# Rethinking the Traditional East Asian Regional Order
# The Tribute System as a set of Principles, Norms, and Practices

## 傳統東亞區域秩序的再思考

## 朝貢制度之原則、規範與實踐

Bongjin KIM

金鳳珍*

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* Professor, University of Kitakyushu, Japan.
　日本北九州市立大學教授。

# Abstract

Despite the limits of its traditional usage, the concept of the tribute system captures a prominent feature of historical East Asian foreign relations and politics. As such, with revision and elaboration, the tribute system could still represent a useful model. Therefore I will create an elaborated model, constitutive of the tribute system as international society, and scrutinize its organizing principles, norms and practices.

First, taking a multi-dimensional view, I examine an elaborated model of the tribute system including its subsystems. Second, I describe the Korean *sadae-kyorin* (C: *shida*, serving the big; *jiaolin*, the interrelationship with neighboring countries) system as a semi-tribute system, and "the way of *kyorin*" (*Mencius*) as a principle. Third, I examine the system as a set of principles, norms and practices based upon Confucian *or* Neo-Confucian ideas and concepts, focusing on two of them, *gong tianxia* (All-under-Heaven as, or for, the public) and *li* (principle, law, or reason) as the basis of *li\** (rites), to understand the organizing principles of the traditional East Asian regional order.

Fourth, I explore the distinctive meaning of two dichotomies: hierarchy/parity in Daoist discourse and inequality/equality in Confucian discourse. Noting that "Sovereignty can be – and is – divisible", I explain the significance of the "endemic" sovereignty of the tributary states. I conclude with several reasons for the collapse of the tribute system in the modern era, and observations on China's approach to global governance and strategy, speculating a new East Asian regional order in the future.

## 摘要

儘管受到傳統用法的侷限，朝貢制度的觀念捕捉到過去東亞的對外關係與政治的主要特色。因此，只要加上修正及詳細闡述，朝貢制度仍然可以代表一個有用的模式。於是筆者將創造出一個以朝貢制度為國際社會的精細模型，並仔細檢視其組織原則、規範與實踐。

首先，筆者以多面向的觀點，檢視朝貢制度的精細模型（包含其子制度在內）。其次，筆者將把朝鮮的「事大交鄰」制度描述為一個半朝貢制度，並把交鄰之道（孟子）描述為一種原則。第三，筆者檢視這種制度時，乃將其視為以儒學或理學觀念及概念為基礎的一整套原則、規範和實踐，把重點放在作為「禮」之基礎的兩個觀念----公天下及理，以瞭解傳統東亞區域秩序的組織原則。

第四，筆者探討兩個二分法個別的意義：道家學說的階層制度/同等，與儒家學說的不平等/平等。筆者指出主權可以是----也確實是----可分割的，藉此說明朝貢國的「地方」主權。最後筆者列出幾個朝貢制度在現代崩潰的原因，並就中國面對全球治理的手段及策略提出觀察，臆測東亞未來新的區域秩序。

# Introduction

The model of the traditional or pre-modern East Asian regional order, known commonly as the "tribute system (*chaogong tixi*),[1]" is problematic. The concept of the tribute system is a Western invention, originally formulated to explain the foreign relations of imperial China. Thus, it is based on the assumptions of Western-centrism, as well as those of Sino-centrism – the notion of China's supposed centrality and superiority. Throughout the history of Sino-Western relations, this concept has led to the creation and reproduction of misunderstandings and biases. For Western analysts, the tribute system represents an intellectual problem, because it cannot be explained and understood in terms of Western usage and practice. Meanwhile, arguments based on Sino-centric viewpoints have argued that China's relations with other states were hierarchic and non-egalitarian. This was not always the case: China had plenty of experience of "equal" interstate relationships, most conspicuously during the Song period (960-1279).[2] In broad terms, the concept of the tribute system represents a significant overgeneralization, and for that reason, "cannot alone capture the whole sphere of China's foreign relations,[3]" let alone furnish a comprehensive picture of historical East Asian politics. Indeed, the non-Sinic areas of Asia, such as Inner Asia, contained states whose foreign relations cannot be characterized by the tribute system.

Despite the limits of its traditional usage, the concept of the tribute system captures a prominent feature of historical East Asian foreign relations and politics.

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[1] See the pioneering work of J. K. Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968).

[2] Morris Rossabi, ed., *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors 10th-14th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

[3] Zhang Feng, 'Rethinking the "Tribute System": Broadening the Conceptual Horizon of Historical East Asian Politics', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 2, No.1 (2009), pp. 545-574, at p. 553.

As such, with revision and elaboration, the tribute system could still represent a useful model. In recent years, several scholars in the field of international relations (IR) have attempted to re-conceptualize the tribute system. David Kang provides a succinct and historically sensitive elaboration of the system as "a set of rules and institutions developed over time that regulated foreign diplomatic relations, social and economic interaction.[4]" He argues that the tribute system reached its apogee between the 14th and 19th centuries, during the Ming and Qing dynasties, and brought interstate peace and stability to China and the Sinic Zone. Raising the question of "why", Kang emphasizes the role of hierarchy and Confucian culture.

To analyze the stability and historical continuity of the tribute system, Zhou Fangyin treats the system as an institutional framework which "depends on such factors as its conceptions of foreign policy, the specific contents of a foreign policy strategy, and underlying strategic considerations.[5]" Zhou explains, with reference to game theory, how the tribute system created equilibrium, characterizing it as "a spontaneous order, an endogenous and self-enforcing institutional arrangement of East Asia which appeared and was reproduced as an outcome of continuous strategic interactions among actors within the region.[6]" Certainly, Zhou's avoidance of a China-centered approach in his theoretical and empirical analysis is laudable. However, his characterization of the tribute system as an outcome of strategic interactions among actors reduces it to a system "without soul." Nevertheless, as Zhang Yongjin and Barry Buzan note, Zhou's work has "teased out two genuine puzzles of great theoretical interest":

> The first is that of the longevity, resilience, adaptability, malleability and
> relative stability of the tribute system. The second is the institutional

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[4] David C. Kang, *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 81.

[5] Zhou Fangyin, "Equilibrium Analysis of the Tribute System," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2011), pp. 147-178, at p. 149.

[6] Ibid, p. 150.

arrangement, configuration and innovation associated with the system as a collective solution invented by and consented to among East Asian states to counter the perennial problems of inter-state conflict, co-existence and cooperation.[7]

To investigate these puzzles, Zhang and Buzan take a different approach which emphasizes "cultural elements and the social constitution of the tributary system." Informed and inspired by the international society theory (the English School) and constructivism in IR theory, Zhang and Buzan treat the tributary system "as an international society with its own social structure.[8]" The key question for them becomes: "How did Chinese culture and civilization influence the creation and assertion of the constitutional structure that informs the evolution of the tributary system?[9]" To answer this question, Zhang and Buzan refer to Chris Reus-Smit's conception of "constitutional structures." "Constitutional structures", in his words, "are coherent ensembles of inter-subjective beliefs, principles, and norms" that perform the function of ordering international societies.[10]

Reviewing the history of the international societies of Europe, Reus-Smit describes three primary normative elements of constitutional structures: a hegemonic belief about the moral purpose of the state; an organizing principle of sovereignty; and a norm of pure procedural justice.[11] Noting that, Zhang and Buzan identify three normative elements of the tribute system as a constitutional structure: promoting cosmic and social harmony, as the moral purpose of the state; ordered sovereign inequality, as the organizing principle of sovereignty;

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[7] Zhang Yongjin and Barry Buzan, "The Tribute System as International Society in Theory and Practice," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No.1 (2012), pp. 3-36, at p. 7.

[8] Ibid, p. 8.

[9] Ibid, p. 13.

[10] Chris Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 30.

[11] Ibid, p. 31.

and ritual justice, as the norm of pure procedural justice.[12] These elements, which were commonly conceived and conceptualized in a specific cultural context, are constitutive of the tribute system as a constitutional structure of international society in historical East Asia.

The tribute system is also "a bundle of fundamental institutions." As Zhang and Buzan argue, "Only insofar as these fundamental institutions and common practices become shared norms and conventions" among constituent states, does the tribute system "constitute the social structure and become the articulation of international society.[13]" In short, shared norms are essential constituents of an international society. And it must be noted, norms are based on a certain common culture. Given this, when the tribute system operated "to regulate European economic and diplomatic participation in the existing East Asian order", can the resulting structure also be articulated as an international society? Zhang and Buzan answer affirmatively, but stress that, "[t]he existence of international society in this instance, if at all, is shallow, thin and precarious, at best.[14]" That the tribute system in this case resulted in an international society would prove its resilience and adaptability. However, this argument is weakened by its overgeneralization of the tribute system as an international society at the expense of due attention to its cultural dimensions and norms.

It cannot be said that the European states did share the "Confucian *or* Neo-Confucian" (Neo-/ Confucian) norms – such as *li\** (禮; rites) or *li* (理; principle, law, or reason) – of the tribute system. Therefore it is hard to argue that "an international society" existed in the relations between imperial China and the European states. In short, the theory of the tribute system as international society does not reflect the reality of historical Sino-European relations. We must conceive of another distinct institutional system in order to identify this

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[12] Zhang Yongjin and Barry Buzan, "The Tribute System as International Society in Theory and Practice," pp. 13-16.
[13] Ibid, p.18.
[14] Ibid, p.24.

relationship: the foreign trade system (*hushi tixi*) as a sub-system of the tributary system. Furthermore, we need yet another model in order to describe imperial China's relationship with the non-Han nomads. During the Qing period (1644-1911), the *Li Fan Yuan* (the Ministry of Ruling the Outer Provinces; or the Board of Dependencies) was the bureaucratic institution that managed the Qing's relationship with the Mongols, the Tibetans, and other nomadic peoples on its borders. Therefore we need to create an elaborated model, constitutive of the tribute system as international society, and scrutinize its organizing principles, norms and practices.

