● Article ●

Balancing in a Hierarchical System: Pre-Colonial Southeast Asia and the Tribute System[1]

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Abstract

Southeast Asia had long been an integral part of the China-centered tribute system in the pre-colonial era. Yet, the hierarchical relationship between China and Southeast Asia has not been studied from the angle of international relations. This article contributes to the literature by looking into the strategic responses of Southeast Asian countries to the China-dominated regional hierarchy. It argues that international relations in pre-colonial Southeast Asia were characterized by a complex political structure of anarchy-within-hierarchy. In such a structural context, Southeast Asian countries often sought close tributary relations with China in order to survive and dominate the sub-regional order. The tribute system was also instrumental in bringing about balancing behavior at the sub-regional level. Detailed analysis reveals that the tribute system offered three mechanisms crucial to the power balance of pre-colonial Southeast Asia: imperial recognition, tributary trade, and external arbitration and protection.

Ⅰ. Introduction

The tribute system had played an essential role in the regional order of pre-colonial East Asia, a state system stretching from Korea and Japan in the northeast to Burma, Siam and Java in the southwest. This order is commonly regarded as a China-dominated regional hierarchy (Fairbank, 1968; Mancall, 1984; Kang, 2003a). One of its key features is that international relations in pre-colonial East Asia had not followed the logic of balance-of-power because '[t]here is ... no evidence of external balancing or other coordinated efforts to constrain China' (Wohlforth et al., 2007: 172; see also Kaufman et al., 2007).

Instead, the hierarchical regional order relied on the cultural prominence of Confucianism, the disparity in economic and military strength, and the long-standing influences of the tribute system, all of which favored the centrality of China（Kang, 2010）.

This article does not dispute the view that there was a lack of systemic balancing against China in pre-colonial East Asia. However, it shows that there was plenty of inter-state balancing among then the small and medium-size countries in Southeast Asia. Though the logic of balance-of-power was not immediately obvious at the regional level, it had played a crucial part in the sub-regional system of pre-colonial Southeast Asia. The centuries-old conflicts between Dai Viet and Champa, between Burma and Ayutthaya/Siam, and among various Sumatra and Javanese kingdoms all point to the importance of power balancing. Notably, the dynamics of sub-regional balancing was not isolated from the power structure of East Asia. Upon close examination, the article argues that the hierarchical regional order dominated by China and embedded in the tribute system was in many ways instrumental in bringing about balancing behavior in pre-colonial Southeast Asia.

More specifically, the Sino-centric tribute system had provided three key mechanisms linking Southeast Asia and China in the pre-colonial regional order. Firstly, the imperial recognition by China was vital for Southeast Asian leaders to acquire political legitimacy in a hierarchical regional order. Secondly, the China-centered tributary trade was essential to meet the commercial interests of Southeast Asian trading states. Thirdly, Southeast Asian countries were not shy of seeking China's arbitration and protection in their inter-state disputes. These three mechanisms, the article shows, had played a crucial part facilitating and regulating the sub-regional balance of pre-colonial Southeast Asia.

Recognizing that balancing remained relevant at a sub-regional level of hierarchical East Asia is important in both theoretical and policy terms. Theoretically, it provides empirical evidence for a possible synthesis of two contrasting theoretical approaches in the realist tradition: the balance of power and the hierarchical relations[2]. Instead of regarding the two as competing

explanations of universal relevance (Wohlforth et al., 2007; Kaufman et al., 2007), it appears more useful to consider their interactive dynamics in a state system. In policy terms, the findings of the article indicate that the lack of systemic balancing and the abundance of sub-system balancing may coexist in a hierarchical system. This helps to explain, for example, the puzzles of post-Cold War international order where the US hegemony met with few direct challenges while the world has not been free from small-scale power balancing at the regional level (see Ikenberry, 2002; Paul et al., 2004).

The remaining of the article is organized in the following way. The next section traces the theoretical arguments about balancing and hierarchy in international relations. The discussion leads to a possible synthesis of the two theoretical approaches to account for complex political structure. In the third section, the China-dominated tribute system and the Mandala-like Southeast Asian states are analyzed. It shows that international relations in pre-colonial Southeast Asia were characterized by a complex structure of 'anarchy within hierarchy'. The fourth section examines three mechanisms of the tribute system that were crucial to the power balance of Southeast Asia: imperial recognition, tributary trade, and external arbitration and protection. The final section summarizes the main findings and discusses the implications of the study.

Ⅱ. Balance of Power and Hierarchical Relations in Structural Theories

Hierarchy is one of the key concepts that Kenneth Waltz employs to examine the balance-of-power theory (Waltz, 1979: Ch6). In his structural realist framework, hierarchy stands on the opposite side of anarchy. Whereas anarchy is an international structure in which the units (i.e., states) are similar and independent, hierarchy denotes a contrasting situation where the units are not just differentiated but closely interdependent. The differentiated inter-state relations may take several forms from a highly hierarchical extreme to complete anarchy. According to Lake (2003: 312), hierarchical political relationships vary from imperium, dominion, mandate, to universal covenant (i.e., treaty between sovereign states); hierarchical economic relationships range from economic union, dependency, economic zone, to non-hierarchical

market exchange; and hierarchical security relationships may appear as empire, informal empire, protectorate, sphere of influence, or alliance under anarchy. It is concerning the dynamics of alliance and balancing in an anarchic system that the theory of balance-of-power has most explanatory power.

The balance-of-power theory has two basic assumptions. First, individual states find themselves in an undifferentiated anarchic world where they can rely only on self-help. Second, states are 'unitary actors who, at a minimum, seek their own preservation and, at a maximum, drive for universal domination' (Waltz, 1979: 118). In order to survive under such an anarchic order, states have to guard constantly against aggressive peers and check the rise of potential hegemon. They may resort to self-strengthening measures such as economic development and military build-up (i.e., internal balancing), to alliance formation strategies by aligning with friendly states and staying away from antagonist ones (i.e., external balancing), and to active learning through the adoption of other states' successful practice (i.e., emulation) (Wohlforth et al., 2007: 157; see also Little, 2007). In the end, balancing behavior is expected to result in the formation of balances of power in the anarchic world. The strongest state in the system always faces systemic balancing by its weak peers.

