

**To Be Or Not To Be A Hegemon: The Relationship Between Political Culture
And Hegemony**

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Abstract

The central tenet of structural realism says the competitive structure of the international system forces countries to challenge each other for hegemony. This narrow view of international relations fails to take into account the effect that domestic determinants have on aspirations for hegemony. To address this gap in structural realist theory, my study looks at a country's political culture and its relationship with aspirations for hegemony. Ultimately, I find that while both structural realism and a political cultural approach provide useful insights, both also fail to fully explain why Japan, the United States, and China would seek hegemony.

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When the Soviet Union fell in the early 1990s, many considered the United States to be the sole surviving superpower. Its economy, although in decline relative to its peers, still accounted for around a quarter of all economic activity throughout the world. Politically, American initiatives and organizations dominated the international scene. Militarily, the Americans were unmatched in their ability to project their power to any corner of the globe. Some hailed this period as the end of history, foreseeing a world inhabited by peace-loving, democratic nations.¹ Yet, only twenty years later, this vision of an inexorable march towards liberalism has ground to a halt as new competitors have arisen to challenge the hegemony of the United States.

The primary challenger to U.S. hegemony today is China.² China, the oldest surviving civilization on Earth, has long sought to its old power. Since seafaring ‘barbarians’ brought the Qing dynasty to its knees in the 1840s, China has suffered a variety of maladies that have constrained this once great empire. Foreign domination and imperialism in the late 1800s and the early 1900s left China divided and weak. Japanese aggression cost China Taiwan in 1895, and countless lives in the Pacific War of the 1930s and 40s. Following independence, the Chinese Communist Party enacted a series of disastrous reforms that culminated in the Cultural Revolution. Agricultural production fell, schools were shut down, and only retention of military control at the top kept the country from falling into civil war.

Since the 1980s, however, China has developed rapidly. Economic reforms implemented by Deng Xiaoping have resulted in one of the largest and longest economic expansions in

¹ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *National Interest* 16 (1989): 3-18.

² Christopher Layne, “The Waning of U.S. Hegemony – Myth or Reality?: A Review Essay,” *International Security* 34, no. 1 (2009): 151-153.

history.³ Double digit GDP growth has propelled poor peasants out of poverty and into prosperity. With this increasing growth, however, China has also been seen by many as a growing threat to U.S. hegemony. Economic growth is the primary determinant for a state's power, and since China is expected to pass the U.S. in terms of GDP sometime this century, American policymakers are concerned about how China will utilize its enormous potential. Yet, despite all these fears, is there really any basis for concern amongst Americans that China will try to usurp American hegemony? What assumptions do these fears rely upon? To answer these and other questions, it is useful to look at Japan's historical experience.

Japan is an example of a country that at one time wanted to be a superpower but has since then moved past these aspirations for hegemony. In the past, Japan (like China) was intent on standing up to the Western powers. After the Meiji Revolution, the country embarked on an ambitious modernization campaign. Political and economic reorganization led to increased growth and a powerful military. Japan won its first modern war in 1895 against China, and ten years later was the first Asian power to defeat a Western country (Russia) in 1905. Spurred on by their victories, the Japanese began a costly, protracted war in the Pacific to expand its territory. However, the Japanese made a fateful error by involving the United States, which ultimately led to the defeat and occupation of Japan after the war was over.

Humiliated and broken, Japan underwent an extensive transformation of its economy and society under the ensuing American occupation. Today, Japan has a vibrant economy that is the third largest in the world behind the United States and China.⁴ Politically, Japan has utilized various regional and global organizations to make sure its agenda is heard in the international

³ Alvin Y. So, "Rethinking the Chinese Developmental Miracle," in *China's Developmental Miracle*, ed. Alvin Y. So (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2003): 3-6.

⁴ Rankings taken from CIA World Factbook.

arena, while Japanese cultural industries have enhanced Japan's appeal abroad.⁵ It is important to note, however, that despite these vast increases in economic strength and political power after World War II, Japan has not sought hegemony of any kind. U.S. fears in the late 1980s and early 1990s that Japan would try to reestablish itself as a regional power proved to be unfounded.⁶ Today, Japan recognizes the U.S.' superiority (US troops are still allowed to be stationed on Japanese territory) and has not sought to undermine the U.S.' strategic position.

Why Japan did not try to seek hegemony again and why China seeks hegemony now are both important questions that revolve around the more general question of why do states seek, or don't seek, hegemony? This question is one of the major questions in international relations today. Before tackling this important question, however, I believe that it would be prudent to discuss what the concept of hegemony means in international relations. By understanding its relational, multi-faceted nature one can better understand how states go about attaining hegemony, or in essence, seek hegemony.

Hegemony is first and foremost an abstract, relational state of being that describes one state's influence, dominance, etc. over another state or group of states. A hegemon can thus be described as having system-changing capabilities in terms of molding the structure of the international system. Traditionally, this influence or dominance has been seen as determined by the amount of preponderant military power a state possesses. The logic goes that the state that has a significantly more powerful military than other states, then ultimately that state will have preponderant influence over those other states. Kenneth Waltz, when talking about the use of military power, defines the "use of power" as "to apply one's capabilities in an attempt to change

⁵ Nissim Kadosh Otmazgin, "Contesting soft power: Japanese popular culture in East and Southeast Asia," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 8, no. 1 (2008): 73-75.

⁶ Koji Taira, "Japan, an Imminent Hegemon?" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 513 (January 1991): 151-163.

someone else's behavior in certain ways.”⁷ Yet other scholars, like Joseph Nye, reject this notion that “hard power” or military capabilities is the single most important factor in determining a country's hegemony. For Nye, he believes that the attractiveness of the hegemon's culture, ideologies, and institutions can co-opt other countries to “want what it [the hegemon] wants.”⁸ Keohane utilizes a similar logic when he writes about hegemony as a tacit agreement between the hegemon and the other great powers in which the hegemon provides leadership to the international community in exchange for acceptance of its ideology.⁹ By leading instead of dominating, the state is also able to maintain its hegemony in a more long-lasting way.

Whether a hegemon leads or dominates is also another key component of hegemony that is primarily addressed by hegemonic stability theory. This theory, as described by Byoung Won Min, is used to classify superpowers as either benevolent or coercive. Benevolent hegemons establish an international system that provides a variety of public goods (like free markets) at little to no cost to others in a system of mutual-gain. Coercive hegemons, on the other hand, provide these same goods but only out of personal self interest.¹⁰ Fundamentally, the difference lies within how one perceives the nature of the hegemon, as both views see hegemons as providing the same basket of goods. This difference is important because ultimately countries should not feel the need to rise against a benevolent hegemon, while countries would balance and challenge a country that acts like a coercive hegemon. What is also important is whether a country with the capabilities to maintain hegemony chooses to use these capabilities. Citing

⁷ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1979): 191.

⁸ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Soft Power,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (1990): 166.

⁹ Howard H. Lentner, “Hegemony and Autonomy,” *Political Studies* 53, no. 4 (December 2005): 735-752.

¹⁰ Byoung Won Min, “Understanding International Hegemony: A Complex Systems Approach,” *Journal of International and Area Studies* 10 (2003): 21-40.

work done by Giovanni Arrighi, Min writes “more emphasis” needs to be placed “on the dimension of the ‘role’ rather than that of ‘capabilities’ in defining hegemony.”¹¹

Providing this background on what hegemony means is useful for this study in two ways. For one, describing what a hegemon is and what it does gives this study a way to evaluate whether a country is a hegemon. If a state maintains a much larger military than its peers, exercise aspects of ‘soft power,’ and has the will to act as a hegemon then that country is a hegemon. This does not mean that one can not definitely say how much military strength, cultural diffusion, or will power constitutes a state having hegemony. However, most international scholars agree that the United States is the only state in today’s world that at least partially fulfills these qualifications, although for how long the U.S. will continue to do so is open to some debate.¹²

The other reason why looking at the components that make up hegemony is useful to this study is because it provides some hints as to why a state would want to seek hegemony. In line with hegemonic stability theory, if the reigning hegemon was “coercive” as the theory describes, then other states would want to challenge that country’s hegemony. Ostensibly one of those challengers could want to gain hegemony for itself. This idea of the coercive hegemon is actually part of the basis for what structural realists believe is the reason why states seek hegemony.

¹¹ Min, 30.

¹² Jason W. Davidson and Roberto Menotti, “American Primacy by Default: Down But Not Out,” *The International Spectator* 44, no. 1 (March 2009): 13-21; Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Robert Singh, “The Exceptional Empire: Why the United States Will Not Decline – Again,” *International Politics* 45, no. 5 (September 2008): 571-593.