First, taking a multi-dimensional view, I examine an elaborated model of the tribute system including its subsystems. Second, observing that the system was emulated by the Sinic states such as Korea (Chosŏn), Vietnam, and Japan, who set up their own type of "semi-tribute" systems, I describe the Korean *sadae-kyorin* (C: *jiaolin*, the interrelationship with neighboring countries) system, and "the way of *kyorin*" (*Mencius*) as a principle. Third, I examine the system as a set of principles, norms and practices based on Neo-/Confucian ideas and concepts, focusing on two of them, *gong tianxia* (All-under-Heaven as, or for, the public) and *li* as the basis of *li\**, to understand the organizing principles of the traditional East Asian regional order. Fourth, I explore the distinctive meaning of two dichotomies: hierarchy/parity in Daoist discourse and inequality/equality in Confucian discourse. Noting that "Sovereignty can be – and is – divisible,[15]" I explain the significance of the "endemic" sovereignty of the tributary states. I conclude with several reasons for the collapse of the tribute system in the modern era and observations on China's approach to global governance and strategy, speculating a new East Asian regional order in the future.

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[15] David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 7.

# The Tribute System and its Subsystems

The tribute system has usually been conceived of as the network of trade (namely, tributary trade) and foreign relations between imperial China and its tributaries in three main zones: the Sinic Zone, consisting of the most proximate and culturally similar tributaries (Korea, Vietnam, Liuqiu Islands and, at brief times, Japan); the Inner Asian Zone, consisting of the tributary tribes and states of the nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples of Inner Asia; and the Outer Zone consisting of the "outer barbarians" including eventually Japan and the other states of Southeast and South Asia and Europe that were supposed to send tribute when trading.[16] This conception, however, is problematic, based upon Sino-centric assumption, and too simple to encompass the multiple dimensions of the tribute system.

The tribute system consisted of four, interconnected elements, each of which cannot be analyzed in isolation from the others: culture, trade, diplomacy, and rituals. Mutual security between China and its tributaries was another facet of the system. As outer subjects of imperial China, the tributary rulers were obliged to send troops for combat against other barbarian groups when deemed necessary by China's rulers. China was also obliged to send troops to assist its tributary subjects, thus creating a relationship of mutual security.

Rituals, appropriate forms, and ceremony constituted the tribute system. Rituals usually included the following elements: *koutou* (a performance to Chinese emperor, kneeling three times, each time bowing head to the ground thrice); *feng* (the conferral of various titles by the Chinese emperor on the tributary rulers, i.e. investiture) with *ce* (the calendar of imperial China) and *yin* (imperial seals granted to the tributary rulers for use in correspondence). *Feng* or *cefeng* was known as the *cefeng* system. Mostly, *feng* entails *gong* (tribute; this term originally referred to tax payments, typically of local products) or *chaogong*.

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[16]  J. K. Fairbank, "A preliminary Framework," in *The Chinese World Order*, p. 2.

In this sense, the term "tribute system" can be misleading as it leaves out the *feng* or *cefeng* dimensions. In cases where both *feng* and *gong* were simultaneously conducted, it would be better termed the *feng-gong* system rather than the tribute system.

Noting its various elements, I elaborate the tribute system including its subsystems as below:

(a) The *feng-gong* system, a sophisticated tribute system that structured the relationship between China and several tributaries of the Sinic Zone. This system, in the Ming-Qing period, was managed by the *Libu* (the Ministry of Rites) and involved local governors, who were in charge of *gongdao*, the specified routes for tributary envoys (*gongshi*), and accompanied merchants on their visits to the Chinese court at regular intervals (*gongqi*). The tribute trade, as an official trade, usually occurred during their stay in the capital, Beijing.

(b) The *feng-gong* system that encompassed tributaries who lacked a common culture with China and did not entail mutual security. This system structured the relationship between China and the (semi-)nomadic tributaries of Inner Asia, as well as some tributary states of Southeast and South Asia.

(c) The *gong* without *feng* system, in which the *gong* occurred at irregular intervals. This system structured the relationship between China and tributaries of the (semi-)nomadic tribes of Inner Asia, or the "outer barbarians", as well as certain states of Southeast and South Asia and Europe.

(d) The *hushi* or foreign trade system, which usually took place in local districts and derived from the *gong* without *feng* system. This system structured China's relationship with the "outer barbarians", including Japan and the sanctioned states of Asia and Europe. Under this system, official *hushi* trade was managed by the local governors at the open ports; occasionally, however, private and illegal trade (smuggling) also occurred.

With this elaborated model, we can redefine the tribute system as a multi-layered international society encompassing various dimensions. For instance, the *hushi* system constitutes an international society with few shared norms. We may call this "shallow, thin" pre-international or minimal international society or economy. By contrast, the *feng-gong* system outlined in (a), above, represents a well-developed international society, with many shared norms, rules, and institutions coordinating, constraining, and facilitating the relationships between its members.

There are several reasons why China's surrounding states were willing to form and participated in such a system. Firstly, the profits and benefits were great: for many centuries, China had been economically more developed and culturally more "civilized", and the other states usually profited from tributary trade and benefited from the material wealth and diversity of Chinese culture. Secondly, the system's political function allowed its members to consolidate their own power and legitimacy: the titles conferred upon the leaders of tributary states by the Chinese emperor helped to legitimatize the domestic status of those leaders, enhancing their prestige and strengthening their authority. Thirdly, mutual security, as described above, provided a powerful incentive on both sides.

For these reasons, some states, such as Korea and Vietnam, voluntarily emulated China in a range of institutions and principles, norms and practices: the more similar to China they became, the more benefits they could reap from the tribute system; the more China would trust them and see them as an ally, the more they could consolidate their own legitimacy and mutual security. As such, they could enjoy interstate peace and stability in the tribute system as an international society. Therefore, among China and neighboring states, there is "a significant degree of convergence in terms of their fundamental values and shared Confucian worldview.[17]"

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[17] Zhang Yongjin and Barry Buzan, "The Tribute System as International Society in Theory and

It is noteworthy that, when the envoys and merchants were travelling and staying in China, almost all of their expenses were born by the Chinese authorities. This practice was based on Confucian principles. For example, *houwang bolai* was the principle that governed the exchange of gifts between host and visitor. Its literal meaning is, "When one receives the gifts of the other, the former must pay more to the latter from afar" (*Mean* 20:13) or, in other words, "offering more and taking less." This principle was often applied to the tributary relationship and tribute trade; as Kang argues, "the ceremonial exchange of gifts, presented on behalf of a ruler and returned, usually in greater amounts, by the receiving ruler.[18]" As such, tributaries could expect to reap significant benefits from the tribute system. The same argument can be applied to the semi-tribute systems among the Sinic states.

With regard to the concept of Chinese cultural superiority, Chinese rulers distinguished between *hua* (the civilized) and *yi* (the barbarian) in two ways. One is based on the closed notion that *hua* and *yi* are divided by geography or race, and therefore, fixed and irreversible. This entails a narrow-minded Sino-centrism (*zhonghuazhuyi*) which assumes that *hua* is a quality exclusive to China, rather than one that any state may achieve by becoming "civilized." The other is, by contrast, based on the opened notion that *hua* and *yi* are defined by culture. In this definition, *hua* culture is transferable, so any non-Chinese ethnic group and nation can be civilized (which is to say, Sinicized) through exposure to Confucianism and Chinese culture: *yi* can be transformed to *hua*. Within *hua* culture, distinctions can be maintained between "inner" barbarians (more Sinicized) and "outer" barbarians (less Sinicized). Furthermore, *hua* may be lost, as well as gained: a society in possession of *hua* would regress back to a state of *yi* were it to lose authentic Confucian culture and civilization.

Throughout East Asian history, scholars on either side of the debate have

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Practice", p. 25.
[18] David C. Kang, *East Asia before the West*, p. 109.

exchanged polemics on whether *hua-yi* should be understood in opened or closed terms. One notable polemic was based on the reading of *Analects* 3:5, in which Confucius said, "Barbarians who have rulers are inferior to the various nations of China who are without." The text was read in two very distinct ways: the so-called "old commentaries (*guzhu*)", dating from the Han (206 BC-220 AD) and following dynasties, as opposed to the "new commentaries (*xinzhu*)" compiled by the Song scholars.[19] The former reading, which represented the above-mentioned "closed" notion, held the meaning of this statement to be, "Barbarians who are fortunate enough to have rulers are still inferior to the Chinese who do not have such luck." The latter, which represented the "opened" notion, interpreted the statement to mean that, "Even barbarians have [moral] rulers – in this respect, they are unlike [better than] the Chinese who do not have any."

Throughout the ages, the dominant interpretation has moved back and forth, depending on both the scholars' personalities and their social and cultural context. During the Song period, Neo-Confucians favored the second reading, believing that *yi* can indeed be transformed into *hua*. This belief spread over East Asian countries, along with the diffusion of Neo-Confucianism, and the second reading developed into the dominant interpretation. Thus Neo-Confucians, basically, believed in the view that *yi* can be civilized.

## The Korean *Sadae-Kyorin* System: Principles and Realities

The Korean *sadae-kyorin* system divided foreign relations into two types, namely *sadae* (C: *shida*, serving the big; respecting the superior) and *saso* (C: *shixiao*, serving the small; cherishing the inferior). The system was based upon a Confucian principle: the way of *kyorin*. *Mencius* contains an important argument

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[19] See Benjamin A. Elman, "One Classic and Two Classical Traditions: The Recovery and Transmission of a Lost Edition of the *Anelects*," *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Spring 2009), pp. 53-82, at p. 55.

on the proper way of handling foreign relations and corresponding mutual behavior between large and small states:

> King Xuan of Qi asked, "Is there any way to regulate one's maintenance of intercourse with neighboring kingdom?"
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> Mencius replied, "There is. But it requires a perfectly virtuous *prince* [*renzhe*, a person of humanity or benevolence] to be able, with a big country, to serve a small one. […] And it requires a wise *prince* [*zhizhe*, a person of wisdom] to be able, with a small country, to serve a big one. [...] He, who with the big serves the small, delights in Heaven. He, who with the small serves the big, stands in awe of Heaven. He, who delights in Heaven, will protect All-under-Heaven. He, who stands in awe of Heaven, will protect his own country." (*Mencius* 2B:3, King Liang of Hui, xia-3)

We find a similar doctrine in the *Zuozhuan*, which states:

> It is by good faith (*xin*) that a small State serves a great one, and benevolence (*ren*) is seen in a great State's protecting a small one. If we violate [our covenant with] a great State, it will be a want of good faith; and if we attack a small State, it will be a want of benevolence. (Aigong 7th year)

In brief, a smaller country should serve a bigger country with good faith or trust, while a bigger country must serve a smaller one with benevolence. This represents an extension of the Confucian principles governing the social and political order, or rather, the interrelationship of humankind as a whole.

