4 DIPLOMACY

The Tribute System

Traveling in faraway places, I recall the old days wearing my Chinese-style garments and being with my beloved wife.
—Ariwara no Narihira

Chinese civilization had an enduring and transformative effect on the domestic politics and societies of many surrounding states, and those most Sinicized formed a Confucian society with shared norms, values, and agreement on what constituted membership. But early modern East Asian international relations was also part of a larger international system, as well: it included all of the political actors in the region, not just the deeply Confucianized states. These more general international rules, norms, and institutions formed the basis of international relations in early modern East Asia.

This international order in East Asia encompassed a regionally shared set of formal and informal norms and institutions that guided relations and yielded substantial stability. With the main institution of the "tribute system," this international system emphasized formal hierarchy among nations while allowing considerable informal equality.[1] As long as the hierarchy was observed and China recognized as hegemon, there was little need for interstate war. Sinic states, and even many nomadic tribes, used some of its rules and institutions when interacting with one another. Status as much as power defined one's place in the hierarchy: China sat highest, and secondary states were ranked by how culturally similar they were to China—not by their relative power. This tribute system also involved restraint by China and provided benefits to the secondary states. As Liam Kelley notes: "It should be clear to the reader that the manner in which we view the world today—that is, as divided between equal nations, each of which takes pride in its own cultural uniqueness—is perhaps inappropriate for viewing the world of the East Asian past."[2]

Michael Mastanduno points out that "hegemony is unlikely to endure if it is primarily coercive, predatory, or beneficial only to the dominant state. In other words, leaders need followers."[3] Incorporation into the Chinese world left the secondary states free to pursue domestic affairs and diplomacy with one another as they saw fit and also brought economic and security benefits at a cost lower than by engaging in arms races or by attempting to develop a counterbalancing alliance against China. Yet more than this functional aspect were the ideas and norms embodied in the tribute system, and Korean and Vietnamese elites in particular accepted the values and ideas of the tribute system.

Thus, it was a mix of legitimate acceptance and rational calculation that motivated Korea and Vietnam to lend their submission to China. They understood China's goals and worked within an overarching set of largely Chinese norms and practices, not against them. The legitimacy of this order played an important role in stabilizing relations between actors. The explicit acceptance of China as hegemon and as the source of civilization and the norms embodied in the various institutions were central to the conception of these states' emerging identities as influential and legitimate political entities.

However, while this underlying set of norms and institutions were the basic building blocks of international relations, by no means were these rules identically and consistently applied by all states in the region. In fact, it is best to view the tribute system as the starting point for international relations, and all the states modified, changed, and sometimes ignored these basic ideas as circumstances dictated. There was no intellectual challenge to the ideas of status, hierarchy, and Chinese civilizational centrality, but what was open for modification were the myriad of ways in which secondary states chose to deal with China, one another, and themselves. As noted in the previous chapter, while some states chose to move closer to China and emulate Confucian practices, others, such as Japan, remained on the edge—a part of, but never wholly embracing, the Confucian society. Still others, such as the various nomadic tribes, used the rules and ideas of the tribute system but explicitly rejected any notions of cultural assimilation along Confucian lines.

Diplomacy

The core of the tribute system was a set of institutions and norms that regulated diplomatic and political contact, cultural and economic relations, and in particular explicitly stated a relationship between two political units. In contrast to the modern Westphalian ideal of equality among nation-states,

the tribute system emphasized the "asymmetry and interdependence of the superior/inferior relationship," and inequality was the basis for all relations between two units.[4] The tribute system was formalized in two key institutions: recognition by the superior state, known as "investiture," and the sending of embassy envoys to the superior state. Investiture involved the explicit acceptance of subordinate tributary status and was a diplomatic protocol by which a state recognized the legitimate sovereignty of another political unit and the status of the king in that tributary state as the legitimate ruler.[5] Tribute embassies served a number of purposes: they stabilized the political and diplomatic relationship between the two sides, provided information about important events and news, formalized rules for trade, and allowed intellectual and cultural exchange among scholars. Missions themselves, composed of scholar-officials, interpreters, physicians, alternates, messengers, and assistants, could consist of hundreds people.

For example, when the Chinese emperor established a tributary relationship with another country or community, that established the sovereignty of that country in Chinese eyes and entitled the recipient to rights of entry into China. The *Da Qing tongli* (Comprehensive Rites of the Great Qing) begins the section on receiving envoys with reference to the ancient Zhou dynasty (1027–481 b.c.): "In the *Rites of Zhou* the Grand Conductors of Affairs (*Daxingren*) handled the rites and ceremonies of the guest. Kingdoms external to the nine provinces were called foreign kingdoms (*fanguo*)."[6] As in the modern Westphalian system, this mutual recognition of legitimacy and sovereignty was the key diplomatic aspect of the tribute system. Classifying foreign kingdoms as *guo* (country) shows both difference and similarity: *guo* was the designation for Qing itself, and thus foreign kingdoms were viewed as similar, although unequal, units.

The tributary was expected to use the Chinese calendar in all communication to the emperor, send diplomatic missions or embassies to China at regular intervals, and present documents or "tallies" that allowed access to China's borders. However, different regulations and rites applied to different categories of visitors, according to their status. For example, more exalted diplomats were excused from kowtowing and were also allowed to trade privately; these were benefits denied to lower-status officials.[7] As James Hevia notes, "the superior/inferior relationship is signified as such in several ways . . . superiors initiate, set affairs in motion, are a source; but inferiors bring affairs to completion."[8]

Yet beyond these measures, China exercised little authority over other states: "When envoys bowed before the Chinese emperor, they were in effect

acknowledging the *cultural* superiority of the Chinese emperor, not his *political* authority over their states."[9] Relations with China did not involve much loss of independence, as these states were largely free to run their domestic affairs as they saw fit and could also conduct foreign policy independently from China.[10] As Liam Kelley writes, "Vietnamese envoys passionately believed that they participated in what we would now call the Sinitic or East Asian cultural world, and that they accepted their kingdom's vassal status in that world."[11]

The Status Hierarchy

A key element of the tribute system was the explicitly unequal nature of the relationship. In early modern East Asia, although states were largely free to do as they pleased, perhaps most significant was the explicit recognition that China was at the top of the hierarchy. Other states were not allowed to call themselves the equal of China, although this had little effect on their domestic politics. This hierarchy was rank ordered, based in part on how culturally similar these states were to China. Rank on the hierarchy was explicit and brought with it different rights, chief among them access to China. James Hevia notes that "it is not, therefore, simply a matter of proposing hierarchy as an organizing principle in 'traditional' China. Rather, the notion of hierarchy to which the *Comprehensive Rites* appears to refer is materialized via a logic of inclusion or encompassment which simultaneously maintains difference."[12]

Korea and Vietnam were no stronger than Japan, but they were ranked more highly by virtue of their relations to China and their more thorough adoption of Chinese ideas. Korea in particular was seen as a "model" tributary[13] and was unquestionably near the top of the hierarchy. Indeed, Korea ranked first in the Ming hierarchy of tributary states, a distinction of pride for Koreans, and they "saw their relationship to China as more than a political arrangement; it was a confirmation of their membership in Confucian civilization."[14] Chosŏn-Ming relations were quite close, with Korea annually dispatching three embassies to China during the fifteenth century, and Korean elites "eagerly import[ed] Chinese books and ideas."[15] Ki-baek Lee concludes that the Chosŏn "relationship with Ming China on the whole proceeded satisfactorily."[16] This stable relationship continued under the Qing, and Hevia notes that "Korea emerges in Qing court records as the loyal domain par excellence. In the *Comprehensive Rites*, Korea appears first among the other domains, and imperial envoys dispatched to the Korean court are always of a higher rank."[17]