In contrast to the theoretical assumptions of balance-of-power, hierarchical relations recognize the structural inequality of international order. The inequality is reflected in the relationship among, say, the dominant power, great powers, and medium and small powers (Organski, 1958; Clark, 1989). It also appears in the interaction between the hegemonic superpower and the rest of the world (Gilpin, 1981). It may even take the form of relational contracts that the dominant state enters into with subordinate ones (Lake, 1996; see also Krasner, 2001; Keene, 2007). Despite the structural difference, states still strive for survival and domination under the hierarchical order. However, the optimal strategy for weak states shifts from balancing to bandwagoning (Waltz, 1979; Walt, 1987; Kang, 2003b). That is, they are more likely to align with strong states. By recognizing their lower status in the hierarchical system, weak states may benefit from their close relationship with the powerful (Schweller, 1994). Such benefits include opener international trade, active security protection by the dominant state[3], and easier resolution of disagreement with third parties.

As David Lake points out, subordinate states 'can prosper internationally under authoritative orders' (Lake, 2009: 176). Under these circumstances, there should be very few, if not none, revisionist challengers against the dominant state in a hierarchical system.

With their theoretical predictions in sharp contrast, the theories of balance-of-power and hierarchical relations appear competing with each other. Indeed, the recent attempt to test the balance-of-power theory against the non-European context is based on such an understanding (Wohlforth et al., 2007; Kaufman et al., 2007). However, as the above discussion shows, the theories of balance-of-power and hierarchical relations make different assumptions about the structures of world politics: anarchy vs. hierarchy; describe contrasting behavior patterns of weak states: balancing vs. bandwagoning; and lead to opposite predictions about international relations: systemic balancing vs. hierarchy-based alignment. If the two theoretical approaches share anything, it is the structural realist presumptions that states seek survival and domination, and that state behavior is influenced by the structure of world politics (Clark, 1989). Because the balance of power and the hierarchical relations each focus on the impact of different international political structure one may reasonably doubt whether the two are competing theories at all.[4]

This, then, opens the possibility of juxtaposing the theories of balance-of-power and hierarchical relations to understand the impacts of *complex structure* in world politics. Yet, can anarchy and hierarchy coexist within the same international system ? In the original Waltzian framework, anarchy and hierarchy are two logically opposite concepts, the former being a realm of politics and power and the latter the realm of authority and administration (Waltz, 1979: 115). Though the view that anarchy and hierarchy are mutually exclusive is now rejected, scholars still use the notion of 'degrees of hierarchy' along a single-dimensional continuum between total anarchy and complete hierarchy to identify different forms of hierarchical relations (see Milner, 1991; Watson, 1992; Lake, 2003; Kang, 2003b). In such a framework, anarchy and hierarchy remains incompatible with each other.

The theoretical rigidity forces scholars to develop new concepts to explain

the analytical anomalies in international relations. In his update of the Waltzian balance of power, Walt（1987）argues that balance of threat is better equipped to explain（the lack of）balancing behavior in world politics. In contrast to Waltz's view that balancing is always targeted at a perspective hegemon, he claims that states are more likely to balance against their imminent security threats which may not originate from the most powerful. In the absence of perceived 'offensive intentions', small and medium-size states may well choose to bandwagon with, rather than balance against, the powerful one. This, for instance, explains the 'abnormal' alliance pattern during the Cold War that western European countries aligned with the most powerful state – the US – under the security framework of NATO, because they faced more imminent security threats from the USSR and its allies in eastern Europe（Walt, 1987: 273-281）.

Focusing on the eastern side of the Cold War confrontation, Wendt and Friedheim（1995）use the concept of 'informal empire' to analyze the USSR-East Germany relations. Within this bilateral relationship, the authors argue that there was a tension between the juridical equality of territorial sovereignty and the *de facto* inequality regarding the distribution of（military）power. The former constitutes 'the states system as an anarchy', and the latter produces 'a genuine hierarchy in the system'（698-699）. Rather than treating anarchy and hierarchy as the two extremes of a single-dimensional continuum, Wendt and Friedheim consider the relationship as 'hierarchy under anarchy'. Their article claims that the tension between hierarchy and anarchy has characterized the USSR-East Germany relations throughout the Cold War. Though the study adopts a constructivist perspective, the conceptualization of informal empire as a 'hierarchy under anarchy' is worth further discussion.

From a structuralist point of view, the Cold War was essentially a bipolar anarchy. It was anarchy at the global level because there was no world authority capable of regulating the inter-state relations. Indeed, the confrontation between the East and the West has several times brought the world on the brink of war. Meanwhile, there were two parallel hierarchies because the US and the USSR were the superpowers in the system. Each claimed special authority over other states belonging to the same ideological camp. Taking both

aspects together, one may ascertain both a system-level structure and a sub-system-level structure of Cold War politics. At the system-level, states were formally recognized as the same independent and sovereign entities; at the sub-system level, the states within the same camp were economically, politically and militarily interdependent. In this analytical framework, the Cold War was characterized by a complex structure of system-level anarchy and sub-system-level hierarchy.

In a world where anarchy and hierarchy coexist, balance-of-power and hierarchical relations each offer a valuable approach to explore the structural impacts of world politics. To account for the alliance of the US and western Europe in the West, Walt (1987) applies the balance-of-threat theory and argues that western European countries balanced against the security threats originated from the anarchic, not the hierarchical, part of the system. By comparison, Wendt and Friedheim (1995) look into the hierarchical dimension of USSR-East Germany relations in the East. Their research highlights the tension between juridical equality and *de facto* inequality in a 'hierarchy under anarchy' system. The two studies highlight different aspects of the anarchy-hierarchy structure. However, the conceptualization of balance-of-threat and hierarchy-under-anarchy allows the researchers to grasp the dual structural feature of the Cold War.

To understand a complex political structure like the Cold War, a more fruitful analytical approach may combine the theories of balance-of-power and hierarchical relations together. Anarchy and hierarchy are conceptualized as two logically opposite structures of international relations. Nevertheless, anarchy and hierarchy may coexist at different levels of world politics, or characterize different domains of international affairs (e.g., in dealing with climate change and terrorism). Under these circumstances, what at stake is not whether states balance or bandwagon, but the seemingly irrational strategies that states adopt in a 'nested game' of complex political structure (see Tsebelis, 1990). After all, states not just choose between balancing and bandwagoning. They also opt for engagement, hedging, buckpassing, containment, neutrality and non-alignment in the real world. Neither the balance of power nor the hierarchical relations alone provides a satisfactory explanation for these empirical anomalies.

A more promising approach in the realist tradition should use the combined explanatory power of balance-of-power and hierarchical relations in theoretical modeling.