Structural realism is, at the most basic level, “a theory about the way in which the systemic pressures expressed through the balance of power constrain the behavior of states.”¹³

What that means for this study is that structural realism contends that it is the competitive nature of the international system that forces states to vie for hegemony against one another. The focus is usually on great powers living in an anarchic system that are unsure of other great powers’ motives. Each great power usually has some offensive military capabilities, is seen as a rational actor, and is primarily concerned with its survival. To ensure its survival, states have to make sure that they have enough power to combat the power of other states. But how much power is enough?

This is the central question that has divided the structural realist school into two strains: defensive realism and offensive realism. Defensive realism, propagated by Waltz, contends that states should not try to seek hegemony because of the exorbitant costs involved in such a process and the backlash that would result from the international system.¹⁴ The suggestion is to not make the mistake of Germany pre-WWI or Japan in WWII and to try to take too much, but to consolidate one’s power. Offensive realists see the situation differently and believe that the only way to ensure one’s security is to hold the preponderant amount of power in the system. To have the most power means that a state can ensure its survival.¹⁵ However, states do not always find themselves in threatening situations and there are other interests that states have that drive states’ foreign policies. This is acknowledged by Christopher Layne when he writes that structural

¹³ Georg Sorenson, “‘Big and Important Things’ in IR: Structural Realism and the Neglect of Changes in Statehood,” *International Relations* 23, no. 2 (June 2009): 224.

¹⁴ Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith, *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 72.

¹⁵ Dunne, 72.

realism “cannot purport to predict the foreign policies of specific states,” but instead can account for the “outcomes and patterns of behavior that happen recurrently in international politics.”¹⁶

These “patterns of behavior” are determined by the composition of the international structure that states find themselves in. Thus states are going to act differently whether they exist in a unipolar (one great power), bipolar (two great powers) or multipolar world (more than two great powers). Ostensibly to ensure the state’s survival, a state seeking hegemony actually presents the greatest threat to the country’s security – the potential for war. History has been riddled, even narrated by, the great power wars that have occurred when a rising power challenged a dominant power’s hegemony.¹⁷

States are obviously aware of this history and aware of the risks involved. Even if a state accurately assesses that it has a greater power potential than the dominant power, and thus in time should eventually be able to usurp the dominant power’s role as hegemon, there will still be a point in time when both states will have a parity in power. Organski and Kuegler note in their book, *The War Ledger* that, “an even distribution of political, economic, and military capabilities between contending groups of nations is likely to increase the probability of war.”¹⁸ Arguably this constitutes the greatest potential for conflict since neither state has a discernible lead.¹⁹ What this means is that contending states, despite the *increased* risk of war and the challenges to security, will *still* seek hegemony.

¹⁶ Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise”

¹⁷ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).

¹⁸ A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980): 19.

¹⁹ This is the general thesis of power transition theory originally put forth by A. F. K. Organski in his book, *World Politics*, published in 1958. A good discussion of this theory can be found in: Jacek Kugler and Douglas Lemke, *Parity and War: Evaluations and Extensions of The War Ledger* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

While there are enormous benefits to being the hegemon, it is not easy to say whether these benefits could necessarily outweigh the costs of “hegemonic war.”²⁰ Japan and Germany during World War II sought hegemony and paid dearly for their efforts. Granted due to benign U.S. policies they were allowed to develop under the U.S. security umbrella and have become economic giants since. However this only occurred after their implicit acknowledgement of U.S. superiority, allowing U.S. troops to be stationed on their soil, and to forgo large, offensive military capabilities. The Cold War saw two powers of relative parity in a stalemate competition to gain superiority over the other. In fact both powers were willing to acquire large nuclear arsenals that if ever actually deployed, would ensure the destruction of the planet several times over. Yet neither country decided to back down from the competition. Obviously there are a plethora of reasons why a state would risk going to war, but in terms of a state seeking hegemony, ensuring state survival and security are not paramount among them.

If security is not the reason why states seek hegemony then what is? One possible way to explore this question is to look at a country’s political culture. Political culture provides the framework from which a society can interpret international events and formulate ways to respond to those events. Certainly if a state decides to seek hegemony as a way to deal with the international system, then the political culture of that country could be worth exploring. For this particular study, I will be looking at Japan, the United States, and China to see how their political cultures influenced their decisions to seek, or not seek, hegemony. While not ignoring the central tenet of structural realism (that the international system forces states to seek hegemony),

²⁰ Robert Gilpin, “The Theory of Hegemonic War,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988): 591-613. Gilpin sees hegemonic war as different from other kinds of war because hegemonic war is caused by broad changes in the international system. These changes are a result of changing “power differentials,” which is the relative power of one country compared to another. Once this differential is diminished by changes in trade, changes in the international structure, etc., then hegemonic war is most likely to occur, thereby upending the international order and establishing a new hegemon.

my study will seek to refute some aspects while expanding on others of this theory to provide a more comprehensive view on why states ultimately make the decision to seek hegemony. I will begin by teasing out the different aspects of political culture as other scholars understand it as well as provide a preliminary analysis of each country's political culture. I will then expand on this analysis in more detail for each country, followed by a structural realist critique of the countries, followed by a counter-critique by other scholars as well as myself.

Brief Literature Review and Methodology

Political culture has been defined by a variety of international relations scholars over the years. Originally the term was used to describe traits, ideas, beliefs within a society that made that society suitable for a particular form of government. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba were some of the first scholars to explore this relationship in their seminal work entitled, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*.²¹ In this book they define political culture as the “political orientations – attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system.”²² The authors keenly studied the individual to ascertain the “cognitions, feelings, and evaluations” that constitute “the political culture of a society.”²³ This work was along similar lines to other work of its time, which was primarily concerned with the difficulties in nation-building.²⁴ Lucian Pye was another major scholar in this field that focused a lot of attention on political culture and political development. Pye defined political culture as “the set of attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments’ that

²¹ Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, 1963).

²² Almond and Verba, 12.

²³ Ibid., 13.

²⁴ Lucian W. Pye, “Political Culture Revisited,” *Political Psychology* 12, no. 3 (September 1991): 496-497.

inform ‘the political process and underlying assumptions.’”²⁵ Rima Berns-McGown altered this definition even further by stipulating that political culture, since it is shared by a particular group of people that it is, in itself, a “shared value.”²⁶ For this particular study, Pye’s definition of political culture suffices in allowing exploration of different factors that affect U.S., Chinese, and Japanese foreign policy.

Using political culture in political science has not been without its critics, however. Acknowledged by Sidney Verba that political culture has “often treated as the explanation of last resort,” scholars utilizing this particular concept find it difficult to define, operationalize, and measure culture.²⁷ Other criticisms of political culture include the lack of hard facts to back up conclusions and that using the term ‘culture’ masks the differences of opinion that can be found within a particular society.²⁸ That being said, some scholars, like John Duffield, have been able to identify three main ways that political culture influences state behavior. The first is that culture helps to define the goals for society. Culture determines what values the society has and thus helps determine what the society wants to achieve. Second, culture shapes perceptions of events in international relations by influencing which events are noticed or overlooked. And third, culture limits the range of possible actions to what is “acceptable, appropriate, or legitimate.”²⁹ Political culture then can be seen as the basic framework by which a society within a state understands, processes, and responds to events in the external international environment.

²⁵ Lucian W. Pye, *Aspects of Political Development* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1966) in Rima Berns-McGowan, “Political Culture, Not Values,” *International Journal* 60 (2005): 342.

²⁶ Rima Berns-McGowan, “Political Culture, Not Values,” *International Journal* 60 (2005): 343.

²⁷ Pye, “Political Culture Revisited,” 504.

²⁸ John S. Duffield, “Political Culture and State Behavior: Why Germany Confounds Neorealism,” *International Organization* 53, no. 4 (1999): 772-773.

²⁹ Duffield, 772.

In Alastair Ian Johnston's work on strategic culture (similar to political culture) in the Qing dynasty, he also outlined a certain methodological approach by which to quantify culture, its impact, and applications to policy. For Johnston's particular study, he has looked at a series of text from two different time periods to find continuity in their strategic cultures.³⁰ To determine what is and what is not strategic culture, Johnston utilizes "cognitive mapping" to capture the "structural" aspects of a particular causal mechanism, thereby relating it to the subsequent policy behavior.³¹ Continuity then reinforces the fact that what are being plucked from the texts are indeed aspects of strategic culture. In terms of empirical analysis, Johnston also highlights the challenges with using political culture to describe state behavior. In his mind, the least that has to be established is outlining preferences rankings based on strategic culture, their effect on policy-makers, and how this effect occurred.³²

To get around the methodological issues outlined by Johnston and Duffield, my particular study does not try to discern the political cultures in the countries of interest, Japan, the United States, and China. Instead, I rely on secondary sources that attempt to describe the political cultures in the said countries and then use those debates as the basis of my research. This does not mean that I entirely avoid the methodological issues raised above, since the scholars whom I rely upon to provide my data could potentially be flawed in their analysis. However, I believe that I reduce my chances of error in identifying the key political cultures in each country by utilizing multiple sources/scholarship and discerning what the debates on political culture for each country center around.