Vietnam, like Korea, was "widely recognized as [one of] the premier domains of manifest civility after the Middle Kingdom," and during the 15th and 16th centuries sent missions to Beijing almost every year. [18] Vietnam first entered into a tributary relationship with China upon its independence in the tenth century, and from that time on, "Song [Chinese] rulers unquestionably placed the Vietnamese kingdom at the top of a hierarchical system of relationships with leaders along the southern frontier."[19] The Le Dynasty (1427–1787) was considered one of the "most loyal" tributaries of China, and tribute missions and cultural imports and learning were regular and comprehensive.[20] Indeed, we consistently find writings such as that by the eighteenth-century Vietnamese scholar-official Nguyen Vinh, who wrote of his service as an envoy to China that:

> The only literatus who can expand his capacity to the greatest degree, have his prestige praised at court, and his name honored for all ages in other lands is the envoy. Only someone who has the skill to govern . . . [is] always aware of what is most important. . . . During the years of the Song dynasty [960–1279] . . . the great talents all emerged in the south. It was at this time we came to be called a domain of manifest civility. Now to be able to see with one's own eyes [China] all that one has read in books, is that not the great joy in one's life?[21]

What Nguyen Vinh described was a process where all of the things that today we would label "traditional Chinese culture" gradually spread southward from the Yellow River valley. Later, when the Vietnamese Nguyen Anh completed his overthrow of the old Le dynasty in 1802 and sought investiture from the Qing, the question came up of what to call the new country. Previously it had been "Annam," but the Annamese now called themselves the Nam Viet.

> This was completely unacceptable to the Qing court, since these characters (Chinese reading *nan yue*) were the name of an old state that had been centered in what was now Guangdong and Guanxi. Several exasperated exchanges produced no solution. Then someone in the imperial court suggested simply reversing the two syllables. Nguyen Anh agreed to call his kingdom Viet Nam. . . . Thus, one of the most passionately cherished national names of our times . . . was invented within the red walls of the Forbidden City of Beijing.[22]

Japan, the Ryukyus, Siam, the Burmese kingdoms, and the other political units that engaged in tribute relations with China were ranked lower than Korea and Vietnam. These kingdoms were allowed to trade and interact with China, but they received fewer benefits and had less access to China than did those ranked more highly. Japan, for example, was technically restricted to one mission every ten years, although it sent tribute missions slightly more frequently.[23]

Tribute Missions

The Ming and Qing "established specific regulations per contact regarding the frequency of tribute missions and the number of people who could attend each mission."[24] For example, sixteenth-century Chosŏn Korea was allowed annual missions and during the Chosŏn dynasty sent an average of three to seven tribute missions to China every year.[25] Vietnam was initially allowed annual missions in the fifteenth century, which eventually became one every three years; Japan was allowed one mission every ten years.[26] Thus, between 1637 and 1881, Korea sent 435 special embassies to the Qing court, or an average of almost 1.5 embassies per year. In practice, however, this was flexible, and some states managed to avoid or modify the number of missions they were allowed to send.[27]

By the fifteenth century, Vietnam was sending embassies to Beijing "every year or two," where the new regime

> sought recognition, offered tribute, congratulations, and condolences, and explained events that were occurring on the southern border. . . . Besides the standard role of political subordination and contact that these tributary missions undertook, they increasingly brought Vietnamese literati, those scholars committed to the beliefs of the Chinese classical and Neo-Confucian texts, in touch with the Sinic literati world as it actually existed and functioned. This included both administrative and social roles, as well as the literary.[28]

The Vietnamese official Ho Si-Dong (1739–1785) wrote of his time as an envoy on a tribute mission:

> I was transferred to take up the post as surveillance commissioner of Hai Duong. Later I received orders to serve as an envoy to the North [China].

> I recalled when I was studying in the capital the Master [Nguyen Tong Khue] was living in seclusion in his home. I always regretted that I could not study under him. Now I was fortunate to be able to follow in his footsteps and view the [moral] radiance of the Esteemed Kingdom [China]. . . . This was truly a meeting of the minds.[29]

Japanese ambivalence toward China was more powerful than in Korea. However, the Japanese have traditionally described the world as *ka-i no sekai*, or "the world of China and the barbarians," and Kazui notes that "from the time of Queen Himiko's rule over the ancient state of Yamatai [a.d. 183 to 248] to that of the Ashikaga shoguns during the Muromachi period, it was essentially these same international rules that Japan followed."[30] Japan had stopped sending envoys to China in 890 and did not resume them until the Ashikaga shogunate of the mid-fourteenth century, and even then it was only a formal tributary of China for 150 years. For example, in 1370 Prince Kaneyoshi of Japan presented a *hyosen* (*piao-chien*, a foreign-policy document presented to the Chinese emperor) in which he referred to himself as "subject," and Yoshimitsu's acceptance of Chinese suzerainty became a powerful legitimizing tool for his government.[31] Writing about the fifteenth century, Key-huik Kim adds:

> In 1404—a year after the ruler of Yi Korea received formal Ming investiture for the first time—Yoshimitsu, the third Ashikaga shogun, received Ming investiture as "King of Japan." The identical status assigned to the rulers of Yi Korea and Ashikaga Japan under the Ming tribute system seems to have facilitated the establishment of formal relations between the two neighbors on the basis of "equality" within the "restored" Confucian world order in East Asia.[32]

During the one and a half centuries that Ashikaga Japan was a formal tributary of the Ming, the Shogun sent a total of 20 embassies with accompanying personnel numbering in the hundreds. The Shogunal representatives were staffed by an official ambassador of the Shogun, and included other court officials as well as the occasional domain representative. The missions engaged in tally trade, returned captured pirates, and exchanged news about each country.[33] Yet the Japanese had a visceral resistance to the subordinating rituals required by the formal tributary conditions that China laid down, and internal criticism along those lines forced the Ashikaga shoguns to discontinue

tribute relations after 150 years. John Wills notes that Ashikaga Yoshimitsu's investiture by the Chinese court "has been reviled by *Tenno*-traditionalists ever since."[34]

Although in theory the number of people allowed on a mission was restricted, this number was also often exceeded. The tribute missions entered China at the border, conducted rituals there, and were eventually escorted to the capital for a series of rituals that took place over several weeks. This included the exchange of tribute gifts and letters. Accompanying personnel would interact with their counterparts, and official trade would occur. Trade also occurred at the border between envoys left there to trade.

