

Introduction

The idea of analyzing East Asian relationships in terms of asymmetry emerged from the experience of a number of visits to China and Vietnam beginning in 1985 while they were still hostile. It was clear that Vietnam's "China" was quite different from China's idea of itself, and that China's "Vietnam" was quite different from the Vietnam that I visited. Moreover, the misperceptions of each side were quite different from one another. At that time, Vietnam's "China" was a malevolent, inscrutable giant attempting to subvert and subdue Vietnam. China's "Vietnam" was a regional and global schemer attempting to conquer Indochina and, together with the Soviet Union, to sandwich China between hostile powers. Each state looked at what mattered most to it — for Vietnam, the threat of a larger neighbor, for China, the possibility of a hostile coalition, and by doing so, distorted the actual reality of its opponent. Asymmetry of power not only distorted perceptions, it produced characteristic perspectives of the vulnerable smaller state's anxious over-interpretation and of the larger state's tendency to link its attention to larger regional and global concerns.

After the normalization of Sino-Vietnamese relations in 1991, mutual recriminations dropped out of the official rhetoric, trade began to improve, and official visits multiplied. Nevertheless, there remained a strong note of caution in Vietnam's interactions with China. The opportunities that China presented were vivid, but so were the risks. Chinese products were welcomed, but they threatened local industry and created a chronic trade imbalance. In 2009, the public uproar over the big Chinese company Chalco's investment in bauxite mining and processing underlined Vietnam's continuing misgivings about becoming too dependent. From China's perspective,

Vietnam's hesitations seem perverse since all projects are based on mutual interest. It is hard for China to appreciate a vulnerability that it does not share.

But the story is by no means simply one of suspicions and misunderstandings. Diplomats on both sides have made important contributions to better relations. Vietnam's membership in ASEAN from 1995 put the bilateral relationship in a broader context. Trade and tourism have blossomed. China and Vietnam cooperate on most regional and global issues. When China wakes up in the morning, it is happy to see a circle of friendly neighbors, Vietnam included, and beyond them a multipolar world, so it fires up its factories and produces something for them. Vietnam wakes up in the morning and buys something "made in China," but when it goes to sleep it keeps its eye on China open.

The relationship of China and Vietnam is only a more acute version of China's general relations with its neighbors. China operates in a system of normal relationships with all of its neighbors, and its multilateral cooperation has strengthened regional organizations. China has succeeded with its "good neighbor" policy over the past two decades by itself being a good neighbor. Other Asian states are appreciative of China's stance not only because of the immediate benefits of cooperative interaction, but also because they realize the increasing disparity of capacity between themselves and China. Only Japan is capable of being a rival, and the different growth trajectories of China and Japan would suggest that cooperation would be the more prudent move.

Yet China's centrality to Asia and its rise as a major power causes every neighbor to be alert to possible threats to its own identity and interests. Vulnerability to China is positional rather than a result of China's current behavior or intentions. However reassuring Chinese diplomacy is, the neighbors are more exposed to China than vice versa, and they will remain alert to risks as well as to opportunities.

Fortunately, China and its East Asian neighbors have a rich history of successfully managing asymmetric relationships in the pre-modern era. As David Kang has pointed out most recently, relations among the states of East Asia were remarkably peaceful until Japan's

modernization, though the situation was different on the nomadic frontier.¹ The Sino–Vietnamese relationship was the exception that proved the rule. Although Vietnam won its independence from China and its identity was shaped by patriotic resistance to China, its success against the Ming occupation in 1407–27 led to three and half centuries of peace. During this time, Vietnam was not isolated from China. On the contrary, with Korea, it was one of the model members of the tribute system, and Confucian influence increased.

The historical background to contemporary re-emergence of China as an Asian center is important because it provides China an indigenous model of successful foreign relations and provides the East Asian region a common cultural background for the new era. However, history does not repeat itself, and the rise of China is no exception. There has been a 150 year hiatus in China's Asian centrality, and the context of international relationships has been transformed. No modern state would submit to performing the gestures of inferiority involved in the tributary visits to the Chinese capital. Trade is no longer a peripheral governmental concern, and to it has been added the economic contact points of investment and finance. Most importantly, East Asia is no longer alone, but part of a globalized world. It is impossible to consider China's external relations and not pay special attention to its relationship with the United States, and more generally to the global order. The old *tian xia*, "All under heaven" has become "Some under heaven."

Nevertheless, the current asymmetry of China's relations with its neighbors is similar to its traditional asymmetric situation, and this creates a resonance with earlier patterns of relationships. China is, again, among unequals.