The international relations of pre-colonial Southeast Asia offer a good case in point. Under a hierarchical tributary order, Southeast Asia had been subordinate to the imperial influences of China for several centuries. Indeed, most Southeast Asian countries chose to comply with the regional hierarchy, rather than challenge it (Reid, 1996). Focusing only on the hierarchical relations, Kang (2003b, 2010) argues that the China-centered tribute system had contributed to the regional stability in pre-colonial East Asia. This account overlooks the fact that Southeast Asia, an integral part of the tribute system, was dominated by the inter-state competition for survival and domination throughout the pre-colonial era (Lieberman, 1993). Yet, the theory of balance-of-power is not able to decode the complexity of pre-colonial relationship between Southeast Asia and China, either. In sharp contrast to the theoretical prediction, the balance-of-power politics of pre-colonial Southeast Asia had never challenged the predominance of China (Wohlforth et al., 2007). It was instead played out under the auspices of the hierarchical tribute system. Such structural complexity can only be accounted for by a combined theoretical perspective of balance-of-power and hierarchical relations.

Two related questions are of importance here. First, how did regional hierarchy and sub-regional anarchy evolve into a viable political structure between China and Southeast Asia? Second, what were the structural impacts of China's supremacy on the dynamics of power balance in pre-colonial Southeast Asia? The rest of the article addresses these two issues in turn.

Ⅲ. Structuring Anarchy within Hierarchy: The Tribute System and the Mandalas

China had for centuries stood at the center of the regional hierarchy in pre-colonial East Asia, a multi-state system that was eventually brought to an end by the Europeans around the mid-19th century (Fairbank, 1968; Mancall, 1984). There were times when China appeared less than a regional

hegemon because of dynastic changes and internal division[5] (Rossabi, 1983). Nonetheless, East Asia for most of the time had been culturally, economically, and militarily dominated by a single country (Kang, 2010). At the heart of the hierarchical inter-state relations was the long-standing tribute system of China.

1. The Tribute System and the Regional Hierarchy

Generally speaking, the tribute system fulfilled three main functions that were essential to China's central position in the regional hierarchy. First, it created a set of sophisticated rules to regulate how the foreign missions performed the tributary rituals (Fairbank, 1942; Mancall, 1984; Stuart-Fox, 2003). Though the details varied from time to time, receiving a tributary mission normally involved the following procedures. The tributary mission was first welcomed at a designated border or coastal city. From this point onwards only a limited number (of people, animals and ships) were allowed to travel to the capital. Transportation and postal services were provided to facilitate the trip. In the capital, the mission stayed at the Official Residence for Tributary Envoys. Its members were paid allowances drawn from the Chinese treasury for the period of their stay. In the court, the tributary ruler (via his/her envoys) received an imperial patent of appointment, together with a noble rank and an imperial seal. All these were dated according to the Chinese dynastic calendar. Then, members of the mission were entertained at the banquets with the presence of the emperor. On this occasion the envoys performed the so-called *kowtow*[6], and then received tea and gifts from the emperor. The tributary mission's return trip was accompanied by a ceremonial usher, who escorted the mission back to the border.

The tributary rituals, performed usually on the important days such as the New Year or the birthday of the emperor, aimed at a large domestic and foreign audience to show not only the superior status of China in relations to tributary countries but also the virtue of the emperor and his/her personal prestige. Despite the symbolic significance of tributary rituals, the tribute was not supposed to be a burden on the tributary countries. As Fairbank (1942: 135) notes, 'the value of the tribute objects was ... balanced, if not out-weighed, by the imperial gifts.' Of more importance to China was the extent to which tributary countries respected the Chinese civilization. Indeed,

tributary countries were ranked by China according to this standard, creating a regional hierarchy based on the perceived Chinese-ness rather than the actual power or strengthen（Kang, 2010: 57）. For instance, Korea and Vietnam were ranked higher than Japan because of their closer adoption of Chinese practices. The rules of tributary rituals directly reflected such a ranking. Highly ranked tributary countries not just enjoyed more elaborated rituals in the Chinese capital, but were rewarded with higher noble ranks and better imperial seals by the emperor. They were also allowed more frequent tributes, a privilege some Southeast Asian countries once fiercely competed for. Considering that the ceremonies for foreign missions were organized around the same days, such artificially ranked status was of considerable significance in a China-dominated regional hierarchy.

Second, the tribute system offered a two-way diplomatic channel between China and tributary countries. The foreign relations of traditional China were conducted almost entirely within the tributary framework（Fairbank, 1968; Mancall, 1984）. From time to time China sent its own envoys to foreign countries. These China-initiated diplomatic missions were tributary in nature because most were tasked with the imperial communication that encouraged a foreign country to send tribute to China.[7] This usually occurred at the beginning of a new dynasty in China. Historical records show that, soon after he defeated the Mongols and reunited China in 1368, the first Ming emperor sent his envoys on the same day to Korea and Dai Viet（in today's northern Vietnam）to inform them of his victory and the birth of the new dynasty; one month later, similar missions were dispatched to Japan, Champa（in today's southern Vietnam）, and Java（Ming Shi Lu, 1968）. Notably, even before the Ming envoy reached the destination, a tributary mission from Champa had arrived at Nanjing to congratulate the new dynasty（Wang, 1998: 304）. When the famous expeditions of Zheng He was sent abroad, the missions brought imperial appoints and seals with them in order to convince foreign rulers to take part in the tribute system. Such imperial communication was considered so important that after the Qing dynasty replaced the Ming in the mid-17th century, tributary states were explicitly required to 'send back the imperial seal granted［to］them in the Ming period'（Fairbank and Teng, 1941: 164）.

Third, the tribute system allowed the bilateral trade between China and tributary countries to be conducted at the official level. Before the colonial trade of staple goods dominated the world, international trade focused mostly on luxury goods since only a very high profit margin could compensate for the risks associated with trade. Then, China was both a major producer of luxury goods such as silk and porcelain and a crucial market for luxuries and precious metals. There were two ways that a foreign country conducted trade with China: tributary trade and private trade. During the Song dynasty, tributary and private trades were both allowed. Private trade generated substantial tax revenues for the imperial court, but the official tributes to China came to a minimum (Shiba, 1984). When private trade was banned in the Ming and the early Qing dynasties, tributary trade flourished as a result. It is therefore not surprising that the tribute system is considered by some as 'a cloak for trade' (Fairbank, 1942, 1968; Wang, 1998; Stuart-Fox, 2003). The tributary missions usually included merchants, who effectively monopolized the tributary trade with China. These merchants were allowed to trade at the designated market in the border or coastal city where the mission was first received. Alternatively, they could bring their goods to the special market set up next to the Official Residence for Tributary Envoys in the capital of China. Though trade outside these markets was strictly forbidden, tributary trade was free of duty – an attractive bounty of the tribute system that many trading states found difficult to resist.