The Vietnamese court would begin the process of sending an embassy by instructing the Ministry of Revenue and the Imperial Household Department to draft an official request for approval to cross the border on a given day. This request would be delivered to the border, and a delegation of "awaiters of orders" would be dispatched to the border to await a response [from China]." The Vietnamese court would also select envoys and other members of the actual entourage. "A chief envoy journeying to the North to request investiture for the Southern king would have to be an official of at least second rank, while the first and second assistant envoys had to be of the third or fourth rank."[35]

Serving on a mission was an immense honor, as is reflected in the following poem composed by the scholar-official Nguyen Co Phu for the Vietnamese king in the fourteenth century:

> To this distant domain which desires to be transformed official word has come . . .
> I will sincerely report our fief's efforts when I visit the Celestial Court
> The benevolence we bathe in is as if from a golden goblet brimming to the rim
> Already the radiance seems so close as I set off to receive his moral blessings
> In this distant wilderness we will joyfully maintain this enterprise for ages to come

Liam Kelley notes that the poem "describes the South's relationship with the North in strikingly unequal terms . . . why [would] a Southern official describe the relationship in this manner to his own monarch? Could it be that the Southern elite actually believed in this characterization of their rela-

tionship with the North?"[36] It is important to take seriously the beliefs of the actors at the time. Viewing the world as unequal was not strange; instead, it seemed self-evident to the people of the time. Thus, that rules and norms developed around an unequal, hierarchic international order rather than being based on principles of equality is also not a surprise. Vietnamese tribute sent to the Song in 1156 reveals the character of the relationship:

> The tribute is extremely rich and all the characters in the letter were written with gold. There were 1,200 *taels* of gold wares, half of them decorated with pearls or valuables; 100 pearls contained in gold vases, of which three were as big as eggplants, six as big as the cores of jackfruit, 24 as big as peach pits, 17 as big as palm hearts, and 50 as big as date pits, making a total of 100; there were 1,000 catties of aloewood, 50 kingfisher feathers, 850 bolts of gold brocade decorated with dragons, six imperial horses complete with saddles, plus the regular tribute of eight horses and five elephants. The envoys were quite proud of being able to bring so rich a tribute.[37]

Liam Kelley ends his extensive research on the writings of the Vietnamese scholar-officials by concluding that

> this way of viewing the world as consisting of unequal domains of manifest civility [Confucian] which partook in a common cultural tradition, and this sense of anxiety that some Southern scholars felt at their land's inability to live up to the standard of such a domain, are important to keep in mind. . . . For while the existing scholarship has accustomed us to think of Southern [Vietnamese] envoys as proud believers in their own (cultural) importance who only "posed" as tribute bearers, in fact . . . their minds may have been filled with quite contrary thoughts. Rather than seeking to demonstrate that "Vietnam" was "civilized" so that the "Chinese" would not invade, Southern envoys may have harbored other thoughts and intentions when they journeyed to the North.[38]

Commitment Not to Exploit

A key aspect of legitimate hierarchy is a credible commitment on the part of the dominant state not to exploit the subordinate states. The tributary system provided a range of flexible institutional and discursive tools with which to

resolve conflicts without recourse to war, and a good indicator of the stability in the system is that the borders between Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and China were relatively fixed and did not significantly change during the five centuries under review. Beth Simmons writes: "When they are mutually accepted, [borders] drastically reduce external challenges to a government's legitimate authority . . . and clarify and stabilize transnational actors' property rights."[39] As Wendt and Friedheim note: "Recognizing the sovereignty of subordinate states imposes certain restraints on dominant states."[40]

By the eleventh century, Korea had established the Yalu river as its northern border, and it was the affirmation of this border and the Korean acceptance of tributary status in the fourteenth century that precluded a war between the new Ming Chinese and Chosŏn Korean dynasties. Near the beginning of the Ming dynasty, in 1389, the Ming notified Koryŏ that it considered the area of northeastern Korea that had been under direct Mongol control (the Ssangsŏng commandery) to be part of its territory. Koryŏ decided to fight the Ming over the demarcation of the border, and it was this campaign, and General Yi Sŏnggye's unwillingness to fight it (preferring negotiation), that led to the fall of Koryŏ and, three years later, the creation of a new dynasty, the Chosŏn.[41] Yi immediately opened negotiations with China, and the Ming did indeed settle for Chosŏn's tributary status. Significantly, in exchange for entering into tribute status with China, Chosŏn Korea retained all territory previously held by Koryŏ, and the subsequent relations between China and Korea remained close and stable for two hundred and fifty years, with the two sides exchanging numerous envoys and regularly trading.

The late Koryŏ-dynasty era in Korea was turbulent: the Mongols had attacked and subjugated the dynasty in the thirteenth century; *wakō* pirates attacked and plundered along the southern coast 378 times between 1375 and 1388; Jurchens continually raided Koryŏ's northern border; and, most importantly, a resurgent and militarily powerful Ming China in the fourteenth century was a potential military threat to the new Chosŏn dynasty's survival.[42] One obvious response to these security threats could have been a full militarization of the new Chosŏn dynasty and a resort to force. Yet the opposite occurred: the founding of the Korean Chosŏn dynasty in 1392 heralded an intensification of Confucian practices, and "scholar-officials . . . became directly involved in policymaking at all levels."[43] Deuchler notes: "To the social architects of early Chosŏn, the adoption of ancient Chinese institutions was not an arbitrary measure to restore law and order, but the revitalization of a link with the past in which Korea itself had a prominent part."[44] Indeed, the

Chosŏn dynasty's founder, Yi Song-gye, looked to Ming China for legitimacy with his own aristocracy, who were skeptical of Yi's humble origins, and in the Chosŏn "Founding Edict" he explicitly used the Chinese calendar, and its initial memorials made explicit reference to Chinese dynasties of the past.[45]

This intensification of Confucian practices has been called the "neo-Confucian revolution," during which scholars imposed their ideas about proper government and society over the objections of the military class. The founders of the new Chosŏn dynasty were not outsiders rebelling against an established order—in fact, they came from the educated elite—and their dissatisfaction was driven by a desire to intensify neo-Confucian practices, not overturn them.[46] For example, in his "Admonition to the New King," the Inspector-General wrote:

> The reason for the falls of Kings Chieh and Chou is that they lost virtue and ruled by force. . . . King Yu of Hsia demonstrated his virtue by building his palace low. . . . Emperor Wen of Han displayed his exemplary attitude by being thrifty . . . how much less should the sovereign be careless in his expenditure in Korea, whose land is squeezed between the mountains and the sea and whose population and taxes are not numerous![47]

The Chosŏn founder, Yi Song-gye, looked to Ming China for legitimacy with his own aristocracy, who were skeptical of Yi's humble origins. In this case, investiture from Ming China not only stabilized their border and territory, but diplomatic recognition also provided the Chosŏn king with domestic legitimacy. Thus, the Chosŏn "Founding Edict" explicitly used the Chinese calendar, and the initial memorials also made explicit reference to Chinese dynasties of the past.[48]

By the fifteenth century, Korea's long northern border—along both the Yalu and Tumen rivers—was essentially secure and peaceful; these two rivers have formed the border between China and Korea ever since. The Changbaishan/Paektusan area was negotiated in 1713.[49] Chŏng Yagyong, a Korean scholar-official writing in the eighteenth century, noted that

> the southern slopes of Mount Changbaek, where both the Tumen and Yalu rivers have their headwaters, lay within our territory, but the winding ridges and layers of peaks make the exact location of the border unclear. However, [Qing] Emperor Kang-hsi ordered Area Commander Wu-la Muk'eteng to delineate the border and erect a stone boundary marker. As a result, the border between those two rivers is clear as well.[50]

