muromachi and Tokugawa Japan, Chinese authority over Joseon Korea was at times militarily enforced (in the early Ming period and during the Ming-Qing transition, the two periods highlighted in the book). Wang also reminds us that the Qing court had the legal authority and military power to punish and even remove any official from its tribute-paying neighbors, as it chose to do with the Joseon Regent Daewon'gun in the late nineteenth century.

The reviewers also suggest possibilities for a theoretical extension of the domestic politics argument put forth by Lee. Hui suggests that the Chinese court cared about the façade of compliance by its weaker neighbors for similar reasons—that of domestic legitimation. Similarly, Wang notes that Ming and Qing China's cultivation of relations with less powerful entities was due to their domestic political needs, especially during

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times of high legitimacy demands (such as internal feuds over appointing the imperial successor or dynastic change), as argued by Lee. The domestic political legitimation logic can be applied even further, according to R. Bin Wong, who suggests that the search for centralized domestic political authority, in addition to revenue collection, is a core characteristic of premodern European state-building efforts as well.

This leads to a third question, one that is not directly addressed in the book but promises fruitful analysis, as implied in the global history perspective advocated by Wong: How unique was Ming-Qing hegemony, and how much of it was tied to the tribute system? Even in the case of East Asia, Wang points out that hegemony should not be associated only with imperial China. Korean-Japanese relations, Korean-Jurchen relations, and Japanese-Ryukyu relations offer other historical examples or types of hegemony, ones that are not dominated by China. Many of the choreographed rules of conduct within the tribute system, adds Timothy Brook, had both Chinese and non-Chinese origins. These suggestions for further theoretical examination and extension are, in a sense, a tribute (pun intended) to the carefully researched and deeply insightful analysis provided in Ji-Young Lee's magnificent first book.

### Participants:

**Ji-Young Lee** is an Assistant Professor of International Relations at American University's School of International Service, where she holds the C. W. Lim and Korea Foundation Professorship of Korean Studies. Her research focuses on Asian international relations and history. She is the author of *China's Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination* (Columbia University Press, 2016) and is currently working on a project on the future the U.S. alliance system in East Asia with China's rise. Prior to AU, she was an Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Politics and East Asian Studies at Oberlin College, where she taught as a Visiting Assistant Professor. She was a POSCO visiting fellow at the East-West Center and a non-resident James Kelly Korean Studies Fellow with the Pacific Forum Center for Strategic and International Studies. She received a B.A. from Ewha Womans University (Seoul) and an M.A. from Seoul National University in Korea, and received a Ph.D. from Georgetown University's Government Department.

**Seo-Hyun Park** is Associate Professor in the Department of Government and Law at Lafayette College. Her research interests include hierarchy and regional orders, national identity politics, state sovereignty, and history and international relations, with a regional focus on East Asia. She is the author of *Sovereignty and Status in East Asian International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2017). Her work has appeared in the *Review of International Studies*, *International Relations*, *Journal of East Asian Studies*, *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, and *Chinese Journal of International Politics*. Park received her Ph.D. from Cornell University and has received research fellowships from the Japan Foundation as well as Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) and the Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center (APARC) at Stanford University.

**Timothy Brook** is Republic of China Chair in the Department of History at the University of British Columbia. A historian of late-imperial China, he is the author of *Vermeer's Hat*, *The Troubled Empire*, and *Mr Selden's Map of China*, among other books. *Sacred Mandates: International Relations in Inner and East Asia since Chinggis Khan*, co-authored with Michael van Walt van Praag and Miek Boltjes, will appear in 2018 from the University of Chicago Press.

**Victoria Tin-bor Hui** is Associate Professor in Political Science at the University of Notre Dame. She received her Ph.D. from Columbia University and her B.SSc. from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Hui's research examines the centrality of war in the formation and transformation of 'China' in history. She is the author of *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). She has published articles "Toward a Dynamic Theory of International Politics," "The Emergence and Demise of Nascent Constitutional Rights," "History and Thought in China's Traditions," "Building Castles in the Sand," "How China Was Ruled," "Testing Balance of Power Theory in World History," and book chapters "How Tilly's Warfare Paradigm Is Revolutionizing the Study of Chinese State-Making," "The China Dream: Revival of What Historical Greatness?," "Confucian Confusion," "Confucianism and Peacemaking in Chinese History," "Citizenship Rights in Ancient China," "The Triumph of Domination in the Ancient Chinese System" and "Problematizing Sovereignty." As a native from Hong Kong, Hui also analyzes Hong Kong politics. She testified at Congress, has published "Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement: The Protest and Beyond," and has maintained a blog "The Umbrella Movement and Beyond."

**Yuanchong Wang** is an assistant professor in the Department of History at the University of Delaware, Newark. His research focuses on late imperial and modern Chinese and East Asian history. He is currently working on a book manuscript that is tentatively titled "Remaking the Chinese Empire: Manchu-Korean Relations and China's Transformation, 1616–1910," which is aimed at revealing China's development into a modern state through the changes in Sino-Korean relations during the Qing period. His recent publication regarding this topic will be published in the June 2017 issue of *Late Imperial China*.

**R. Bin Wong**, Distinguished Professor of History, UCLA, is author or co-author of several books and some hundred articles appearing in five languages in East Asia, Europe and the United States. His books include *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press) and (with Jean-Laurent Rosenthal) *Before and Beyond Divergence: The Politics of Economic Change in China and Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). For several years he has been constructing historical perspectives on contemporary ideas and institutions of governance in China, Europe, and the United States, currently looking at water governance in particular.

Review by Timothy Brook, University of British Columbia

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The tribute system (TS) is the rubric that is generally used to frame the history of China's foreign relations. Thinking of historical international relations in East Asia in this way is eminently sensible, given that the system furnished the terms within which participants conceptualized and organized their relations with China. To dismiss the TS as an artificial construct, however mutually constituted, is to ignore that choreography and politics of diplomacy that took place when China and a lesser polity in the region interacted. At the other extreme, to rely exclusively on the TS to explain every aspect of such relationships limits what is visible to us in the present.<sup>1</sup> The challenge is to find a point of balance between affirming and denying the TS—and not merely as the language of International Relations (IR) in East Asia (as though language did not matter in diplomacy) but as a description of the motives driving those relations. Finding a way out of this maze is a task for which recourse to the in-house squabble over realism versus constructivism does not provide a solution, at least in the mind of this historian. We need elements of both—which is what Ji-Young Lee offers in *China's Hegemony*.

Lee is part of a rising generation of Korean (and other) historians who are now deploying the history of Korea, as well as other Asian polities, to re-evaluate what we think we know about China. Rather than explain tributary relationships from the Chinese side of the dynamic, which is what historians of the TS traditionally have done, she works up her analysis from the other side, most importantly Korea but also Japan.<sup>2</sup> This impels a more critical reading of the Korea-China relationship that focuses on the practice of tribute submission rather than the Chinese rhetoric explaining it, pointing out, among other things, that Korea has not always been the compliant model tributary—a notion that Koreans through the Chosŏn dynasty found convenient to propagate nonetheless.<sup>3</sup> The history of this relationship has involved considerable duplicity and aggression on the Chinese side, to which Koreans have responded with creative deception and outright resistance.<sup>4</sup> Sharing this perspective, Lee is not interested in confirming or denying the logic of the system on its own terms, but in showing how Koreans as well as Japanese adapted the tribute model to their own benefit, often in defiance of external demands.

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<sup>1</sup> The conspicuous recent example of the latter interpretation, which affirms the TS as an adequate and comprehensive description of East Asian foreign relations, is the work of the Korean-American political scientist David Kang, *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). For a spirited rebuttal of this benign view of the East Asian past, see Yuan-Kang Wang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Approaching the TS from outside China was pioneered a dozen years ago by Zhenping Wang in his path-breaking study of the early TS from the perspective of Japan; see his *Ambassadors from the Islands of the Immortals: China-Japan Relations in the Han-Tang Period* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Many examples could be cited, among them Cha Hyewon, "Was Joseon a Model or an Exception: Reconsidering the Tributary Relationship during Ming China," *Korea Journal* 51:4 (Winter 2011), 33-58; and Sixiang Wang, "Co-constructing Empire in Early Chosŏn Korea: Knowledge Production and the Culture of Diplomacy, 1392-1592" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2015), especially chapter 2.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Koo Bumjin, "Dai Shin teikoku no Chōsen ninshiki to Chōsen no isō" (The Qing Great State's perception of Korea from the Korean perspective), *Chūgoku shigaku* 22 (2012), 91-113.

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If the TS is used as a model for describing IR in the historical context of East Asia that the TS suggests, we need to consider what the model obscures and what it leaves out. Lee is particularly good at pointing to what it obscures, which is the constitutive role that the tribute-sender plays in instantiating and sustaining the system. Lee gets at this issue by asking why a tribute-sending state such as Korea made the choices it did in managing its relations first with the Ming dynasty, and then with the Qing. Her argument is that these choices could not have been predicted solely from the self-declared rules of the model; more than that, the system worked to the extent that the tribute-senders could manipulate it to attain domestic and foreign-policy goals that had nothing to do with China's expectations. Her treatment of the Korean king's decision to continue acknowledging Ming suzerainty even after the Manchus had specifically demanded that he transfer his state's submission entirely to their Qing state is particularly good at revealing the extent to which the logic of the system could produce defiance of, rather than compliance with, overwhelming material power. In that instance, domestic politics had more to do with tributaries' decision-making than did the requirements of the tribute-taker.

But let us also consider what the TS as a model of international relations in historical East Asia leaves out. It is this: the active presence of rules of inter-polity conduct that have nothing to do with the Chinese system. Particularly apt in this case is the Chinggisid model of inter-polity relations, based on the rule of Chinggis Khan from the time he became Great Khan of the Mongol Great State in 1206. According to the model that his practice adumbrated, the Great Khan claimed supreme authority over all other states and therefore required all other rulers—and in practice, those unable to resist the material power of the Mongols—to pay obeisance to him as his vassals. These rulers were permitted to exercise authority over their territories so long as they conformed their conduct to a set of strict rules of obligation that amounted to what can be called a Chinggisid system of international relations. Mongol princes near the apex of the hierarchy of fealty who held their positions by virtue of direct lineal descent from Chinggis Khan were not so heavily constrained.