³⁰ Alastair Ian Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995): 39-49.

³¹ Johnston, 50.

³² Ibid., 52.

Looking at the literature, one unique aspect of Japanese political culture that has been identified is Japan's anti-militarism. As explained by the prominent Japanese historian Thomas Berger, Japan's anti-militarism has been a result of Japan's historical memory of World War II, the country's unique constitution, and the country's continued reliance on U.S. security guarantees.³³ While it is not really debated that anti-militarism has been a major part of Japanese foreign policy for decades, many scholars today argue whether or not anti-militarism is still as pervasive as it used to be. For example, Christopher Hughes suggests that pacifist attitudes are slowly eroding away in the face of a nuclear armed North Korea and a rising China.³⁴ Given in recent years how political elites have been trying to expand the capabilities of the Japanese Self-Defense Force (JSDF) coupled with an increasingly active Japan in international organizations and crises, Hughes' argument appears to have some traction.

While I agree that there has been a shift in the political culture and the country's foreign policy since the first Gulf War, I would contend that anti-militarism is still the primary, underlying determinant of the country's foreign policy. Just because Japan has become more active in the international arena does not necessarily mean that it has become more aggressive. In terms of this study, none of the most recent scholarship on Japan remotely suggests that the country aspires for global or even regional hegemon. Even if Japanese elites and the general public have become more concerned about Japan's security, their response to this situation has largely meant continued cooperation with the current hegemon, the United States.

The United States, however, has its own set of political cultural values that have helped maintain and define the country's hegemony. One trait that many scholars have identified as

³³ Thomas U. Berger, "From Sword to Chrysanthemum: Japan's Culture of Anti-militarism," *International Security* 17 (1993): 119-150.

³⁴ Christopher W. Hughes, "The Erosion of Japan's Anti-Militaristic Principles," *Adelphi Papers*, no. 403 (April 2009): 99-138.

having a profound impact on American foreign policy and hegemony is the concept of ‘exceptionalism.’³⁵ Articulated by Seymour Martin Lipset in his book, *American Exceptionalism*, exceptionalism is the belief by Americans that their values (individualism, laissez faire, etc.) have produced political and economic systems that are unique to America and worthy of emulation.³⁶ Within the rest of the scholarly literature, American exceptionalism has come to take many forms as other scholars have dissected the value and analyzed its affect on U.S. foreign relations. For example, William Appleman Williams identified “a hyperactive sense of mission” as a key aspect of the American historical experience, which gave American exceptionalism religious overtones.³⁷ Another scholar, Mary Nolan, disputes that exceptionalism is not unique to America and that many countries have also considered their history and their institutions as unique and exceptional.³⁸ Mary Nolan also wittily points out the hypocritical nature of American exceptionalism in that it suggests other countries should emulate America while simultaneously celebrating that America is unique and that others have not been able to copy American success.

This scholarship pertains to the study because it shows how political culture affects the character of U.S. hegemony. American exceptionalism helps explain why the U.S. has been so devoted to exporting its capitalistic model and democracy to other countries, despite consistent failures by some countries to implement these changes. And, while any country could be expected to shape the international system to maximize its own interests, I believe that American exceptionalism provides a unique lens into why the U.S. has so vehemently pushed its ideas onto

³⁵ Michael Adas, “From Settler Colony to Global Hegemon: Integrating the Exceptionalist Narrative of the American Experience into World History,” *The American Historical Review* 106 (2001): 1696.

³⁶ Adas, “Settler Colony,” 1696.

³⁷ William Appleman Williams, *America Confronts a Revolutionary World, 1776-1976* (New York, 1976), 27 in Michael Adas, “From Settler Colony to Global Hegemon: Integrating the Exceptionalist Narrative of the American Experience into World History,” *The American Historical Review* 106 (2001): 1694.

³⁸ Mary Nolan, “Review: Against Exceptionalisms,” *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 3 (June, 1997): 769-774.

others and shaped the international system the way that it did. This idea of exceptionalism is thus still important whether or not it is unique to America because its persistence as a political cultural value still influences U.S. hegemony.

Chinese political culture is markedly different than Japanese or American political culture because of its longevity and remarkably static nature. Scholars looking at Chinese political culture, instead of drawing from events or ideas that might have been influential in the past few centuries, go back thousands of years to show where these values came from. Arguably the most talked about topic is the influence of Confucianism on Chinese foreign policy. Many Chinese political elites, even today, have referred to ancient Confucian values to try to reassure uneasy neighbors about the nature of China's rise. This is touched upon by the Chinese scholar Qing Cao, who has shown how Chinese leaders have often utilized a variety of Confucian concepts to emphasize China's desire for peaceful relations, that it wants to use soft power to attain its goals, and that it respects all cultures.³⁹ However, having peaceful values and exhibiting peaceful behavior are two different things, something that Chinese scholar Suisheng Zhao takes note of in his article on nationalism. For Suisheng Zhao, nationalism is a 'double-edged sword' that forces Chinese leaders to be harsh on foreign countries like the U.S. and Japan during international crises or events.⁴⁰ This gives Chinese foreign policy an assertive tone that only heightens other countries' fears about China's rise.

This scholarship relates to my study because it shows how Chinese leaders have held up certain political cultural values to the world to show China's peaceful intentions, while at the same time these leaders are undercut by Chinese nationalism. While no country can proclaim that its foreign policy perfectly aligns with its values, China presents an extreme case where the

³⁹ Cao, "Confucian Vision," 431-451.

⁴⁰ Suisheng Zhao, "Chinese Nationalism and Pragmatic Foreign Policy Behavior," in *Chinese Foreign Policy: Pragmatism and Strategic Behavior*, ed. Suisheng Zhao (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004) 76.

political elites and the public are fundamentally at odds at how China should conduct foreign policy. This relates back to the general discussion of hegemony, because within China one can clearly see two competing definitions of hegemony. Both the elites and the general public want China to develop rapidly and to become a great power, but how China should *act* as a hegemon is still not in agreement amongst the two sides.

Japan

The concept of militarism that developed in Japan during the 1930s and 40s had long-standing roots in the country's political culture that emerged after the Meiji revolution. Ostensibly the driving force behind the revolution was to reform a feudal, backward Japan into a modern nation-state that could stand up to the Western powers. Subsequent foreign policy goals included revising the unequal treaties that shackled Japan's economy during the late 1800s and to stand up to the Western powers, to keep them from interfering in Japan's affairs. The intervention by Germany, France, and Russia in 1895 to keep Japan out of the Korean peninsula only infuriated the Japanese and left a stain on their historical memory.⁴¹ Japan at this point in time was still too weak to stand up to any one Western power, and had to moderate its foreign policy whenever it drew too much criticism from Europe or America.⁴² This was purely out of necessity, however, as Japan was trying to continue along the path of development and modernization to become a great power.

⁴¹ Frank W. Ikle, "The Triple Intervention: Japan's Lesson in the Diplomacy of Imperialism," *Monumenta Nipponica* 22, no. 1/2 (1967): 122.

⁴² Hilary Conroy, "Government Versus 'Patriot': The Background of Japan's Asiatic Expansion," *The Pacific Historical Review* 20, no. 1 (February 1951): 31-36.

Societal developments in Meiji Japan also maintained the militaristic undercurrents that defined Japanese society prior to the revolution. Reforms enacted during the Meiji restoration increasingly made the existing military class, the samurai, irrelevant as the old feudalistic society was done away with. This did not mean that samurai were not entirely useful to the new state, however, as the Meiji government began a “rehabilitation” program that helped these once proud warriors become bureaucrats in administrative, police, and education institutions.⁴³ Maintaining their dominant position within the society through their government positions, these samurai also continued to carry with them their martial tradition.⁴⁴ Among the masses, a militaristic identity was also embodied in State Shintoism. This religion, unique to Japan, emphasizes among other things the divinity of the imperial family which helped cultivate “intense patriotism.”⁴⁵ Embodied in such symbolic acts as a bi-annual, solemn ceremony of burning dead soldier’s names at the Shokon shrine, shows how central the imperial family and the military were to Japanese identity.⁴⁶

As Japan gained in strength so to did its foreign policy behavior and goals shift. In 1905 Japan was the first Asian country to defeat a European power when it destroyed two Russian naval fleets and fought a ruthless ground war in Manchuria.⁴⁷ Although the country eventually sued for peace because its armies and resources had been exhausted, Japan’s victory in this war buoyed nationalist sentiment and cemented Japan’s position in East Asia. After the outbreak of World War I, Japan sided with the Triple Entente and captured German colonies in the Far East,

⁴³ Harry D. Harootunian, “The Progress of Japan and the Samurai Class, 1868-1882,” *The Pacific Historical Review* 28, no. 3 (August 1959): 265.