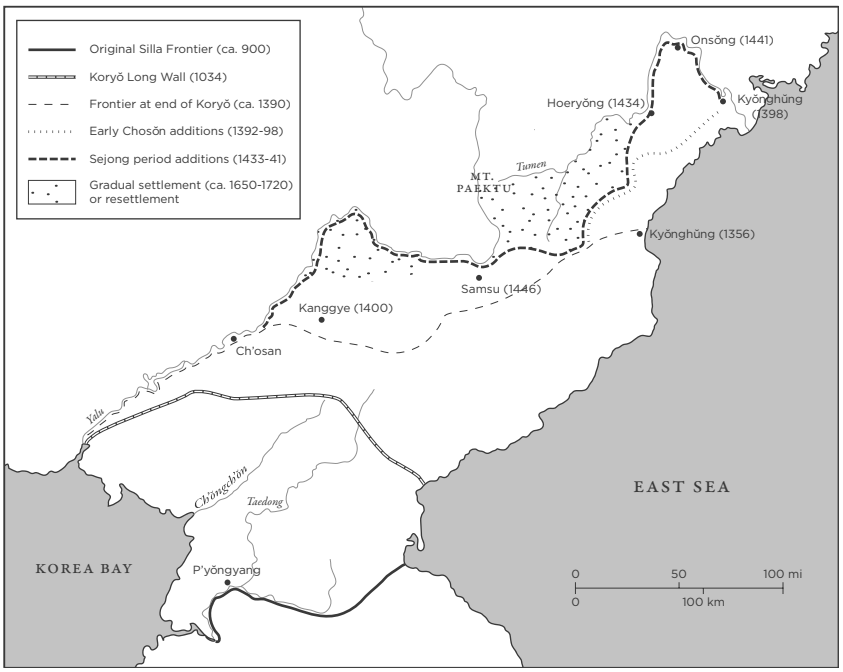

FIGURE 4.1 Korea's border with China, 900–1999

In the late 1880s, the Chinese reopened the issue of the border. Over the course of these negotiations, the Koreans presented documents and maps from the 1710–1713 negotiations with which to document their case. Rather than risk losing, the Chinese abandoned the negotiation and never returned to the table, and the Korean status quo stood (figure 4.1).[51]

Gari Ledyard notes:

> While the Koreans had to play the hand they were dealt, they repeatedly prevailed in diplomacy and argument . . . and convinced China to retreat from an aggressive position. In other words, the tributary system did provide for effective communication, and Chinese and Korean officialdom spoke from a common Confucian vocabulary. In that front, the relationship was equal, if not at times actually in Korea's favor.[52]

The Vietnam-China border was also clearly drawn. Vietnam and China demarcated their border in 1079, "which has remained essentially unchanged to the present day."[53] The Vietnamese and Chinese had agreed that "the Quan Nguyen and Guihua prefectures [were] two sides of a 'fixed border' (*qiangjie*)

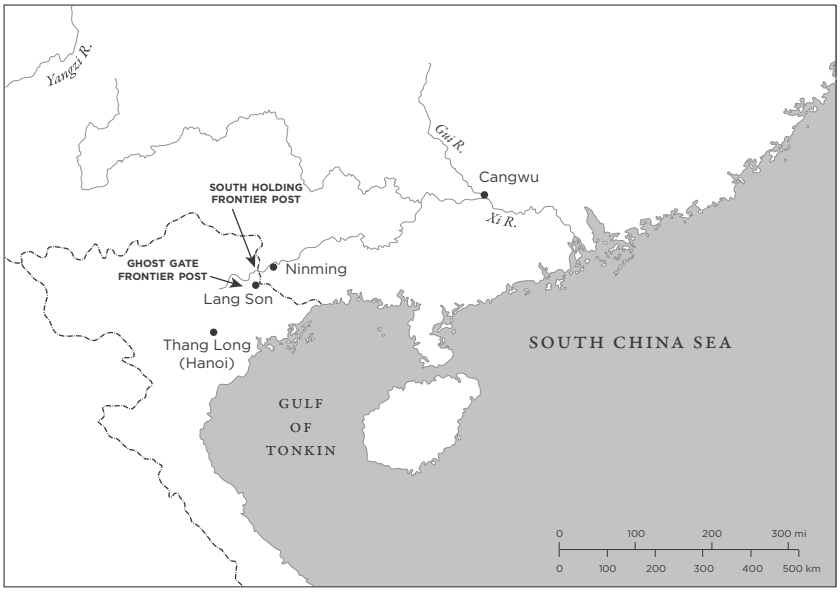

FIGURE 4.2 Vietnam's border with China, 1079–1999

region between the two states."[54] A fifteenth-century Vietnamese map shows the "official [route] for Vietnamese embassies traveling to the Chinese capital of Beijing. Going north from the capital, the map . . . moves past the walled city of Lang-son to the great gate on the Chinese border leading into Guanxi Province."[55] When China and Vietnam signed their modern treaty in 1999, they agreed upon essentially this same border (figure 4.2).

Recognition of the border and the stability it represented is woven through the writings of government officials of the time. The Tran Nam/Zhennan Frontier Post, or "South Holding Frontier Post," was located at the border of Guangxi province and Lang Son defense command. For centuries it was "the main border post between the two domains."[56] As the scholar-official Nguyen Du (1765–1820) wrote in 1813:

> The old affairs of Ly and Tran are distant and hard to find
> The two kingdoms evenly divide at this lone rampart
> But it is close to the Celestial, so one can finally understand the depth of the benevolence we receive
> From the [Qing] emperor's palace looking down, this place is as if beyond the scattered clouds
> Yet by my ears I can still make out a bit of the imperial tune.[57]

The Vietnam-China border, especially the western areas, were especially difficult to define and patrol, given that the frontier was jungle mountains populated by hill tribes and that "the Qing had regular procedures for the extradition of criminals to Annam. . . . Qing authorities knew they had all they could do to control territory on their side of the border as it filled up with miners and frontier farmers, frequently encroaching on and clashing with the hill peoples."[58] For example, in 1725, Vietnam moved the border 120 *li* northward (about forty miles) into Yunnan, toward promising copper mines. Given the difficulties in dealing with the border, Ertai, an official and confidant of the Yongzheng emperor, argued: "If we get the land we won't be able to defend it; if we get the people we won't be able to make any use of them." The emperor agreed to let Annam keep eighty *li*; forty *li* returned to Qing. "The King of Annam sent officials to greet with great ceremony the emperor's edict conceding the territory," and the matter was settled.[59]

Rulers often relied on diplomatic recognition by China to stabilize their own domestic rule, to ensure Chinese acceptance of their rule, and prevent Chinese intervention to stabilize Chinese borders.[60] Japanese historians such as Ishii Masatoshi, Murai Shosuke, and Tanaka Takeo explicitly acknowledged Japan's subordination to China in the Heian and Muromachi eras—Murai emphasizing that the adoption of investiture was a means of securing legitimacy of rule domestically and securing a monopoly of trade with China.[61] Ashikaga Yoshimitsu received Ming envoys in 1402, along with a letter from the emperor and the Chinese calendar (which "indicated respectful subordination to China"), by offering incense and kneeling "reverently" in order to read it.[62]

Even some Southeast Asian kingdoms benefitted from tribute relations. For example, in 1767, Siam was in chaos due to Burmese incursions that managed to capture the capital city of Ayutthaya. After the Burmese had been pushed back, a Siamese provincial governor, Taksin, sought investiture from the Qing as ruler of Siam. The Qing responded that he should first try to find a ruler from the previous ruling house and sent three envoys to Siam to investigate the situation. When the Qing concluded that Taksin was the best alternative, they recognized him—not formally as king but as "lord of the country."[63] When Taksin was deposed in 1782, a general emerged in Siam—Rama I—the first king of the Chakkri dynasty, which rules to this day. In appealing to the Qing for recognition, he wrote in Chinese to the Qing court that his "father" Taksin had "exhorted me to rule with care, not to change the old order, to have care for our own sovereign land and to honor the Heavenly Dynasty."[64]

China's strength also allowed it to provide security benefits to lesser states that agreed to play by the system's rules. Parameswara Iskandar Shah, the sultan of Malacca from 1394 to 1414, entered into a tributary relationship with China in order to protect himself from Siamese influence in 1403. Ryan notes that "the Chinese were not averse, therefore, to accepting Parameswara's request for protection. In 1403 a Chinese fleet led by an admiral named Yin Ching arrived in Malacca confirming Parameswara as the ruler of the settlement. In return further envoys were sent to China in the same year and again in 1407."[65] Siam sent seventy-eight tribute missions to China between 1371 and 1503.