In short, the tribute system with its elaborated tributary rituals, two-way diplomatic communication and profitable tributary trade had created a China-dominated regional hierarchy in East Asia. Nevertheless, the system provided China with surprisingly few means to interfere with the internal affairs of tributary countries. As long as the tributary rulers agreed to an inferior status, they were mostly 'free to pursue domestic affairs and [conduct] diplomacy with one another as they saw fit' (Kang, 2010: 55)[8]. Standing at the top of the regional hierarchy, China was consciously self-restrained to limit the potentially negative impacts of its superiority. The self-restraint by China, paradoxically, allowed the formation of a complex political structure of 'anarchy within hierarchy' in Southeast Asia.

2. The Mandalas and Sub-Regional Anarchy

In pre-colonial Southeast Asia, sub-regional anarchy was a direct consequence of the distinctive political structure that characterized many pre-modern Southeast Asian states – the Mandalas. The Mandalas refer to the political structure of concentric circles of power that a central authority claims over its territory, where the influences of the authority wane as it moves away from the center (Wolters, 1999; Stuart-Fox, 2003). As the basic form of pre-modern states, the Mandalas had dominated the political scene of Southeast Asia until they were finally displaced in the 19th century (Frederick, 2011). There is an inherent tension within the political structure of the Mandalas. In rhetoric, the king of each Mandala claimed universal authority over the local rulers as if they were obedient allies and vassals. In practice, the Mandalas represented an 'unstable political situation in a vaguely definable geographical area without fixed boundaries and where smaller centers [and their local rulers] tended to look in all directions for security' (Wolters, 1999: 27-28). Adding to the internal uncertainty is the fact that 'Mandalas would expand and contract in concertina-like fashion. Each one contained several tributary rulers, some of whom would repudiate their vassal status when the opportunity arose and try to build up their own networks of vassals' (28). For pre-modern Southeast Asian states, the fluid and often overlapping claims of the Mandalas generated intensified security problems from both within and without.

The recurring inter-state conflicts in pre-colonial Southeast Asia offer some vivid examples of such intensified security problems. The political history of Southeast Asia is usually divided into two phrases: the rise of early kingdoms between the 8th and 13th century, and the consolidation of pre-modern states from the 14th century to the late 18th and early 19th century (Bentley, 1986; Lieberman, 2003, 2009; SarDesai, 2010). In the earlier phrase, mainland Southeast Asia was occupied by Dai Viet and Champa in the east, the Khmer Empire of Angkor in the middle, and the Burmese-Mon Kingdom of Pagan in the west. Around the same time, maritime Southeast Asia was dominated by the trading state of Srivijaya in Sumatra and the mostly agriculture-based Javanese Kingdoms of Sailendra, Mataram and Kediri. These earlier Southeast Asian kingdoms virtually all adopted the organizational principles of the Mandalas. For instance, the Khmer Empire of Angkor was characterized by

'a pluralistic society permeated by crosscutting patronage ties' (Bentley, 1986: 282). There were often multiple claims to the throne. The royal controls weakened as it moved further away from the capital. The maritime power of Srivijaya was no less Mandala-like. Once monopolizing the trade routes of the Malacca Strait, Srivijaya was a powerful trading state claiming authority over much of the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and West Java (Wolters, 1967, 1970). Nevertheless, study shows that there was a lack of 'centralized administration' in Srivijaya (Wicks, 1992). During its reign, Srivijaya had moved its capital several times because successive rulers formed close alliances with different neighbors. The internal instability of early Southeast Asian Kingdoms coincided with intensified inter-state conflicts. In the mainland, Dai Viet battled with Champa in the east; the Khmer Empire was split into Upper Chenla in the north and Lower Chenla in the south, and was ultimately weakened by internal division (Lieberman, 2003; SarDesai, 2010). In the Indonesian archipelago, Srivijaya competed with successive Javanese Kingdoms for almost five centuries, especially during the periods when the latter developed special interests in maritime trade (Wolters, 1967, 1970; Lieberman, 2009).

The early phrase of political development was abruptly interrupted by the Mongol invasion in the 13th century. Within a period of less than four decades, Mongol troops were dispatched to Dai Viet in 1257, 1285 and 1287, to Champa in 1281, to the Burmese-Mon Kingdom of Pagan in 1277 and 1287, and to Java in 1293 (Stuart-Fox, 2003: Ch4). These military expeditions ended only in short-term victories. By the end of the 13th century, Mongol troops were mostly pushed out of Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, the Mongol invasion fatally weakened some powerful early kingdoms, and opened up crucial space for the rise of new states. Adding to the political changes were the growing influence of new religions – Theravada Buddhism and Islam, both of which were set to replace Hinduism in Southeast Asia (Coedes, 1968).

Not surprisingly, the second phrase of political history in Southeast Asia began with a period of widespread turmoil in the 14th century as newly established states struggled for survival and competed for domination on the ruins of old kingdoms (Lieberman, 2003: 28). In the central mainland, Tai kingdoms of Sukhothai, Lan Na, and Ayutthaya started to challenge the

authority of weakened Khmer Empire. Among them, Ayutthaya quickly rose to prominence partly because of the steady revenue from trade（Wyatt, 1984）. In the east mainland, Dai Viet and Champa both survived the Mongol invasion, so did their centuries-old antagonism. The power balance between the two was largely maintained until the Dai Viet's campaign in 1471 decisively defeated Champa. In the west mainland, the newly formed kingdoms of Ava, Pegu, Toungoo, and the Shan states battled against one another on the ruins of Pagan. It was not until the mid-16th century that Toungoo finally conquered the rest and unified the country. In maritime Southeast Asia, Majaphit established a powerful maritime empire. At its peak, the country controlled nearly the whole Indonesian archipelago. As Majaphit went into decline, the Muslim state of Melaka turned itself into the best Southeast Asian trading port in the 15th century.

Most of the newly established states still followed the Mandala model of concentric authority and 'semi-independent tributaries'（Lieberman, 2003: 35）. As powerful states competed for domination through their networks of tributary vassals, small countries strived to survive between powerful neighbors. For instance, the Tai state of Lan Na was a victim of the rivalry between Toungoo and Ayutthaya. It became a vassal of Toungoo after a war broke out between the two sides in 1558. Yet, when the first Toungoo dynasty fell apart in 1599 the Toungoo prince who resided in Lan Na was forced to seek assistance from Ayutthaya. This created a bizarre situation that 'a Burmese prince ruling in Lan Na under Siam's suzerainty', a clear evidence of the anarchic order and intensified power struggles at the time（Wyatt, 1984: 118）. By contrast, Melaka was skillful enough to maneuver between its powerful neighbors. Soon after it was established as a small trading city-state in the early 15th century, Melaka sent tribute to Ayutthaya and accepted its claim. Meanwhile, the Melakan rulers made considerable efforts to pursue close tributary relationship with China to counterbalance the influence of Ayutthaya（SarDesai, 2010: 57）. Between 1405 and 1435 it dispatched 20 tributary missions to the Ming court, and the first three rulers of Melaka all visited China in person（Wang, 1968b）.