On the basis of the demands that the Mongol Great Khans imposed on Korea and Annam (Dai Viet) during the Yuan era as recorded in the Yuan dynastic history, Matsuda Kōichi has determined that a ruler of a lesser polity demonstrated compliance to the Mongol international order by fulfilling seven obligations: presenting himself annually at the Great Khan's court, surrendering a son or brother as a hostage, conducting a census of all households, supplying soldiers for military service, submitting annual payments of tribute, maintaining a courier system, and accepting a Mongol governor to supervise state affairs.<sup>5</sup> When the distance from the Mongol court was too great, the first obligation (annual presentation at court) could be adjusted by requiring the ruler to send delegates in his place, and the seventh (acceptance of a Mongol governor) was often waived. The other five were mandatory.

I was reminded of these obligations when I read Lee's summary of the seven demands that Manchu ruler Hong Taiji imposed on Korea in 1637 to enforce Korea's submission to the Qing (135). The first and third on her list—abandoning Ming observances and receiving Qing envoys—accord with TS rules. But the second and fourth—sending two royal princes as hostages and supplying troops and supplies for Qing military campaigns—have nothing to do with the TS as China had practised it theretofore. These are elements of Chinggisid practice, which constituted a compelling, near-to-home model for the Manchus. The fifth and

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<sup>5</sup> Koichi Matsuda, "Imperial Subjugation of Polities and Extension into Tibet," in *Sacred Mandates: International Relations in Inner and East Asia since Chinggis Khan*, by Timothy Brook, Michael van Walt van Praag, and Miek Boltjes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

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sixth—desisting from building defense fortifications and refusing sanctuary to refugees from the Qing—are also Chinggisid to the extent that the TS really had nothing to say on either matter. Regarding the sixth in particular, Chinese law forbade people who left China without official authorization to return under pain of death, but placed no obligation on other states to return refugees. The seventh demand—that Korea send tribute every year—is to all appearances the classic feature of the TS, and yet it is heavily inflected by Chinggisid expectations. The Mongol state regarded tribute as a significant form of state revenue that was intended to be onerous for the tribute-sender; this is unlike Chinese state practice, which managed the collection of tribute as a largely symbolic form of submission. Furthermore, the Mongol model insisted on annual payment, whereas the Chinese model sought to restrict payment to once every three years in order to limit its own costs of accommodating and rewarding tribute embassies. Wanting to make Koreans pay for their resistance to him and to bind that state tightly to his hegemony, Hong Taiji did not limit his requirements to standard TS demands. If we then shoehorn this case into the TS model, we revert unthinkingly to the Chinese model at considerable cost to historical depth.

I offer this perspective not to question Lee's perceptive observations regarding the strategies tributary states adopted to respond to China's demands to regulate inter-polity relations. Her interpretation is a corrective to some of the more simplistic views of the system that have tended to find support and repetition within IR and political science. My purpose is rather to remind us that the practices that regimes in Beijing adopted, especially but not only during the Qing, were shaped by important traditions coming from outside China, particularly from Inner Asia. The tribute system is therefore only part of the framework through which East Asian states historically constructed their relations, and covers only some of the practices by which states mobilized their material power in what they perceived to be their interests. If we Asianists ask IR to send its dogged Eurocentrism out the front door, it would be advisable that we avoid letting Sinocentrism sneak in the back one.



Review by Victoria Hui, University of Notre Dame

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Ji-Young Lee's *China's Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination* should be recommended for exploring China's historical hegemony from the perspectives of China's neighbors (namely, Korea and Japan), examining the full spectrum of their China policies from compliance to defiance and challenge, highlighting the domestic origins of international relations (IR), and, most of all, taking painstaking historical research to test competing explanations.

The most important contribution of Lee's book is to highlight the fact that study of Chinese hegemonic authority "requires an understanding of the history of *East Asia*, not just that of China" (11). This book advances the literature by zooming in on how China's East Asian neighbors, specifically, Korea and Japan, exhibited variable reactions to Chinese hegemony: compliance, defiance, and challenge (74). Unlike most works on Asian historical IR that rely on translated Chinese sources, Lee's book is the first to use Korean sources to challenge the prevalent Sinocentrism in the literature (11, 168). Lee's deep reading of Korean state letters, court documents, and personal essays shows that Korean leaders consistently sought to "ensure and protect their political independence and autonomy against Chinese control" (103). Lee may have aimed to salvage China's historical hegemony, contending that skepticism is not warranted because defiance, challenge, coercion and war are "integral feature[s] of how the system functioned" (178). Paradoxically, this book succeeds in hollowing out China's hegemonic authority better than any other works in the genre.

Lee's book contains the words "Chinese hegemony" and "domination" in its title, but the research question, as stated in the very first paragraph, is more about defiance and challenge:

"In the early modern period, China was the sole great power in East Asia... However, consider the following episodes. In 1388, Korea, a tributary of the Ming empire of China since 1370, sent armed forces against the Ming. In 1592, Japan invaded Korea in an attempt to conquer the Ming and build a 'Japanocentric world order.' A few decades later, during the Ming to Qing transition in seventeenth-century China, Korea supported Ming war efforts against the more powerful, rising Qing at the risk of its own survival... Japan created a self-proclaimed tributary order centered on itself, treating Qing tributaries Korea and Ryukyu as its own. Why did these less powerful East Asian actors accept, defy, or challenge China?" (1)

Lee makes the argument that "savvy political leaders" among China's neighbors "manipulated external recognition from the hegemon... in ways that enhanced their legitimacy at home against domestic rivals" (2). They followed "compliance" when there was "hegemonic ideological resonance" between receiving investiture from China and "local notions of legitimacy," and high "compliance" when political leaders under the condition of resonance also suffered from legitimacy deficits (73). China's neighbors pursued "defiance" when there was "hegemonic ideological dissonance" with China-centered tribute practices, and "challenge" when political leaders under the condition of dissonance also suffered from internal regime crises (73). Lee's book explains more than the macro variation between Korea and Japan: Korea demonstrated more "compliance" because Korean contenders for power needed to legitimate their rule by receiving Chinese recognition whereas Japan showed more "defiance" and "challenge" because Japanese political rivals sought legitimacy from Japan's own divine imperial institution (4, 15, 68). This book is most interesting when it examines micro variation within Korea and Japan and their "outlier behaviors"—when Korea switched to "defiance" and "challenge" and when Japan turned to "compliance" (80).



Lee's domestic legitimation argument aspires to transcend the debate over the primacy of Confucian culture versus relative power (11). Lee situates her book with David Kang's *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* and Yuan-kang Wang's *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics*.<sup>1</sup> She observes that Kang's and Wang's arguments may explain the overall pattern of higher Korean compliance and stronger Japanese defiance, but they do not account for the micro variation. In her view, Kang's "culture-based argument cannot explain why there were fluctuations in the patterns of compliance *over time* within Japan and Korea when there was little change in culture" (173). Similarly, Wang's structural realism "fails to explain the micro variation within each state's behavior, as shown in the fluctuations in the patterns of compliance *over time*" (172). She contends that it was Korea's and Japan's "own internal political conditions of coups, civil wars, regime vulnerability... that were responsible for major shifts in Japan's and Korea's compliance patterns vis-a-vis China" (169). Lee suggests that Kang and Wang are equally half-right and half-wrong. However, her empirical analysis presents a much harder blow to Kang. Lee's examination of defiance and challenge fundamentally undercuts Kang's basic assumption that compliance was the norm in Asian historical IR, which, in her view, is developed "without testing" (8, also 10).

If the best part of Lee's book is to analyze defiance and challenge as well as compliance, the weakest part is where it contradicts itself by asserting the taken-for-granted nature of compliance. Lee takes a practice-oriented approach to studying "tribute practices": China's neighbors "coming to pay tribute, receiving the Chinese title, and using the Chinese calendar" (64, also 48). She underscores that such practices were "unthinking," "taken-for-granted" "socially acceptable behaviors" that were not based on material power, rational calculation, mutually beneficial social contract, or deliberate choice (58-62). She argues that "Chinese hegemonic authority resulted when *defiance by actors was not socially possible*" or "*off the table*" (58-59, 41; italics added). This sets up a very high bar for hegemonic authority. By this definition, any deliberations of defiance or challenge in Korea and Japan, even when not acted upon, as well as any instances of calculating instead of unthinking compliance should negate China's hegemony.

What Lee has achieved, with her in-depth combing of Korean records, is a fascinating account of how "savvy political leaders" (2) of Korea, the supposedly "model tributary" (13, 43), manipulated overt compliance but showed behind-the-back defiance. It is curious that Table 2.1 suggests that Korea always followed "compliance" – high "compliance" under Ming hegemony, hyper "compliance" during the Imjin War, and high "compliance" under Qing hegemony. This table is strangely at odds with the rest of the book. Figure 2.1 shows that Korea pursued "challenge" in early Ming and again during the Ming-Qing transition (75). Lee further notes in later pages that, under Ming hegemony, "Korean responses vacillated markedly—from compliance (1370), to a failed challenge (1388), back to compliance (1392), and then to another attempt at challenge (1398)" (172). She adds that Korea was "unusually aggressive... in 1370, 1388, and 1398," sending armed forces to "strike at the Ming" in 1388 (86, 79).

The empirical chapters provide illuminating evidence that Korean compliance with Chinese hegemony was calculating rather than unthinking. When the Ming first rose to power, "Korea's immediate reaction ... was the fear of possible Ming invasions" (83). In 1370, Koryo King Kongmin agreed to become a Ming tributary

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<sup>1</sup> David Kang, *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Yuan-kang Wang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

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but also ordered a military campaign to the Liaodong region (Chinese) or Tongnyong Administration (Korean) against the Ming's warning (87). Lee's account of Kongmin's reasoning is worth quoting at length:

“a new tributary relationship with the Ming was a welcome development to the extent that the Ming did not repeat the kind of imperial control that the Yuan empire had exerted over Koryo Korea. According to Yong-su Kim, even while accepting a Ming tributary status, Kongmin wanted to be considered an equal to the Ming empire within Korea. Kongmin performed a memorial service to Heaven, which was allowed only to the Son of Heaven (meaning an emperor as opposed to a king); when the Ming founder sent his envoy to erect a tombstone and perform a memorial service that signified Koryo Korea's status as a Ming tributary, Kongmin denied the reception of the Ming emperor's edict on the pretense of sickness. Upon the Ming envoy's departure, Kongmin had the tombstone pulled out and thrown away. Therefore, it is through the lens of domestic concerns that one can explain why Koryo king Kongmin's decision to become a Ming tributary came in the same year that he ordered a military campaign in a strategically important area to the Ming to regain the lost territory” (88).