Arrighi, Hui, Hung, and Selden note that "the China-centered tributary-trade system can often mediate inter-state relations and articulate hierarchies with minimal recourse to war. Japan and Vietnam, being peripheral members of this system, seemed more content to replicate this hierarchical relationship within their own sub-systems than vie directly against China in the larger order."[66] Thus, even though Japan only sporadically accepted tributary status, the system as a whole was stable because Japan accepted Chinese political, economic, and cultural centrality in the system, and it also benefited from international trade and the general stability the system brought.

Systemic stability seems to have been good for the political regimes in each of these Sinicized East Asian countries, which, in comparative perspective, were remarkably long lived. Tellingly, this was the case even more for the weaker states. The East Asian experience may be the pacific obverse of "imperial overstretch." Rather than being foolish for relying on bandwagoning and regional diplomatic order instead of constant self-strengthening and displays of resolve and commitment, in retrospect these states appear quite canny.[67] Pamela Crossley noted that "this set of institutional and discursive practices provided a wide range of tools with which to mediate conflict in East Asia."[68]

Legitimacy

The best evidence that secondary states saw China and Confucianism as legitimate are the voluntarily adoption of Chinese and Confucian ideas and institutions; the absence of evidence that Koreans, Vietnamese, or Japanese were smirking at Chinese behind their backs; and the use of the tribute system by secondary states in their dealings with one another. There is extensive

discussion in the historical records of Korea, Japan, and other Sinic states about Confucianism, civilization, and their states' and societies' roles. There is also little evidence that such discussion was merely a façade designed to fool Chinese diplomats. One good example of the explicit acceptance of Confucian ideas about civilization came in the wake of the Manchu (Qing) conquest of China in 1644. The Qing conquest caused intense debate within China and also in the surrounding states about whether the new dynasty was legitimate and whether it was Confucian. For example, in a 1786 memorial to the Korean king Chongjo (1776–1800), Pak Chega, a noted official, wrote:

> Our country served the Ming as a tributary subject for more than two hundred years . . . even though the Qing have now ruled the world for more than one hundred years, the descendants of the Chinese and their etiquette still prevail . . . thus, it is quite incorrect to rashly call these people [Manchu] "barbarians." . . . If we want to revere China, there is no greater reverence than to put the Chinese ways into practice.[69]

Significantly, even the Japanese accepted notions of Confucian civilization, although they grimaced at China's centrality in the system. Perhaps most interesting was a Tokugawa report from the 1730s. Edited by Hayashi Shunsai, it was titled *Ka'i hentai*, or "the Chinese-Barbarian Transformation." The book's title comes from the Qing's conquest of China; the author saw the Manchu conquest as transforming Ming China from civilized to barbarian.[70] As Mizuno notes, "the perception of the Manchus as barbarians seemed to remain among the Japanese throughout the Tokugawa era."[71] That the Japanese retained Confucian ideas about what comprised status, cultural achievement, and the larger hierarchic and tributary order is significant. Implicit in both the Korean and Japanese debates about the Qing is both the idea and the acceptance of what constituted Confucian civilization and what constituted the rightful rule of China.

Indeed, Liam Kelley reports: "I have found no evidence of mockery or belittling of the tributary relationship in any of the poetry that Southern [Vietnamese] envoys composed. One finds instead that this relationship and the concepts on which it was based were part and parcel of these envoys' understandings of the world and the way it worked."[72] Thus it was a mix of legitimate acceptance and rational calculation that motivated states such as Korea and Vietnam to lend their submission to China.

Although dominant or hegemonic states might exploit secondary states, what China appears to have wanted was legitimacy and recognition from secondary states, not necessarily material benefits such as wealth or power. Extensive trade relations did not necessarily favor China and, as we will see in chapter 6, was sometimes a net loss.[73] Militarily, China was content to coexist with the Sinic states as long as they were not troublesome. Yet recognition of China as dominant was important, and a challenge to legitimate authority was a key factor in the cause and resolution of the one war between China and Vietnam during this time. As a hegemon, the Chinese tributary relationship could be costly for the Chinese government. Gregory Smits notes: "China, in effect, purchased the participation of surrounding states by offering them incentives."[74]

Alliance behavior existed as well, yet states worked with China, not against it. Other states bought into the Chinese role as system manager. In 1592, for example, King Naresuan of Siam learned of Japan's invasion of Korea and sent a mission to China in October of that year, offering to send the Siamese fleet against Japan. Wyatt emphasizes: "This was no empty gesture. Naresuan understood the interconnectedness of international relations, and he wanted to maintain a balance of power favorable to open international commerce and to China's dominance in an orderly Asian state system."[75]

Even John Wills, a critic of the concept of the tribute system, concludes that

> it is crucial to my critique of the tribute system as a master concept that important parts of Qing foreign relations had little or no relation to the institution of the tribute embassy. But the relations with Siam and with Annam were very much within the tribute system . . . relations with Siam were managed with far better information about the foreign polity and far more realistic policy making than in most cases.[76]

Vietnam fell into domestic disorder in the 1500s, as the Trinh (north) and Nguyen (south) fought for legitimacy, and in 1644 the Qing accepted the restored Le dynasty under Trinh hegemony. Wills notes that "the Le kings sent regular tribute embassies, were meticulous in the use of seals and terminology, and prepared their own tribute memorials and accompanying documents in quite respectable literary Chinese."[77]

This type of diplomacy reveals the way in which international relations had a formative influence on states throughout the region. Although China was

clearly the center, and maintaining stable relations with it was paramount, these states sought information about each other, interacted with each other, and had a set of norms and practices that were recognized and accepted that communicated information about each other's preferences, interests, and goals. As noted above, being able to read and write in sophisticated Chinese was central to presenting the state in a positive light to China. "Looking at the stability of their tribute relations with stable and effective states in Vietnam and with Siam in the early nineteenth century, the Qing rulers had every reason to believe that their inherited practices were working very well . . . a multiplicity of sources of information increased the possibility that the emperor could demonstrate his mastery of the situation."[78] In sum, states engaged in diplomacy with one another on a consistent basis. Far from being isolated and autarkic, the early modern East Asian system developed rules and norms governing trade, diplomacy, and international migration.

Hierarchy and Relations Between Secondary States

Further reflecting the acceptance of the tributary system as legitimate is the fact that Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and other states used the institutions of the tribute system and also replicated these rank orders in their own relations with other political units. Indeed, the emphasis on status and hierarchy pervaded not just states' relations to China but extended to all foreign relations of the time. The tribute system was the regionwide political framework that allowed for diplomacy, travel, and official and private trade between all the states in the region. Secondary states also replicated these rank orders in their own relations with other political units. These states conducted formal diplomatic relations with each other, with elaborate protocols, ranks, and systems of interaction. When other states interacted with each other, the rules were still hierarchic and within the tributary system—Korea and Japan each looked down on the other as less advanced, and Koreans looked down on Jurchens and Japanese as being lower than Vietnamese, because of their less Confucian ways. Status in the hierarchy was a function of cultural achievement, not economic wealth or military power.