As Southeast Asian states continued to consolidate, the Mandala model of political governance went through some notable changes in the 18th century. By this time maritime Southeast Asia had already fallen under the controls

of the Europeans, but mainland Southeast Asia still followed its own political dynamics. In the central mainland, an Ayutthaya general, Taksin, managed to reclaim the country after a devastating Burmese invasion. He declared himself the king of Siam in 1768. The successive campaigns of his troop unified Siam and Lan Na, solving a long-term security problem of the vassal state. In the west mainland, the Toungoo dynasty collapsed in 1752. Its successor, the Konbaung dynasty, pursued a more rigorous state-building policy that brought Arakan, Manipur and Assam and the Shan states under its firm control around the end of 18th and the start of 19th century. In the east mainland, the remnant of Champa and the Mekong Delta were finally incorporated into soon-to-be-unified Vietnam in the mid-18th century. Though the traditional Mandalas still characterized weak Khmer, Malay and Tai states till the 19th century, 'tighter tributary controls' had replaced 'semi-independent tributaries', and became the key feature of consolidated Siam, Burma and Vietnam in mainland Southeast Asia (Lieberman, 2003: 35). Nonetheless, it would be difficult to assess the long-term impacts of consolidated states on the sub-regional conflicts in Southeast Asia. Soon these countries were to face major security challenges from the other side of the Eurasian Continent.

In short, notwithstanding the regional hierarchy formalized by elaborated tributary rituals and lucrative tributary trade, the relationship between China and its tributary states allowed 'considerable informal equality' (Kang, 2010: 54). Behind the China-dominated regional hierarchy, one may identify fairly independent dynamics of international relations at the sub-regional level of Southeast Asia. As a result of the political configuration of the Mandalas, Southeast Asian countries faced more intensified security threats from their sub-regional neighbors than from China. These factors contributed to the distinctive political order in pre-colonial Southeast Asia: formal hierarchy at the regional level and *de facto* anarchy at the sub-regional level, the structural impacts of which are examined in the next section.

Ⅳ. Balance of Power under Hierarchy: the China Factor in Pre-Colonial Southeast Asia

China had always loomed large in the sub-regional affairs of pre-colonial

Southeast Asia because of its prominent status in the regional hierarchy. Nonetheless, the unusual impacts of China were not derived from the military strength it had. Except for the expeditions sent by the Mongols, large-scale military operation by China was rarely seen on the ground of Southeast Asia. Dai Viet was twice invaded by Ming and Qing troops in 1407 and 1788 (Wang, 1998: 316-319; Reid, 1996: 47; Stuart-Fox, 2003: 113); the Konbaung dynasty of Myanmar was attacked by the Qing in the 1760s (Dai, 2004). Apart from the Mongol invasions, these were all the major military campaigns that China had ever launched against Southeast Asia between the 8th and 19th century (Shu, 2012). Notably, none of them ended in the long-term victory of China.

Compared with China's lack of military ambitions, Southeast Asian countries were keen to be involved in the China-dominated regional hierarchy. Most paid tributes to China; some rulers even presented the tributes in person. It was not a small deal if one considers the transportation conditions of pre-modern East Asia. Some indeed died on their way to China. This was the case when the King of Brunei took his family to pay homage to the Ming court in 1408 (Reid, 1996: 23-24).[9] Then, what had made China so important to Southeast Asia ? In general, Southeast Asian countries were keen to seek the imperial influences of China under three specific conditions. First, when a dynastic change or royal succession took place, these countries usually sought China's approval of the new ruler. Second, during the periods when private trade was banned, Southeast Asian trading states tried to establish close tributary trade relations with China. Third, when these countries were in conflict with neighboring states, they were inclined to invite China to arbitrate, and sometimes intervene, in their disputes.

Discussed in the last section, Southeast Asian countries faced the harsh reality of sub-regional anarchy in the pre-colonial era. Individual states constantly struggled for survival and domination. Royal succession, trade competition and inter-state conflicts were the crucial circumstances under which the fate of a country could be fundamentally redefined. Turning to a powerful 'outsider' for assistance and assurance was not inconceivable even if it required ceremonial subordination to the imperial court. As Reid (2003: 234) points out, 'all Southeast Asian states recognized that China was larger

and stronger than themselves, and ... all were content to have letters of homage written in Chinese in their name.' The political influences that China had on Southeast Asia were very likely an outcome of the balancing strategies that Southeast Asian countries adopted in response to the complex political structure of sub-regional anarchy and regional hierarchy in the pre-colonial era.

1. Balancing Strategy I: Seeking Imperial Recognition

Royal succession and dynastic change were probably the most sensitive political issue in pre-colonial East Asia. Legitimate succession enhanced the authority of the newly installed ruler *vis*-à-*vis* his/her subjects. It also allowed the ruler to resume the responsibilities and privileges of his/her predecessor. By contrast, illegitimate succession weakened the new ruler's authority. If the self-claimed succession turned out to be a disguise of usurpation or even dynastic change, not only were the country's foreign relations subject to re-definition, but also the norm of legitimate succession was left in limbo. Hence, both the new ruler and neighboring countries had strong interests in legitimizing the succession process.

In pre-colonial Southeast Asia, succession issues were complicated by the anarchy-within-hierarchy structure of international relations. At the sub-regional level, the Mandala-style polities were prone to the problem of illegitimate succession. The concentric circle of power structure often created a situation that several royal members or local rulers simultaneously claimed to the throne (Stuart-Fox, 2003: 28). The existence of antagonist neighboring states further exacerbated the problem. Meanwhile, China had adopted a set of very strict rules of legitimate succession, reflecting the deep influences of Confucian tradition. Legitimate succession was so important to China that it was willing to use force to punish the usurpers (see Shu, 2012). Because of this, China's recognition of the new regime could bring substantial legitimacy to the rulers in Southeast Asia.