The *sadae-kyorin* system thus includes two types of international relationships, *sadae* and *saso*. So far many scholars used to divide Chosŏn

Korea's foreign relations into *sadae* with China and *kyorin* with the surrounding countries, particularly, Japan – the stereotyped *sadae-kyorin* (system). And they have assumed that *sadae* was hierarchical, while *kyorin* was equal. But, as we have seen in the original text, these two concepts cannot stand side by side, because *kyorin* contains *sadae* as a subdivision of its own. And the assumption that "*kyorin* was equal" cannot help being wrong, since the original concept of *kyorin* does not refer to any relations among equals. It was a fact that a few Korean and Japanese intellectuals traditionally used the term *kyorin* in regard to their relationship as if to welcome mutual equality. This usage was a kind of customary practice, or rather rhetoric expression; nevertheless *kyorin* could not be reduced to the relationship between Korea and Japan. Moreover, both Chosŏn and Japan actually never recognized each other as equals (see below).

Although the term *kyorin* could refer to relations among equals, Confucian thinkers including Mencius interpreted it as referring to an unequal relationship between large and small states. Their reason was that states, in reality, differ in size and power, just as people differ – some are big and strong while others are small and weak. The goal of the *kyorin* system was to project inequality onto nations and transform the relationship between them into a "hierarchical but benign and harmonized" one. According to this model, larger states should adopt a more moral posture when dealing with smaller states and shoulder greater responsibility for sustaining peace and order. *Ren*, the way of the large state, is the supreme virtue of the Five Constant Virtues (*wuchang*) of Confucianism – *ren*, *yi* (justice, righteousness), *li\**, *zhi* (wisdom), *xin*.

The Chosŏn dynasty, which became known as "a model tributary" and "the most Confucian state", set itself up as a practitioner of the way of *kyorin*. With this principle, Chosŏn Korea entered into a tributary relationship with Ming China in the early 15$^{th}$ century. Despite certain discord marring their initial relationship, Chosŏn quickly became the most important tributary and was ranked first in the Ming's hierarchy of tributary states. The ruling elites of

Chosŏn readily recognized the superiority of the Ming and adopted the doctrine of *sadae* as the fundamental principle guiding their relationship with China, believing themselves to be a small but civilized country – the so-called *sojunghwa* (literally "little China"). Chosŏn, in turn, played the role of "the big serving the small" in its relations with the surrounding countries – Japan, Tsushima Island, Liuqiu Islands, and the Jurchen tribes of southern Manchuria.

## *Sadae Relations: Ambivalence towards the Qing*

The Korean *sadae-kyorin* system, as a semi-tribute system, attained full institutional maturity during the Ming period. Chosŏn served the Ming in accordance with the doctrine of *sadae*, while the Ming served Chosŏn in accordance with *saso*. Both struck bargains over the jurisdiction of certain lands and Jurchen tribes in border areas, and any disputes were solved peacefully through the *feng-gong* system. This bilateral relationship maintained peace and stability for a long time, until it was affected by two external events. The first was the Japanese invasion of Korea between 1592 and 1598 (Imjin Waeran). After unifying Japan, Toyotomi Hideyoshi ordered an attack on the Korean peninsula. The Ming sent armies to support the Korean resistance. The six years of warfare took a heavy toll on all three states and produced critical consequences to each. The Toyotomi regime fell after the war, the Ming suffered serious financial crises and domestic turbulence, and Chosŏn suffered both material and spiritual damages.

The second event originated in Manchuria. The Jianzhou Jurchen tribe, who had maintained semi-tributary and *hushi* relations with the Chosŏn court for centuries, unified most Jurchen tribes in the early 17th century. Led by Nurhachi and his followers, the Manchu invaded Chosŏn twice in 1627 and 1636 to remove the potential threat from the rear to their conquest of Ming China. They

forced Chosŏn to renounce its tributary ties with the Ming and pay tribute to the Manchu regime instead. In 1644, the Manchu regime re-titled itself "the Great Qing." Later, the Qing finally conquered Ming China. The transition from Ming to Qing caused a deep trauma to Chosŏn, which was forced accept *sadae* relations with the Qing. This relationship continued until the late 19th century, when Chosŏn renounced its tributary relationship with the Qing.

The Chosŏn-Qing tribute system was based on that which had existed between the Chosŏn and the Ming, but with some variations. Song Nianshen had described how "the Qing also eased its earlier cohesive policy towards the Chosŏn, reducing the quantity and frequency of Chosŏn tributes and also granting the Chosŏn almost autonomy in its internal affairs. [20] " Non-intervention – the basic principle of the traditional Chinese policy toward Chosŏn – was restored to its original state. As Kim Key-Hiuk notes, "It was neither China's intention nor its normal practice under the tribute system to interfere in or to assume responsibility for Korean affairs, internal or external.[21]"

Chosŏn sent an annual envoy, usually numbering 200 to 300 people including merchants, and sent special envoys and delegates on special occasions. In the Qing period, Chosŏn was once again ranked first of tributary states. In return for abiding by the ceremonial rituals, Chosŏn drew practical benefits of considerable value in the area of politics, diplomacy, trade, culture, and security. However, tensions between Chosŏn and the Qing continued to flare up occasionally. In the early Qing era, in particular, its Manchu rulers exacted an enormous amount of tributes and local products from Chosŏn. This burden no doubt was received by Chosŏn as an insult and intensified its animosity toward the Qing, which was built on Chosŏn's historical sense of moral and cultural superiority over the Jurchen tribes. Accordingly the Chosŏn king and officials,

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[20]  Song Nianshen, "'Tributary' from a Multilateral and Multilayered Perspective," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No.2 (2012), pp. 155-182, at p. 171.
[21]  Key-Hiuk Kim, *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1980), p. 9.

who still regarded Manchu rule as anomalous, rallied under the slogan of "Revere the Ming and resist the Qing."

Anti-Manchu sentiment among Koreans persisted. For instance, King Hyojong (reigned 1649-59), who had spent eight years as a Manchu hostage, plotted a war of revenge against the Manchu. In 1704, King Sukchong (reigned 1674-1720) built a secret shrine named Taebodan (the Alter of Great Retribution) as a symbol of loyalty to the late Ming. In 1717, disciples of Song Siyol (1607-89), who had been Hyojong's tutor, built a shrine called Mandongmyo (the Eastern Shrine to the Ming emperor). Furthermore, Chosŏn literati maintained informal use of the Ming calendar for more than 200 years, as a means of expressing their allegiance to the Ming. Aware of this recalcitrance, Qing leaders gradually made efforts to improve their relationship with Chosŏn.

In order to improve the relationship, Emperor Kangxi (reigned 1661-1722) set out to reduce the quantity of tribute demanded of Chosŏn. During his reign, having witnessed the military, economic, and cultural achievements of the Qing, Chosŏn gradually changed its attitude. Subsequently, during the Yongzheng (reigned 1722-1735) period, the Qing court considerably reduced Chosŏn's tribute. Emperor Yongzheng shored up the legitimacy of the Qing, by winning the loyalty of several important Han literati who had previously maintained loyalty to the Ming. He contributed to the construction of the empire's historical identity in his text the *Dayi Juemilu* (A Record of Rightness to Dispel Confusion), which was published in 1730 after the exposure of anti-Manchu sentiments in the Zeng Jing case.[22] Attacking the sharp division of *hua* and *yi*, this text argues that such division is, or should be, defined by culture, not territory or tribal lineage:

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[22] The Zeng Jing case took place during the reign of Yongzheng Emperor. Zeng Jing, a failed degree candidate heavily influenced by the writings of the late Ming anti-Manchu scholar Lü Liuliang (1629-1683), in October 1728 attempted to incite Yongzheng's trusted general Yue Zhongqi (a descendant of the famous Song loyalist Yue Fei) to rebellion. Yue immediately exposed the plot to the emperor and, after extensive interrogation, obtained confessions from Zheng. Yongzheng pardoned Zeng and published their interrogations in a large text, titled *Dayi Juemilu*. See Jonathan Spence, *Treason by the Book* (New York: Viking, 2001).

regardless of their origin, all peoples could potentially have the right to rule China. Identifying the ideal of "One family of All-under-Heaven (*tianxia yijia*)", the emperor asserts that Qing rule has attained the Great Unity (*dayitong*). As such Yongzheng proudly declared that the Qing had become the legitimate successor and protector of Confucian civilization.

Chosŏn had little choice but to acknowledge the authenticity of Yongzheng's argument, since Chosŏn's identification of itself as *sojunghwa* was based on the notion that any kingdom could attain a Chinese level of civilization. Furthermore, during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1735-95), the apogee of Qing power, Chosŏn officials and literati began to take a more pragmatic attitude towards the Qing in scholarship. Several immersed themselves in *shirak* (Practical Learning, C: *shixue*). Among them, Hong Daeyong (1731-83), Pak Jiwon (1737-1805), and Pak Jaega (1750-?) constituted a new school under the name of *bukhak* (Learning from the North), which called for Chosŏn to learn from and import more of Qing's advanced civilization. These development did not, however, rid Chosŏn of anti-Manchu sentiment and ambivalence towards the Qing, which would persist into the last phase of Qing rule.


## *Saso Relationship with Tsushima and Kyorin Relationship Tokugawa Japan*

From the late 13<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the Koryŏ kingdom, Tsushima was an important base for the infamous *Waegu* (J: *Wakō*) pirates who ravaged Korean and Chinese coastlines. After the founding of the new kingdom in 1392, Chosŏn, having subjugated pirates on Tsushima, preferred to offer the prospect of trade to Tsushima: "Policies to legalize and regularize trade were very successful in converting Tsushima to a respectable role as intermediary between Japan and

Korea, a role continued to play until 1873,[23]" the year when Meiji Japan consolidated its political authority over Tsushima to centralize its diplomacy based on Western norms and the practices of international relations.