What difference does asymmetry make? That is the focus of this book, from various angles. Briefly, there are three basic theses concerning asymmetry. First, asymmetric relations are resilient. Even though by definition the smaller side cannot be an equal challenger to the larger, it is far more difficult than the differences in capacity would suggest for the larger side to force its will on the smaller. The reason

¹ David Kang, *China Rising* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

is that, in a conflict, the smaller side is mortally threatened and thus can mobilize its entire strength, while the larger side is engaged in a “small war” for limited objectives and can be frustrated by the cost of persistence. Thus, it is not surprising that over time the smaller polities have not all disappeared, and historical resilience is now further strengthened by international law and by membership in the United Nations.

Second, asymmetry produces a difference in perspectives. The larger side has less to gain or lose in the relationship, and usually has more important concerns, both foreign and domestic. The smaller side is more exposed to opportunities and risks, and has less control over the relationship. This fundamental difference in interest produces a difference of attention. The larger side will tend to be inattentive to the specific situation of the smaller, regardless of how much information it collects. The smaller side will tend to be overly attentive to the larger. Attention affects behavior. The larger side will tend to operate in terms of strategic relationships of friendship, normalcy, or hostility, while the smaller will be more agile and less trusting of the overall climate of the relationship. Behavioral differences can lead to misinterpretations that can lead, in turn, to a vicious circle of bullying and alarmism.

Third, it is possible to have a normal asymmetric relationship. Taken together, the first two theses might give the impression that larger and smaller states are constantly locked in endless struggles caused by inevitable misunderstandings. But the very fact that neither can win gives both the incentive to figure out how to live together. The requirements for a normal relationship are different for each, however. The larger needs assurance that cooperation with the smaller will not challenge its relative power. In a word, the larger state needs deference from the smaller state. The smaller state needs assurance from the larger that its identity and interests will not be threatened. The smaller state needs recognition of its autonomy. It should be emphasized that a normal asymmetric relationship based on the exchange of deference and autonomy is not a relationship of domination. On the contrary, it results from the realization of both sides that neither can simply force its interests on the other. The common

ground of deference and autonomy is mutual respect. A normal asymmetric relationship is not an equal exchange, but is one of negotiation rather than coercion.

The three dimensions of asymmetric relationships can be seen in both traditional and contemporary Asian relationships and more broadly in international relationships in general. The main function of the tribute system was to ritualize the exchange of the deference of the tributary states for the imperial recognition of the legitimacy of their rule and hence the guarantee of non-interference by China. Currently, China's diplomacy under the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence respects the autonomy of its partners, and other states are careful not to engage in actions that would imply disrespect for China. But normalcy does not resolve asymmetric differences, it merely provides a stable framework for negotiating them. Vietnam will always sleep with its eye on China open, but it now expects to talk rather than to fight.

Especially to an Asian audience, the three theses sketched above might seem like common sense. However, each is quite different from the expectations of Western international relations theory. First, it would see an asymmetric relationship as an imbalanced one, to be rectified by either domination or defensive, balancing alliances. If one side cannot win, it is assumed that it will lose. Second, although misperception and information asymmetries are common topics, they are not seen in structural terms. The linkage between asymmetries of capacity, of exposure, of interests, of attention, of behavior and so forth have either been ignored or seen as peripheral factors. Thirdly, it is usually assumed that normal relationships are either symmetric, between great powers, or hegemonic, between great powers and their clients. In the latter case, the relationship is based on control by the hegemon, and so the relationship is not primarily one of managing differences, but of the hegemon managing and protecting its power.

To some, the Western perspective sketched here might seem more hard-headed and "realistic" than asymmetry theory. However, its main focus is on great powers and the possibility of great wars. While these are undeniably important, most international relationships are between states of different capacities, and they are negotiated rather

than forced. An international relations theory that is blind to the importance of asymmetric relationships is not comprehensive, nor is it helpful to most states most of the time. It is least helpful in understanding Asia's past, present, and future.

Of course, Asia has done without a theory of asymmetric relationships thus far, and it has done well. What can asymmetry theory contribute? In general, the utility of theory is not that it provides quick answers, but that it explains structural features underlying the day-to-day diplomatic activities. Asian diplomatic relations are well habituated to managing their asymmetric relationships, but the articulation of these in old-fashioned terms such as elder brother-younger brother relationships makes too much of the underlying asymmetry, while new-fashioned ones such as multipolarity deflect attention away from the real difference in capacities. Asymmetry theory is more accurate, and it focuses attention on the real and continuing problems of managing asymmetric relationships.