In 1388, after the Ming announced plans to lay claim to the same contested territory, Koryo Korea sent another army “in a direct challenge to Ming power” (89). In a dramatic manner, General Yi Song-gye turned back the army and overthrew King U. In 1392, he established the Choson dynasty and immediately sent a tribute mission to the Ming requesting investiture. Was this a case of compliance based on unthinking practices or power calculation? Lee recounts that Yi was sent to the battlefield by a rival faction and he knew that Liaodong “would likely be his tomb” (90). Even if he could score an initial victory, “Koryo Korea did not have sufficient supplies” to sustain a full-scale war against the Ming (89). Choson-Ming relations remained tense for years, with the Ming executing Choson envoys and Choson preparing for a military campaign in 1398 (though abandoned) (85, 92).

During the Imjin War (1592-1598), the Ming came to the aid of Choson Korea not “out of a sense of Confucian obligation toward a tributary” but because of “the realpolitik logic” that Japan's ruler Toyotomi Hideyoshi was planning to march from Korea onward to the Ming (133). It is remarkable that the Ming's initial reaction to Japan's lightning invasion of Korea was to “suspect possible collusion between Japan and Korea against it” (108). At the end of the war, King Sonjo pursued hyper compliance because he had to cover up his “failures as a king” (130).

Lee reports similar thinking calculation during the Ming-Qing transition. King Kwanghae originally “adjusted his Ming policy in accordance with shifting power balances between the rising Manchus and the declining Ming empire” (150). Injo dethroned Kwanghae under the pretext that the former king had abandoned his tributary obligations to the Ming. To shore up domestic legitimacy, King Injo was bound to follow a hyper compliance policy with the declining Ming even though he knew that Choson could not realistically fight the rising Qing. Lee goes so far to suggest that Injo's compliance “should be understood as playing domestic power politics on the *selectively chosen notion* of ‘repaying the debt of gratitude to Ming’” (149; italics added). After the second Qing invasion in 1636 (in less than 10 years after the first invasion in 1627), Injo “was forced to comply” (25, 135). Lee is right that Wang's relative power cannot explain Korea's “seemingly irrational behavior of supporting the Ming against the Manchus” (137, also 21). At the same time, her detailed analysis of Korean deliberations is devastating to Kang's argument of culture-based compliance.

Lee narrates the same power considerations to explain micro variation in Japan. Table 2.1 reports that Japan adopted low “compliance” under Ming hegemony before switching to “challenge” during the Imjin War and “defiance” under Qing hegemony (76). In the early Ming, shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu pursued compliance because Japan’s imperial institution “had been on the other side” of the civil war (97). During the Imjin War, Hideyoshi challenged the late Ming because he “felt confident about Japanese military superiority” (107). During the Ming-Qing transition, “Japan contemplated balancing against the Qing but abandoned the idea” (25). Lee insists that there was “no external balancing,” as structural realists would expect. It is noteworthy that Japan “seriously considered a military alliance” with Korea and the Ming against the Qing (143) before it eventually “distanced itself from China and began to act as a new center of a miniature international order” (25). As noted above, the value added from sifting through historical records is to dig into actors’ considerations of alternative courses of action. It is theoretically significant that Japan in fact contemplated the option of forming balancing alliances against the Qing’s hegemony.

Given Japan’s built-in “dissonance” with China’s hegemony, Lee asks the important question “what happened when tribute practices ... met with Japan’s notion of itself as the ‘country of gods?’” (106) Interestingly, Lee does not think that the “Japanocentric order” undermined China’s hegemony. Lee argues both that Hideyoshi “rejected a China-centered world order” (112) and “adopted Sinocentric rhetoric and tributary practices (113). Likewise, although Tokugawa Japan asserted its own centrality “no longer in terms of the Chinese ‘other’, but in terms of the Japanese self” (146), Lee insists that Japan still “used Chinese tribute practices” (147). We may follow Lee’s adoption of Edward Steinfeld’s term<sup>2</sup> (181): Was Japan playing China’s game or playing its own game? Lee follows Kang’s position that Japan was still acting within China’s hegemony, but such a view would have difficulty explaining Japan’s renewed challenge of China in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Lee’s book tears down China’s hegemony not just by the detailed narrations of power calculation, but also by her discussion of what the tributary system was and was not. It turns out that actual tribute practices were exactly what they were not supposed to be. In the ideal world, only the Chinese emperor could be the Son of Heaven while “barbarians” could not (49). Yet, when the “barbarian” Manchu Qing took over the Ming, Korea complied, however reluctantly (135). Second, Confucian ideal held that tributes should not involve “economic exploitation” “akin to taxes” and “imperialism” as the Mongols once applied (50). Yet, the Ming “adopted some of the most notorious Mongol practices, including demanding human tribute as well as large amounts of goods,” blurring “the line between imperialism and... benign hegemony” (81-83). The Manchu Qing likewise demanded royal princes as hostages and Korean troops in support of the Qing’s other wars (141). Third, the investiture practice should have signified China’s respect for the political autonomy of the receiving country (50). Yet, the Ming considered the option of annexing Korea in 1608 and again a decade later (141). Though the Ming court eventually ruled out annexation, it had long “employed coercive diplomacy through tribute practices to extract Korean compliance” (84). Lee concludes that “[b]oth the Ming and the Qing crossed the boundaries of what was accepted as legitimate within the framework of typical tribute practices” (141).

Thus, Lee’s book has done more than any other works to prove that ‘the Chinese emperor had no clothes.’ Why, then, did Chinese emperors care about the façade of compliance? Lee could have more explicitly

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<sup>2</sup> Edward S. Steinfeld, *Playing Our Game: Why China’s Rise Doesn’t Threaten the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

transferred the same concern for domestic legitimation to the Chinese side (42). In Lee's idealized tribute practices, tributary states should always be the first to send tribute missions while the hegemon should always be on the receiving end (13, 48). Yet, it was the Ming's founder Hongwu who first sent tributary envoys to neighboring countries "urging them to send tribute-bearing embassies" (18). Why was Hongwu so eager to initiate diplomatic contacts (19, 82)? Lee states that, in Tokugawa Japan, the "public display of extravagant Korean embassies" was good "propaganda for the enhancement of shogunal prestige and legitimacy" (162, 164-5). By the same logic, Chinese emperors also needed the arrival of foreign embassies to shore up domestic legitimacy. Lee quotes Rossabi on the Confucian belief that "the more virtuous the emperor, the more foreign potentates would arrive" (18).<sup>3</sup> If Korean and Japanese leaders who suffered from regime crises had higher need for legitimation (73), then Hongwu, the Ming founder who had emerged from humble origins, and Yongle, the third emperor who had usurped the second emperor, should be particularly interested in international recognition. Seen in this perspective, it is also not difficult to comprehend why the Qing allowed Ryukyu to pay tribute to both the Qing and Japan, even though this practice "counter[ed] the Confucian theory" of Chinese hegemony (145). For Chinese emperors as for Japanese shoguns, what really mattered for domestic consumption was the public display of foreign envoys "coming to pay tribute" at the capital.

Last but not the least, Lee's book is strikingly similar to Feng Zhang's *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History* reviewed earlier on H-diplo.<sup>4</sup> Lee could have benefited from a deeper engagement with it beyond mentioning in passing (10). Zhang's book likewise analyzes the variation of normative and instrumental strategies in historical Sino-Korean and Sino-Japanese relations. What Zhang adds is Sino-Mongol relations. Lee follows Kang in insisting on the "civilized versus barbarian distinction" between East Asia and Inner Asia (17, 137). If we follow through this bifurcation to the logical conclusion, then the Qing's "barbarian identity" should further deplete China's hegemonic authority. As Lee pointedly asks, "what if China as a country was no longer identified with that Confucian moral authority" (45)? She laments that the Manchus' assumption of the "Son of Heaven" was "an attack to... socially acceptable practice" and "a threat to the deeply held notion among East Asian contemporaries about who was entitled to rule" (45, 137). If both Koreans and Japanese "disqualif[ied] the Qing rulers from the status of hegemon" (143), then should the Qing be excluded from this study of "China's hegemony"?

Despite these inconsistencies, *China's Hegemony* presents the best account of Korea's and Japan's defiance of and challenge to Chinese hegemony. It offers an excellent analysis of variation in Korea's and Japan's China policies based on Korean and other sources. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in historical Asian IR and hegemony.

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<sup>3</sup> Morris Rossabi, *A History of China* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 240.

<sup>4</sup> Feng Zhang, *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015). Review at <http://issforum.org/roundtables/9-1-chinese-hegemony>.

### Review by Yuanchong Wang, The University of Delaware

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*China's Hegemony* is aimed at complicating the concept of hegemony in the international relations (IR) field by giving more weight to the role of the domestic politics of the less powerful sides in constructing the dominant position and authority of the preponderant power within an asymmetrical framework.<sup>1</sup> For that purpose, this book takes China's hegemony in premodern East Asian history as a case and analyzes the establishment, presentation, and practice of this hegemony by revisiting the China-dominated tribute system from the second half of the fourteenth century to the first half of the seventeenth century. By comparing the dynamics and fluctuations of Sino-Korean relations with Sino-Japanese relations, with the aim of answering "why Chinese hegemony was accepted to varying degrees in historical East Asia" (168), the book argues that Chinese hegemony was "not solely a product of Chinese material power or culture but rather was constructed in interactions with other, less powerful actors' domestic political needs" (169). Based on this empirical conclusion drawn from the case studies, the book further argues from a broader theoretical perspective that "the process of building a new political order or legitimating a leader's rule in the domestic realm was tied to the degree to which a hegemon enjoyed authority at the international level" (12). The book substantially demonstrates the central argument and provides a remarkable theoretical perspective for interpreting the contemporary East Asian international situation against the background of China's rise and American hegemony in East Asia.

The most important contribution of this book to the IR literature on hegemony is to interpret hegemony as a domestic phenomenon that occurs when less powerful actors shrewdly and pragmatically make use of their hierarchical relationship with the preponderant power to fulfill their own domestic political needs. In other words, in contrast to mainstream interpretations of hegemony in IR that focus on the preponderant side, the book demonstrates that the establishment of the hegemony of the preponderant state is a continuation of the domestic political struggles of the less powerful participants. Hegemony is thus co-constructed through social interactions, instead of imposed by the military or cultural might of the powerful state in a geopolitical context. If the mainstream literature embraces a state-centric approach focused on the dominant state, this book offers a state-centric approach that emphasizes less powerful states.