The tribute system ordered relations regarding the management of borders, dealing with crises, and regulating a host of other interactions. International diplomacy was not merely a functional set of rules to allow trade, either: in general, the tribute system was the political framework that allowed for

diplomacy, travel, and official and private trade between all the states in the region. By the early fifteenth century, the Korean Chosŏn court had divided foreign contacts—such as envoys from Japan, the Ryukyus, and Jurchens—into four grades, with several statuses within these grades. These grades corresponded not only to different diplomatic statuses and rights but also entailed different trading and commercial rights, regulated Japanese and Jurchen contact, and covered issues such as the repatriation of traders and sailors who had been shipwrecked in Japan. Korea, for example, explicitly ranked its relations with other countries: various Mongol tribes were rank 4, the Ryukyus rank 5.[79]

Japan also maintained tribute relations with other states, most notably with Korea and the Ryukyus. The Japanese also devised an elaborate set of rights and regulations—to be discussed in detail in chapter 6—that covered economic relations. For example, in 1601, Tokugawa Ieyasu wrote to the Vietnamese lord Nguyen Hoang, stating: "In the future, ships visiting your country from our country are to be certified by the seal shown on this letter, and ships not carrying the seal should not be deemed lawful."[80] These shipping licenses granted by the shogun were called *shuinsen* (朱印船) and were similar to Chinese tallies, although without as extensive a political or diplomatic relationship attached to the trade.

As for Korea, Kenneth Robinson concludes that the Chosŏn Korean court "borrowed, adapted, and expanded upon rights and policies of the sinocentric tribute system," developing "a tribute system designed over time in part to organize interactions with a broad collection of Japanese elites and separate them into a multi-level hierarchy for reception and ritual purposes."[81] Ha Ubong argues that Chosŏn relations with the shogun were conducted on the basis of equality, but Chosŏn relations with Tsushima and Japanese traders were hierarchical.[82] Kenneth Swope notes that "when addressing states such as Ryukyu they [Korea] considered to be inferior in status within the Chinese tributary system, they implied . . . paramountcy. Japan they regarded as an equal or as an inferior depending upon the occasion."[83]

Different rank led to different rights: the highest-grade Japanese officials, for example, were allowed to outfit up to three ships for trade with Korea "and also move an unlimited amount of that cargo . . . but Korean officials severely restricted the volumes of official trade permitted contacts in the two lower grades."[84] Entry into Korea was governed by an official seal, and Japanese officials occasionally attempted to forge diplomatic seals in order to gain better trading benefits. By the fifteenth century, Korea and Japan had developed

elaborate rules governing the recognized Japanese envoys to Korea and their status for the purpose of reception, where envoys and traders could land in Korea and where they could travel, the number of trading ships allowed to visit the country, the manner in which trade was to be conducted, and who would actually be allowed to trade. For example, by 1418 copper seals were required to distinguish authorized Japanese traders from pirates, and a treaty in 1443 limited the number of Japanese ships to fifty per year and required them to receive credentials from the lord of Tsushima to be presented in one of three Korean ports: Pusan-po, Chae-po, and Yon-po.[85] Trade between Korea and Japan was so extensive that by 1494 over three thousand Japanese were permanently residing around Pusan. After the Imjin War, Korea restricted Japanese traders and diplomats to only the port of Pusan.

The key diplomatic institutions concerning Korea-Japan relations were the Korean *waegwan*, or "Japan houses," that were built as early as 1419. Originally designed to house official envoys and separate them from Japanese living in Korea, by the seventeenth century the Pusan *waegwan* had become a series of buildings within a compound and was the sole legal place for Japanese envoys and traders to stay while they were in Korea. Official permission was required to leave the *waegwan*. In existence until 1876, the *waegwan* housed over one thousand Japanese and had operated continuously except for the interruption of the Imjin War.

There is a great deal of evidence that both Korea and Japan regarded each other as inferiors. States without the cultural or civilizational influence of China had far less claim to superior status relative to other secondary states. As a result, states down the hierarchy had trouble dealing with each other and with determining their own hierarchic ranking. Kenneth Robinson concludes about the fifteenth century:

> Japanese went through the motions of obeisance, used the right words, such as "tribute" . . . and sought entry as frequently as possible. They did not assume this posture so that they could first and foremost display their respect to the King of Chosŏn and his officials. They wanted entry to Chosŏn for the grains, cloths, Buddhist sutras, and other items of value in Japan and among Jurchens.[86]

The Japanese followed the same procedure. During the Muromachi bakufu of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Japan sent twenty delegations to China, "but during the same period, hundreds of groups . . . traveled to

Korea."[87] Japan-Korea interactions occurred on multiple levels—not only the central governments but also regional and local governments as well as common people traded and traveled between the two countries.[88] The Japanese, of course, regarded the Koreans as inferior. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, relations between the two had been distant but relatively stable. Mizuno notes that Hideyoshi "described traditional Japanese-Korean relations as "*gyuji no mei* (an alliance of cow ears)." The term came from a Chinese classic, *Chun qiu Zuoshiizhuan* (Spring and Autumn Annals and Zuo Commentary), and meant hierarchical bonds or a partnership between two parties.[89]

The Imjin Wars of the 1590s (to be discussed in chapter 5) severed relations between Korea and Japan. Given the domestic politics of the subsequent Tokugawa regime (1600–1868) and its need for legitimacy, the Tokugawa shoguns preferred to see Korea as a subjugated state after the Imjin War, despite the overwhelming evidence that Japan had lost the war. Internationally, the Japanese leaders needed to find a way to interact with the other states, and the Korean restrictions on Japanese travel provided them with a convenient excuse. As Mizuno points out, "the bakufu were neither ignorant of the implications of diplomatic protocols nor self-flatteringly imbued with a belief in Japan's superiority over Korea. It was obviously aware of the discrepancy between its own ideal vision of relations with Korea and the actual state spelled out through diplomatic protocols."[90]

Quite illuminating as to how both Japanese and Korean elites viewed each other and the international system of the time is the diplomatic wrangling that took place between Japan and Korea over reestablishing diplomatic ties, which took place nine years after the conclusion of the Imjin War. Particularly, the trading families that had been most affected by the war sought to repair relations between the two sides. Thus, the So family of Tsushima worked to repatriate captives and "ingratiate themselves" to the Koreans as early as 1599. Much of the disagreement between the two states, however, had to do with the explicit positioning of the two states on the status hierarchy. The Japanese shogun Ieyasu began negotiations in 1602, opening communications through the Tsushima domain of So Yoshishige. Ieyasu told So that "I had no personal grudge against Korea. Hence I will grant peace if the country wishes it. However, an overture of peace must not be a matter for Japan to propose first."[91]

Eventually, the Korean king sent two emissaries to Kyoto in 1605, and in 1606 the Korean court agreed to consider normalizing relations, as long as

it was Japan, not Korea, that made the first move. Hence the Korean court would wait for "Ieyasu [to] ask for peace by submitting a letter."[92] Doubting Ieyasu's sincerity, the Korean court wanted a *kukso* (J: *kokusho*), an official "document of state." At this point the history becomes unclear: numerous scholars have suggested that the intermediaries between the two courts—particularly the So Yoshishige house on Tsushima—forged letters, seals, and documents to make both the Korean and Japanese courts feel that they had achieved what they wanted.

What is known is that the first letter that Ieyasu sent, on July 4, 1607, was found to be unbearably insulting to the Korean court, and they demanded revisions before they would accept the letter. The Japanese tone of this first letter was that of victor to supplicant. Ieyasu had written to the Koreans: "Your country requests restoration of its previous association [with Japan]. Why would my country decline it?"[93] Worse than the tone were the title and the era name; neither the title of the Korean king nor the Chinese era name, *Wangli*, was in the shogunal letter. The shogunal letters instead used the Japanese era name, *keicho*. Refusal to use equivalent titles of "king"—*Ilbon Kukwang* or *Chosŏn kokuo*—implied subordination. Sharing the same honorific implied parity between the two rulers. Confucian honorifics in diplomacy had specific hierarchies: the highest title was "majesty" (C: *bixia*; J: *heika*; K: *p'yeha*), followed by "highness" (C: *dianxia*; J: *denka*; K: *jonha*), and then "excellency" (C: *gexia*; J: *kakka*; K: *gakha*). Although Ieyasu first used *gakha* in referring to the Korean king, eventually the Tokugawa shoguns and the Korean kings settled on referring to each other as "highness" in letters written to a peer, to "avoid trouble."[94] This was not mere diplomatic wrangling about a relationship that would surely have come about another way. Rather, this negotiation over status was central to the diplomatic relations of the two states. The ability to situate oneself on a ranking was critical to the hierarchical order; without it, relations were impossible to normalize. The reflection of status and hierarchy was central to the international relations of the time.