Following the *saso* relationship, Chosŏn established regulations to govern people from, and living in, Tsushima. Chosŏn offered people from Tsushima access to open ports and the Japan Houses (*Waegwan*) in Kyŏngsang Province – under its own *hosi* system. As well as trade benefits, Chosŏn also provided them with large quantities of grain and other products. Moreover, in return for privileges of *hosi* trade and diplomacy, the rulers of Tsushima were issued with "official titles or seals from the Korean court" which placed them into "a semi-tributary relationship with the Korean court.[24]" When the Tsushima rulers sent envoys to the Chosŏn court, they presented a token tribute. In return, they received generous gifts from the Korean king – an expression of benevolence. As such Chosŏn identified Tsushima as a tributary, under its semi-tribute system. However, Tsushima's role as an intermediary between Chosŏn and Japan created ambiguities and complicated Tsushima's status within that system.

After the Hideyoshi invasion, *saso* relations were restored between Chosŏn and Tsushima by the Kiyu Agreement (1609). Under this agreement, formal relations with Tokugawa Japan (1603-1868) were restored as well. However, both relationships were strictly controlled and managed. Japanese were forbidden from going beyond *Waegwan*, and their envoys were not permitted to visit Chosŏn. Since 1636, Korean envoys referred to as *T'ongsinsa* (Communication Envoy, J: *Tsūshinshi*) had been sent to Japan, at irregular intervals, in order to reaffirm relations based on trust and maintain awareness of Japanese affairs.[25] During the 17th and 18th centuries a total of eleven envoys visited the Edo *bakufu*

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[23] James B. Lewis, *Frontier Contact between Chosŏn Korea and Tokugawa Japan* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 17.

[24] Key-Hiuk Kim, *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order*, p. 18.

[25] For details concerning *T'ongsinsa*, see Ronald P. Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Stanford University Press, 1991), chapter 5.

government, usually on the occasion of a new *shōgun* ascending to power. The last envoy was sent in 1811 and travelled to Tsushima to meet with the *shōgun*'s emissaries from Edo. Thereafter, direct communications between Chosŏn and Japan ceased altogether.

Ostensibly constituted as an equal relationship, in reality both sides actively treated each other as inferiors. Chosŏn regarded Japan as a small state, since its Confucian culture was less developed. In the eyes of Chosŏn literati, Japan was a less civilized or barbarian country, subject to military rule under the *bakuhan* system. From the Confucian perspective, "Status in the hierarchy was a function of cultural achievement, not economic wealth or military power.[26]" Therefore, Chosŏn opted to manage its relations with Japan using the *saso* model by the name of *kyorin*. For its part, Japan looked down on Chosŏn as a weak state, governed by Confucian literati with no military power. The Tokugawa *bakufu* relied on *buyi* (the prestige of military power) and *Tennō* (the emperor) as the sources of its authority. In the *bakufu*'s view, Chosŏn should be subordinate to its own superior *buyi* rule.

## Principles of the Traditional East Asian Regional Order: Norms and Practices

For a certain kind of regional order or system to overcome the perennial problems of inter-state conflict, co-existence and cooperation, there must be some cohesive glues or rules – not only institutional arrangements but working principles (norms and practices) to organize relationships. The norms and practices that structured relations between states in historical East Asia were derived from the ideas and concepts governing the regional order. The traditional East Asian regional order and the tribute system were underpinned by a network

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[26] David C. Kang, *East Asia before the West*, p. 71.

of Confucian ideas and concepts, which were manifested in certain organizing principles. These included *tianxia* (All-under-Heaven), *gong* (公; the public), *he* (harmony or peace), *ren, de*, *li* and *li\**. The way of *kyorin* and the doctrine of *houwang bolai* are examples of organizing principles derived from them. In the following section, I will explain how *gong tianxia* and *li* provided a basis for *li\**, and in doing so shed light upon the organizing principles of the traditional East Asian regional order.

The norms and practices used by imperial China for maintaining border stability and handling security threats included *huairou* (appeasement), *jimi* (loose rein),[27] *yiyi zheyi* (defend against barbarians through [using the other] barbarians), and *zhengfa* (conquest). Toward the Outer Zone, appeasing the "barbarians" with *de* and *li\** was often viewed as the best option for China and the other "civilized" states. When *de* and *li\** were inadequate, they employed *jimi* and *yiyi zheyi*, which can be construed as policies designed to shore up the "balance of power" in modern Western terms. Conquering non-Sinic peoples without cause was considered a barbarous deed that violated the *wangdao* (the Royal Way). However, China and the other Confucian states conducted *zhengfa* to subjugate "barbarians" when it was deemed necessary, in the name of *chunqiu dayi* (the Great Cause for discerning right and wrong, good and evil), which justified *badao* (the hegemonic way).

## *Gong Tianxia: "All-under-Heaven" as, or for, the public*

It can be said that the tribute system exists "first and foremost, as a discourse, articulating the ideas of a cosmic-social order with universal kingship centered on the Chinese civilization, and of an all-inclusive moral and political

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[27] The term *jimi* was first seen in the annotation of *Shiji* written by Sima Zhen (BC. 145?-BC. 87), which implied to a person directing a horse or ox by use of rein.

order presided over by the Chinese emperor as the embodiment of benevolence and virtue.[28]" Here, "a cosmic-social order' or 'an all-inclusive moral and political order" describes the *tianxia* order under the universal kingship of the Chinese emperor *tianzi* (the Son of Heaven). This discourse, however, represents a Sino-centric view, which often gives rise to the misunderstanding that *tianxia* is simply *tianzi*'s *tianxia*, or the Chinese empire. From a Confucian perspective, *tianxia* is not, and should not be, construed as *si tianxia* (All-under-Heaven as, or for, the private) able to be monopolized by anyone (emperor/king/ruler) or an empire. The correct interpretation, in fact, is *gong tianxia*: for everyone and all states.[29] In the *Book of Rites* (*Liji*), Confucius says:

> When the Great Way (*dadao*) is practiced, All-Under-Heaven is for the public *(tianxia wei gong*; "The World is for All" or "Sharing the world in common by All"). Those with virtue and those with ability are chosen. People value trust and cultivate harmony with each other. Thus people do not treat only their parents as parents, nor do people treat only their sons as sons…. In this way people do not engage in intrigue or trickery, nor do they engage in robbery, theft, and rebellion. Thus, doors remain open and unlocked. Such is *datong* (the Great Union). ("Li yun", *Book of Rites*)

Here *tianxia wei gong*, the original expression of *gong tianxia*, implies that the social, political, and international order should work for the benefits of everyone and all states. Its ultimate aim is the ideal of *datong*, implying Great Harmony or Togetherness. The word *tong* literally means "sameness, uniformity, or unity" but *datong* does not so much mean "sameness/unity" as "harmony/togetherness." Thus, *datong* transcends *tong*. Confucius prefers *he* to

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[28] Zhang Yongjin and Barry Buzan, "The Tribute System as International Society in Theory and Practice," p. 23.

[29] On *gong tianxia* and *tianxia wei gong*, see Joseph Chan, *Confucian Perfection: A Political Philosophy for Modern Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 225-234.

*tong*, so he warns people against uniformity, saying "the superior person cherishes harmony but not uniformity (*he er butong*, *Analects* 13:23)." Following this principle, Neo-/Confucian thinkers traditionally sought the harmony of diversity in all forms of social life. This was also applied and extended to the norms and practices of international relations. By setting up a form of inter-subjective relationship, China and the other Sinic (Confucian) states could counter the perennial problems of conflict, coexistence and cooperation.

According to *Shuowen Jiezi*, the word *si* in *si tianxia* means "to close, closeness", while the word *gong* means "to open, openness." There, *gong* is annotated as *pingfen* (fairly or equally allocated share), implying the notion of fairness or equality. Zheng Xuan (127-200), an important Confucian scholar of the Later Han period (25-220), identified the *gong* of *tianxia wei gong* in the *Book of Rites* as *gong\** (共; the common, commonality). Furthermore, Neo-Confucians combined the concept *gong* with *gong\** to produce the binomial *gonggong\** (the public-common).[30] *Gong* also implies the notion of impartiality, while *si* implies selfish partiality. Like the *Book of Rites*, the "Dispensing with Selfish Partiality (*qusi*)" chapter of the *Annals of Lü Buwei* mentions the importance of impartiality as a way to govern the world:

> Heaven covers all without partiality; Earth bears all without partiality; the sun and moon shine on all without partiality; the four seasons alternate without partiality. Each bestows its Virtue, and the myriad things attain thereby mature forms.

It can be said that China and the other Sinic states used this principle to establish and maintain the *longue durée* peace and stability in the traditional East Asian

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[30] See Kim Bongjin, "Tradition and Modernity of a Concept: The Public-Common in China and Japan [概念の伝統と近代:中国と日本における「公共」]," in Hirano Kenichro et al. eds., *Study on the History of International- Cultural History* [『国際文化関係史研究』] (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2013), pp. 23-49.

regional order.

In April 2005, Zhao Tingyang published *Tianxia Tixi*, in which he reexamines and emphasizes the significance of the *tianxia* concept for China's intellectual legacy.[31] For Zhao, *tianxia* is an important concept not merely for China but for the world. He argues that *tianxia* has three interwoven meanings. First, *tianxia* is the world geographically. *Tianxia* is also relevant to the *idea* of empire or the supposed ideal of a perfect empire. Secondly, *tianxia* is the hearts and minds of all peoples (*minxin*) or general will of the people. Thirdly, *tianxia* is a world institution which aims at eventually achieving the political-ethical ideal of a universalized global system, a world-as-one- family utopia. Throughout the work, Zhao offers stimulating suggestions for a truly global perspective – thinking *through* the world in an all-inclusive (*wuwai*) way, rather than thinking *about* the world from a narrow national or individual perspective.

Nevertheless, Zhao's conception of *tianxia* is problematic, because it evokes the suspicion that China might attempt to revive a Sino-centric world order, driven by a hegemonic ambition to dominate and order the world once more. Then, what of the *tianxia* idea, if anything, should be inherited today and developed in the future? Not *tianxia* as such, but *gong tianxia*; that is, *tianxia* as and for the public. In other words, *tianxia* should not be "an idea of empire" nor "a world institution." Instead, *tianxia* should be an idea of a global society and order, or rather, the *public* temporal-space for constructing and promoting global institutions based on the principle of *gong tianxia* – "The World is for All" or "Sharing the world in common by All." Efforts to reinterpret not *tianxia* but *gong tianxia* and to adapt it to the present and future global order should therefore be given credit. *Gong tianxia* represents a valuable organizing principle for a potential new world order.