When Taksin, a provincial governor of Ayutthaya, reclaimed his country from the devastating invasion of Burma, he declared himself the King of Siam in 1768. Immediately he sent his envoys to China for recognition. The Qing court replied that the new ruler should first try to find and install the

descendants of the older ruling house. Indeed, there was evidence that two Ayutthaya princes had fled the Burmese invasion and stayed in a settlement of Chinese emigrants on the western edge of the Mekong Delta. The settlement was stormed and conquered by Taksin forces in 1771. During the process, the Qing authorities had sent at least three missions to investigate the matter. When it was concluded that no Ayutthaya descendant could be found, China recognized Taksin as 'lord of the country' (Wills, 2001). Only after he decisively defeated the Burmese and built an even stronger country than Ayutthaya, was Taskin eventually recognized by the Qing court as 'King of Siam' in 1781 (Stuart-Fox, 2003: 114).

Another complication occurred one year later when Taksin was disposed and imprisoned by his own general for alleged mental problems. The general, once an adopted son of Taksin's family, claimed himself the legitimate successor to the throne. In his letter to the Qing court, he used the same Chinese surname as Taksin's to report the 'death' of his father. The letter stated, Taksin on his deathbed 'exhorted me to rule with care, not to change the old order, to have care for our own sovereign land and to honor the Heavenly Dynasty' (cf. Wills, 2001). The new King called himself Rama I, and started the Chakkri dynasty which remains the ruling royal family of Thailand today. The dynasty continued to use Taksin's surname in its correspondence with China until the tribute system came to an end in the mid-19th century.

The recognition by China was of particular importance to small Southeast Asian states. An illegitimate small country was vulnerable to the intervention of neighboring powers. It might even be used as an excuse for the country's inclusion in an expanding Mandala. Because of such risk, China's recognition was considered as a vital counterbalance to aggressive neighbors. The grand expeditions of Zheng He between 1405 and 1433 strengthened such a view (Wang, 1998: 320-321). On his fourth voyage, Zheng He sent his forces to restore a rightful ruler of Samudra, a small state on the northeast coast of Sumatra. The usurper was defeated and humiliated. He was then taken as a prisoner to China, together with his wife and child (Stuart-Fox, 2003: 88). On some other occasions, the submission of small Southeast Asian countries to China provoked their powerful neighbors. In 1377 the son of a recently

died ruler of Jambi, then a vassal of the Majapahit Empire in central Sumatra, sought China's recognition because he 'had not dared to succeed his father without imperial permission' (Wolters, 1970: 62). The powerful Javanese empire was so angry with the contact, that they diverted the Chinese envoys, who were due to grant Jambi investiture, to Java and killed them there in 1378 (Wolters, 1999: 132).

2. Balancing Strategy II: Securing Tributary Trade

To benefit from the highly profitable tributary trade was another major reason why many Southeast Asian countries paid tributes to China. Particularly during the periods when private trade was banned, the only way to get access to the products and the market of China was tributary trade. As Reid (1993: 235) notes, '[i]f Chinese emperors tolerated international trade only as an aspect of diplomacy, with Southeast Asian rulers it was inclined to be the other way around.' However, trade diplomacy was only half of the story. In pre-colonial Southeast Asia, the steady inflow of trade revenues not just brought the tributary states wealth but provided them with the crucial means to compete in an anarchic world.

Along the pre-colonial Southeast Asian trade routes, three areas had been able to thrive repeatedly on their trade with China. One of these was located in southern Vietnam. Until it was integrated into unified Vietnam in the early 19th century, the area witnessed the rise and fall of Champa as well as the southern Vietnamese regimes known as Cochin-China. To the north, Champa was locked in the power struggle with Dai Viet for nearly five centuries. To the west, the country faced threat from the Khmer empire. Throughout its history, Champa had kept close tributary relations with China. Trade was undoubtedly an important factor behind this relationship. For example, between 960 and 1087 Champa sent 44 official trade missions to the Song court whereas Dai Viet only dispatched four such missions during the same period (Wade, 2009: 227). Trade with China was so extensive that Song cashes became an integral part of Cham economy around the 11th and 12th century. In the end, however, trade was not enough to help the country survive the attack of Dai Viet in the 15th century. Yet, the significance of trade further grew in the next one hundred years. Cochin-China became the base of southern Vietnamese regimes around

the second half of the 16th century. The continued importance of traditional trade routes allowed these regimes to collect a substantial amount of taxes from the shipping trade（Reid, 1993: 211）. Between 1627 and 1672 seven wars were fought between the north and the south. All ended with Cochin-China's victory over the numerically much larger armies of the north. In the 18th century trade revenues reached about one-third of the royal income（Li, 1998）. The inflow of trade revenues aided the Nguyen regime's military campaigns against the north in the 1780s and 1790s, and probably contributed to the final unification of Vietnam in 1802（Lieberman, 2003: 48）.

The southern coast of Thailand was another area that had traditionally benefited from trade with China. In the aftermath of destructive Mongol invasions, three Tai kingdoms – Ayutthaya, Sukhothai and Lan Na – established themselves on the west edge of the weakened Khmer Empire. When it was founded in 1350, Ayutthaya was only a small kingdom along the southern coast. The country was recognized as a trading state by China in 1370. In response, Ayutthaya dispatched 61 missions to the Ming court in the following six decades, more frequently than any other country in Southeast Asia（Reid, 1996: 22-23）. Private trade was banned in China during this period. The close tributary relations made Ayutthaya and its port an integral part of the Southeast Asian trade routes. Trade revenues quickly became a major source of loyal income（Stuart-Fox, 2003: 93）. Soon the country expanded to the Malay Peninsula in the south, and made Sukhothai its vassal in the north by 1412. Even after Ayutthaya was destroyed by the invasion of Konbaung Burma, the newly established Kingdom of Siam continued to rely on the China connection to prosper（Lieberman, 2003: 48）. Regular tributes were sent to Beijing between 1781 and 1853（Fairbank and Teng, 1941: 195-197）. With the help of substantial trade revenues, Siam's skillful rulers managed to turn the country into the most powerful Tai Kingdom in history. Economically, Bangkok probably replaced the Dutch base of Batavia to be the leading port of Southeast Asia at the end of 18th century; politically, Siam managed to extend its authority to the Laos to the north and to Kedah and Terengganu to the south in the same period（Reid, 1996: 47）.