After a semblance of diplomatic recognition had been achieved between Korea and Japan, Chosŏn Korea did not permit Japanese envoys to travel to the capital, restricting them to the port city of Pusan. For its part, Korea sent twelve envoy missions to Tokugawa Japan between 1607 and 1871. Although the Koreans were clear that these envoys were explicitly *not* tribute missions, the corresponding prohibition on Japanese diplomatic missions to Korea allowed the Japanese to act as if the Korean envoys actually were tribute missions from a supplicant Korea dispatched to Tokugawa. Given the lack

of Japanese diplomatic access to the Korean capital and the amount of trade that occurred, the ambiguity of the Korea-Japan relationship remained over the years, allowing both sides to view the situation in their own preferred manner. "The *bakufu* attempted to exploit the presence of the foreign missions on Japanese soil as a political tool to vindicate the legitimacy and authority of its own regime."[95]

For its part, Japanese tribute missions (considered a "humiliation" by the Tokugawa bakufu but maintained nonetheless) consisted of an envoy offering a letter (*sogye*) from the lord of Tsushima addressed to the Korean Third Minister (Sr. 3) in the Board of Rites. A return letter consisting of gifts was delivered a few days later. Japanese tribute (the Tokugawa bakufu used the term *pongjin*, "special gifts") was typically pepper, alum, sappan wood, gold or silver lacquerware, ink-stone cases, figured paper, and sometimes other goods from Southeast Asia. Korean return gifts were usually ginseng, leopard and tiger skins, dogs, hawks, linen, white silk thread, oil paper, brushes, ink, inkstones, swords, bamboo saddlebags, fans, combs, oil, honey, starch, juniper seeds, chestnuts, and dates. Following this exchange of letters and tribute trade was a "tea ceremony," or banquet.[96] After this, the real trading began between the two sides. Until the 1876 Kanghwa treaty, which began the modern era of relations between the two countries, tribute relations were the diplomatic protocol that governed economic relations between Japan and Korea. However, by delegating responsibility for Korean relations to Tsushima, the bakufu was able to hedge their relationship with Korea, and this allowed the Koreans to pretend that the shogun was actually engaging in tribute with the Korean king, while the shogun could pretend that such actions had nothing to do with the central government but were rather the actions of the local Tsushima lord.

Korea and Vietnam did not have as intense or frequent interactions as did Korea and Japan, but there was some indirect (and direct) contact and trade between the two sides. When emissaries from Korea and Vietnam met in the Chinese capital, for example, they could communicate through their knowledge of Chinese and Confucian classics. For example, the Vietnamese scholar-official Li Bancun wrote in 1748 that:

> Chosŏn [Korea] and the Secure South [Vietnam] are especially considered as domains which have established the proper institutions. In the past I perused the *August Dynasty's collections of Pearl and Jade* and the

> *Record of Collected Airs from Dongxing*. From these I saw that poetry in Chosŏn is deeply imbued with the ways of the Efflorescence [Confucianism]. My only regret is that I have never seen such a poetry collection from the Secure South.[97]

Le Quy Don, writing in the eighteenth century, noted:

> The people of Chosŏn are gentle and respectful. Envoys from our Viet kingdom who journey to Beijing to present tribute often meet with their envoys. . . . The Eastern Kingdom [Chosŏn] is a kingdom of exemplary men who take pleasure in upholding trust and propriety and following [the teachings in the *Classic of*] *Poetry* and the *Venerated Documents*. This all inspires respectful admiration among others.[98]

Tokugawa Japan's Foreign Relations

The role of Japan is perhaps the most important to discuss, because for centuries Japan was the second-largest country in East Asia. Did the system really encompass Japan? Japan is the liminal, or borderline, case of the Confucian society. That is, Japan was heavily influenced by Chinese and Confucian ideas in both its domestic politics and international relations, and it unquestioningly accepted the larger diplomatic rules of the tribute system and both the hierarchic nature of the institutions and the way in which status within that society was determined. However, Japan was the most skeptical of and uncomfortable with China's dominance within the Confucian system. Indeed, over the centuries Japanese rulers and scholars have distinguished between Confucian ideas and Chinese civilization—which they accepted virtually completely—and China itself as a state—about which they were far less impressed, to say the least.

Even this sense of Japanese skepticism was dormant and muted until the seventeenth century. In the centuries before the Tokugawa shogunate (1600–1868), Japan followed essentially the same rules as other Sinicized states. The question of Japan's status and place in the international hierarchy came into sharp focus with their defeat in the Imjin War. The new regime that arose after Japan's defeat, the Tokugawa, thus faced a decision about how to conduct its foreign relations. Should it return to the Chinese system, and, if so, how should it fit into it? Their retreat from both the tribute system and from active

maritime trade was an "epochal change: a maritime East Asia with an active Japan would have been a very different place."[99]

Numerous scholars have disagreed about whether or not Tokugawa originally considered accepting tributary status with China. Ronald Toby argues that "the Tokugawa bakufu had had ambivalent feelings about participating in the Ming world order from the very beginning,"[100] while in contrast Mizuno "does not find any concrete evidence that the bakufu sought to obtain the specific status of an equal with China . . . ambiguity remained in the Japanese views and attitudes over a status relationship with China even after it came under the control of the 'barbaric' Manchu Qing."[101] What is clear is that by the mid-seventeenth century, explicit tributary relations between China and Japan no longer existed.

The evidence from the seventeenth century is illuminating yet inconclusive. On the one hand, the Tokugawa shogun Ieyasu sent a letter to the Ming in 1600 in which he expressed his wish to reopen relations with China and to resume the "tally trade" that had governed China-Japan relations until the mid-sixteenth century. The tally trade was part of the tribute-system institutions and was a process by which Ming China allowed vassal states—such as Thailand and Japan—a set number of seals ("tallies") that distinguished approved traders from pirates. The tally trade put control of trade with the Chinese, and Ashikaga shoguns had previously accepted investiture and a lower hierarchical position from the Ming, in return for which they were allowed tally trade. As Mizuno notes, "since 1404 [lasting until 1551], Japan had been a participant in the Chinese tributary system and received one hundred sets of tallies upon the accession of each new Ming emperor."[102] However, there is growing suspicion that this letter in 1600 did not indicate Ieyasu's desire to resume tributary status with China but rather merely that he wished to reopen trade with China, but this time that it would be Japan—not China—that was the grantor of trade and hence be in the dominant position.