⁴⁴ Kenneth Colegrove, “Militarism in Japan’s Foreign Policy,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 215 (May 1941): 7.

⁴⁵ Shinjiro Kitasawa, “Shintoism and the Japanese Nation,” *The Sewanee Review* 23, no. 4 (October 1915): 482.

⁴⁶ Kitasawa, “Shintoism,” 482-483.

⁴⁷ Raymond A. Esthus, “Nicholas II and the Russo-Japanese War,” *Russian Review* 40, no. 4 (October 1981): 396-411.

as well as made a list of twenty one, humiliating demands upon China.⁴⁸ Under international pressure from Great Britain and especially from the United States, Japan toned down some of its demands. However, Japan's break from its past diplomacy showed that the country was becoming more assertive abroad in trying to accomplish its foreign policy goals.

The end of World War I did not provide any solace for Japan however as the failure to include a clause in the newly founded League of Nations that guaranteed equality of all nations made it clear to Japan that it was still not considered a peer with the Western world. This resentment was further stoked by individual actions taken within the United States by the California legislature and Congress which inhibited the immigration of Japanese to the United States for blatantly racist reasons.⁴⁹ Yet these incidents, combined with the subsequent unfair naval treaties signed between the U.S., Britain, and Japan which attempted to lock in a favorable ship ration against Japan, were not enough to push Japan to embark on a major campaign in the Pacific.⁵⁰ It would take the onset of the global depression as well as rising authoritarian sentiments around the world to provide the right conditions for Japanese ambitions for hegemony to bear fruit.

In 1931, a group of disaffected, ultranationalist officers took it upon themselves to secure Japan's eroding position in Manchuria. For the officers, the program of Chinese unification undertaken by the Chinese Nationalists as well as the growing Soviet strength on the Manchurian border added a sense of urgency that something had to be done to secure Japan's influence in the resource rich land. These officers, without orders from their commanding officers, bombed a section of the Manchurian railroad, engaged in a firefight with Chinese troops, and subsequently blamed the Chinese for the attack. Before the Japanese civilian government could fully react to

⁴⁸ Kenneth B Pyle, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 2nd ed., (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1996): 183-187.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 183.

⁵⁰ Kichisaburo Nomura, "Japan's Demand for Naval Equality," *Foreign Affairs* 13, no. 2 (January 1935): 196-203.

the crisis, Japanese reinforcements were moved in and the defending Chinese army was routed.⁵¹ The other victories that followed in Manchuria were greeted with strong praise from the wider Japanese public for a variety of reasons. One was the Great Depression had already begun to take affect across the world so that by 1931 many Japanese were suffering. Although state-sponsored capitalism had proven beneficial to the Japanese thus far, many ordinary peasants became disenchanted with what they considered a “Western” system that was eroding traditional values.⁵² Thus when ultranationalist army officers and civilian leaders began advocating a new policy that hinged on outward expansion to relieve Japan’s economic woes, as well as a more traditional focus on the Shinto religion, the agricultural family, and “Japanese” values, many within the public domain were highly sympathetic. Even the news media and entertainment industries, without any prodding from the government, “volunteered” and “took the lead” in promoting the army’s war efforts in northern China.⁵³

Of course the more urban and capitalistic sections of the society viewed this new policy with a degree of skepticism. For one, there were many within the government that believed operations in China could sour Japan’s relations with the other two naval powers in the region, the U.S. and Great Britain, and that any military “adventurism” was not worth the cost internationally.⁵⁴ Both foreign minister Shidehara and Prime Minister Inukai wanted to localize and diffuse the crisis before it got out of hand. However, as became a reoccurring trend in the years to come, the military ignored the Cabinet’s request to cease hostilities, considering the

⁵¹ Mikiso Hane, *Modern Japan*, 3rd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001): 262-291.

⁵² Hane, 262-291.

⁵³ Louise Young, *Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998): 56.

⁵⁴ Hane, 262-291.

request “non-binding.”⁵⁵ It was not until the Emperor took a strong position against the military’s autonomous activities in Manchuria did most of the fighting stop.

This incident was only the beginning of the troubles the civilian government would have to cope with. In 1932, upset by the Prime Minister’s reluctance in pursuing the war in Manchuria, an ultranationalist shot Inukai as he was exiting a train. While this was just one of many future assassinations that were yet to come against politicians that fell out of the right’s favor, many historians consider these two events the death knell that signaled the end of what was already a weak, party based democracy. Stepping into the void of political power, the military took an ever bigger role in not only politics, but also the economic and social aspects of the country.⁵⁶ Fearful of nationalist reprisals from military and civilian elements within the society, civilian leaders subjected their cabinet choices to military vetoes. Zaibatsu or the large corporations of Japan at that time came to align their interest with the military and helped in developing heavy industries in Manchuria as well as upping military production at home. And finally, building upon the ambitions of the Meiji leaders and combined with popular resentment towards the international community over its disapproval of Japanese aggression, the military began a massive nationalist campaign that permeated every level of society. Mayors, Shinto priests, and even the heads of elementary schools were co-opted into propagating the Japanese national agenda, which included making sacrifices so that “Japan could fulfill its destiny.”⁵⁷

Out of all the changes the military made to Japanese life, its affect on the masses in terms of nationalism were the least controllable. By 1941, Japanese politicians who had feared the growing power of the military and ultranationalists now were unable to make a stand against war

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Yale Candee Maxon, *Control of Japanese Foreign Policy: A Civil-Military Rivalry, 1930-1945* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1973).

⁵⁷ Pyle, 190.

simply because it was supported by the overwhelming majority of the public.⁵⁸ By and large, members of Japan's national Diet and the press were more jingoistic than the government was, making the government actually seem like a moderating force in terms of Japanese public opinion.⁵⁹ What started off as the agenda of a few ultranationalist members of the civilian populace and within the military ultimately turned into the will of the Japanese people as Japan's leaders made "the plunge" in attacking the United States at Pearl Harbor.

The Japan of today would be hard-pressed to recognize a 1930s portrait of itself. The destruction wrought by World War II, particularly by the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, left searing images within the Japanese historical conscious that continue to remind generations today the dangers of militarism. Combined with the American imposed Constitution that legally binds the country to not have an offensive military capability, Japan has largely adhered to an anti-militaristic doctrine to the present day. This is a fairly unique product of history, and this particular aspect of Japan's political culture has remained the subject of intense scholarly debate.

Many scholars are convinced with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the advent of a nuclear N. Korea, a rising China, and the threat of international terrorism that Japan is trying to roll back some of its anti-militaristic stances.⁶⁰ The failure of Japan to provide any troops for the American led coalition during the Gulf War led to international criticism that prompted Japan to provide more than just 'checkbook diplomacy' for the American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁶¹ Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) for the first time participated in overseas missions as well

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Young, 56-60.

⁶⁰ Christopher W. Hughes, "'Super-sizing' the DPRK Threat: Japan's Evolving Military Posture and North Korea," *Asian Survey* 49, no. 2 (2009): 291-311.

⁶¹ Jeremy Moses and Tadashi Iwami, "From Pacifism to Militarisation: Liberal-Democratic Discourse and Japan's Global Role," *Global Change, Peace, & Security* 21, no. 1 (February 2009): 76-77.

as refueling missions in the Indian Ocean for American ships. Japan has also revised and updated its security treaty with the United States which provides for greater cooperation between the two countries on issues like missile defense as well as regional security operations around Japan.⁶² Also of note, many Japanese are starting to view the Japanese Self Defense Force more favorably which has resulted in the agency having more of a say in Japanese foreign policy making.⁶³ This has all led many scholars to believe that Japan is undergoing a process called ‘normalisation’ in which it has finally begun assuming all the behaviors of a regular state.⁶⁴

On the other side of the debate, many scholars have pointed to the resiliency of the anti-militaristic political cultural value and how it still restrains Japanese security policy to day. For instance, despite the nuclearization of North Korea, the prospect of Japan acquiring or producing nuclear weapons remains very slim. This is not because Japan lacks the capacity to produce nuclear weapons; quite the contrary, Japan has an advanced and thriving nuclear power system that would be readily capable of enriching uranium to the point that it could be weaponized. The issue lies with the Japanese public’s aversion to nuclear weapons, which even today is proving its resilience with the outcry that has ensued with even the possibility that the U.S. allowed ships with nuclear weapons to pass through Japanese territorial waters.⁶⁵ Aside from nuclear issues, Japan has also recently cancelled its over seas missions as well as the refueling of U.S. ships in the Indian ocean because of large domestic opposition. Recent public polls also highlight the resiliency of Japanese anti-militarism: in September of 2006, a poll done by the Pew Research Center found that only 27 percent of the Japanese public wanted to revise article nine of the

⁶² Moses and Iwami, 79.

⁶³ Christopher W. Hughes, “The Erosion of Japan’s Anti-Militaristic Principles,” *Adelphi Papers*, no. 403 (April 2009): 99-103.