Asymmetry theory originated in the study of Asia and is especially relevant to Asian international relationships, but it has broader applications as well. Since the theory is grounded not in a specific culture but in the differences of relational exposure inherent in asymmetry, it should apply to any asymmetric relationship, at any time. It can be used to understand the relative success of the Persian Gulf war in contrast to the later occupation of Iraq, or the Irish struggle for independence against the British. US-China relations will be presented here as a case in which China is the vulnerable actor. Even more generally, the view of the world system from the perspective of asymmetry theory is that of an active but ultimately fairly stable matrix of unequal relationships. A rising power like China is not necessarily a challenger to the matrix, but its growth requires rethinking.

Structure

This book is a collection of articles, lightly revised, written between 2001 and 2009. It is the most comprehensive collection to date of my writings on asymmetry. The articles were published in very disparate places: Istanbul, Brussels, Buenos Aires, Vancouver, Jilin, Beijing,

Nanning, Hanoi, and, of course, the United States. Some make their first appearance in this volume, while many others were only available in Chinese, Spanish, or Vietnamese. I have made some corrections in each of them, but in general the ones that were originally published in English are close to their original form. Thus, the Iraq war will be on the horizon of the earliest articles and an ongoing problem in others. There is little direct repetition among the articles, but because they were written for different audiences there are many similar narrations of basic aspects of asymmetry theory. I have left these in for the most part because this is an anthology and I cannot assume that all readers will start with the first chapter and go on to the last.

Asymmetric International Relationships

The book consists of four general sections. The first, “Asymmetric International Relationships,” includes five chapters introducing the general approach to analyzing asymmetric relationships as well as probing specific issues such as human rights, soft power, regional patterns of asymmetry, and the puzzle of how large states lose “small wars.”

Chapter 1, “Recognition, Deference, and Respect: Generalizing the Lessons of an Asymmetric Asian Order,” provides an overview of a number of the major themes of the book. It argues that the Asian experience of successful management of asymmetric relationships is useful not only for its current challenges, but has general lessons for the successful management of international relations. The chapter presents in brief form the structure of bilateral asymmetry, its implications for regional and global leadership, and techniques for managing asymmetric relationships.

Chapter 2, “The United States, Human Rights, and Moral Autonomy in the Post-Cold War World,” addresses a familiar source of tension in international relations from the point of view of asymmetry theory. It argues first that the moral autonomy required for rights must exist for communities as well as for individuals. If communities have rights of autonomy, then the question of human rights is not simply one of applying universal standards, but of respecting

individual and communal autonomy. The second point is that in an asymmetric world, it is the weaker states who are vulnerable and feel that their identity and autonomy can be at risk. A powerful state can afford to ignore the importance of communal autonomy because their own autonomy is not threatened and it is its own value judgments that are being forced on others. The third point is that intermediate powers have the greatest interest in a multilateral regime of human rights because they have to deal with more powerful and less powerful states. The United States, as the sole superpower, does not feel threatened and does not want its influence hampered by multilateral institutions unless they are under its control.

Chapter 3, “Dissecting Soft Power: Attention, Attraction, Persuasion,” criticizes Joseph Nye’s notion of soft power for being too ambiguous. It argues that soft power should be disaggregated into attention, attraction, and persuasion, which are each quite different characteristics but are often associated in soft power. Asymmetry comes in because a regional power attracts attention from all smaller regional states since they are each more exposed in their bilateral relationships. This idea is developed in more detail in the following chapter. Here, the emphasis is on persuasion, since the defining characteristic of soft power is to persuade another to do something without specific reward or punishment. Successful leadership of this sort requires not only attention and attractiveness, it also requires the unforced compliance of other states. The extent of soft power, therefore, is decided not by the power itself, but by the “audience.” If they are persuaded, then leadership is effective; if not, then no amount of attention can compensate.

Chapter 4, “The Dilemma of Regional Powers,” treats the situation of regional powers in depth. Instead of concentrating on China, it takes India, Brazil, and South Africa as its examples. The dilemma faced by regional powers is that they are the natural centers of attention in their regions because of their greater capacities, but their regions are limited and there are global powers that can intervene. So regional powers are in a situation of episodic vulnerability to global intervention. They can reduce this vulnerability either through normal or friendly relations with global powers, or by supporting global

legal regimes that bind global powers (as well as others) to predictable behavior.