The tribute system practiced between China and other countries during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and the Qing dynasty (1636-1911) is a good case for proving the theory in this book. Chapter 3 explores the different responses of Koryŏ Korea (918-1392), Chosŏn Korea (1392-1910), and Muromachi Japan (1336-1573) to the Ming's hegemony in the late fourteenth century after the collapse of the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), in which savvy Korean and Japanese rulers used the building of the tribute relationship with China to pursue external endorsement of their internal political legitimacy. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 explore the same theme in the context of the Imjin War (1592-1598) and the rise of the Qing empire in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, consolidating the argument that the less powerful actors' domestic political needs determined the degree of their compliance or denial of China's hegemony. The author has compellingly demonstrated her claim that the domestic quests of less powerful states played a key role in constructing China's hegemony.

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Danielle Cohen, Dr. Nianshen Song, and Dr. Zachary Howlett for their helpful comments on the draft of this review.

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As a historian, I applaud Lee's practice-oriented approach to interpreting China's dominant position in East Asia. Historians have adopted this approach to reveal the diverse manifestations of the tribute system in China's contacts with its so-called tributary states during the Ming and the Qing periods, as illustrated by the case of Sino-Siamese relations.<sup>2</sup> Lee's approach to emphasizing the less powerful states also bears a remarkable similarity to the similar approach of "de-centering China" in the history field.<sup>3</sup> By the same token, from the historical research perspective, Lee might reconsider the following three issues that concern her major arguments.

The first issue relates to a possible alternative to Lee's interpretation of hegemony in premodern East Asian IR history. *China's Hegemony* follows mainstream IR theory, which interprets hegemony as "an outcome of a single actor and its activities" (2, 6) in identifying imperial China as *the* single actor in the East Asian world and Korea and Japan as two less powerful actors. The last section of the book addressing American hegemony in East Asia and "China's return" also undergirds the exclusivity of hegemony in East Asia and a clear linear understanding of hegemonic power in East Asian international history (179–183). From the historical research perspective, this approach to interpreting hegemony is problematic. Since the tribute system was not necessarily Sinocentric (Chapter 1), a point particularly supported by historians' recent research on Qing-Inner Asian relations (30),<sup>4</sup> hegemony was not necessarily associated only with imperial China in East Asian history. In Korean-Japanese contacts, Korean-Jurchen contacts, and Japanese-Ryukyu contacts, one can find Korean hegemony and Japanese hegemony as well.

For example, while Tokugawa Japan used the Korean embassies to Japan to demonstrate and enhance the domestic legitimation of the shogun's Bakufu (161-166), as *China's Hegemony* shows, Chosŏn Korea also used the Japanese embassies to Korea, in particular those from Tsushima in the trade of "annual ships" (Japanese. *Saikensan*, 歲遣船), to display and consolidate Korea's geopolitical hegemonic authority. Korea showed its hegemonic power over Tsushima by dictating trade and diplomatic terms, exactly as China did to Korea. The Korean hegemony crystallized by this Korean-Tsushima quasi-tribute system caused Korea to refuse to accept the Japanese sovereign letter from Tokyo after the Meiji restoration in 1868. A similar Korean hegemony can be found in Korean-Jurchen relations before the Jianzhou Jurchen invasion of Korea in 1627. In this bilateral hierarchical power framework, Jurchen trade and its contacts with Korea were at the latter's mercy. The Korean military expedition to the Jurchen area near the Tumen River and the establishment of four prefectures there in the early fifteenth century also showed its military power and hegemonic authority vis-à-

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<sup>2</sup> See Chuang Chi-fa, "Xianluo guowang Zhengzhao rugong qingting kao" 暹羅國王鄭昭入貢清廷考, *Dalu zazhi* 51:3 (1975): 126-141; Mark Mancall, "The Ch'ing Tribute System: An Interpretive Essay," in *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, ed. John King Fairbank (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 68-70; Masuda Erika, "The Fall of Ayutthaya and Siam's Disrupted Order of Tribute to China (1767-1782)," *Taiwan Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 4:2 (2007): 75-128.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Evelyn S. Rawski, *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia: Cross-Border Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, James A. Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); James A. Millward, Ruth W. Dunnell, Mark C. Elliott, and Philippe Forêt, eds., *New Qing Imperial History: The Making of Inner Asian Empire at Qing Chengde* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); Kwangmin Kim, *Borderland Capitalism: Turkestan Produce, Qing Silver, and the Birth of an Eastern Market* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).



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vis local Jurchen tribes. The Korean side also used the tribute discourse informed by the civilized–barbarian distinction to consolidate its central and civilized position in this bilateral framework. While Chosŏn served as “barbarians” in the Ming–Chosŏn relationship in accordance with the Ming discourse, the Jurchen tribes acted as “barbarians” in their contacts with Chosŏn. Similarly, in its contacts with Ryukyu, Japan, in particular the Satsuma domain, demonstrated its long-lasting and very stable hegemony.

Just as European hegemonies co-existed in the colonial period and the age of empire, hegemony in late imperial East Asia was also multiple and co-existed in the geographical and temporal senses. China’s relations with Inner Asian entities, Vietnam, and Siam during the Ming and the Qing periods serve as good examples of this system of multiple hegemonies on different levels and in different geopolitical contexts. This issue further concerns the definition of ‘China’: When China is interpreted as the central kingdom, one can find many Chinas and each of them possessed its own hegemony. Consequently, the portrayal of imperial China as the exclusive hegemonic power to which Korea and Japan needed to respond is problematic from a historical perspective.

Second, Lee interprets hegemony as a domestic phenomenon (5-11, 174), but the ‘domestic’ applies to only the less powerful states. In fact, the construction of China’s hegemony during the Ming and the Qing in its relations with other less powerful states was also a result of China’s domestic political needs. Lee points out that most theories of hegemony in IR focus on the preponderant power and its activities, but this does not justify neglecting the significance of the role of the preponderant side, in particular when it comes to the establishment of the Ming and the Qing tribute relationship with Chosŏn Korea. Domestic politics in China are also especially significant in three historical periods that Lee examines, including the Yuan–Ming transition, the Imjin War, and the Ming–Qing transition.

*China’s Hegemony* shows how Koryŏ Korea responded to the rise of the Ming after 1368, when the Ming overthrew the Yuan dynasty of the Mongol Empire, but the story of the Sino–Korean tribute relationship did not stop there. After the Chosŏn dynasty replaced Koryŏ in 1392, the establishment of their bilateral relationship proved increasingly influential for East Asian international relations. The founder of the Chosŏn dynasty, Yi Sŏng-gye (r. 1392–1398), tried to obtain an imperial investiture from the founding father of the Ming, Zhu Yuanzhang (Hongwu, r. 1368–1398), but Zhu refused to offer him one partly because of his bias against Yi himself. In 1399, a civil war broke out in China between Prince of the Yan in Beijing, Zhu Di (Zhu Yuanzhang’s fourth son), and the Jianwen emperor (Zhu Yuanzhang’s eldest grandson, r. 1399–1402) in Nanjing, then Ming’s capital. In order to seek Korea’s military assistance in the civil war, the Jianwen emperor in 1401 sent envoys to invest Yi Bang-wŏn (King T’aejong, r. 1400–1418) as “King of Chosŏn.” The investiture underlined that the king should serve as a fence of the civilized kingdom and “protect China forever” (Chinese. *yongfu yu Zhongguo*, 永輔于中國),<sup>5</sup> formalizing the tributary relationship between the two countries. Yi Bang-wŏn had assumed the throne through bloody *coups d’état* and his kingship in 1401 was legitimated by the Ming investiture. If the Ming court had not encountered the civil war, it could have postponed the investiture of the king. After the Jianwen emperor died in the civil war, Zhu Di assumed the emperorship and took a new regnal title of Yongle (1402–1424). In 1403, the Yongle emperor sent his envoys to Hansŏng to award Yi Bang-wŏn the official robe in accordance with the rank of first-degree prince of the Ming (Chinese. *qinwang*, 親王, a brother of the emperor), known as the “robe with nine items” (Chinese.

<sup>5</sup> *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄 (King T’aejong, 太宗大王) (Seoul: Kuksa p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe, 1984), vol. 1, 205.



*jiuzhang mianfu*, 九章冕服). In this way, Zhu Di, the Chinese usurper, legitimized his emperorship beyond the Ming's geographical border through the tribute mechanism and dictated the hierarchy between the Ming and its tributary states. After 1403, the Sino-Korean tributary arrangement lasted for 492 years without significant changes until it was terminated by the Sino-Japanese War in 1895.

*China's Hegemony* in Chapter 5 demonstrates how King Injo (r. 1623-1649) of Chosŏn, in the face of the grave challenge from the Jurchens, strongly supported the Ming in order to pursue imperial investiture that could legitimize his kingship after his coup against his uncle, Kwanghaegun (r. 1608-1623), in 1623. This is a classic case cited by scholars to show the close relationship between Korea's domestic politics and its foreign policy toward the Ming and the Jurchens/Manchus. Yet, before King Injo, Kwanghaegun's experience of pursuing the Ming's imperial investiture during and after the Imjin War vividly shows another side of the story, namely, that the Ming's domestic political needs and its hegemonic authority exercised in its contacts with Korea. Kwanghaegun was the second son of King Sŏnjo (r. 1567-1608) and the younger brother to Imhaegun (1572-1609). According to primogeniture, Kwanghaegun had no hope to become the king. But Imhaegun was so capricious that his father did not endorse him as his successor. As the war with Japan broke out in 1592, King Sŏnjo invested Kwanghaegun as crown prince (Korean. *seja*, 世子) and Kwanghaegun showed his remarkable ability as a leader during the war. However, the Ministry of Rites of Ming China in Beijing, an institute in charge of the tribute practices between China and other tributary states, refused to endorse Kwanghaegun's status as crown prince. The main reason lay in the Ming domestic political situation at the time. The Wanli emperor (r. 1572-1620) preferred to invest his third son, Zhu Changxun (1586-1641), rather than his eldest son, Zhu Changluo (Emperor Taichang, r. 1582-1620), as crown prince (Chinese. *taizi*, 太子). In contrast, the majority of the officials from the Ministry of Rites and other central institutes requested that the emperor invest his eldest son as crown prince. Under the circumstances, the Ministry of Rites firmly refused to endorse Kwanghaegun, who was not the eldest son of the king of Chosŏn either. Rejecting Kwanghaegun was a way to block Zhu Changxun. In 1601, in the face of huge pressure from his bureaucrats, the Wanli emperor invested his eldest son as crown prince, but Zhu Changxun still lived in Beijing, presenting a threat to his elder brother. Thus, the Ministry of Rites continued to deny Korea's request for Kwanghaegun's investiture, which caused a legitimacy crisis for Kwanghaegun in Korea. It was not until King Sŏnjo died in 1608 that the Ministry of Rites eventually agreed to endorse Kwanghaegun as the king. In this episode, Chosŏn's requests of investing Kwanghaegun were bound with the Ming's domestic political struggles. This case also helps to explain why Kwanghaegun embraced a pragmatic policy in the Ming-Manchu war, which was used by his nephew (King Injo) as an excuse to dethrone him through the bloody coup in 1623.

