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In *China's Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination*, Ji-Young Li examines China's relationship with two of its East Asian neighbors during two of China's important dynasties. With this work, the author contributes to the subject of East Asian international relations, past and present. While the evidence in this book is drawn from a historical case study, the conclusions of the text have implications for an understanding of diplomacy in the region today.

The subject of China's traditional tribute system in Chinese international relations is a starting point. This system, which involved trade and diplomatic relations between the Chinese empire and its neighbors, was characteristic of an East Asian approach to relations between states before the nineteenth century. Although a great deal of research has been done on the system from China's perspective, Li urges scholars to consider the perspectives of the "subjects" of this system. To Li, the international relations interpretation of "hegemony" insufficiently analyzes the nature of the tribute system due to misconceptions of China's influence on its partners. Instead of China simply exerting military and economic domination over other states, the relationship is more complex, involving domestic political considerations.

Li's study used the rise of the last two dynasties of China, the Ming and the Qing, as the focus for her analysis. The Ming Dynasty, when it was established as a result of a revolt against the Mongol rulers of China in 1368, prompted debates in Korea and Japan whether to accept the new rulers as legitimate, which would, in turn, require Korea and Japan to recognize their own regimes as such. In the case of the Koreans, at the time a vassal state of the Mongolian empire, recognizing the upstart Ming dynasty involved risk. A protest against its vassal status would lead to debates as to who the legitimate ruler of Korea should be. This required the official recognition of China to ensure the cooperation of the Korean ruling *yangban* class. The conquest of China in 1644 by the Manchurians also provided a dilemma for Korean and Japanese leaders. For the Koreans, it was, at first, a chance to defy the conquerors and to overthrow a king who preached conciliation. For the Japanese, it was a chance to deny the supremacy of the Chinese emperor and limit their participation in the system.

To explore these themes, Li has divided her discussion into a number of topics and approaches. In chapter 1, Li addresses the uniqueness of the tribute system compared to other, mostly Western, systems of international relations. In chapter 2, she assesses Korea's and Japan's use of the tribute system and the cultural influence of the hegemon, China. Li then states her major theme, the influence of domestic politics on foreign policy. She suggests Korean and Japanese leaders were not entirely of one mind when approaching relations with China (or each other).

Chapter 3 is devoted to a case study. Li assesses the reactions of Korean and Japanese officials and rulers to the rise of the Ming Dynasty. The uncertainty and the danger of recognizing the Ming Dynasty and the simultaneous rise of revolts and dissension in Korea and Japan would color their attitudes towards the new rulers of China. Chapter 4 is devoted to an important event in the history of East Asia, an invasion of Korea sponsored by the shogun of Japan, Hideyoshi Toyotomi. This event illustrated the unique position of the shoguns of Japan and served as an attempt by the Japanese to challenge China's overall hegemonic domination and end the tribute system altogether. In Chapter 5, the rise of the Qing Dynasty is examined. Once again, the system was stressed by a new actor, in this case, an outsider.¹ However, the acceptance

of the Qing by Koreans and Japanese was again very much influenced by the domestic agendas of government officials in Korea and samurai elites in Japan.

With these case studies complete, Li in her conclusion, addresses two main points. The first involves the significance of these cases to today's international relations of the three countries, China, Korea, and Japan. The nature of their relationship has transformed considerably since the historical eras discussed. However, precedents remain, and to this day, elections in South Korea and Japan and the vicissitudes of factional infighting in North Korea very much influence the relationship. From this, the larger question emerges: that of China's role in the world order, particularly in its relationship with the United States. After all, since the Second World War, the U.S. has constructed its own "tribute" system in Asia, particularly in its close alliance with South Korea and Japan. The text urges the reader to ponder whether we are now looking at two competing "tribute" systems today and what the implications of China's re-rise as a dominant power may be—and further, whether and how the two Koreas and Japan are looking to associate with either system, depending on the opinions and tendencies of their respective elected (or, in the case of North Korea, dictatorial) officials.

Ji-Yong Li's work is strong in its clarification of the relationship between hegemon and subject. She has taken the idea of the centrality of the hegemon, its power and influence, and turned the focus to the subject, its needs, and its use of the relationship to further those needs. The structure of the work expresses the themes clearly and concisely, examining each key point in a highly logical fashion. Her writing style promotes comprehension and leaves no doubt from the reader's perspective as to what is to be accomplished in each section. The result is a clear picture of an actor's role in an established system.

Were there any shortcomings of this study, it would be the repetitiveness of the ideas and approaches. The use of signposts makes the work seem like a well-made dissertation rather than a strong monograph. The often-repeated goals and objectives are more suited to an introductory textbook rather than a groundbreaking study. And the lack of primary sources on the Japanese side of the equation leaves this reader to wonder whether the Japanese leadership was acting in ways similar to that of the Koreans or not. Surely, the Japanese sources are not unapproachable for a scholar well-versed in Korean and Chinese writing.

The contributions of this work, whatever its shortcomings, are substantial. The concept of hegemony and the theories based on its analysis, have their origin in the European tradition and reflect the continuous struggle of many European states to achieve it. However, this concept may not apply so well to the Asian continent's experience. Li has shown that not only are previous conceptions of hegemony inapplicable to the East Asian context, they may not explain the nature of the system itself. Clearly, domestic politics plays a role here, for the Koreans and the Japanese often concerned themselves with their relationships with China to serve the needs of various factions and ruling groups. What mattered in the more common periods of peaceful relations was the use of these relationships by elites in both of these nations' societies.

In addition to her work's contribution to the field of international relations, Ji-Young Li has added much to the study of the Chinese tribute system. Rather than view it as relatively meaningless or seeing it as a kind of mafia-like system, Li shows that for the Koreans and the Japanese, the system was a tool to use against domestic rivals. Further, the study illustrates differences between Korean and Japanese approaches to the system and illustrates differences in their respective domestic political structures. For the Koreans, China's neighbor, the Chinese emperor's approval provided a means to use against Korean kings who followed policies not in line with a particular faction within the *yangban* Korean elite. For the Japanese, the relationship

with China as a way of gaining the title of shogun and maintaining it against rivals. The shoguns, who depended on the approval of the Japanese emperor, also benefited from claiming a good relationship with the Chinese emperor as well.

This reviewer found *China's Hegemony* to provide not only a valuable contribution to key theories in international relations but also a useful look at the inner workings of the traditional tribute system. Theorists are presented with an opportunity to more closely analyze the system of international relations that existed in Asia before the nineteenth century and are presented with a refinement of the concept of hegemony overall. Historians are given the opportunity to look behind the curtain at domestic politics in Korea and Japan and to see the use of the tribute-subject relationship to further the cause of political factions. Overall, Li's study illustrates a need to revise studies of the tribute system, the concepts of hegemon and subject, and the relationship between international and domestic politics.

¹ The "outsider" in this case are the Manchus, who conquered China by 1644 and who chose to not only create a typical Chinese dynasty, but to maintain the tribute system. As with the Mongolian conquest of China in the thirteenth century, the members of the system debated its continued legitimacy.

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