Chapter 5, “Democratic Defeatism: Reconsidering the Logic of Asymmetric Wars,” is an extended review and critique of Gil Merom’s thesis that democracies find it difficult to win asymmetric wars because of the free media’s exposures of the negative effects of war and the gradual realization of the middle class that war will be costly for them. Merom considers this a weakness of democracies. Instead, I argue that democracies may easily enter “small wars” because they are promised quick and easy solutions. However, the resistance of the population of the smaller state makes the war drag on, and frustration with the apparently endless war turns public opinion against it. Democracies may be quicker to abandon fruitless “small wars” because they can replace their leaderships, and this is actually an advantage for democracies because the war is unlikely to result in permanent victory.

Underpinnings of China’s Foreign Policy

The second section addresses the question of the general context of China’s foreign policy. China’s general foreign policy is often discussed in terms of China’s “grand strategy,” but that term focuses on the intentionality of Chinese action rather than its context. The general point of these chapters is first to explore the horizons of China’s external relations as they have been set by its internal constitution and position in Asia and then to consider the effects of asymmetry on its traditional foreign policy, its norms, and its current conception of multipolarity.

Chapter 6, “China between Region and World,” suggests that China’s external relations have three dimensions. First, China can be viewed as a region-state, one in which scale and the diversity of the domestic political economy make it necessary to view the state as an interrelationship of parts even in its external relations. As a sovereign nation, China is a unitary actor unlike international regions, but it is not as uniform an actor as most other states. Second, China is a multi-regional power. Its relationships with the various international regions

in which it is a major power are affected by the fact that it is not enclosed by a single region. Lastly, although China is not likely to be in the position of challenging the United States as a global great power in the foreseeable future, its stature as a global presence in a multi-nodal world is already assured. Its global foreign policy of multipolarity is fundamentally shaped by its situation of being incapable of domination.

Chapter 7, “China and the Globalization of International Relations Thinking,” argues that a fundamental difference in the context of Asian and Western external relations is that China has provided a “solid center” for Asia, a massive and prosperous state in the middle, while the Mediterranean and later the Atlantic provided a “liquid center” for the West around which competitive powers fought for territory and empire. China’s centrality to Asia was not one of control. The nomads were especially impossible to subdue because of their mobility, but even states such as Korea and Vietnam could not be permanently pacified. Thus, China developed a general policy of managing its asymmetric relationships rather than dominating them. The tribute system was the most characteristic form of management. By contrast, the general situation in the West was more competitive and empires tended to be zones of control rather than of problematic centrality. In the post-Cold War world, and especially in the current era of global economic uncertainty, the United States is in a situation of problematic centrality rather than one of control, but it still has the mentality of competitive hegemony.

Chapter 8, “Sustainable International Leadership: Lessons from the Sino–Vietnamese relationship, 968–1885,” describes the interactions of China and Vietnam from Vietnamese independence in 968 to China’s ceding of suzerainty to France in 1885. It recounts how the aggressiveness of the Mongols in the Yuan Dynasty stimulated Vietnam’s articulation of its identity as the “southern kingdom” separate from China, and the Ming occupation of 1407–27 led to popular patriotic mobilization. After the Ming withdrawal and the stabilization of Vietnam’s participation in the tribute system, Vietnam could afford to learn from China without feeling threatened. The sustained asymmetric relationship was not the result of victory and

domination, but rather the evolution of a role pattern in which each side felt reasonably confident that its vital interests were not at risk and that there was a general advantage in maintaining the relationship. Role-based asymmetric leadership has weaknesses as well as strengths, and it cannot be applied directly in the modern era, but the chapter suggests general lessons concerning the management of asymmetric international relations.

Chapter 9, “China as a Normative Foreign Policy Actor,” was written as part of a larger European project to consider normative foreign policy of various major states. It argues that a fundamental difference between China as a normative actor and the West is that the West focuses on the actor’s moral motive, while China focuses on appropriate behavior within specific relationships. The chapter sketches the evolution of China as a normative actor from classical Chinese philosophy to present-day politics, and then applies the general framework of the project to eight cases of Chinese foreign policy including ASEAN, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, and North Korea. The chapter concludes with four lessons for the West of China’s normative action: perspective matters in assessing norms; power matters but does not determine asymmetric relationships; relational logic is more appropriate for international relations than transactional logic; and respect for the international partner should be considered the cardinal virtue of normative foreign policy.