When the Manchu regime began to rise in Manchuria in the early seventeenth century, it also used its relationship with Chosŏn to strengthen its political legitimacy within the Manchu-dominated world between 1616, when Nurhaci founded Houjin, and 1644, when the Qing took over Beijing. *China's Hegemony* shows well how King Injo adopted a pro-Ming policy in order to win the Ming investiture that would legitimize his rule in Korea. In fact, the Manchu regime, which had emerged as the hegemon by subordinating its neighboring Jurchen and Mongol tribes in Manchuria, was also making use of its connections with Korea to construct its new identity as the center of the known world including neighboring Mongol entities, Chosŏn, and the Ming. From at least the 1620s, a group of Han Chinese officials serving the Manchu regime, such as Bao Chengxian, Fan Wencheng, and Ning Wanwo, enthusiastically embarked on the project of transforming the regime's politico-cultural identity from 'barbarians,' which had been imposed by both the Ming and Chosŏn, to the 'civilized.' Changing Korea's position in the Manchu-Korean hierarchy thus proved

significant for the domestic political construction of the Manchu regime. The two Manchu invasions of Korea in 1627 and 1636 served this domestic political objective well. After the Qing-Chosŏn tribute relationship was founded in early 1637, the Qing further used this mechanism to strengthen Qing centrality, which lay the solid foundation for the Qing imperial enterprise after 1644. *China's Hegemony* briefly addresses the Korean and Japanese responses toward the High Qing during the Revolt of the Three Feudatories during the Kangxi period, but it fails to notice that it was precisely during the High Qing period that the Qing continued to use its tribute relationship with Korea to consolidate its civilized status in the known universe in accordance with the Confucianism underlying the Qing's domestic political norms regarding statecraft. Thus, the emergence of Qing hegemony was also the result of the domestic political needs of the Manchu regime. In the conventional political and cultural context of the civilized–barbarian distinction, which *China's Hegemony* acknowledges, the Qing made remarkable efforts to consolidate its legitimacy as the civilized central kingdom within the Qing border. The prolonged process of consolidating its position within China from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, namely, from the Shunzhi to Qianlong periods, exerted strong influence on the Qing's contacts with Korea, Vietnam, Ryukyu, and other tributary states through a set of tribute discourse and norms and helped to establish Qing hegemony. When it comes to the political legitimacy of China and its tributary states in this system, the two sides were mutually constitutive and mutually defined.

These three episodes—the Yuan-Ming transition, the Imjin War, and the Ming-Qing transition—occurred during precisely the same historical period that *China's Hegemony* engages. They show that the establishment of China's hegemonic authority in the tribute framework reflected China's domestic political needs. These three cases call into question the book's argument that “neighboring actors' pursuit of political legitimation in domestic power struggles was at the heart of Chinese hegemony and variations in its receptivity” (2). The domestic political needs of the preponderant state should not be neglected in the examination of those of the less powerful states. *China's Hegemony* has made it clear that “the Chinese hegemonic order was not as Sinocentric as many people believe” (3), but the deconstruction of Sinocentric historiography does not justify a one-sided approach to interpreting imperial China's hegemony.

Third, Lee argues that “Chinese hegemonic authority was in large part a function of symbolic power contingent upon other East Asian actors' recognition of Chinese way of defining socially acceptable behavior” (13). She repeatedly asserts that imperial China had “symbolic power” or “symbolic authority” over Korea, Japan, and other tributary states (61, 66, 67, 116, 128, 129, 132, 133, 142, 151, 175, 177). Lee also finds David Lake's definition of “symbolic obeisance” useful in defining China's “symbolic power” (48).<sup>6</sup> This assertion of the nature of China's power over its tributary states, however, can be misleading. The author argues for China's “symbolic power” partly because of the narrow definition of the concept of the “tribute system” used in this book, namely, “a set of diplomatic practices in pre-nineteenth-century East Asia that involved ‘tribute’ (*chaogong*, 朝貢) and/or ‘investiture’ (*cefeng*, 冊封)” (47). Lee is fully aware of the complexity of this system and tries to deliver a definition that fits the book's practice-oriented approach, but this definition has trimmed down the multilayered nature and diverse manifestations of the system to the most conspicuous presentations of the communications between China and its tributary states. The argument that Chinese hegemony in day-to-day international political practices was presented as “symbolic domination” (51, 59) in the less powerful states is reasonable, but this observation does not prove that China's power was only symbolic. Indeed, for Muromachi and Tokugawa Japan, Ming China's and Qing China's hegemony was more symbolic than substantial, but that was not the case for Chosŏn Korea. In early

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<sup>6</sup> David Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 165.

1393, for instance, Zhu Yuanzhang decided that Yi Sŏng-gye's new regime should be called "Chosŏn" and the Yalu River should be the border between the two countries, a decision concerning Korea's national identity and the demarcation of the two countries in the Yalu River area. This authority was not symbolic. The fact that the Ming and the Qing barely exercised their supreme power over Korea does not mean that such authority was merely nominal, as European, American, and Japanese diplomats understood and asserted it to be in the second half of the nineteenth century, when they struggled to define the nature of the Sino-Korean relationship. Rather, China's power was tangible, although it was also invisible in day-to-day tribute practices.

The Qing dynasty of China, for example, in its reactions to the political turmoil of its tributary state, showed that it retained the full legal power to punish any official of the tributary state, and even to remove the king, if necessary. The Qing's decisions to dethrone the last king of the Lê dynasty of Annam, Lê Duy Kỳ (1765-1793), in 1789 and to detain Taewŏn'gun (1820-1898) of Korea in China for three years were two cases par excellence. It was in this context that in 1886 Yuan Shikai, the Chinese imperial resident in Korea, proposed to Li Hongzhang that China should replace the king of Chosŏn with an abled man of the Korean royal family.<sup>7</sup> During the Sino-Japanese War in 1894-1895, the proposal to replace the king or integrate Korea into China reached a peak in China and almost all proponents based their rationale upon China's authority within the tribute system since the Zhou dynasty. Within the tribute system, the Chinese emperor possessed absolute patriarchal power over the kings, and this is particularly true for the Confucian kingship of Chosŏn. What determined this relationship was not China's military power or geopolitical gravity, or its "suzerainty," as Western and Japanese diplomats understood it in the nineteenth century, but the mutually constitutive legitimacy of each side of the bilateral arrangement that was undergirded by the tenets of the tribute mechanism and Confucian ethos and norms. China's power was not merely symbolic. The rituals performed by the Korean king and officials at the Korean royal palace toward the imperial envoys, imperial documents, and imperial gifts also demonstrate China's tangible power.

Furthermore, although *China's Hegemony* aims to discuss "four hundred years of East Asian domination," as the subtitle of the book suggests, it primarily discusses the three aforementioned tumultuous periods. These periods reflect the flexibility of tribute system and the diversity of actors' motivations, but they cannot reflect the nature of the tribute system and the manifestations of China's authority during more peaceful times. An examination of other historical times beyond these short chaotic periods might suggest a different picture of China's hegemony. For instance, the Qing imperial calendar reform in 1644 and the spread of the new calendar among its tributary states, the Qing's nation-wide cartographical survey in the 1710s and 1720s and its reach into Korea, and the Qing's emphasis on the Manchuness among Manchus and its influence on the Manchu envoys to Korea in the Qianlong period all suggest the strong connection between China's domestic political needs and the construction and substantial presentations of China's hegemonic authority in a cross-border sense.

In conclusion, Lee's book substantially contributes to scholars' understanding of China's hegemony in the tribute system in premodern East Asia by highlighting the important role of less powerful states in co-constructing the hegemony. Although additional investigations into the diverse presentations of China's authority in East Asia would further strengthen the argument of the book, Lee's highly useful practice-

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<sup>7</sup> Yuan Shikai to Li Hongzhang, Aug. 6, 1886, in *Li Hongzhang quanji* 李鴻章全集, eds. Gu Tinglong and Dai Yi (Hefei, Anhui: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2008), vol. 22, 77.

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oriented approach is bound to inspire more productive interdisciplinary exchanges between IR scholars and historians.

### Review by R. Bin Wong, University of California, Los Angeles

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Ji-Young Lee's wonderful new book, *China's Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination*, is most immediately an important contribution to revising the manner in which Asian specialists have viewed China's position within Northeast Asian politics before the European-driven global order took shape in the second half of the nineteenth century. Like Anthony Reid and Zheng Yangwen's edited volume from 2009 on Southeast Asian state efforts to deal with China aptly entitled *Negotiating Asymmetry*, Lee offers us fresh perspectives regarding, in her case, how Japanese and Korean governments pursued relations with the Ming and Qing empires.<sup>1</sup> Lee assigns far greater agency to Japanese and Korean political actors in defining the nature of relations with the Chinese than what have often been Sinocentric perspectives and is thus able to create accounts of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean political relations that persuasively draw upon constructivist and realist traditions in IR scholarship. Her explanations of critical moments in Chinese-Japanese and Chinese-Korean relations that contradict conventional expectations of Korean acceptance of Chinese diplomatic conventions and Japanese rejection of those same conventions stress the ways in which domestic political agendas influenced Japanese and Korean government approaches toward their relations with the Ming and Qing empires. Her careful treatments of Korea's late fourteenth-century military expeditions against the Ming empire, the late sixteenth-century Japanese invasions of Korea intended to conquer the Ming empire, and the Qing empire's perceived cultural inferiority all demonstrate the crucial roles that Japanese and Korean political interests and intentions played in determining East Asian political relations. For this commentary I propose to connect her findings to the ways we view the Qing Empire in global history and observations on IR methodologies. To supplement her suggestions regarding the possible influence of Chinese hegemony in the East Asian past on the country's global rise, I will consider how the present-day global political economy includes the current practice of hegemony that is different both from both China's past hegemony in East Asia and from what the Chinese might possibly pursue in the future.