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[31]  Zhao Tingyang, *Tianxia Tixi: Shijie Zhidu Zhexue Daolun* [*The Tianxia System: A Philosophy for the World Institution*] (Nanjing: Jiangsu Jiaoyu Chupanshe, 2005).

# *Li as the basis of Li\**

The Confucian conception of *tianxia*, in Joseph Chan's words, "refers to an ideal moral and political order admitting no territorial boundary – the whole world to be governed by a sage according to principles of rites (*li*) and virtue (*de*).[32]" For Confucians, this moral order has universal applicability. All humans are capable of understanding, respecting, and developing their own virtue and practicing rites. This worldview and belief in human nature suggest that the main purpose of social communities, be it family, tribe, state and empire, is to promote, establish and maintain moral and political order in harmony with the benefits of All. This ideal order is constituted as a network of mutual deference through the virtuous practice of rites; instead of being artificially imposed, it emerges originally from social and ritual practices.

Throughout the *Analects*, the harmonious society is defined as basically self-ordering:

> Leads the people with administrative injunctions (*zheng*) and keep them in line with penal law (*xing*), then they will avoid punishments but will be without a sense of shame. Lead them with virtue and keep them in line through ritual practices (*li\**), then they will develop a sense of shame, and further, will order themselves. (*Anelects* 2:3)

Where this self-order based on virtue and rites is realized, the ruler does not rule (*wuwei er zhi*, rule of non-doing/action; *Anelects* 15:4). This is the Confucian ideal order, based on the rule of virtue (*dezhi*) and the rule of rites (*li\*zhi*). In historical reality, however, Confucian societies utilized not only the rule of virtue and rites but also the rule of law (*fazhi*) based on *zheng* and *xing*.

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[32] Joseph Chan, "Territorial Boundaries and Confucianism," in Daniel A., eds., *Confucian Political Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 69.

The *Daodejing* provides the original meaning of *dao* and *de*: "*Dao* produces all things; *de* nourishes them, brings them to their full growth, nurses, completes, matures, maintains, and overspreads them (*Daodejing* 51)." Thus *de* originally refers to the "virtuous power *or* inner strength" of nature, which later developed to mean "virtue *or* morality." The semantics of *de* resemble English *virtue*, developed from *virtù*, which meant "inner potency *or* divine power" before it gained its modern meaning of "moral excellence." Accordingly, *de* is identified as the personal quality of sincerity or integrity. *De* became an essential constituent of the organizing principles of Confucian society. Related to *de*, *daoli* (the principle of the Way) or *li* as the basis of *li\** is another essential constituent of the organizing principles of Confucian society. I will now argue for my own interpretation of *li*, with reference to *tianli* (the Principle of Heaven).

Originally, *li\** referred to the norm or practice that determined the hierarchy of village or family society; *li\** is based on the idea that hierarchy governs social order. Thanks to the influence of Confucian thinkers, it eventually became the norm that governed various levels of human relationships, as well as inter-state relations. In the Han period (206 BC-220 AD), Confucians sought the basis of *li\** from the Three Guiding Principles (*sangang*) and the Five Moral Relations (*wulun*), formulated as the Five Constant Virtues – *ren*, *yi*, *li\**, *zhi*, *xin*. Neo-Confucians reinterpreted the concept of *li*, treating it as the basis of *li\**.

### *The Invention of Li and its Metamorphoses*

Among the classical pre-Qin Confucian texts, only the *Xunzi* includes extensive use of the term *li*. In this text, *li* appears more than 80 times and is employed in two different ways: the *li* of things (*wu zhi li*) and *li* as a single term. Originally, the term *li* referred to the "pattern" inherent in natural phenomena such as veins or striations in a piece of jade. The *li* of things represents this

original meaning, but it can also refer to the principle of nature in a broader sense. By contrast, *li* as a single term refers to the "principle or reason" of nature or humans and such constituent entities as society or state. This *li* resides not only in the human mind-and-heart (*xin*) or nature (*xing*) but also in the social and political order. In its singular sense, *li* is connected to other core concepts including *li\**, *dao*, *tian*, *gong*, and *yi*. Neo-Confucians also combine the concept of *li* with other concepts to produce *li*-binomials such as *daoli*, *tianli*, and *gongli*.

Zhu Xi (1130-1200), the preeminent Neo-Confucian master, articulated each of these *li*-binomials with greater clarity, precision, and coherence than his Song predecessors such as Zhou Dunyi (1017-73), Zhang Zai (1020-77), and the brothers Cheng Yi (1033-1107) and Cheng Hao (1032-85). The Cheng brothers combined Zhang Zai's conception of *qi* (the energy of nature, material force) as the psycho-physical element of all things with the concept of *li*: all things consist of *li* and *qi*. In people, *li* structures human nature (*renxing*), moral nature (*dexing*), and Heavenly nature (*tianxing*), which shares the growth-principle of the Way (*daoli*) and Heaven's principle (*tianli*) of things/affairs. Zhu Xi worked out a philosophically holistic synthesis of the ideas of the Cheng brothers, giving rise to the Cheng-Zhu school. Notably, Zhu elaborated Cheng Yi's famous apothegms *liyi fenshu* (*Li* is one but its manifestations are many) and *xing ji li* (Nature is principle), stressing the normative sense of *li*. Thus, Cheng and Zhu saw the "unity of principle and diversity of its particularizations" in the sense that every person is rooted in a shared physical existence and moral nature.

The Neo-Confucian invention of *li* provided a new model for thinking about the world and how it should be ordered. With this new interpretation of *li*, people were able to grasp the natural world in terms of the principle of nature. It had a great influence upon the philosophy of human nature and society, and led to the development of new forms of metaphysics and cosmology. In this interpretation, every human is regarded as a holder and mediator of *li* and thus worthy of dignity and respect. *Li* also dictates that every person is a creature with the potential to

free itself from any "unreasonable" appetites. The essence of humanity, in this view, is inter-subjectivity: each person is a "being-between, co-becoming" whose life derives meaning from "good" relationships with others. The same can be applied to society and state. This principled interpretation of *li* sought to describe the organization of a "good" society and its relationships with other societies and states.

Well into modern times, Zhu Xi's doctrines exerted a significant influence on the cultural development of East Asia. They are the doctrines of *li-qi*, *renxing*, *xin*, *tianli-renyu* (selfish desires), *gewu* (investigation of things), and *qiongli* (probing into principle). The influence of these doctrines, however, did not prevent further reinterpretations and subsequent developments in Confucian thought. Among the influential thinkers of Ming China, Wang Yangming (1472-1528) had the most powerful impact. His doctrine *xin zhi li* (Mind-and-heart is principle.) revitalized the concept of *li*. His doctrines of *wanwu yiti zhi ren* (humanity forming One body with All things) and *zhi liangzhi* (extending innate knowledge of the good) became commonplace among scholars as well as ordinary people. Inheriting the legacy of "Learning to Be a Sage", Wang Yangming spread Zhu Xi's doctrines among the common people, thus ensuring the popularization of Zhu Xi's learning.

## *The Connotations of Li or Tianli*

Neo-Confucian thinkers conceived of and used the meaning of *li* in a variety of ways. Its diverse uses notwithstanding, any effort to explain the significance of *li* in Confucian contexts tends to center on human relationships, with *li* connoting the dignity and respectability of each person as a holder and mediator of *li*, and through "being-between, co-becoming", able to establish good relationships with others. As we shall see, *li* implies human rights, as well as duties, that govern the

relationship between self and others.[33] In the context of larger entities such as society and state, *li* also implies a social and national rights – including sovereignty – and duties for constituting and maintaining a healthy society and inter/trans-national societal relationships.

Furthermore, *li* becomes more complex as it becomes linked with other concepts, eventually leading to an abundance of different meanings. Even terms usually regarded as antonyms, i.e. *li-qi*, *yin-yang* etc. are combined to engender new ideas. Neo-Confucian thinkers tend, ultimately, to reject the logic of dualistic thinking or dualism. For Neo-Confucians, this kind of logic often prevents one from understanding a concept in opposition to another. According to Zhu Xi, *li* and *qi* belong to two different realms: namely, the realm "above form (*xing er shang*)" and the realm "below form (*xing er xia*)." However, both cannot exist apart from one another. *Li* and *qi* are different, but not separable: they are "two but one (*ereryi*)." In order to understand the relationship between *li* and *qi* as well as *li* and its connotations, we need to distinguish between dualistic thinking and tri-dimensional thinking (my coinage).

Dualistic thinking is necessary for the analytical understanding of things and affairs. Nevertheless, the world contains plenty of paradoxes that cannot be fully understood through dualism and its logic. A pair of things or affairs are, by their very nature, inter-connected and interdependent with each other. While on the surface they confront and conflict with each other, ultimately they have the potential to harmonize and complement each other. Such paradoxes cannot be

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[33] Regarding Confucianism in terms of human rights, see Wm. Theodore de Bary & Tu Weiming, eds., *Confucianism and Human Rights* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); and Wm. Theodore de Bary, *Asian Values and Human Rights: A Confucian Communitarian Perspective* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998). There are two positions on the question whether Confucian ideas imply human rights or not: First, West-centric modernists who emphasize the western origins of human rights ideas, based upon the individualism and liberalism. Second, proponents of East Asian values who assert Confucianism incorporates a heritage of ideas compatible with human rights under the communitarian interpretation of civil-political rights. I stand for the second position. It is not true that human rights ideas have been the exclusive possessions of the West. In my opinion some of (Neo-) Confucian ideas or concepts – *li* as well as *tianli*, *ren*, *fen*, etc. – are compatible with human rights.

explained by dualistic thinking. Dualistic thinking conceals the fact that a pair – the typical example is *yin-yang* or female-male – combines to produce a new life by harmonizing and complementing each other. *Yin* and *yang* are mutually complementary, but not the same as each other. This is the meaning of "harmony but not uniformity (*he er butong*)."

The nature of *yin-yang* is and becomes "one but two and two but one (*yierer ereryi*)"; "neither one nor two (*buyi buer*)"; "neither close nor distant (*buji buli*).[34]" These are examples of the paradoxical logic of tri-dimensional thinking.[35] Since all humans are born and live in the world of "co-living, polar opposites, and mutual complement", all humans must think tri-dimensionally in order to live with others. For that reason, tri-dimensional thinking is universally present in every religion and philosophy – both Eastern and Western. Notably, however, Eastern philosophies and religions such as Buddhism, Daoism, and Neo-/Confucianism contain fully developed tri-dimensional thinking.