⁶⁴ Yongwook Ryu, “The Road to Japan’s Normalization: Japan’s Foreign Policy Orientation Since the 1990s,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 19, no. 2 (2007): 63-88.

⁶⁵ Llewelyn Hughes, “Why Japan Will Not Go Nuclear (Yet): International and Domestic Constraints on the Nuclearization of Japan,” *International Security* 31, no. 4 (2007): 67-96.

constitution, while 67 percent were opposed to any changes and 6 percent didn't know or refused to answer.⁶⁶

Regardless of the scholarly debate over the extent that anti-militarism holds sway in the country today, most scholars would agree that this aspect of political culture is still a major force to be reckoned with.⁶⁷ If Japan were to re-militarize, most scholars would content that this would probably not occur for at least some time to come, if ever. What is important to note for this study, however, is that Japan's anti-militarism has affected its security policy and any potential aspirations for hegemony. Although Japan has the economic capabilities to be a regional great power in the Asia-Pacific, the country has been relatively content with adapting its security policies to the U.S.-Japanese alliance and U.S. hegemony since the end of World War II.⁶⁸ Despite some reevaluations that are occurring within the current Japanese government in regards to the U.S.-Japan security alliance, a significant percentage of the Japanese public still believe that this alliance is vital to Japanese security in the face of a nuclear North Korea and a rising China.⁶⁹

United States

The United States has not undergone as dramatic a shift in its political culture as Japan has. This can be partially explained by the fact that political culture is not something that can be changed over the course of a few years, unlike various economic, social, and political policies.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *Pew Global Attitudes Project* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2006).

⁶⁷ Llewelyn Hughes, 2007; Christopher Hughes 2009; Moses and Iwami, 2009.

⁶⁸ Takashi, "Japan as a Global Ordinary Power: Its Current Phase," *Japanese Studies* 28, no. 1 (May 2008): 3-13.

⁶⁹ Akitoshi Miyashita, "Where do Norms come from? Foundations of Japan's Postwar Pacifism," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 7, no. 1 (2007): 112-113.

⁷⁰ Duffield, "Political Culture and State Behavior," 770.

Indeed, the main reason why Japan's political culture took such a dramatic turn is because of the destruction wrought by World War II. The United States suffered a great deal during World War II as well, losing upwards of 400,000 troops in the European and Asia-Pacific theaters. However, these numbers pale in comparison to that of countries like France, Germany, or the Soviet Union, of which each country had casualties measured in the millions.⁷¹ Aside from the loss of life, the United States also did not face any danger or destruction at home, which preserved the political culture but also left the U.S. the unquestionable hegemon the world. Presented with this unprecedented amount of power, U.S. officials had to decide whether the U.S. should assume a leadership role to try to prevent the catastrophe that was World War II from ever happening again, or to retreat back into isolation as the country had done during the interwar years.

This decision accurately reflected the two competing American political cultures that were influencing American foreign policy at this time. These two political cultures were isolationism and interventionism.⁷² The debate surrounding these two competing traits revolves around the relative influence of one against the other during different periods of American history. For example, historians debate whether the U.S. began to have imperialistic designs abroad (not including the expansion across what is today considered the American mainland) in 1898 following the Spanish-American War, after World War I in 1918, or after the conclusion of World War II in 1945.⁷³ And even after the U.S. became firmly committed to containing communism at the advent of the Cold War, it is still possible to trace the impact that isolationism

⁷¹ Vladimir L. Bykov, "The USSR and Security in Europe: A Soviet View," *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 414 (July 1974): 99.

⁷² Oliver M. Lee, "The Geopolitics of America's Strategic Culture," *Comparative Strategy* 27, no. 3 (May 2008): 267-286.

⁷³ Bernard Fensterwald, Jr., "The Anatomy of American 'Isolationism' and Expansionism. Part I," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 2, no. 2 (June 1958): 111-139.

can have on certain American foreign policies, how officials have to frame arguments for the public, and subsequent voluntary withdrawals of American military and political influence.

Of interest for this particular paper is the period following immediately after World War II when American policymakers were starting to demobilize the millions of troops overseas while at the same time, trying to contend with an ambitious Soviet Union. What makes this period crucial to understanding the political cultural debate is that it marked a major shift away from the U.S.' largely isolationist tendencies of the previous decade and would define U.S. action abroad for the remainder of the century. How and why this shift took place was as much dependent on domestic factors as it was international ones.

Even by the end of 1945, the cozy image of 'Uncle' Joe Stalin puffing a cigar propagated during World War II began to be whittled away by misunderstandings and Soviet and U.S. actions against each other.⁷⁴ American policy was shifting towards establishing a world order dependent on multilateral trade, guided by the principle of self-determination, and underwritten by a vast web of military alliances and foreign aid programs.⁷⁵ For the Soviet Union, they were much more concerned with their immediate periphery. Looking to prevent the catastrophic destruction that had visited Russia following both World Wars, the Soviets were looking to establish a string of Communist countries along its borders to act as a buffer between itself and Germany.⁷⁶ The fact that the Soviets attempted to do this with acts of subversion only intensified Western suspicions of Soviet Actions in Eastern Europe and around the world.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Joseph M. Siracusa, "The Night Stalin and Churchill Divided Europe: The View From Washington," *The Review of Politics* 43, no. 3 (July 1981): 398.

⁷⁵ G. John Ikenberry, "Power and Liberal Order: America's Postwar World Order in Transition," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 5, no. 2 (2005): 137-140.

⁷⁶ Bykov, "The USSR and Security," 96-100.

⁷⁷ Howard Jones, *Crucible of Power: A History of American Foreign Relations From 1945*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009).

One of the first signs of trouble between the U.S. and the Soviet Union cropped up with the post-World War II negotiations over Germany. From the start, the U.S. and the Soviet Union (as well as the other occupying powers of France and Great Britain) nominally indicated their desire for a united Germany. However, this turned out to be largely a façade only enthusiastically supported by the U.S. and Great Britain, who saw a unified, federal Germany as a necessary bulwark against Communist aggression in the east.⁷⁸ The Soviet Union and France were still reeling from the damage that the Nazis had caused in their respective countries and were very reluctant to return Germany to a position where it would be capable of that kind of mayhem again.⁷⁹ Hence subsequent agreements after the war which pushed for the four occupied regions of Germany to work in concert to develop the German economy failed. The Soviets exacted appropriations from the Western parts of Germany, forced German laborers to stay in the East to work in the factories, and stalled on the prospect of forming a federal, unified Germany.⁸⁰ Other events following World War II also proved detrimental to U.S. – Soviet Relations.

The Soviet advances against Nazi Germany had left its troops in positions throughout the Eastern Europe. Agreements made during the war had led many in the West to believe that the Soviets would allow free elections in Eastern European countries (while still maintaining a sphere of influence) and that its troops would pull out of places like Iran. However, the Soviets were worried that if they allowed free elections in the countries that it controlled then there was the possibility that these governments would not be friendly to the Soviet regime.⁸¹ The thinking was that elections had allowed a man like Hitler to rise to power and that this democratic

⁷⁸ Peter Alter, *The German Question and Europe, A History* (London: Arnold, 2000): 113-115.

⁷⁹ Alter, 116-117.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 117-120.

⁸¹ Ibid.

instrument could be detrimental to future Soviet interests. The only way to ensure that the Soviet Union would be safe again from invasion would be to support domestic communist movements in neighboring countries to create a string of governments friendly to the Soviet regime.

The Soviets could have easily forced these governments into power considering the large presence of troops it had in places like Poland, Hungary, etc.⁸² However, what Stalin and many of his advisors were well aware of was the presence of the atomic bomb in the American arsenal. Consequently, any actions that the Soviet Union took had to be done without particularly upsetting the United States. Yet at the same time, the Soviet Union decided not to withdraw its troops from Eastern Europe precisely because of the awesome power of the atomic bomb, which only fed into American fears of future Soviet aggression. Subsequent events in Iran in 1946 as well as an escalating propaganda campaign within the Soviet Union against the U.S. and the West hardened the positions on both sides and started the countries down the path of the Cold War.

The year 1947 saw actual U.S. dollars and soldiers being used abroad to prop up other countries against the threat of Soviet aggression. A domestic crisis in Greece which pitted monarchists against socialists (not supported by Stalin) and rising tensions between Turkey and the Soviet Union over the possession of the Dardanelles Straits came to be seen as maneuvering by Stalin for world domination.⁸³ This sentiment among American policymakers can be seen by the President's comments following the dispatch of a naval taskforce headed by the aircraft carrier *Franklin D. Roosevelt* to the Mediterranean in response to the Turkish crisis, "We might

⁸² Peter Summerscale, "Is Eastern Europe a Liability to the Soviet Union?" *International Affairs* 57, no. 4 (1981): 585-598.