#### *The Qing Empire in global history*

Lee's reconstruction of the ways in which domestic political agendas affected Japanese and Korean approaches to their relations with China, which is based on careful reconstructions and new interpretations of fourteenth and sixteenth episodes of war, places them in a perspective similar to those we have for the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 as depending on a combination of competing Korean political factions with their respective Meiji and Qing state allies. When Lee's episodes of East Asian war are juxtaposed with European proclivities to pursue military actions against each other it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the relative importance of what we call today 'soft power' and its more coercive alternatives have visibly varied in East Asia and in Europe only to become more parallel during World War II when Japan's aspirations for hegemony in its Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere (大東亞共榮圈) more nearly paralleled German (and the Axis partners') efforts of the same period to achieve hegemony over Europe.

We can also compare political relations pursued by eighteenth-century European states and the Qing Empire since the Qing occupied territory roughly comparable to the extent of Europe from the British Isles to the Russian Ural Mountains and ruled a population greater than those of European states put together. I suggested a few years ago a preliminary taxonomy that distinguished three kinds of political relations for

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Reid and Zheng Yangwen, eds., *Negotiating Asymmetry. China's Place in Asia* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2009).

European states and three kinds of political relations fashioned by the eighteenth-century Qing state.<sup>2</sup> According to my interpretation, European rulers forged relations with their elites and commoner subjects, with their European neighbors and competitors, and with peoples they engaged in other world regions. Qing rulers channeled domestic political relations largely through a bureaucratic system supported by particular relations between officials and elites, the capacities of which were augmented by extraordinary political movements and campaigns in pursuit of military as well as domestic material welfare objectives that included water control projects and those affecting food supply security. The Qing state aspired to have its relations to Northeast and Southeast Asian states framed by the tribute system, but this did not always occur, as Lee's accounts of Korean and Japanese relations to the Qing state make clear. The very different ways political relations were organized by the eighteenth-century Qing and European states reflected differences in the spatial and demographic scale of polities and the agendas of rule that Chinese and European states pursued in order to be successful. Chinese domestic political relations and those they forged with outsiders operated in contrast with the mix deployed in Europe, which is the context within which I appreciate the important new insights into Chinese relations with Japan and Korea presented by Ji-young Lee.

### *IR Theories and Practices*

The importance of *China's Hegemony* extends well beyond its reconstruction of Japanese and Korean agency in determining the characteristics of their relations to the Ming and Qing empires. It would be easy for non-area studies specialists to acknowledge the book's contributions as affirming the differences between East Asian international relations historically and the global model of international relations spread by Europeans in the nineteenth century based (putatively) on the principles of the 1648 Peace of Westphalia. But that would be settling for taking a conceptually comfortable and, in my opinion, clearly incomplete measure of the book's arguments. In terms of method, Lee argues that the Chinese state achieved a position of authority with respect to Korea and Japan through practices it pursued for those relations, a formulation drawing upon Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice.<sup>3</sup> Lee explains China's hegemonic authority based on the practice of the conventions of diplomatic interaction framed by ideas asserting and affirming China's symbolic domination. She makes the further important move of conceiving the principles of engagement practiced by distinct political regimes to follow from the efforts made by Chinese rulers to achieve domestic political legitimation. Legitimation matters as much as material power and the coercive threats such power can project for the construction and reproduction of unequal relationships, whether those between rulers and subjects domestically or relations between two distinct political regimes. Lee develops her arguments about hegemony based on a combination of political and sociological theories used to elucidate her reading of historical documents and the existing secondary literature built on those documents, largely the products of historians. She identifies herself to be working largely within the constructivist wing of international relations specialists, spending little time highlighting how different her work is from much other work in international relations, whether produced at the realist or constructivist poles of the spectrum or from some theoretical position between the extremes.

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<sup>2</sup> R. Bin Wong, "Reflections on Qing Institutions of Governance: Chinese Empire in Comparative Perspective," *Crossroads* (2012) 5: 103-114.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, trans. by Richard Nice, *An Outline of a Theory of Practice*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).



For purposes of contrasting her own work with other scholarship on international relations, she argues that the Westphalian solution to the anarchy of inter-state relations present in early modern Europe is only one path to stable relations among polities. It is also a path one can imagine for a large number of small polities competing with each other in order to find a means to reduce conflict between themselves. Yet among the popular explanations of European state formation are those most associated with Charles Tilly, especially in his *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992*, where war making among European states drives the expansion of bureaucracies and increased revenue extraction needed to build competitive military forces.<sup>4</sup> The early modern European links between domestic and international political relations clearly included the pressures of international competition within Europe fostering state building efforts domestically; rulers found themselves negotiating with well-established elites over how they would gain additional revenues as they sought to create centralized domestic political authority. The causal logic regarding international challenges creating domestic responses runs in the opposite direction from that proposed by Lee for China. She argues for the empire's relations with Japan and Korea to be driven by efforts to create domestic political legitimacy.

Her argument makes sense because the Chinese empire had been facing the chronic challenge of asserting the bureaucratic authority of a central state over populations and territory as large as Europe itself. Europe's so-called Westphalian solution to anarchy among European polities was an alternative to fashioning political order under a single system of ruling authorities. The Westphalian solution to anarchy did not, however, reduce conflict. It simply imagined alternative principles according to which agreements could be achieved that relied less on coercion and threats of violence. Missing from the Peace of Westphalia was any hegemonic power in Europe similar to China's hegemonic position in East Asia. Indeed, the outcome of the Thirty Years' War in part confirmed the inability of the Holy Roman Emperor to influence, let alone control, the religious beliefs and practices of his subjects; the limitations rather than the extent of the Holy Roman Emperor's powers regarding his subjects coupled with military offensives from neighboring polities make it impossible to imagine a European equivalent to China as a hegemonic power.

From a modern global history perspective, one could argue that the Chinese experience in its world region resembles more what became the modern norm of a more global hegemon, first with Britain's nineteenth-century achievement of dominance and then with American hegemony that reached mid-twentieth century maturation following European polities pursuing mutual destruction for the second devastating time conflagration in less than four decades. From an early-modern perspective, Europe's political fragmentation and chronic warfare seemed largely solved during the nineteenth century. Some major and minor nation states were consolidated in the first half of the century, while others, like Germany and Italy, were only created in the second half of the century. Yet, it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that successive steps were taken in Europe to form a European Union (EU) that became at its height a polity spanning as large a part of Europe as had been subject to common authority since the time of the Romans.

The distinguished Harvard legal scholar, David Kennedy, famously uncovered the twentieth-century illusion that nineteenth-century international relations were based on a shared notion of sovereignty that made possible the application of a core set of principles across global international relations.<sup>5</sup> The illusion was

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> David Kennedy, "International Law and the Nineteenth Century: History of an Illusion," *Nordic Journal of International Law* (1996) 65: 385–420.



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useful, to be sure, as it gave reasons to legitimate the kinds of logic that twentieth-century leaders and their agents wished to promote for an orderly world. But the illusion remains, it seems to me, even as it is countered by others who have sought to adjudicate between competing notions of the conceptual sanctity of sovereignty among equals and empirical presence of unequal international relations. These troubling theoretical simplifications fostered by Westphalian-inspired ideas about sovereign countries as the actors in international relations contribute to what we can consider the poor fit between real-world international relations and the IR theory based on so-called Westphalian sovereignty. Perhaps the kind of Chinese hegemony Lee identifies in East Asia can help us to better understand the conditions of modern and contemporary IR within which the presence of hegemony is part of our world order.

### *A Modern Political Economy of Global Hegemony*

To understand contemporary IR conditions consider for a moment going back to the early modern era, in which the 1648 Peace of Westphalia is taken as a key event, and consider what else was occurring at the time. How might we understand the development of early modern European relations within Europe and other parts of the world? All too briefly I will sketch characteristics of the early modern European political economy that mattered to European state-making and economic expansion; they shaped relations within Europe and between Europeans and others. The subsequent transformation of these practices into principles of the modern world order form crucial components of the context within which China's contemporary global rise can be understood.

The competition between early modern European rulers was both political and economic. Understanding their political success to depend in part on their ability to raise resources needed to compete in wars with each other, early modern European rulers sought to enrich their economies often at the expense of those countries with whom they were competing politically. European maritime expansion exported the mercantilist political economy to other world regions. In Asia this meant competition among European merchants and their governments for control over supplies of Southeast Asian spices, Indian cotton and Chinese silk textiles, and Chinese porcelains and teas for sale in Europe. European maritime moves into Asia were commercial in purpose but, unlike merchants and commercial networks that Europeans encountered, they brought with them the threat of military violence in order to establish their presence.<sup>6</sup> They were not, however, successful in all their early modern military efforts, in particular against the Chinese empire, as Tonio Andrade demonstrates convincingly in *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation and the Rise of the West*.<sup>7</sup> By the nineteenth century the British in particular had succeeded in creating iron warships that forced themselves into Chinese harbors and inaugurated the beginning of unequal treaties between China and European powers. This military enhancement was a direct result of capabilities created by the industrial revolution that powered the British economy's development and propelled British state into a position of political hegemony globally.

Europeans more generally benefitted in the nineteenth century from the economic and military divergence with African and Asian world regions that had its origins in the military warfare within early modern Europe.

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<sup>6</sup> R. Bin Wong, Featured Review of Tonio Andrade, *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation and the Rise of the West* in *American Historical Review* (April 2017) 122-3: 464-467.

<sup>7</sup> Tonio Andrade *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation, and the Rise of the West in World History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

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The particular mix of economic and political motives to use military violence as Europeans moved into other world regions was accepted by both public and private actors. Relations among European political and economic actors changed in the nineteenth century—and our historiography highlights those changes by arguing for the separation of state and entrepreneurs after the demise of mercantilism and the rise of free markets. Such a modern perspective does, however, entail some intellectual costs. It makes less clear how Europeans embarked on an entwined set of political and economic objectives when both state and private actors looked to pursue some mix of wealth and power beyond their own world region in the early modern era as well as its consequences for the modern era. This mix of political and economic intents set Europeans off from not only the Chinese but from all other states in other world regions of the early modern era and initiated a cascade of complexities through which the pursuit of wealth and power has traveled into contemporary times.