The Chinese ignored this letter, and in 1611 Ieyasu approached Ming China indirectly, though the Ryukyus. The 1611 letter did not include the customary honorific *biao* to the Chinese emperor, yet at the same time, "the Japanese seemed to be historically aware that they would need to give way to the Chinese to a certain degree."[103] In Tokugawa Japan's indecisiveness about how to interact with China we see reflected two enduring themes: the Japanese acceptance and recognition of China's position as a cultural and economic center and a Japanese ranking of status and respect based not on size but on culture. As Mizuno notes:

> The Japanese had, on the other hand, continued to revere China and had drawn extensively from its civilization since antiquity. Even claims and discourses on Japanese superiority had depended on Chinese rhetoric, consciously or unconsciously. . . . Japanese, fascinated, adoring, envying and yearning after the Chinese civilization, had tried to preserve their independence and individuality by fostering a sense of rivalry . . . the Japanese also refused to accept the disparity in size as a rationale for China's superiority.[104]

Perhaps most central to the question of Japanese Tokugawa status was the issue of its overall foreign policy. One common misperception in the scholarly literature is that Tokugawa-era Japan (1600–1868) was a closed and isolated nation that operated outside the East Asian international system. Although this policy is sometimes referred to as *sakoku*, the reality was that trade with China and the rest of the world continued to be an important part of Japan's economy. Indeed, Ronald Toby has pointed out that the term *sakoku* only first appeared in a translation of a Dutch traveler's stay in Japan and that its meaning was focused more on Japan's relations with the West, not Asia.[105]

Indeed, in the last two decades, a revisionist view has become widely accepted, one which sees Tokugawa as deeply interested in, and interacting with, the rest of East Asia. There was a change in Japan's international status following its attempts in 1592 and 1598 to invade China through Korea. China essentially derecognized Japan, forcing it outside the legitimate international order of the time. The Ming in 1621 expelled Japan from the Chinese world system, making it the "outcast of East Asia."[106]

The more recent scholarship interprets *sakoku* as merely "maritime provisions" that were "simply a part of a sequential process rather than firm indications of new policy directions.[107] As noted previously, Japanese exports in the seventeenth century are estimated to have reached 10 percent of its GNP.[108] This revisionist view sees Tokugawa foreign relations more as an expansion of state power and regulation within Japan itself rather than as a policy of isolation related to other countries. China and Japan, even during Tokugawa and Qing, had extensive relations. Klein notes that "by the end of the seventeenth century the Tokugawa regime had succeeded in maneuvering Japan into the center of a regional system of international diplomacy of its own making."[109] Wray adds that "[Tokugawa] Japan had a distinctive policy for virtually every country or area with which it traded. There were far more Chinese than Dutch ships coming to Nagasaki."[110] Historians today interpret these mari-

time provisions more as examples of normal statecraft and the extension of Tokugawa control rather than as paranoia or cowering xenophobia. Toby argues that Japan under Tokugawa had an "active state-sponsored program of international commercial and technological intelligence . . . that enhanced domestic sovereignty and enabled the state to regulate a desired foreign trade."[111] Most significantly, the Japanese continued to see the world in hierarchic terms and used the same ideas and measures of cultural achievement as before. That is, the Japanese attempted to find a way out of explicit recognition of China, but they did not reject the larger rules and institutions of the tribute system itself.

As a result, Japan was forced to find an alternative way to conduct its foreign relations and trade. Although not fully reincorporated into the tributary system, Japan operated by essentially the same set of rules, following the function if not the explicit form of tributary relations with China. The key point is that Tokugawa Japan continued to accept the Chinese-centered system even though formal tributary relations were never fully restored. Indeed, after the Hideyoshi invasions of Korea in 1592–1598, the Tokugawa shogunate recognized China's centrality and Japanese-Korean relations as equal. Kim writes:

> The Tokugawa rulers understood and accepted the Korean position. Japan after Hideyoshi had no ambition for continental conquest or expansion. They tacitly acknowledged Chinese supremacy and cultural leadership in the East Asian world. . . . Although Tokugawa Japan maintained no formal ties with China . . . for all intents and purposes it was as much a part of the Chinese world as Ashikaga Japan had been.[112]

The Japanese called this new policy the *Taikun* (Great Prince) diplomacy, and some view this as a way for Japan to opt out of the Chinese tributary status yet remain within the larger set of diplomatic rules and institutions. It allowed the Japanese to conduct foreign policy without explicitly recognizing the Chinese emperor as superior while still not provoking too harsh a response from the Chinese by formally challenging the position of China. However, the Tokugawa rulers remained integrated into East Asia and made systematic efforts to gather information on regional affairs.[113] Trade was still conducted through Nagasaki and the Ryukyus, and indirectly through Tsushima with Korea. As John Wills notes, "there was no government-to-government connection, and the Japan-China connection was weaker than it had been at any time since before the Tang."[114]

Indeed, Tokugawa relations with the Ryukyus provides an informative window on Japan's foreign relations and their views of both China and the larger rules of the game. The Ryukyus gave tribute to both China and Japan during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The two most powerful East Asian states both claimed suzerainty over the same Ryukyuan territory, but at least through the late nineteenth century they never come to blows over it. Gregory Smits notes that "in 1655, the [Japanese leadership] formally approved tribute relations between Ryukyu and Qing, again, in part to avoid giving Qing any reason for military action against Japan."[115] The Japanese pressured the Ryukyus to actually increase the rate of tribute missions to China, hoping to indirectly "increase its trade with China and thereby relieve ongoing financial woes."[116] So careful were Japanese authorities to conceal their involvement in the Ryukyus that when Chinese envoys visited the islands, Japanese officials hid in a small village outside of the capital.[117] Evidence of the ambiguous hierarchy continued—the Tokugawa bakufu accepted Ryukyu tributary status to the Qing, realizing that Ryukyuan "authority and legitimacy could not be preserved without the bestowal of the title of king [on the Ryukyus] from the Qing."[118]

Conclusion

The tribute system was not merely a symbolic set of actions that diplomats had to go through before they could get to the "real" issues such as trade and war. Rather, the tribute system was a set of institutional structures that provided an overarching framework for organizing external relations among political actors in early modern East Asia. A set of rules and institutions developed over time that regulated foreign diplomatic relations, social and economic interaction, and provided a clear sense of order to the system. Yet we cannot ignore that key elements of the early modern East Asian international system involved a clear hierarchy that was marked as much by cultural achievement as it was by purely military or economic prowess. And surrounding states, as much as China itself, acknowledged and embraced these ideas. There was rational pursuit of self-interest and a set of institutions designed to solve problems. But inherent to those solutions and woven into the institutions were basic values and ideas regarding status and hierarchy and a set of ideas about how international relations should function.

5 WAR

The Longer Peace

> The post–World War II system of international relations . . . after four decades of existence shows no perceptible signs of disintegration . . . this great power peace has survived for so long . . . we could do much worse.
> —John Lewis Gaddis, "The Long Peace"

The past millennium of European history was soaked in blood, and that experience has affected the way we tend to view history in every region of the world. Jeffrey Herbst describes the situation well: "[European] Peace was the exception and long periods with no major fighting were almost unknown, as for centuries weak states were routinely defeated and populations regularly absorbed by foreign rulers."[1] States engaged in the "great game" of the balance of power, alliances, and conquest whenever possible. The slightest advantage was to be seized; the slightest weakness was exploited. States constantly jockeyed with one another to survive, and survival meant conquest. Scholars such as Thomas Hobbes saw life outside government as a war of "all against all," where life was "nasty, brutish, and short," and a classic work of international relations referred to a four-decade span without war as "the long peace."[2]

Because European states were constantly under threat of attack, being bigger and more powerful enhanced a state's chances of surviving. Thus states strove and competed to become as powerful as possible. Yet, if one state became too big, it would threaten to take over the entire system and conquer all the other states. In response, other states tended to join together against the strongest power, flocking to the side of the weak, in order to keep any one state from dominating the system and conquering everyone else. This European pattern gave rise to one of the most enduring concepts in international relations: balance of power.