The third such area, the Malacca Strait, had long been the center of

Southeast Asian trade routes. The rise of Srivijaya in the 7th century coincided with the growing importance of maritime Silk Road. Located on the northern coast of Sumatra, Srivijaya was a powerful trading state able to attract a large number of ships to its ports. The country's influence did not rely on territorial occupation, but on its control over strategic ports on the main trade routes. In order to secure the lucrative trade with China, Srivijaya started to send tributary missions to China as early as in the late 7th century. With the exception of the 9th century, tributary missions continued into the 13th century (Lieberman, 2009: 778; Wolters, 1967, 1970). The close relations with China considerably strengthened Srivijaya's position among its peers. Especially when private trade was banned prior to the Song dynasty, its ports offered the only way to trade with China. When Srivijaya lost its prominence around the end of the 13th century, Melaka rose quickly on the southern coast of Malay Peninsula. Initially a small port city, Melaka adopted a very similar strategy to seek close tributary relations with China. Not only were regular tributes submitted, the rulers of Melaka five times went to China to pay their homage (Wang, 1968b, Reid, 1993: 206). In 1405 the country received the first inscription that the Ming Yong-le emperor ever addressed to the foreign rulers, an extraordinary honor in the eyes of neighboring states (Stuart-Fox, 2003: 91). When Zheng He's grand fleets sailed across Southeast Asia in the early 15th century, they visited Melaka no less than ten times (Lieberman, 2009: 804). These exchanges significantly enhanced the reputation of Melaka as a China-favored trading port. It did not take long for Melaka to become the major trading center, where Southeast Asian goods gathered for sell in China and Chinese goods gathered for sell in Southeast Asia and beyond.

3. Balancing Strategy III: Inviting External Arbitration and Protection

Amid sub-regional anarchy, the China factor was carefully reckoned with by Southeast Asian countries. When it became necessary and urgent, some were willing to invite China to arbitrate in their disputes with other countries, and to protect themselves from the aggression of powerful neighbors (Wolters, 2008: 69; Stuart-Fox, 2003). On some occasions China's mighty presence in the regional hierarchy was enough to restore the sub-regional balance; on other occasions China had to issue explicit warnings to make certain countries comply with its opinions; on still other occasions the request for assistance

was carefully turned downed or quietly ignored. Though not always effective, China had played a non-negligible part in the sub-regional power balance of Southeast Asia.

Mentioned earlier, the powerful trading state of Srivijaya had long benefited from the monopoly over maritime trade that it secured through close tributary relations with China. This monopoly, however, came to a steady decline after the 10th century because the Song Dynasty (960-1279) gradually abolished the official ban on private trade (Shiba, 1984; Heng, 2009: 41). Contrary to the expectation that Srivijaya would reduce its tributary missions to China, it actually sent more. The reason, as Wolters (2008: 68-69) argues, lied in the non-commercial interests of these missions. Srivijaya was under heavy attacks by the Javanese and Tamil armies between 992 and 1025. The support from China was particularly important during this period. Indeed, Sirvijiyan missions to the Song court 'were never so numerous as during and after this troubled period' (68). Although the lack of historical records made it difficult to ascertain the actual exchanges between the two countries during these tributary missions, the maritime order in Southeast Asia was duly restored. Srivijaya not only survived the attacks but prospered well into the 13th century.

The China factor was also important for another maritime trading state: Melaka. In its rise to prominence in the first half of the 15th century, Melaka had to deal with the rapidly growing influence of Ayutthaya to the north and the declining but still powerful Javanese Empire of Majaphit to the south. Soon after its establishment, the city-state paid homage to both Ayutthaya and Majaphit in an attempt to win their support (Lieberman, 2009: 804). Nevertheless, it was not the final solution for the Melakan ruler. When the Ming envoy visited the country in 1403, Melaka asked for full protection from China. In response, the Ming emperor Yong-le ordered the enfeoffment of its western hill and personally wrote an inscription for the occasion. The intention was to ensure Melaka that full protection would be provided as if the country were 'a tribute-paying province of China' (Wang, 1968: 56). Ayutthaya, itself a loyal tributary of China, was not happy. It even tried to confiscate the imperial seal that the Ming court had granted to Melaka. When Zheng He's voyages visited Ayutthaya in 1407 and 1419, stark warnings were delivered –

demanding Ayutthaya not to infringe the rights of Melaka (Stuart-Fox, 2003: 91-92).

In mainland Southeast Asia, countries like Champa, Lan Xang, and Lan Na had all referred to China for assistance. In particular, Champa was keen to have China arbitrating in its conflict with Dai Viet. Dai Viet won independence from China in the 10th century (Taylor, 1983). Soon after, the Song court was requested by Champa to provide arbitration in its conflict with Dai Viet (Stuart-Fox, 2003: 50). Instead of favoring one side over the other, China had been careful not to disturb the power balance between the two countries. When the conflict broke out again in the 1370s, the Ming court five times appealed to the two sides to stop fighting (Wang, 1998: 309). Nevertheless, such appeals did not stop Champa from being fatally defeated by Dai Viet in 1471.[10]

In 1479 Dai Viet launched the attack against another neighboring country – the Laotian Kingdom of Lan Xang, capturing its capital and killing its ruler. The Laotian envoys applied to China for assistance (Stuart-Fox, 2003: 92). China responded with a strong worded warning against Dai Viet, demanding its withdrawal from Lan Xang. Similar warning was also sent to nearby tributary vassals against any assistance to Dai Viet. However, the Laotian request for Chinese forces was turned down. It was the Tai Kingdom of Lan Na that eventually offered military support to Lan Xang. Together, they drove Dai Viet out of the country. The Ming court promptly rewarded Lan Na for its action (Wang, 1998: 329). The sub-regional order was restored without the direct intervention of China. Indeed, on some occasions China was unable to offer meaningful assistance and the request for protection was quietly ignored. This was the case when Melaka requested imperial protection against the Portuguese in 1511, and when the Burmese asked for assistance to save their Toungoo dynasty in 1750 (Stuart-Fox, 2003: 101, 107). Yet, these unanswered requests show that amid intensified security threats from both within and without, there was 'a tendency among Southeast Asian rulers to appeal to China for help against enemies' (Wolter, 2008: 69).

Ⅴ. Conclusion

This article has examined the structural characteristics of international relations in pre-colonial Southeast Asia and the special roles that China had played at the sub-regional level. In pre-colonial Southeast Asia, most countries were willing to submit to the hierarchical order in East Asia by taking part in the China-centered tribute system. At the same time, these countries were involved in the fierce competition for survival and domination at the sub-regional level. Taken together, international relations in pre-colonial Southeast Asia featured a complex political structure: regional hierarchy coexisting with sub-regional anarchy.

The anarchy-within-hierarchy structure, the article argues, had generated considerable impacts on the inter-state relations of Southeast Asia. While there was no clear sign of systemic balancing against China at the regional level, Southeast Asian countries carefully checked and maintained their power balance at the sub-regional level. In this structural context, the supremacy of China allowed it to play a crucial part in the sub-regional power balance. More specifically, there were three essential mechanisms through which the China factor became important in the international relations of Southeast Asia. First, the imperial recognition by China enhanced the legitimacy of individual Southeast Asian countries in a hierarchical regional order. Second, the tributary trade with China met the commercial interests of Southeast Asian trading states, and allowed these countries to consolidate their power amid intensified sub-regional competition. Third, China's arbitration and protection were often sought by Southeast Asian states to defend themselves against the threat of neighboring powers. Notably, all these took place even during the periods when China was not actively seeking a dominant role in Southeast Asia.