In what can only be for present purposes proposed in a brief and bald fashion, I suggest that Europeans may have been the only people to make such politically consequential moves in the early modern era because they had the capacities to mount coercive and commercial adventures at the same time as they were unable to eradicate warfare between their own world region's major states until the mid-twentieth century. More local conflicts persisted through the twentieth century in Europe, and despite (or perhaps also partially because) of the European Union, the affirmation of peace as a basic principle for uniting a large portion of Europe after World War II continues to be challenge of managing EU-Russian relations. For the world more generally, European war-making first developed as part of inter-state relations within early modern European world region, joined European desires for overseas commerce and territory, and bequeathed the modern era a set of political, military, and economic relations that, for better and for worse, define our world today. Warfare in no other world region produced this monumental set of consequences. Only after economic and military divergence set in, did the possibility of warfare becoming increasingly similar and connected become real. This is the world in which China's global rise is occurring.

### *China's place in the twenty-first century global political order*

Ji-Young Lee suggests that the future dynamics of China's rise will depend on how the domestic political desires of other state actors such as Japan and South Korea influence their understandings of the global status and positions of China and the U.S. As she notes, the ideological components of U.S. hegemony are more attractive than those proffered by the Chinese at the moment. But may not that be the consequence of a long-time Chinese focus on opposing American hegemony followed by China's decision to become part of the global order without a plan of how to practice Chinese soft power? Now that China has become a consequential part of the economic order and is establishing a growing visibility in political affairs, perhaps the Chinese domestic practice of proclaiming the pursuit of a more "harmonious society" or may be the "China Dream" will spur some more attractive vision appealing to others.

These possibilities proceed amidst China doing far more internationally than they did in the past and in some arenas doing considerably more than the U.S. and its allies have been doing, certainly in economic terms at least.

China's late twentieth-century economic rise was impossible to imagine in 1975. Its early twenty-first century movements of capital and technology into Africa and Latin America were extended and conceptualized more fully under the government's "One Belt One Road" (OBOR) initiative announced in autumn 2013. OBOR conceives creating the infrastructure for trade through poor parts of Eurasia where global terrorism has often created more threat than economic development has fostered material improvements. Chinese participation in

international organizations and their formation of new international agreements and institutions ranging from regional trade pacts to new institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank means that Chinese voices on issues of global economic and political governance will grow even if we cannot predict confidently how their voice will change in the future. The significance for changing the world order and the effectiveness of their voice will depend with how different their voice becomes from Western voices and if conversations over a shared global order can continue to develop without armed conflict. To ponder very briefly what appear to be potential differences between Chinese and the U.S. and its allies, the Chinese do not always make the sharp distinctions between what is often called ‘bankable’ investments and development aid. They refuse to rely on the principle of investing solely where political risks are low to enhance the likelihood of profitable returns. Their approach appears akin in at least some limited ways both to ancient Chinese principles of governance and some contemporary thinking among development economists. Like the former, Chinese development projects seem to support the logic that people can only begin to consider political ethics and accept authority if their material needs have been met—poverty is the major enemy of political order. Like the latter, the Chinese appear to be extending their own development experience where successful steps call forth institutional innovations to consolidate them and prepare a path for subsequent steps. What is not as clear is how and where geopolitical strategic thinking fits into this initiative.

The global political order is based on a combination of competition and cooperation that has evolved out of early modern Europe’s maritime expansion and the subsequent formulations of British and American hegemony. Open conflict has historically occurred under modern hegemonic political order. This realist dimension of the past and present accompanies whatever constructivist possibilities exist for a Chinese hegemony in the future or some hybrid of shared hegemonic governance. The Chinese pursuit of their future will depend on how openly and creatively Americans and their allies prove able to fashion theirs, with all parties increasingly aware they share a world with only a common set of possible futures.

### Author's Response by Ji-Young Lee, American University

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I would like to begin by expressing gratitude to the editors of H-Diplo/ISSF for making this roundtable happen and to Seo-Hyun Park for kindly agreeing to share her introductory remarks. I appreciate how the roundtable brought such an extraordinary group of highly respected scholars to review and discuss my book, *China's Hegemony*. As a political scientist who ventured out into a deeply historical work, I feel extremely fortunate that the review panel included three historians Timothy Brook, Yuanchong Wang, and Bin Wong, who not only read my book carefully but viewed it in a positive light. Their reviews each introduce valuable historical details and perspectives that I learned from, in such ways that can not only bolster the book's arguments but also situate them in the broader comparative context of global history. Likewise, Victoria Hui, whose own interdisciplinary scholarship inspired my thinking on this project, offered thoughtful, engaging comments, for which I am deeply grateful.

From their careful reviews, it is gratifying to know that the two main objectives of the book—first, incorporating the agency of China's less powerful neighbors Korea and Japan in understanding the tribute system as a corrective to the existing literature, and second and relatedly, explaining Chinese hegemony as a domestic, as well as international phenomenon, based on the role of the domestic political needs of the less powerful states—have been largely achieved. At the same time, the reviewers raised important questions and criticisms that merit serious consideration. Below I categorize their comments in four themes and address them in greater detail.

#### *Broader Global Contexts and New Themes*

Perhaps the best place to start is Bin Wong's review—a fascinating essay in its own right—that contextualizes and extends my book's findings into larger and new themes with regard to the Qing empire's place in world history. In that process, he did a great service to me and other scholars in terms of suggesting a future research agenda, as he shared his extensive knowledge and penetrating insights on several relevant historical trajectories involving late imperial China, early modern Europe, and contemporary globalization, among other themes. Specifically, in my view the following historical patterns he explains deserve more scholarly attention in light of their theoretical as well as empirical significance in multiple fields of study.

First, he notes that in light of Japan and Korea's relations with the Qing empire, it becomes distinctively clearer that eighteenth-century European states and the Qing, while comparable, are strikingly different in how they organized political relations both domestically and internationally. Second, linking my findings to the literature on state formation, he contrasts patterns in early modern Europe—where the pressures of international military competition created domestic responses of state-building efforts<sup>1</sup>—with those in the East Asian case, in which the domestic power struggles and strategies for legitimation shaped hegemonic authority and order building at the international level. Third, the different proclivities toward military actions in pre-nineteenth century East Asia and Europe converged by the twentieth century, especially during WWII when Germany and Japan aspired to achieve hegemony in their respective regions. Fourth, China's global rise in the late twentieth century should be understood in this specific context where the competition between early modern European rulers and the resulting European maritime expansion into Asia transformed their

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), cited in Bin Wong, 3.

mercantilist practices into the principles of today's international order. Among other things, Wong's keen observations and comparisons are good reminders that international relations theorizing should consider the specific historical, social contexts in which actors operate, and strive toward understanding each region and its dynamics in their own right.

These historical trajectories and long-term processes illustrate how an understanding of China's rise cannot be separated from what Robert Gilpin called "systems change,"<sup>2</sup> a series of major events during which China was transformed into a sovereign state from an empire, while Asian and European regions came to form a single international system. Wong further suggests that today's China follows a different mode of global political economic practices from that practiced under American hegemony, which may have important implications for the future of international order. In conjunction with my argument, he further asks, "perhaps the Chinese domestic practice of proclaiming the pursuit of a more 'harmonious society' or maybe the 'China Dream' will spur some more attractive vision appealing to others." While I do not have a definitive answer to what implications China's global rise might have for geopolitical strategic thinking, my observation, albeit limited, is that China's power and influence bring out into the open whatever differences China and the United States have had in terms of their notions about how international politics should be conducted.

### *Chinese Hegemony and Symbolic Power as Coercion*

Some of the important critiques raised in the reviews have to do with the way in which my book sought to articulate the notion of 'hegemony' as a social process, as was practiced in the East Asian historical context. Victoria Hui points out that the book "succeeds in hollowing out China's hegemonic authority better than any other works in the genre," and that it "contradicts itself by asserting the taken-for-granted nature of compliance." Yuanchong Wang raises the issue that "China's power was not merely symbolic," especially vis-à-vis Korea. He maintains that "the argument that Chinese hegemony in day-to-day international political practices was presented as 'symbolic domination' (51, 59) in the less powerful states is reasonable, but this observation does not prove that China's power was only symbolic." Together they share the concern that my conceptualization of Chinese hegemony did not give enough weight to the role of China's material, 'tangible' power.

In *China's Hegemony*, I follow the standard definition of hegemony in the field of IR—a structure in which "a single powerful state controls or dominates the lesser states in the system"<sup>3</sup>—but at the same time, suggest viewing it in a more sociological way. My reading of historical documents, especially those written by Chinese and Korean envoys at that time, gave me a remarkable, vivid sense of the notion of "authority," grounded not just in China's exercise or threat of brute power, but its ability to establish its own view of the world as the norm, with substantial consequences for the domestic politics of its neighboring powers under certain conditions, which I theorize in chapter 2. In a sense, Hui's insightful observation that "the Chinese emperor had no clothes" may indeed be one way of interpreting my book's argument. However, that is not all. China's symbolic power was 'tangible,' particularly in its relations with Korea, because unlike in Japan, contemporary Koreans regarded Chinese hegemonic ideology that advanced imperial China's position as being morally

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 41.

<sup>3</sup> Gilpin, 29, cited in *China's Hegemony*, 6.

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superior to Korea's as 'natural' and 'appropriate,' as if those ideas advanced their own and the "universal interests of the people in general."<sup>4</sup>

Consider Wang's own example of Yi Sŏng-gye after he founded a new dynasty in Korea. Yi's need to receive external recognition from the Ming emperor—without which he was made vulnerable to attacks from his own domestic political opponents—is what I mean by China's 'symbolic power' and 'hegemonic authority,' embedded in the tribute practices (investiture), which acted out the shared understanding of the Ming emperor's identity as the Son of Heaven among contemporary Korean ruling elites. This way, Chinese symbolic power was a mechanism of coercion for China, but only because Korea's own local notion of legitimacy resonated with the Chinese hegemonic ideology based on the Confucian civilized-barbarian distinction. Under the Chinese hegemonic order during the Ming and High Qing periods, which is the scope of this book's investigation, coercion was "always latent but [was] only applied in marginal deviant cases," to borrow Cox's words.<sup>5</sup> My position, therefore, is not incompatible with rational-choice approaches, but maintains that actors' cost-benefit calculations do not take place outside the specific social, historical context. In other words, what Timothy Brook characterized as "considerable duplicity and aggression" on the part of China and "creative deception and outright resistance" on the part of Korea—arguably, the behaviors arising from these actors' rational calculations and deliberate choices—took place while they were using and manipulating tribute practices, whose performances were natural and unthinking for contemporary East Asians. As such, my arguments will be 'inconsistent,' only if we treat socially shared ideas and identities as epiphenomena of material power, which is not the position that I take in this book.