Chapter 10, “Asymmetry Theory and China’s Concept of Multipolarity,” analyzes a key concept of contemporary Chinese foreign policy in terms of asymmetry theory. Although the idea of multipolarity fits China’s general situation in world politics, in both empirical and normative dimensions, it needs better theoretical support. Asymmetry theory provides a grounding that recognizes the salience of relative power and, at the same time, the necessity of cooperative asymmetric relationships.

China and the United States

The third section deals with China’s most important bilateral relationship, one that at the same time is a key structuring relationship for

all of Asia. But the United States has been a difficult partner for China, even in the 30 years of reform and openness. The section begins with two analyses of the global situation of the United States and then moves on to two considerations of the US–China relationship.

Chapter 11, “The Brightest House: Civilization and Asymmetry,” makes use of a metaphor to discuss the problems and reality of Samuel Huntington’s famous thesis regarding the “clash of civilizations.” If one imagines a village of glass houses at night with one in the middle brighter than the others, then everyone in the other houses could see clearly what was going on in the brightest house, but the occupants of the brightest house would see only their own reflection. Something similar is going on with Huntington’s clash of civilizations. As a theory of civilizations it is fundamentally flawed, but it is useful as an example of a characteristically American blindness to others. The chapter concludes with principles of managing asymmetric relations.

Chapter 12, “The Reality and Limits of American Power,” was first published in China early in the junior Bush administration, when China and the rest of the world was concerned about the arbitrary unipolarity of the United States as exemplified in the invasion of Iraq and the doctrine of preemptive war. The argument is that American power is real, but the limits of American power are just as real. It could defeat the army of Saddam Hussein, but it could not successfully occupy Iraq. The weakest link in American power is its relationship to the world economy. The United States might not acknowledge the limits of its power, but ultimately limits as self-enforcing.

Chapter 13, “How Size Matters: The United States, China and Asymmetry,” was the first chapter presenting asymmetry theory, and it looks at the United States and China as both large powers dealing primarily with smaller powers. It contrasts China’s situation in Asia with the global situation of the US, and argues that each has specific advantages in dealing with its asymmetric relations. The final part of the chapter analyzes the asymmetry of the US–China relationship.

Chapter 14, “United States and China’s Rise: Parity and the Accommodation of Civilizations,” analyzes the American concern that if and when China reaches economic parity with the US, it will

then challenge American hegemony. The chapter discusses three different American views of China, as threat, as challenge, and as opportunity, and then considers the effect of parity on these viewpoints. In fact, however, parity is a very problematic concept for China and the US because the structures of their socio-economies are so different. In any case, tensions will certainly continue as they have in the past, but most probably within a framework of mutual accommodation rather than hostility.

China and Asia

The final section presents chapters on areas of China's Asia relations that illustrate various applications of asymmetry theory. The triangular relationship of Washington, Beijing, and Taipei is analyzed, and also the evolution of Washington's view of the Sino-Vietnamese relationship. Another three-way comparison parallels the deteriorating Sino-Vietnamese relationship in the 1970s with the Vietnam-Cambodia relationship that was turning hostile at the same time. On a happier note, the success of China's Southeast Asian policy since 1990 is discussed. The Sino-Vietnamese relationship in the current era of global economic uncertainty is analyzed, and finally the situations of Korea and Vietnam vis-à-vis China are compared.

Chapter 15, "Asymmetric Triangles and the Washington-Beijing-Taipei Relationship," co-authored with Wu Yu-Shan, Director of the Institute of Political Science at Taiwan's Academia Sinica, is perhaps the most technically demanding chapter in the book. Wu is an expert on strategic triangles, and in this chapter we apply game theory to the problem of how asymmetry affects triangular relationships. We conclude that the strongest side in an asymmetric triangle will tend to be a reluctant pivot that actually preserves the hostility between the other two players by preventing the resolution of their differences. The strongest is, therefore, likely to be a "peace holder" rather than a "peace maker." The case of the Washington-Beijing-Taipei is then analyzed. The role of the United States as peace holder is evident, however, since 2008, the KMT's return to power in Taiwan and the improvement of Beijing's military deterrence capability in the Taiwan

Strait together have changed the situation from a “hard triangle” pivoted by the US to a soft triangle in which the bilateral Beijing–Taipei relationship is moving toward normalcy, though the US remains influential.

Chapter 16, “The United States and Sino–Vietnamese Relations,” discusses the changing attitude of the US toward Sino–Vietnamese relations since the Second World War. American assumptions about a strong relationship between China and Vietnam played an important role in justifying the American war in Vietnam, though concerns diminished after the Shanghai Communiqué of 1972. Several lessons are drawn concerning the pattern of involvement of a distant global power in local affairs.