*Li*, as the basis of *li**, is the most important concept in Neo-Confucian thought. *Li* implies and holds in harmony individual human, social and national rights and duties, maintaining balance through the mutual dignity and respect among persons, societies and states. Someone whose relationship to another person grants them greater rights is also expected to bear more duties to that other person. Likewise, someone whose relationship to another person grants them fewer rights also bears fewer duties to that other person. Therefore, all kinds of equality and inequality may be complimented and harmonized. It is important to note that *li* is linked to its antonym, *qi*. Both are interrelated and

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[34] This means that *yin* and *yang* mutually complementary, and become a medium for each other. The theory of *yin-yang* and five elements (*wuxing*; fire, water, wood, metal, and earth) used to be explained by a circulating scheme of two dimensions – 'polar opposites (*xiangke*) and co-living (*xiangsheng*)'. But, it should be explained by adding the third dimension of 'mutual compliment *or* harmony' (*xianghe*) in the middle.

[35] This kind of paradoxical logic, based on the grammar of 'both-and' or 'neither-nor', cannot be explained by three laws of the Western classical logic, since it reverses the law of contradiction, and transcends the law of excluded middle. However, this is a kind of trans-logic that can explain paradoxes in the world.

should be harmonized and complement each other. *Li* without *qi* will become rigid, stiff, and eventually broken; *qi* without *li* will become self-indulgent, illogical, and accordingly rotten.

# Hierarchy and Sovereignty

Earlier, I suggested that we should be cautious about the dichotomy of "the tribute system versus multi-state system." Morris Rossabi argues that "The Sung's [Song's] military weakness compelled its officials to treat the foreign dynasties in Chinese equals. Thus, a true multi-state system operated during Sung [Song] times.[36]" What is meant by "a true multi-state system?" Rossabi is likely referring to a system of equals, like that of the European sovereign states after the Westphalia Pact. This, however, represents a Western-centric notion. Historically, the tribute system usually coexisted with the multi-state system. In fact, the tribute system itself functioned as a kind of multi-state system. Both systems are "one but two and two but one."

The tribute system, which maintained remarkable consistency and relative stability, was an enduring discourse and a set of institutional practices. Yet this discourse "contrasts sharply with the striking variations in the institutional designs and functional operations, as well as the fluid and precarious existence", that is to say, "At one end, the emphasis is on the tribute system as a set of ideas and discursive practices … and as an enduring order in the Chinese world over centuries.[37]" At the other end, however, the tribute system "was constantly under challenges, breaking down, being reconfigured and rebuilt. It was never stable, fixed, nor uniform.[38]" How can we explain this contrast between ideas, principles

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[36] Morris Rossabi ed., *China among Equals*, p. 11.
[37] Zhang Yongjin and Barry Buzan, "The Tribute System as International Society in Theory and Practice," p. 30.
[38] Peter C. Perdue, "A Frontier View of Chineseness," in Giovanni Arrighi et al., eds., *The Resurgence of East Asia: 500, 150 and 50 Year Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 67.

and practices? In order to answer this question, Zhang and Buzan put forward an idea of the tribute system characterized by what Stephan Krasner calls "organized hypocrisy." That is to say, under the tribute system, principles endured but were violated by challenges, breaking down, reconfiguration and rebuilding.

Krasner argues: "Both international legal and Westphalian sovereignty are best conceptualized as examples of organized hypocrisy. [....] Principles have been enduring but violated.[39]" Through conventions, contracting, coercion, and imposition, the principle of equal sovereignty was violated. Moreover, "Violations of Westphalian as opposed to international legal sovereignty have been more pervasive even within areas such as western Europe.[40]" It is notable that

> "Westphalian" sovereign equality is no guarantee of peace. The contrary case would be easier to make, that unequal or asymmetric relations have historically been the more stable when accepted by both sides.[41]

When one reflects on the historical and contemporary situation, the notion of sovereign equality becomes problematic. As David Lake observes,

> International hierarchy did not disappear in 1648 [the year of Peace of Westphalia signed] ....nor after World War II with the death of Europe's overseas empires. It remains a core, if frequently overlooked, feature of modern international hierarchy.[42]

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[39] Stephan Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 40.

[40] Ibid, p. 52.

[41] Anthony Reid, "Negotiating Asymmetry: Parents, Brothers, Friends and Enemies," in A. Reid and Zheng Yangwen eds., *Negotiating Asymmetry: China's Place in Asia* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2009), pp. 2-3.

[42] David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, p. *x*.

We used to identify this "international hierarchy" with colonial and imperial systems established beyond Europe, but such systems were also established within Europe. An international hierarchy has existed among European states, even while equal sovereignty was working as a principle. Sovereignty as a principle is "strongly egalitarian with respect to state rights"; nevertheless, "This does not preclude asymmetric interactions.[43]"

Throughout the historical and contemporary record, it is difficult to positively identify the genuine practice of equal sovereignty. Ultimately, it seems, equal sovereignty has endured as a principle, but has not been realized. All states are formally equal, but de facto unequal. Generally speaking, (sovereign) equality is a worthy ideal, but in reality, it works only as a sort of "organized hypocrisy" – an enduring but violated ideal.

## *Hierarchy in terms of Daoist and Confucian Discourse*

In *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) postulates what life would be like without state or government, a condition which he calls the state of nature: "war of all against all (*bellum omnium contra omnes*).[44]" In this anarchical state, people fear death. In order to avoid that state, people accede to a social contract and establish a civil society by subordinating themselves to a sovereign authority. According to Hobbes, society is a population beneath a sovereign to whom all individuals in that society cede some rights in return for protection. In this model, hierarchy is necessary for constituting society and state. Thus, Hobbes explains the process of building sovereign authority and the

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[43] Alexander Wendt and Daniel Friedman, "Hierarchy under anarchy: informal empire and the East German state," *International Organization,* Vol. 49 No.4 (Autumn 1995), pp. 689-721, at p. 700.

[44] Concerning such postulation, we may doubt whether it is right or wrong. I think it contains a (problem of) modern, realistic way of thinking, and a (fallacy of) dualistic thinking. Nature is not merely a state of confront and war but harmony and peace in virtue of 'interdependence of all with all'.

transition from anarchy to hierarchy: hierarchy as a social and political system is taken as a matter of course.

David Lake insightfully argues, "relations between states are anarchic and that is one of the most unique, important, and enduring features of world politics", yet "international hierarchies are pervasive", both in the past and present.[45] Lake also asserts that: "Hedley Bull argues that the society of states, even under anarchy, produces a rudimentary order.[46] [….] Hierarchy is not a prerequisite for political order.[47]" Here, we need to pay attention to Bull's "*under* anarchy", "a *rudimentary* order." Though states *under* anarchy may produce a *rudimentary* order, this cannot be a normative structure of order. Or rather, a *rudimentary* order can be none other but a hierarchy *under* anarchy. Here, unlike in Lake's formulation, hierarchy is a prerequisite for political order, and even for a *rudimentary* order. An order without hierarchy would be anarchy.

Hierarchy is indispensable to any order, system, and society. Throughout history and into the present day, a variety of hierarchies have persisted, even in anarchic situations. This undermines the polarity of "either anarchy or hierarchy." The opposite of anarchy is not *hier*archy but "archy", government or rule. Therefore, Jack Donnelly notes that "Rather than thinking of anarchy *or* hierarchy we should attend instead to hierarchy in anarchy.[48]" Global politics are based not on anarchy but on hierarchy in anarchy. In world politics, states differ in size, power, and position. Thus hierarchies of various types are omnipresent in the relationships between states. It is important, then, to ask what type of hierarchy it is – benign or malign, cooperative or coercive, *etc*.

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[45] David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, pp. 1-2.
[46] See Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).
[47] David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, p. 29.
[48] Jack Donnelly, 'Sovereign Inequalities and Hierarchy in Anarchy: American Power and International Society', *European Journal of International Relations* 12:2, June 2006, pp. 139-170, at p. 141.

Quite apart from Hobbes, Daoist and Confucian philosophers see nature as a harmonious state insofar as it contains "co-living, polar opposites, and mutual complement." *Ziran* (nature) is a key concept in Daoism and Confucianism that literally means "self so, so of itself" and thus "natural, naturally, spontaneously, freely." The word *ziran* first occurs in the *Daodejing*, and refers to the Way. For example, "Human follows Earth; Earth follows Heaven; Heaven follows the Way; The Way follows Nature (*Daodejing*, 25)." This concept is closely tied to the practice of *wuwei* (non-doing). For Laozi, the author of the *Daodejing*, one must jettison unnatural doing (*renwei* or *zuowei*) and return to the entirely natural, spontaneous state of *wuwei ziran*.

*Ziran* refers to a state of "as-it-isness" and includes the hierarchy of nature. Should, then, the hierarchy of nature be left to take its course? It seems clear to me that the answer is "No." Regarding this answer, it must be noted that *wuwei* often included the paradox *wei wuwei*, "action without [artificial] action." Both *wuwei* and *wei wuwei* are fundamental tenets of Daoism (and Confucianism). One cannot actively pursue *wuwei*. Instead, one can and must pursue the *wei* of *wuwei* following the principle of *ziran*, which is related to *de* – developing a moral sense of human nature and of nature. *Ziran* does not leave hierarchy unchanged, but subjects it to constant transformation: the big/superior becomes the small/inferior, and vice versa. In this connection, Zhuangzi, another Daoist, suggests the term *qi\** (parity) in order to distinguish the differences among things without making invidious or unfair distinctions. The title of the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi* is *qi\*wulun* (The Adjustment of Controversies), which means "a discourse on parity among things."

According to *Shuowen Jiezi*, the term *qi\** describes ears of grain that have grown to the same level. Like this, *qi\** allows for distinctive differences among things that, nonetheless, exist on a par with one another. Meanwhile, the *de* of *ziran* works on things as the basis of their parity with all other things. Noting this notion of parity, David Hall and Roger Ames argue that "all relationships in the

classical Chinese worldview are resolutely hierarchical",

> The husband and legal wife, although having social parity, still stand in a
> hierarchical relationship on to other, depending on the specific issue
> under review. In terms of the education of young child, for example, the
> wife has dominant responsibility; later education becomes the main
> responsibility of the husband.