Therefore, I do not deny the role that China's material power plays in the workings of Chinese hegemony. Rather, my argument is that one should pay greater attention to the ways in which actors use cultural resources for realpolitik purposes, as in the case of the early Ming empire's behavior vis-à-vis Korea. This is also where the agency of the less powerful is brought in to understand the workings of Chinese hegemonic authority, because those cultural resources are ineffective as a mechanism of coercion on the part of the dominant power unless they resonate with the locals' notions of what they consider legitimate in the first place. As Brook notes, the book's departure from the bifurcating view of hegemonic order building either through power or culture created room theoretically and empirically to show how "authority is determined not by those who wield it but by the attitudes of those who obey it," to use Watson's words.<sup>6</sup>

### *Practice Turn in Interpreting the Tribute System*

My understanding of the tribute system as a set of diplomatic practices emerged in the course of my research on the notion of hegemonic order in East Asia. In that light, I am pleased to read Brook's comment that "thinking of historical international relations in East Asia in this [the tribute system] way is eminently

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Ted Hopf's articulation of the concept of hegemony. Hopf, "Common-sense Constructivism and Hegemony in World Politics," *International Organization* 67:2 (April 2013): 321, cited in *China's Hegemony*, 63.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony, and International Relations: An Essay in Method," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 12:2 (June 1983), 164, cited in *China's Hegemony*, 63.

<sup>6</sup> Adam Watson, *Hegemony and History* (London: Routledge, 2007), 22, cited in *China's Hegemony*, 6.



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sensible.” Although offering a new way of interpreting the tribute system was and is not the goal of this project, I came to take a certain approach focusing on the role of “practices,” as I delved into historical details. Contrary to Wang’s observation that I defined the tribute system in a narrow manner, I actually thought my approach was fairly broad, since I viewed it in terms of “a set of diplomatic practices in pre-nineteenth century East Asia that involved ‘tribute’ and/or ‘investiture,’” (47) thus leading Brook to write that I am “not interested in confirming or denying the logic of the system on its own terms.”

As a political scientist, what was fascinating to me about the historical East Asian international order was that there was one definite, common observation emerging through my research—which was that the actors conducted diplomacy through a set of tribute practices and shared their meaning. That is, in any given relationship, the meaning of actor A sending (as opposed to receiving) tribute to actor B signified that actor A acknowledged actor B’s position as superior to actor A’s. Likewise, the meaning of actor A receiving (as opposed to granting) investiture from actor B signified that actor A acknowledged actor B’s position as superior to actor A (47). My argument on China’s ‘symbolic domination’ rested on the observation that China was almost always on the receiving end of the tribute while granting investiture to other rulers, never the other way round, at least in the East Asian context as specified in the introduction. Further, other East Asian powers, even when they did not have a direct tributary relationship with China, as in Japan during the Tokugawa period, conducted relations with one another through these practices. Therefore, Wong notes that I “explain China’s hegemonic authority based on the practice of the conventions of diplomatic interaction framed by ideas asserting and affirming China’s symbolic domination.” In a sense, contrary to Hui’s observation, I believe that I set the bar low for hegemonic authority, precisely because compliance was measured at the very minimum by these practices that were taken for granted in the conduct of diplomatic activities. For example, even when Korea showed “behind-the-back defiance” vis-à-vis imperial China, there was no deliberate decision when it came to performing tribute practices themselves.<sup>7</sup> As Wang writes, in the early fifteenth century Korea demonstrated its military power and authority vis-à-vis local Jurchen tribes, “using the tribute discourse informed by the civilized-barbarian distinction,” which to me is a form of Chinese symbolic domination.

Hui and Wang offer somewhat contrasting views on my practice-oriented approach to Chinese hegemony. Whereas Wang “applaud[s] Lee’s practice-oriented approach to interpreting China’s dominant position in East Asia,” Hui questions whether compliance was based on unthinking practices or power calculation. More broadly, she suggests that my book is more about a study of defiance and challenge than compliance. In light of my measure of compliance above, Wang’s statement that “the Sino-Korean tributary arrangement lasted for 492 years without significant changes until it was terminated by the Sino-Japanese War in 1895” is worth noting. In other words, of all of the years marked by the continuation of tribute practices, the case studies of the book signify only those ‘marginal deviant cases,’ in which coercion—which was always latent—came to the surface as the usual boundaries of the tribute practices were disrupted.<sup>8</sup> I give a lot more causal weight to the role of practices than Hui does—treating them as constitutive of the shaping of hegemonic order, as well as indicative of compliance. It is for this reason that the Qing empire is considered as holding hegemonic authority, albeit at a much lower level compared to that of the Ming.

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<sup>7</sup> On how to measure compliance in *China’s Hegemony*, see page 74.

<sup>8</sup> See n. 5 of this response.



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Brook's discussion of the need for scholars to discern what the tribute system model obscures—"the constitutive role that the tribute-sender plays in instantiating and sustaining the system"—and what it leaves out—"the active presence of rules of inter-polity conduct that have nothing to do with the Chinese system" is an important one. He suggests that the book does a particularly good job with the former by investigating the motives on the part of China's neighbors, which reveals that "the logic of the system could produce defiance of, rather than compliance with, overwhelming material power." I gratefully acknowledge this comment, because viewing defiance as an integral part of the tribute system is what I sought to show through my theory and empirical chapters.

At the same time, he cautions against "shoehorning" every aspect of China's relations with other powers into the tribute system model. For example, he notes that of the seven demands that the Manchu ruler Hong Taiji imposed on Korea in 1637, only two would fall under the category of the tribute system, while other demands are either influenced by or directly come from those of the Chinggisid model. Due to my rather broad, practice-oriented interpretation of the tribute system, it is possible that my book does not do a good job of elucidating what the tribute system leaves out, despite Brook's gracious emphasis that his perspective is not to question my observations regarding the strategies of the tributary states vis-à-vis imperial China.

My response is two-fold. First, my conceptualization of the tribute system allowed me to view actors' performance of tribute practices as drawing the boundaries of what was considered legitimate in the East Asian diplomatic world specifically during the Ming and High Qing periods—such as 1) no "barbarian" could be the Son of Heaven or hegemon, 2) tribute was not a form of economic exploitation, and 3) Chinese emperor's granting of the title "king" signified China's respect for the recipient country's autonomy (47-50). The boundaries established by the tribute system were not immutable, however, as seen in the case of the rise of the Manchus as hegemon in the seventeenth century. Based on the notion of boundaries, the book also explains how Mongol practices were differentiated from those of the tribute system (imperialism as opposed to hegemony), which is in line with Brook's point above.

My second point does not directly speak to Brook's point, but I wonder if it would be possible to think of the tribute system as having evolved and adopted to new realities over time, while incorporating past practices, such as the case of the early Ming that adopted and incorporated some of the Mongol practices. I do not discuss this idea in the book, but suggest it here as a case against the possibility of viewing the tribute system and relevant practices as unchanging. At the same time, it deserves mention that those demands of 1637 mentioned above, that violated the boundaries established by the tribute system, turned back to the typical practices similar to those during the Ming, once the Qing empire's relations with Korea became more stable after the initial period.

### *Asian History and International Relations*

One of the most rewarding and yet challenging parts of writing *China's Hegemony* was to 'bridge the gap' between the two fields of international relations and history. Many of the other perceptive criticisms that Wang raised about my book concern my decisions in the course of employing social science concepts, methods, and research design while working with rich historical details.

He argues that my approach associates hegemony with imperial China only, while ignoring other "multiple hegemony" in East Asia, and thus is problematic. He further suggests that "one can find Korean hegemony and Japanese hegemony as well," considering Korea's and Japan's dealings with local Jurchen tribes and

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Korean embassies respectively, for example. I think this issue arises from differences in how the two fields define and understand the concept of hegemony. If my approach of hegemon as “the single actor” is problematic “from the historical research perspective,” in the field of international relations, the very notion of hegemony presupposes the presence of “a single powerful state” in the international system. Perhaps one way of thinking about this is that historians use the word “hegemon” to refer to Toyotomi Hideyoshi, for example, only after he reached a certain point where his unification of Japan placed him at the top of samurai hierarchy above all or most other military houses.

Wang and Hui raise the criticism that I should have included the analysis that China’s responses were also driven by its own strategies of domestic legitimation and this point is well taken. On the one hand, the question of this book, as Wang notes in his review, is “why Chinese hegemony was accepted to varying degrees in historical East Asia.” Since my inquiry was on the attitude and motivations of those less powerful actors, I designed my research to focus on Japan and Korea’s responses. On the other hand, I agree that looking into China’s domestic political needs would have further enriched and strengthened my arguments. I am gratified that Wang’s detailed discussion of this China equation against all of my three cases offers strong evidence in support of my arguments, pointing to the causal link between domestic legitimation strategies and the shaping of hegemonic order.

Hui points out that I should have engaged more with Feng Zhang’s book that covers the early Ming empire’s relations with the Mongols, Korea, and Japan, another point well taken. In addition to my discussion of his book in the context of its contribution to the East Asia IR history research program, I have published a review of his book in the *Journal of Chinese Military History*, in which I had a chance to refine my thinking on his arguments.<sup>9</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Ironically, the conclusion of *China’s Hegemony* is that there was no such thing as “China’s” hegemony per se. International order building is an interactive, social process even when it is “hegemonic.”

I would like to express my sincere thanks again to the reviewers and the editors who have put so much time and effort into this roundtable. I am truly appreciative of their remarkable understanding and encouragement of my intellectual journey, and of their illuminating comments on the book’s strengths and weaknesses. This process of interdisciplinary engagement has undoubtedly sharpened my thinking and horizon on the topic, while inspiring me to explore more deeply and broadly the various manifestations of political order, power, authority, coercion, legitimacy, and historical East Asia. I very much look forward to further engagement.

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<sup>9</sup> Ji-Young Lee, “Review of ‘Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History,’” *The Journal of Chinese Military History* 5:2 (December 2016): 180-182.