⁸³ Dennis Merrill, "The Truman Doctrine: Containing Communism and Modernity," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (March 2006): 27-37.

as well find out whether the Russians were bent on world conquest now.”⁸⁴ What intensified the crisis for the Americans was the fact that Great Britain told the U.S. it was unable to continue its monetary commitments to Greece and Turkey, and that if anyone was going to pick up the bill, it would have to be Uncle Sam. U.S. officials acted quickly. Within 16 days Truman outlined the now famous ‘Truman Doctrine’ to Congress, and other officials worked behind the scenes to get Congress to fall in line with an economic and military aid package to Greece.⁸⁵ By May of that year, Congress approved both the Greek and Turkish aid bills and America began its first (and not last) serious involvement in European affairs after World War II.

Although this course of events provides substantial evidence for the influence that “interventionism” had in the U.S. at this time, I think it is equally important to note how hard U.S. officials worked to convince Congressmen and the American public about the reasons why the U.S. had to continue to commit money and troops abroad. Senator Arthur Vandenberg warned U.S. officials “that the proposal [Greek and Turkish Aid Bills] would succeed only if the administration engaged in a major campaign designed to scare Americans about the dangers of a Communist takeover.”⁸⁶ Truman echoed a similar sentiment in the epic task ahead of him when he told his advisers that he would have “the greatest selling job ever facing a President.”⁸⁷ Throughout the contentious discussions about whether the U.S. should commit aid to Greece or Turkey, then Secretary of State Dulles had to constantly reassure members of Congress and fend off criticism from within the State Department (from Marshall and Kennan) that the President’s

⁸⁴ Jones, *Crucible of Power*, 13.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 14.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

plan was emergency by nature, that once the crisis had passed the U.N. would takeover, and that the U.S. would not be indefinitely committed.⁸⁸

What eventually helped Americans get over their unease about foreign commitments was the perceived threat from the Soviet Union. The Communists overthrew the Czech government in February of 1948 and installed a pro-Kremlin regime, which also resulted in the suspicious “suicide” of the Czech foreign minister Jan Masaryk. Escalating tensions over Berlin in 1949 and especially the outbreak of the Korean War convinced Americans that the Soviet Union was the ringleader of communist nations, bent on world domination. Thus for the American case, one can clearly see that structural realist arguments have particular credence given American fears about Soviet expansionism were the primary motivators behind the proliferation of U.S. security treaties and commitments abroad.

China

Since China has only been an ancient, regional hegemon, there has yet to be a recent shift in political culture that has heralded the acquisition or loss of hegemony. However, there have been shifts in the political/strategic culture of the ruling elites in China that have brought political and economic reforms in China. This shift occurred after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 and particularly after the death of Mao Zedong in 1979. Ultimately, party cadres that had followed Mao unquestionably throughout his entire life became fed up with the disastrous results that his policies produced. One former Red Guard member remarked, “I began to ask questions about the fit between feudal Chinese culture and Mao’s terrifying version of communism, about why there was a discrepancy between the beautiful words described in our

⁸⁸ Ibid, 15.

books and the harsh reality around us.”⁸⁹ The reinstatement of intellectuals and former party officials, like Deng Xiaoping, used this new consensus to embark on a new plan of modernization.

The Cultural Revolution was initiated by Mao Zedong in an attempt to destroy the old aspects of Chinese culture and to fully transform Chinese society into one based solely on socialist ideals. This mission was carried out by gangs of youth who voluntarily formed ‘Red Guard’ groups to upend the existing social order. Party officials, intellectuals, and anyone deemed “upper class” were subject to public humiliation, beatings, deportation to the countryside, and even execution. The educational system was transformed to place more emphasis on labor, which resulted in high school students serving two years time in factories or on farms before starting the regular curriculum. Traditional educational systems were attacked as being class-based and catering to the Chinese bourgeoisie. To ensure a more equitable distribution of spots in classrooms, students with good study habits (who were usually from wealthier backgrounds) were ridiculed, and studying liberal arts or foreign languages was looked down upon. Some of the systems best students ultimately found their way into hard labor assignments in the country side, effectively ending the potential for a good career.⁹⁰

Red Guard factions were also responsible for impairing China’s foreign relations. The Red Guards came to occupy the Foreign Ministry in 1967 and proceeded to denounce the officials working there as well as send inflammatory cables to diplomats overseas. This created a great deal of confusion for the diplomats who were uncertain whether the orders were sent by the Red Guards or people who were actually in the administration. In one instance, a cable sent to a Chinese organization in Cambodia ordered it to overthrow the reigning Prince, which

⁸⁹ June Grasso, Jay Corrin, and Michael Kort, *Modernization and Revolution in China: From the Opium wars to World Power*, 3rd ed. (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2004): 239.

⁹⁰ Grasso, 223-224.

resulted in the Prince cutting off relations with China. Zhou Enlai, Premier of China, quickly intervened and apologized for the incident. Other diplomatic crises occurred within China when Red Guard youth attacked foreign diplomats in Beijing and even at one point, capturing and humiliating the British diplomat to China and setting the British legation on fire. This dislike of foreign countries came from the worry that they were infecting China with foreign ideologies that had to be purged before true socialism could take hold.

This fear of infection also spread to the Chinese arts. The Ministry of Culture was denounced by Mao as a haven for “revisionists” who promoted bourgeois values. Mao’s wife and actress, Jiang Qing, went further and said that the existing arts in China did not represent the working man enough and that an entirely new art form was needed to reflect China’s socialist economy. New operas and plays were written that featured peasants and workers, and even some famous works that Communists had used in the past as propaganda were written to show peasants having more control over their own lives.⁹¹ Any artist or critic that was deemed unsympathetic to these changes was promptly shipped to the countryside or a factory, thereby diluting China’s arts.⁹²

The fall of the Gang of Four and the subsequent trial in 1980 marked the end of an era of Maoism. While his image as the founder of the PRC was maintained after his death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping knew the country needed a new path towards development. Mao’s policies during the Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s and his sparking of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s directly and indirectly led to the deaths of millions of Chinese. Studies after the death

⁹¹ Ibid., 225.

⁹² Ibid., 224-225.

of Mao found that peasants, who made up over 80% of the population at the time, had not had an improvement in their livelihood from 1949 to 1979.⁹³ International trade was small and only accounted for a small percentage of GDP, which was entirely dominated by inefficient state-owned enterprises. And, most serious for the party, there was general disillusionment with socialism and the Communist Party itself after the tumultuous decade that purportedly produced the ‘Lost Generation’ in China because of the substandard education and the frequent work assignments for students in rural areas. Deng responded in a strong, albeit haphazard fashion with the declaration of his ‘four modernizations’ (articulated first by Zhou Enlai). These included the need to modernize in: agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense.

This new “socialism with Chinese characteristics” first was implemented in the countryside. Deng accurately perceived that the area of greatest need was agriculture; people had to be able to feed themselves again. To encourage agricultural production, Deng encouraged decollectivization and the development of traditional family plots by peasants. When these reforms produced substantial yields in Sichuan province and other places, these reforms were implemented nation-wide.⁹⁴ The other major reform that was made was in industry. State owned enterprises, which had not only provided the most employment but also social welfare services in terms of education, health care, etc., were slowly dismantled. This opened room for the development of smaller businesses owned by young entrepreneurs, which by 1987 numbered around 4 million and produced roughly half of China’s total output.⁹⁵ Along with Deng’s

⁹³ John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006): 409.

⁹⁴ Fairbank, 408.

⁹⁵ Grasso, 246.

opening up of special economic zones along the Chinese coast which allowed foreign businesses to operate in a largely free atmosphere, Deng's economic reforms put China on a rapid track towards modernization that it is still on to this day.

Along with the advancements at home, the ushering of Deng's "second revolution" also brought changes in its foreign relations.⁹⁶ This was largely manifested through the normalization with relations with the United States. Partly out of dissatisfaction with the Soviet's version of communism, partly because of the growing skirmishes between Soviet and PRC forces along their border, Mao had become open to dialogue with the U.S. by the early 1970s. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger visited China after Japan normalized relations in 1971, and in 1972 President Nixon visited the country and formulated what later became known as the "Shanghai Communiqué." Essentially agreeing to disagree, the two countries also set up a process by which the U.S. would recognize China, which it finally did in 1979.⁹⁷ Following on the heels of Deng's reforms, Communist China engaged the world to a degree that it hadn't since the Western powers had established spheres of influence along China's coast. While this beneficial for China's development, this greater engagement also brought with it expectations for social change, in particular, democracy.⁹⁸

Although these desires culminated in the failed 1989 Tiananmen Square incident in which an estimated 800 to 1300 people died, these changes marked a large cultural shift within China. During the 1970s, Red Guards panned out throughout the country to try to tear down the physical manifestations of past Chinese cultural achievements while at the same time trying to cleanse the minds of the populace to prepare them for true socialism. By 1989 this mentality had been replaced with a widespread acceptance of foreign ideas and the flourishing of capitalistic

⁹⁶ Ibid., 241.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 250.