They go on to assert: "Daoist notions of difference contrast dramatically with the
sense of 'ontological difference', one of the popular themes in speculative
philosophy since Heidegger.[49]" Unlike the ontological way of "Being, being and
non-being", *dao* is the Way of things, encompassing all of the generative
processes of "becoming."

"The dominant sensibility of Western philosophy is imbued with a
commitment to a single-ordered world, hierarchically arranged, with human
beings near to the top of the ladder", but Daoism is sensible to "a more horizontal
world of things possessed of an indefinite number of orders.[50]" In deference to
the coexistence of a plurality of viable world-orders, Daoism is not especially
interested in pursuing orders for controlling and managing the differences among
things; in a word, hierarchy. This contrasts with the Confucians, for whom
hierarchy – how to control and manage difference – was the big question. In
order to create order, they derived organizing principles from *li\** and applied
them to the governance of relationships. This is the ideal Confucian moral and
political order, based on the rule of virtue (*dezhi*) and the rule of rites (*li\*zhi*).
Thus, the pattern of hierarchy is and should be benign and cooperative.

Xunzi, who prefers *li\*zhi* to *dezhi*, sets out his thinking on rites in the

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[49] David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from Han: Self, Truth and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 59.
[50] Ibid, p. 68.

following passage:

> What is the origin of rites? I reply: Humans are born with desires. If their desires are not satisfied for them, they cannot but seek some means to satisfy themselves. If there are no limits and degrees to his seeking, then they will inevitably fall to wrangling with others. From wrangling comes disorder [anarchy] and from disorder comes exhaustion. The former kings [sages] hated such disorder, and therefore they made [establish] ritual principles in order to allocate [share] them, to keep [nourish] their desires and provide for their satisfaction. [….] Thus both desires and goods were looked after and satisfied. This is the origin of rites. (*Xunzi*, Li*lun [Discussion of Rites] 1)

Human desires entail wrangling and disorder. The ancient kings (sages) hated this disorder, and creates rites to keep human desires and provide for their satisfaction. Implying "allocate, share (*fen*)", rites are established as a means of keeping human desires. But, in order to keep them, distinction is necessary. Xunzi asserts:

> A gentleperson [*junzi*], having obtained a means of keeping [desires], is also fond of the distinctions [*bie*] to be observed. What do I mean by distinctions? Eminent and humble have their respective grades, elder and younger their degrees, and rich and poor, important and unimportant, their different names [status] in society. (*Ibid*.)

Rites in terms of distinctions, which are indispensible to order, naturally represent hierarchy. Thus the *li** of hierarchy is necessary. Then, what pattern of hierarchy is desirable? It is and should be benign and cooperative, allowing for *li**'s implication of allocation or share to keep human desires and provide for their satisfaction.

But Xunzi seems to be less concerned with the "fair or equal" allocation or share than other Confucians. He says: "Where shares are all equal, there will not be enough goods to go around; where power is on parity, there will be a lack of unity." He continues:

> The former kings abhorred such disorder, and they regulated ritual principles in order to set up degrees. They established the grades [ranks] between the rich and the poor, eminent and humble, making it possible for them to join together. This is the basis upon which All-under-Heaven are nourished. This is the meaning of "Parity is based on non-parity" in the Documents [*Shujing*] (*Xunzi*, *Wangzhi* [The Regulation of a King] 3).

It can be said that rites are in between parity and non-parity, but Xunzi seems to lean toward non-parity.

Later, Neo-Confucians, favoring *dezhi* over *li*zhi*, put forward the concept of *li* as the basis of rites, *li*\*. In particular, the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi laid out the doctrine of the "public-common *dao/li* of the people or All-under-Heaven", which became fashionable among Neo-Confucians.[51] This doctrine represents the apothegm *liyi fenshu*: *liyi* symbolizes both the idea of the equality of All-under-Heaven and the apex of the hierarchy among many, while *fenshu* implies both hierarchy (inequality) and parity (equality). Meanwhile, *li* as the basis of *li*\* implies the "one and many" of the public-common. Thus *li*, connoting *gong* as *pingfen* (fairly or equally allocated share), also implies the notion of "fairness, equality", and further, "commonality, impartiality."

In sum, *li* and *li*\* exist in between hierarchy and parity. Here, both represent "the unity of principle and the diversity of its particularizations", which implies that every human and entity is rooted in a shared physical existence and in a

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[51] Kim Bongjin, "Tradition and Modernity of a Concept: The Public-Common in China and Japan," pp. 26-29.

moral nature. Therefore, every human and entity is a "being-between, co-becoming" and a mediator of *li* and *li\**, and thus worthy of dignity and respect. Although humans and entities such as society/state exist in a state of hierarchy, they should pay deference to one another, and maintain "good" relationships with others. *Li* and *li\** constitute "a philosophy of good relationship" based on the ideas of mutuality, harmony, and morality. This interpretation of *li* and *li\** reveals ways of organizing and maintaining good societies and relationships. In this model, hierarchy exists, but is kept benign and cooperative by virtue of *li/li\**.

## Endemic Sovereignty and Equality

Based on such principles as *li*, *li\**, and *gong tianxia*, China and the other Sinic states could establish and maintain a "hierarchical but benign" order, and thus ensure relatively *longue durée* peace and stability. Any tribes and states of different territories could participate in the tribute system, therewith, each of them had its own sovereignty. Under the tribute system,

> "Participants in *Pax Sinica* did accept ordered sovereign inequality as the organizing principle of the system" but, "they retained their domestic autonomy and remained largely independent in conducting their 'international' affairs, they carried with them the most important attributes of sovereign entities. In other words, the tributary system, hierarchical as it was, remained a system of multiple actors.[52]"

As we shall see, this kind of endemic sovereignty was probably sustained by the idea of the "Natural Right of *tianli* (my coinage)." This sovereignty, unequal as it was, constituted interstate relations under the "benign" hierarchy. It is

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[52] Zhang Yongjin and Barry Buzan, "The Tribute System as International Society in Theory and Practice," p. 27.

notable that unequal sovereignty under hierarchy is not only theoretically possible but is historically common. Because there are various kinds of sovereignty, in David Lake's words, "sovereignty is a bundle of rights or authorities that can be divided among different levels of governance.[53]" Stephan Krasner classifies four usages of sovereignty as "domestic, interdependence, international legal, and Westphalian.[54]" Then, sovereignty under the tribute system can be construed as a kind of "domestic and interdependence", distinct from "international legal and Westphalian" sovereignty. According to Krasner's argument, equal sovereignty has been a principle enduring but unrealized, so it can only work as a sort of "organized hypocrisy."

David Kang, observing that the norms and institutions of the tribute system yielded substantial stability, argues: "With the main institution of the tribute system, this system emphasized formal hierarchy among nations while allowing considerable equality.[55]" How could formal hierarchy coexist with considerable equality? Can equality and inequality occur simultaneously? I have already explored the meaning of the coexistence of hierarchy and parity in Daoist discourse, and suggested the importance of the coexistence of inequality and equality in Confucian discourse, in terms of *li*. *Li* implies human rights including both equality and inequality, and national rights including both equal and unequal sovereignty – and duties as well. From the perspective of tri-dimensional thinking, rights and duties, and equality and inequality, are "one but two and two but one": they coexist harmoniously.

*Li* as a basis of *li*\* is a core concept constitutive of "a moral philosophy of relationship" based on both rights and duties. It can be conceived in two ways. First is the notion of the "Natural Right of *tianli*." Zhu Xi considers this moral disposition as the ultimate principle (*li* or *tianli*) of the world. To him, myriad

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[53] David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, p. 3.
[54] See Stephan Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, pp. 9-25.
[55] David C. Kang, *East Asia before the West*, p. 54.

things and affairs have their own *li* by way of "the reason why it is so (*suoyiran zhi gu*)" and "the norm of what it ought to be (*suodangran zhi ze*)" (*Queries on the Great Learning* [*Daxue Huowen*], *shang*, *jing* 1). From this, we can derive the notion that every person or entity has its own innate *raison d'être* and possesses natural rights endowed by the Way or the Principle of Heaven, *tianli*. Expounding further, Zhu Xi says:

> Each and every thing has its own *li*. *Li*, inherent in every single thing, comes out of one and the same origin. Only its residing place is different i.e. the *yong* [use, application] of *li* is distinct... since one and all things in the world necessarily plumb the depths of *li*, each of them can get the residing place of its own *yi\*\** [property, right]. (*Daxue Huowen*, *xia*, *zhuan* 5)

This means that at the exact moment when a thing resides, *li* or *tianli* has already given it its nature. Elsewhere, Zhu Xi conceives *xing* as a form of *taiji*, the Supreme Ultimate:

> Question: The Way of Heaven flows and acts in phase with the birth and growth of all things. Each and every person or thing has the corporeality under one's own *zhu* [superintendence, supremacy] from birth. It means that *xing* is omnipresent everywhere the birth is given. Is that correct?
> Answer: Each and every thing possesses its own *taiji*. (*Ibid.*)

In this way, Neo-/Confucian thought makes no distinction among (human) beings but regards every person and entity as equal. *Taiji* (identified as *li* by Zhu Xi) ultimately, and equally, unites one's body with Heaven and Earth, fulfilling the ideal of *datong*, the Great Unity.

A second way in which a moral philosophy of the relationship of *li* and *li\**

can be conceived pertains to the idea of virtue-based rights and duties. Since *li* or *tianli* contains the notion of ethical rights, it is sometimes associated with *daoli*. Just as *li* is the combination of *suoyiran zhi gu* and *suodangran zhi ze*, so is *daoli* the reason why a person is as he or she is, and the norm for what a person ought to be. *Daoli* represents human nature (*renxing*) residing within the mind-and-heart, which suggests that humans should follow *daoli* as the "moral principle." According to Zhu Xi,

> The principle is *tianxia gonggong\* zhi li* [the principle of the public-common of All-under-Heaven], which is proper for every person, since it makes no distinction between the thing and the self. It cannot be said that I myself have *yiban daoli* [the general-moral principle] because others also have *yiban daoli*. (*Ibid*.)

Thus every person as a holder of *daoli* or *li* possesses his or her innate, naturally born, rights.