Chapter 17, “Asymmetry and Systemic Misperception: The Cases of China, Vietnam and Cambodia during the 1970s,” is the most extensive analysis of misperception in asymmetric relationships. The first half of the chapter details the effects of asymmetry on attention, behavior, and perception. The second half discusses two cases of mutual misperception, that of China and Vietnam and of Vietnam and Cambodia in 1975–79. The cases are particularly interesting because in the former Vietnam exhibits the typical behavior of the weaker side in a deteriorating asymmetric relationship, while in the latter Vietnam’s behavior fits the role of the stronger side. The situation of the same actor in the same time period playing different asymmetric roles demonstrates the strength of the analytic model.

Chapter 18, “China and Southeast Asia: Asymmetry, Leadership and Normalcy,” presents a general overview of the improvement of relations between China and Southeast Asia from 1990 to 2003. Despite remarkable growth in China’s capacities relative to Southeast Asia during the reform era, their relationship has vastly improved. Increasing interdependence is part of the explanation, but interdependence between states of vastly different capacities can lead to hedging and balancing as well as to cooperation. The chapter argues that the quality of China’s regional diplomatic leadership has been decisive, complemented by the cautious deference of Southeast Asia. Reform era diplomacy has created a general situation of normalcy between China and the individual countries of Southeast Asia, and it

has made possible remarkable advances in the relationship of China to ASEAN. Although normalcy creates a momentum favoring cooperation, the importance of leadership makes current trends vulnerable to changes in leadership direction.

Chapter 19, “Vietnam and China in an Era of Economic Uncertainty,” addresses the currently developing era of global economic uncertainty and its possible effects on China and Vietnam separately as well as on their relationship. The original article was written in September 2008 at the beginning of the crisis and presented in Hanoi and Shanghai in December 2008. The chapter was updated in August 2009. Clearly, global economic uncertainty will continue as secondary effects from the initial crises play out, patterns of developed country consumption change, and states try to protect themselves against fluctuations in the US dollar. The chapter argues that uncertainty, rather than loss, is the chief characteristic of the new era, because the instability has been at the global level and particularly in the United States. Both China and Vietnam are negatively affected, although China is the least damaged major economy and likely to be the first to recover. The implications of the relative decline in developed country consumption are that for both China and Vietnam developing country markets, especially that of China itself, are increasingly important. This adds to domestic tension within Vietnam regarding the need to encourage Chinese trade and investment on the one hand and on the other hand anxieties about dependence on China. The recent public uproar in Vietnam concerning Chinese investments in bauxite mining and processing in central Vietnam is a symptom of this dilemma.

Chapter 20, “Korea and Vietnam: Similarities and Differences in their Relationships to China,” is a tentative attempt to compare Korea and Vietnam as neighbors of China. Alexander Woodside has provided a stimulating comparison of the similarities in domestic governance (and problems) of traditional China, Korea, and Vietnam, and there are clearly similarities between the bilateral relationships with China.² Vietnam and Korea were considered by China to be the

² Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

model tributary states. However, there are two important differences. First and most important, for most of its history Korea has been between two powers, China and Japan. Since Japan has usually been the more aggressive, the Korean identification with China has been stronger. Vietnam established its identity by distinguishing itself from China; Korea defended its identity between China and Japan. A similarity that since 1975 has turned into a difference is that Vietnam has been united while Korea remains divided. Korea's exposure to manipulation of its two states by China makes it hypersensitive to China's actions even though China has been careful since 1992 to encourage better North–South relations.

Asymmetry theory is still very much a work in progress, and I hope that readers will contribute their thoughts, criticisms, and suggestions. Because it directs attention to interaction in specific relationships, asymmetry theory should encourage historically-informed and detailed studies. While there may be universal principles and patterns underlying international relationships, the dialectical relationships of states do not reduce to a single historical track or to an inevitable outcome. Mao Zedong once emphasized the “universality of the particularity of contradiction,” by which he meant that the understanding of a concrete situation must be based on an empirical examination and cannot be derived from universal truths.³ Unfortunately, he lost sight of this later in life. Perhaps the deepest contribution of East Asia to global thinking about international relationships would be to bring the particularity of relationships back into focus, and I hope that asymmetry theory helps.

³ Mao Zedong, “On Contradiction (1937),” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung I*, pp: 311–347.