Theoretically, the article has challenged the widely held structural realist view that international relations are either characterized by the balance of power in an anarchic system or dominated by a single superpower in a hierarchical system（Waltz, 1979; Walt, 1987; Clark, 1989; Lake, 2009）. It argues that a complex structure of *hierarchy-anarchy coexistence* is empirically viable and theoretically important. If the Cold War resembled a 'hierarchy under anarchy'

order (Wendt and Friedheim, 1995), pre-colonial Southeast Asia under the China-centered tribute system had been an 'anarchy within hierarchy' system. The article has made an attempt to juxtapose the theories of balance-of-power and hierarchical relations to account for the complicated dynamics of international relations in pre-colonial Southeast Asia. Throughout the pre-colonial era Southeast Asian countries engaged in the fierce competition for state survival and sub-regional domination. Most of them also sent regular tributary missions to China. The simultaneous balancing and bandwagoning was a clear sign of hierarchy-anarchy coexistence at the time. Meanwhile, though China had long been a 'detached' superpower in pre-colonial Southeast Asia, its impact on the sub-regional power balance was substantial and profound. A structuralist model of anarchy-with-hierarchy makes it possible to trace the distinctive roles that China had played at the sub-regional level.

A better understanding of China's roles in pre-colonial Southeast Asia also sheds light on the current debate about the future of East Asia. As China rose quickly in economic and political terms in the past decades, the future of East Asia has been increasingly considered as a choice between balancing against the growing Chinese influences and bandwagoning with the rise of China (Friedberg, 1993; Kang, 2003a, Acharya, 2004). The history of Southeast Asia's engagement with China indicates that neither balancing nor bandwagoning is sufficient to guide the future of East Asia. Like pre-colonial Southeast Asia, international relations in East Asia after the Cold War have been characterized by simultaneous sub-system-level (regional) anarchy and system-level (global) hierarchy. Despite its rapid rise, China has not yet been able to play a dominant role in East Asia. The norms of respecting sovereignty and non-interference, to which China and ASEAN countries adamantly subscribes, provide few normative bases to re-build a regional hierarchy. Instead, inter-state relations in East Asia have shown many signs of regional anarchy such as the balance of influences between China and Japan, the competition for export between Japan and South Korea, and the institutional balancing dynamics centered on ASEAN (He, 2009). The hierarchical relations in East Asia, if any, almost always point to the US – the only global superpower in the post-Cold War era. Like China in the pre-colonial era, the US has dominated the region not only in cultural, economic and political terms, but also through

its unmatched military capacity. The supremacy of the US has been far beyond the widely recognized dollar hegemony in East Asia. Just as pre-colonial Southeast Asia paid tributes to imperial China, East Asian countries, China included, all prefer to maintain a cordial relationship with the US. Under this anarchy-within-hierarchy structure, it is perhaps not surprising that (i) the recognition by the US, in the form of normalized diplomatic relations, has been eagerly sought even by North Korea and Myanmar; (ii) the access to the US market has shaped the commercial interests and economic competition of East Asian trading states; (iii) East Asian countries have not been shy of seeking the US arbitration and protection in their inter-state disputes. As it is often said, 'history never repeats itself but it rhymes'. If the experiences of pre-colonial Southeast Asia are of some guide to the future, it probably points to the structural impacts of the intricate link between the US unipolarity and the complex balancing dynamics in today's East Asia.

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[1] This is the first of the two related articles that explore the pre-colonial relations between Southeast Asia and China. This article focuses on the strategic reactions of pre-colonial Southeast Asia to the China-dominated regional hierarchy, and the other article (Shu, 2012) examines China's hegemonic impacts on the sub-regional stability of Southeast Asia. The author wishes to thank Paul Bacon, Hiro Katsumata, Haolan Zheng, and the anonymous reviewer's helpful suggestions and comments.

[2] According to Wohlforth et al. (2007: 160), hierarchical relations may vary 'from various stages of system hegemony and suzerainty to rare instances of universal empire'.

[3] Lake's (2007) empirical analysis shows that subordinate states spend significantly less on their own defense than non-subordinate states in a US-dominated security hierarchy between 1950 and 2000.

[4] For example, Japan formed an alliance with Germany to balance against the US prior to the Pacific War under an anarchic structure of world politics. By contrast, during the Cold War as the West formed an initially ideological and late political and economic hierarchy, Japan became a subordinate state under the dominance of the US. Apparently, neither cases can be used to disconfirm the theories of balance-of-power or hierarchical relations.

[5] For instance, China was divided between the Jin Dynasty and the Southern Song Dynasty for nearly one and a half centuries (1127-1279). During this period, the Korean kingdom of Koryo paid tributes to both royal courts. Meanwhile, the weakened Sothern Song lost almost all the tributary contact with Southeast Asia (Wang, 1968a: 47).

[6] *Kowtow* refers to the gesture of deep respect that one kneels and bows so low that his/her head touches the ground. This tributary ritual met a famous refusal in 1793. On

that occasion Lord Macartney was sent by the British government to demand trade concessions from China. He refused to perform *kowtow* in front of the Qian-long emperor in the belief that such behavior would indicate that Britain was inferior to China.

[7] China also sent its own tributary mission to other countries when it was weak (see Rossabi, 1983). A notable example is the Southern Song court that paid regular tributes to the Jin.

[8] It should be noted that the tribute system operated under the Yuan dynasty followed a very different pattern. The Mongols requested the tributary rulers to (1) seek imperial audience personally, (2) send their sons as hostages, (3) conduct a census of their population, (4) provide military covée, (5) pay tax, and (6) allow a Mongol governor to be in charge (Wang, 1968a: 48). Such a sharp departure from the traditional Chinese understandings of its tributary authority had never been repeated in the late history of imperial China.

[9] China has stipulated detailed rules on how to bury and honor a foreign envoy died on the tributary mission (Fairbank, 1942: 133-134). The Bruneian King was eventually buried in China. His lavish tomb is still located in Nanjing today.

[10] China did not intervene in the conflict between Dai Viet and Champa in 1471. The reason probably lies in the fact that China's occupation of Dai Viet between 1407 and 1427 ended in a humiliating withdrawal. Dai Viet seemed to believe that the Ming court would not attempt another invasion to punish its campaign against Champa (Wang, 1998: 327).

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