Unlike the Western concept of individual rights, the Neo-/Confucian concept of rights is innate yet divisible, in the sense that it implies both indigenous and relational (interdependent) rights. Unlike individual rights, the Neo-/Confucian concept is not conceived in terms of opposition or resistance to others, including rulers. Underlying the Neo-/Confucian view of self is a rejection of privileged individuality and an acknowledgement of humans as relational beings, whose identities, roles, and rights and duties are constituted through their relationship with others. According to Zhu Xi, *li* or *daoli* is public-common (*gonggong\**), available to all humans.

The Five Constant Virtues, for instance, serve as the basis for rites, *li\**. Human beings must actualize those virtues. Only by cultivating the virtues will they acquire both rights and duties, so that the rites may embody those virtue-based rights and duties. As a private being every person has natural and innate

rights, while as a public being he or she possesses relational rights and duties. From a correlative viewpoint of tri-dimensional thinking, rights and duties are "two but one", inter-connected with each other. Both the ideas of the "Natural Right of *tianli*" and "virtue-based rights" are also "two but one", fundamentally inter-connected. It can be said that the "Natural Right of *tianli*" symbolizes "*ideal equality*", including equal rights and sovereignty; "virtue-based rights" represents "virtual inequality" including unequal rights and sovereignty.

Even if Neo-/Confucians would recognize the inequality between China and its tributaries as well as among states, however, they could not suppose or recognize the inequality in terms of domination and submission. On the contrary, Neo-/Confucian teaching rejects domination by coercive measures and submission without due reward of virtues. Since Neo-/Confucian thought defines human relations in terms of fundamentally moral relationships, which find their highest expression within the family, those relations can never be construed as domination-submission. For Neo-/Confucian thinkers, the cultivation of virtues is essential, and those virtues are available to persons of any nation or ethnicity. The Neo-/Confucian texts propose not discrimination, but distinction on the basis of difference in personal ability, race and nationality (which does not mean that discrimination does not exist in reality). Rather, Neo-/Confucianism is more concerned with the cultivation of virtues which can generate a moral world and maintain its order, allowing human beings to live in harmony with the Way of Heaven.

# Conclusion

Under the tribute system of the traditional East Asian regional order, interstate relationship were built on the ideas of mutuality, reciprocity, and morality. Based on such principles as *li*, *li\**, and *gong tianxia*, it also relied on the

ideas of harmony, coexistence, impartiality, and fair or equal allocation. It goes without saying that there is always a gap between principles and reality. In reality, principles are enduring but violated in a form of "organized hypocrisy." The traditional East Asian regional order was not an exception. East Asia was divided into different territories and dominions, each with its own sovereign, and between those territories, inequalities existed. Like interpersonal relationships, interstate relationships were hierarchical but benign, taking Neo-/Confucian concepts as organizing principles, which governed the order. These principles, norms and practices constituted the regional order, while the tribute system maintained its consistency and stability in the face of challenges, breakdown, reconfiguration and rebuilding. In the long history of this regional order, however, we can see the ups and downs of principles enduring but violated. Particularly, in a power transition period, China was inclined to violate principles and to treat other countries without respect.

The tribute system collapsed finally, in the late 19th century, after China and the other East Asian states entered into the international system of modern states. Here, it is necessary to rectify the widely held and misleading myth that East Asian states acquired the idea of sovereignty only after entering into the international system of modern states. This myth not only produces a distorted understanding of the tribute system, but also assumes, falsely, that East Asian states were seen – and saw each other – as sovereign equals. In fact, it was the opposite. They were at best less-than-equal members. The "unequal treaty system" they were forced into entering by the Western colonial powers could be more accurately characterized by a lack of sovereignty. Moreover, this myth interprets East Asia's failure to enter the modern era to have been caused by its excessive attachment to tradition rather than by the negative features of modernity, such as Western-centrism and colonialism.

The modern states system helped to legitimize its unequal structure and East Asia's inferior place within it. Edward Keene argues that while "the 'Westphalian

system' of equal and mutually independent territorially sovereign states was taking shape, quite different colonial and imperial systems were being established beyond Europe.[56]" That is,

> The fundamental normative principle of the colonial and imperial systems beyond Europe, by contrast, was that sovereignty should be divided across national and territorial borders as required to develop commerce and to promote what Europeans and Americans saw as good government.[57]

Stephan Krasner, as we have seen above, contends that "Both international legal and Westphalian sovereignty are best conceptualized as examples of organized hypocrisy. [….] Principles have been enduring but violated."

In recent decades, China has risen rapidly within the international community, bringing to an end its long period of national humiliation, marginalization, and isolation. The rise of China has become a sensitive issue within both academic and policy communities worldwide, and provoked fierce debate about the balance of power and hegemonic succession between the United States and China. But its implications for the future global order remain vague and undefined. In response to China's rise, scholars and analysts have posited two theories: the "China threat" theory and the "peaceful rise of China" thesis.[58] China tends to suspect that American and Japanese neo-conservatives and realists are the originators of a variety of "China threat" arguments. Responding to the external fear of a China's threat, the former Chinese premier Wen Jiabao put forward the thesis of "China's peaceful rise (*heping jueqi*)" in his speech at Harvard University in December 2003. He claimed that China will not seek

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[56] Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 97.

[57] Ibid, p. 98.

[58] It seems to me that the 'China threat' theory is a biased way of looking at China, which entails a distorted spell of the modern. I wish its 'China threat' would not be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

global hegemony or pose a threat to any country.

The notion of a peaceful rise represents a great leap in China's approach to global governance and strategy. Since 2005, it has been substituted by the notion of "harmonious world (*hexie shijie*)", which first appeared in former Chinese president Hu Jintao's speech at the Asia-Africa Conference in Jakarta in April 2005. Later, Hu explained that in order to achieve a "harmonious world,[59]" it is necessary to first "abandon the Cold War mentality, cultivate a new security concept featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and cooperation, and build a fair and effective collective security mechanism." Establishing "mutually beneficial cooperation to achieve common prosperity" comes second; for this, "the developed countries should shoulder greater responsibility." The third requirement is "the spirit of inclusiveness to build a harmonious world together." Finally, both the UN and the Security Council should be reformed by increasing "the representation of the developing countries, African countries in particular", giving them greater power in decision-making. This "harmonious world" thesis was inherited by China's new leader, president Xi Jinping and his government.

It is clear to me that the "harmonious world" thesis incorporates those portions not only of socialist utopianism but also the Neo-/Confucian notions of harmony (*he*), *gong tianxia*, *li* and *li\**. Thus, "traditional Chinese worldviews, philosophical legacies, and discursive practices in regard to international relations in Chinese history inform the present Chinese leadership of their visions of the future of global order.[60]" Rising China's role in shaping this order, however, still remains restrained and restricted. Harmony derives from Neo-/Confucian ideas and utopian desires, and its institutionalization at the global level – and even the regional level – remains dull and limited. Nonetheless, it cannot be

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[59]  See Hu Jintao, "Build Towards a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity" (written speech by H.E. Hu Jintao at the Plenary Meeting of the United Nations' 60th Session, New York, September 15, 2005).

[60]  Zhang Yongjin and Barry Buzan, "The Tribute System as International Society in Theory and Practice," p. 5.

denied that China's approach to global governance and strategy will have an increasingly significant impact and effect on the future global order. In the 21st century thus far, China has set out global policy in economics, security, and ideology, and more than a little affected the process of globalization and regionalization as well.

China has been active in promoting efforts to improve regional governance and strategy through various forums and agreements involving the Asia Pacific region as a whole, including East Asia, Central Asia and Northeast Asia. The goal is clear: to overcome the Cold War mentality and create a favorable environment for enhancing economic cooperation, political trust and regional security. The spirit of inclusiveness is also a factor, but recently, it has been obstructed by deepening contradictions with U.S. policy and strategy toward East Asia. China worries about the recent strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance, fearing that Japan may stumble into confrontation with a supposed adversary in the East Asian region that has hitherto lain beyond both the statutory scope of self-defense and the "Far East" limits of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. A fresh reinterpretation of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which allows for the exercise of the right to collective self-defense in areas and waters surrounding Japan would enhance, not decrease, the tensions between the neighboring states.

No region has been more affected by both the Cold War and its mentality than East Asia. While the East-Western Cold War has ended, the Northeast Asian Cold War has not. Between China and Taiwan, South and North Korea, the Northeast Asian Cold War continues to influence regional and world affairs. The Cold War mentality has been maintained, not only among those states, but also – "all against all" – among surrounding countries, divided into pro- and anti-America camps. This is a typical example of dualistic thinking, a product of the negative side of modernity – the binomial antagonistic thinking. This has resulted in the perpetuation of feelings of animosity, resentment, mistrust, contempt, and disregard – among East Asian states, in particular, between China, Korea and

Japan.

The key obstacle to the construction of a new East Asian regional order as a "Concert of Asia" is the still-existing Northeast Asian Cold War and its mentality. The legacies of colonialism, international and civil conflicts among Northeast Asian states persist, thwarting any attempts to rebuild trust and achieve multilateral cooperation. Issues of the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku and Dokdo/Takeshima Islands wait peaceful settlements. And the Spratly Islands dispute is an ongoing territorial dispute between China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei. Under this circumstances, many observers are wondering how China will behave in the future. Whether China will continue to be a pacific power or not is the matter in dispute. Between the benevolent, Royal Way (*wangdao*) and the brutal, hegemonic way (*badao*), what is China's choice? Put in the context of China and East Asia, we must consider and discuss the question: how to revitalize a legacy of Confucian ideas and concepts. But this question remains careless and unanswered.

Despite this grim reality, the East Asian region remains full of opportunities. Economic dynamism and growing interdependence in this region have steadily created common interests and reduced incentives for conflict or instability. In the coming several decades, the East Asian states will develop a greater sense of regional awareness and integration. Accordingly, they will institute a new East Asian regional order. Brantly Womack asserts, "Clearly, the re-establishment of anything like the tributary system, by China or by any other state, is out of question in contemporary world politics.[61]" Nonetheless, the principles, norms and practices of the tribute system can be revised and represent a very valuable legacy for the institution of a new East Asian regional order, and the global order as well.♦

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[61] Brantly Womack, "Asymmetry and China's Tributary System," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No.1 (2012), pp. 37-54, at p. 51.

♦ Responsible editor: Chieh-Ju Wu

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