⁹⁸ Fairbank, 412-414.

enterprises. How this shift in political culture, which has remained largely intact to this day, will affect the country's aspirations for hegemony is unsure.

There has been less of a consensus among China scholars about the existence of a principal, political cultural trait. More often than not Chinese scholars will point at different aspects of Confucianism, its influence throughout Imperial China's history, and its persistence to the present day. William C. Callahan focuses on the Confucian concept of *tianxia*, which means "the earth" and "all the people." According to Callahan, this concept of *tianxia* predisposes China towards dialogue with countries that have different cultures from its own, instead of relying on force, because of a desire to "transform" the other.⁹⁹ Guoli Liu looks at the underpinnings of China's relatively new foreign policy of "peaceful development" by looking at the values of civility, harmony, and humility that Confucius stressed. Aside from these three traits, the author says that general Chinese cultural traditions emphasize "unity in diversity" and "priority to peace" as guiding principles behind Chinese foreign policy today.¹⁰⁰ Shaohua Hu also stresses the pacifist messages of works by Confucian scholars like Mencius who decried offensive wars.¹⁰¹

Looking at strategic culture in the past and today, Tiejun Zhang has also noticed carry-overs in China's traditional strategic culture and the country's strategic culture today. For Zhang, non-violent methods were the norm in terms of resolving disputes along China's border. If

⁹⁹ William C. Callahan, "Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony," *International Studies Review* 10 (2008): 748-761.

¹⁰⁰ Guoli Liu, "Domestic Sources of China's Emerging Grand Strategy," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 43, no. 5 (October 2008): 543-561.

¹⁰¹ Shaohua Hu, "Revisiting Chinese Pacifism," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 32, no. 4 (2006): 256-278.

China did take military action, often it was in the form of “passive defense” and hardly ever expanded beyond its known periphery.¹⁰² Other scholars, however, are not as convinced of China’s peaceful intentions. Peter Moody, Jr. believes that the dominant political culture in China today is nationalism/patriotism.¹⁰³ While this political culture can be useful for rallying the masses, especially against perceived injustices done to China by the United States, nationalism can also threaten the government leadership. In this way it is an unbridled force with unforeseen consequences for China in the future.¹⁰⁴

Structural Realist Critique

As was discussed in the beginning of this paper, structural realists contend that it is the structure of the international system that compels countries to seek hegemony. The underlying logic behind this assertion is that hegemons are coercive by nature and that they construct an international system that is intended only to benefit themselves. Resentment over this situation causes other powers to rise up and challenge the existing hegemon, thereby creating the “tragedy of great power politics” as described by John J. Mearsheimer.¹⁰⁵ To judge the merits of structural realist arguments, I will analyze some of the arguments used by Christopher Layne in his article, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise.” In this article he provides structural realist explanations for why Japan and the United States rose to power, which

¹⁰² Tiejun Zhang, “Chinese Strategic Culture: Traditional and Present Features,” *Comparative Strategy* 21, no. 2 (2002): 77-79.

¹⁰³ Peter R. Moody, Jr., “Political Culture and the Study of Chinese Politics,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 14, no. 3 (September 2009): 271.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 271.

¹⁰⁵ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).

I will then take in concert with my own descriptions behind their shift in political culture and hegemonic aspirations.

The main focus of Christopher Layne's article is that the 'unipolar moment' that the U.S. was experiencing following the end of the Cold War (which was a recent development for him) was going to be short lived. As Layne explains, states are pushed to become great powers by structural constraints. This push causes states to make "unit-level decisions" on whether or not to pursue great power status. If a state decides to try to attain great power status and it "produces a consequential shift in polarity," then it will have caused a structural impact.¹⁰⁶ According to Layne, even the latitude given to states to choose whether or not to try to achieve great power status is severely constrained by the structure of the international system. All of this is underpinned by the fact that states grow economically/technologically/militarily at different levels so that states are either gaining or losing power relative to the other. Also, states exist in an anarchical system so that a state's primary concern has to be survival. Thus states will often try to balance states that have more preponderant power than it does itself because it can never be sure of a state's intentions.¹⁰⁷

But what about the possibility of a benign hegemon as described in hegemonic stability theory? The author cites arguments by several authors to debunk this particular notion that a hegemon's behavior could persuade other states from rising up against it. For one, hegemonic stability theory assumes that states are indifferent to power differentials between states. Citing Joseph Grieco, the author says that states are concerned with how "cooperation might affect relative capabilities in the future."¹⁰⁸ States that are peaceful today could have new leaders in 5

¹⁰⁶ Layne, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 10-13.

¹⁰⁸ Joseph M. Grieco, "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 184-185.

to 10 years and become hostile. Layne also cites Robert Gilpin in his observations that hegemonic power is unsustainable because 1) the costs of its hegemony erodes its economic and military strength and 2) the “hegemonic paradox” is the diffusion of its economic, technical, etc. skills to other states, thereby causing the hegemon to lose its “comparative advantage” against those states.¹⁰⁹

Another concept that debunks hegemonic stability theory, according to the author, is the principle of sameness. Developed by Kenneth Waltz, the sameness principle predicts that competition produces sameness amongst the hegemon and its competitors.¹¹⁰ Looking to emulate the hegemon’s success, potential competitors will copy the hegemon’s economic, military, political, etc. organization to maximize its power potential. By copying these aspects of the hegemon, it is then predicted/expected that competitors will want to acquire the abilities that the hegemon has and thus seek great power status. The sameness principle is further supported by the assertion that international pressures shape domestic structures, so that the creation of new great powers from eligible states “reflects... [that] state’s adjustment to the international system’s structural constraints.”¹¹¹

Christopher Layne then goes on to describe the rise of the United States and to refute the assertion that hegemony was thrust upon the United States. A growing industrial capacity which outranked the European powers, growing commercial interests in Europe, Latin America, and Asia, was combined with a more assertive diplomacy that made it, more or less, the regional hegemon. This position was consolidated after the diplomatic crises with Great Britain in the late 1890s (as well as the victory in the Spanish-American war in 1898) and enforced by a growing naval buildup to defend America’s interests abroad. Layne also attempts to make a

¹⁰⁹ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 13.

¹¹⁰ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979): 127.

¹¹¹ Layne, 16.

connection between these ambitions for great power status and the unipolarity of Great Britain. For Layne, Great Britain was at least a major factor in America's growing naval expenditures. Belief that America's claims over Latin America would only be as good as the military that could enforce it, Layne believes that this was the primary reason behind U.S. expansion during this period.

For my own analysis of this situation, I would agree that the international structure forced the U.S. to seek great power status or hegemony, but for very different reasons. For one, the U.S. was showing signs of imperial ambition following the Spanish-American war of 1898. The country, for the first time, acquired colonies in the Philippines and Costa Rica, which added to the country's already significant land holdings on the continental mainland (arguably a product of aggressive expansion as well).¹¹² However, these land holdings paled in comparison to other European projects and while colonies in general were morally objectionable to Americans. Also, in terms of the U.S. naval buildup, there was significant expansion of U.S. naval forces in the late 1800s which reflected the growing interest the U.S. had around the world. That being said, at the outbreak of World War I the U.S. had a navy comparable in size to that of Bulgaria. This hardly seems like the navy of country that was "seeking" great power status.

I would argue that the U.S. only truly sought great power status following the conclusion of World War II. The reason why some historians have made the claim that hegemony was thrust upon the United States and not sought is because of how the U.S. acted towards its security commitments in Europe and in Asia. For one, the U.S. was reluctant to keep its forces in other countries. Security and monetary commitments made to European countries were made ostensibly to keep them from falling to Communism, which was developing within the American psyche as a global threat to the U.S. However, these projects were fiercely debated in Congress,

¹¹² Bender, 50.

and many officials had to reassure Congressmen and the American public alike that these commitments would be merely transitory.

Even well into the 1950s under the Eisenhower administration, American officials were still looking for ways to get the Europeans to organize themselves into a military unit that could defend itself against the Soviet Union so that the U.S. could withdraw its troops.¹¹³ Really the only reason why the U.S. decided to commit itself in such an unprecedented way was because of the threat of Communism, which lends credence to the structural realist theory. However, I strongly disagree with the assertion that this hegemony by the U.S. was sought. What hegemon would try to turn down the opportunity to station its *own* troops on foreign soil, by invitation? Does there exist a more influential policy lever? This is where I feel structural realist arguments fall short for this particular case.

In terms of Japan, the author asserts that growth differentials were not a factor in Japan's attempt at acquiring Great Power Status since it always ranked last amongst the developed nations in terms of industrial capacity. What drove Japan to modernize and to ultimately seek spheres of influence was the fact that its "existence as a nation-state was at risk."¹¹⁴ Japan saw China's defeat by Great Britain during the Opium Wars and feared that it could also be carved up like its much larger neighbor. Japan was constantly seeking to ensure its independence in a dangerous world with Western powers that had greater power capabilities than itself. The author also takes note of the sameness effect on Japan, since after the Meiji Revolution in 1868 the country sought to emulate countries like the U.S., Great Britain, and Germany. Ostensibly the reason why feudalism was abolished was because central governance helped provide the bedrock of economic prosperity and military strength that Western countries enjoyed.

¹¹³ Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 95-145.

¹¹⁴ Layne, 28.

In terms of my analysis, I would agree that the sameness effect can be seen in Japan and that the dangers of the international system compelled the country to change its domestic institutions. Japan's current economic and political systems had obviously not accrued all the advantages that modernization had conferred on nations like the United States, which made this point painfully clear in 1853 with the Perry trade missions. However, I would disagree that the international system compelled Japan to pursue an empire during the Pacific War. As I clearly demonstrated, there were domestic determinants that maintained the momentum of militancy within Japan. Even if national leaders had wanted to reign in militarism in 1939, it would have been impossible considering the large amount of public support for what the military was doing. Aside from that, Japan constantly sought the empires that Western powers had. The superiority of U.S. gunships in the 1850s and their presence in Japanese waters forced Japan to confront the fact that despite being the 'land under the rising sun,' it had fallen far behind other states in economic and military terms. This blow to the national conscience, I would argue, was the driving impetus behind the Meiji reforms and is what ultimately pushed Japan to seek empire.

Speaking about the future, Layne then goes on to predict that other states will rise up and challenge the 'unipolar moment' established by the U.S. after the fall of the Cold War, just as states rose up to challenge British hegemony during the late 1800s, early 1900s. He says that it does not matter if the U.S. is a 'benign' hegemon because this will only allow its competitors to free ride off of the U.S.' expensive security commitments until they are ready to challenge the U.S. for hegemony. Thus the United States has to prepare for the adjustment in the international system from a bipolar world to a multipolar world where its security apparatus should be strong enough to preserve its national interests, but not so strong that states seek to balance against it.

As will be discussed in the subsequent section, these assumptions about state behavior and the international system have simply not held true in the 20 years following the Cold War.

Critiquing Structural Realism and Political Cultural Approaches to Hegemony

Despite my differences in opinion with Christopher Layne over his historical accounts of why Japan and the United States sought hegemony, I have also noticed that the post-cold war system has not produced the kinds of competitors discussed in Layne's article. Granted his article was written in 1993 and given the opportunity, he might be able to write a credible defense for his work. However, the tenets of a theory do not just change with the times and thus his principle arguments, I feel, can be put under scrutiny. Scholar John S. Duffield eloquently explains the difficulties structural realism and other neorealist theories have had in explaining Germany foreign policy behavior. He says that even after German reunification, Germany has yet to alter its security policy abroad and that it still emphasizes cooperative approaches to international problems.¹¹⁵ The author then goes on to ascribe this persistency in state behavior to Germany's political culture, which he argues did not change following the end of the Cold War. It is not too much of a stretch, given the similar military histories of both Germany and Japan, to think that the author would agree that a similar effect of political culture can be found in Japan, which is the reason why the country still relies on the U.S. as the guarantor of its security.

Other critiques include work done by Georg Sorenson, in which he contends that structural realist theory offers insights into balance of power politics but falls short in addressing changes in statehood.¹¹⁶ The author notes that the balancing that was supposed to occur against

¹¹⁵ Duffield, 765-803.

¹¹⁶ Sorenson, 'Big and Important Things,' 223-239.

the United States never materialized while Cold War relics like NATO are still alive and well. Sorenson postulates this is because the theory has simplified too much in “the quest for parsimony” and simply cannot predict what a state will do when it is not tightly constrained by the international system.¹¹⁷

Aspects of structural realist theory that I contend with include how the international system is described as well as the behavior of the hegemon. The current international structure can be said to be founded on the post-war ideals of the U.S.: flourishing multilateral organizations, reduction in barriers to trade and commerce around the world, and the spread of liberal ideas/values. After the fall of the cold-war and the advent of globalization, the proliferation of NGOs as well as the existence of a ‘unipolar moment’ also can be said to describe today’s international system. However structural realists fail to account for how these changes the structure of the international system and in particular, how this affects structural realist theory. This is implicitly seen in Shiping Tang’s work on reconciling offensive and defensive realism, in which he postulates that the two different strands of structural realism describe two different historical epochs.¹¹⁸ Structural realism also has a hard time distinguishing differences in regional politics that could affect state behavior. For example, in the Asia-Pacific David Kang has identified an historical intra-regional system based on hierarchy (not anarchy, which is the defining characteristic of international relations according to structural realists) based around China’s leadership.¹¹⁹

Yet political culture by itself has a hard time explaining state behavior and in particular, aspirations for hegemony. The U.S., as I have described above, was a reluctant hegemon and

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 226.

¹¹⁸ Shiping Tang, “Social Evolution of International Politics: From Mearsheimer to Jervis,” *European Journal of International Relations* 16, no. 1 (March 2010): 31-55.

¹¹⁹ David Kang, “Hierarchy and Stability in Asian International Relations,” in *International Relations and the Asia-Pacific*, ed. by G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (New York: Columbia University press, 2003): 163-190.

only agreed to assume the responsibilities as one of the 'poles' during the bipolar Cold War because of the threat posed by the Soviet Union. The isolationist impulse within the U.S. might have been enough to restrain the U.S. between World War I and World War II, but has done little, especially after the end of the Cold War, to roll back U.S. security commitments across the globe. Japanese political culture had a long history of upholding the martial tradition which could have predisposed it to wanting hegemony, but this claim can not be made for certain. Institutional factors, as well as the fact that establishing colonies was an acceptable (arguably the precondition) means of becoming a great power at the time, could have played equally important roles in formulating Japan's hegemonic aspirations. Political culture, in my opinion, also does not provide a satisfactory answer for why states seek hegemony.

Conclusion

Although both structural realism and a political cultural approach have failed to answer the question of why states seek hegemony, this study has produced some useful insights for other scholars in the future. The fact that hegemony is not sought for security purposes I believe is particularly useful when studying this question because it opens up the possibility that states value other priorities more. Establishing this fact opened up the possibility that certain characteristics of political culture could have supplanted security as a state's number one concern. What I find particularly interesting is the potential role that 'pride' plays in a country's foreign policy. Youngho Kim in his short study on U.S. intervention in the Korean War highlights prestige as a major causal factor behind U.S. military moves on the Korean

peninsula.¹²⁰ Citing Bismarck and his distinction between having “a policy of interest” and “a policy of prestige,” Kim argues that the U.S. was willing to suffer massive casualties to sustain its own prestige or to even deny the Chinese communists from gaining prestige.¹²¹

Prestige and international standing has also been noted as a primary motivator for states seeking nuclear weapons. Although having nuclear weapons provides an invaluable deterrent against aggression by other states, some developing countries, like India, sought nuclear weapons for increased international stature. Acharya notes this fact when he writes, “Even if nuclear weapons are not used, they can still bestow international status. As a number of analysts have argued nuclear weapons have historically been regarded as an important symbol of technological and strategic prowess.”¹²² Sometimes prestige can even blind otherwise rational policymakers from making terrible policy decisions. Yale Maxon talking about Japanese military planners leading up to World War II, writes, “Another reason for failure was that the idea of prestige was given too much weight in planning.”¹²³ According to Maxon, these officials had such a “preoccupation” with prestige that “it almost completely obscured the concept of the national interest.”¹²⁴

I admit that these references of prestige are rather scattered and lack coherence. However, I believe that they suggest a motive, a rather strong motive, for why a country would want to seek hegemony. Looking at China’s rise today, analysts have been quick to point out its economic and military build-ups, how this could challenge American hegemony in the Asia-Pacific, and how this could eventually destabilize world peace and security. Not as much

¹²⁰ Youngho Kim, “Does Prestige Matter in International Politics,” *Journal of International and Area Studies* 11, no. 1 (June 2004): 39-55.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹²² Sukanta Acharya, “Security Dilemmas in Asia,” *International Studies* 44, no. 1 (2007): 63.

¹²³ Maxon, 216.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

attention is paid to how China's hegemonic ambitions reflect their deep-seated, national pride. What is written off as "nationalist sentiment" could also potentially point to something deeper, a desire by the Chinese to return the once great stature of the Middle Kingdom to its former glory.¹²⁵ If this is truly China's desire, and if it transcends all security, economic, and political concerns, then it could have profound implications for China's continued rise as well as for the world.

¹²⁵ Peter Hays Gries, "China Eyes the Hegemon," *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs* 49, no. 3 (2005): 403-405.

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