Description of Dissertation

Title: Cultural Motives of War: explaining war in East Asia, 918-1368

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My dissertation aims to answer the question, ‘Does culture affect war?’ Some scholars have argued that, when it comes to war, material interest (or drive for tangible gains such as territory and wealth) supersedes socio-cultural motives and therefore is universal. Using evidence from wars in 10th-14th Century East Asia, I challenge this view by arguing that culturally derived motives such as concern for relative status are crucial in explaining many important aspects of war.

The importance of cultural dimension has been widely established in the field of International Relations (IR). Over the years, many scholars have demonstrated that states are not like billiard balls, and that socio-cultural context and environment greatly shapes states and their interests (Reus-Smit 2017; Schultz and Goemans 2019; Bull 2002; Buzan and Zhang 2012). However, the study of *war* is still predominantly focused on material factors (Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2001; Organski and Kugler 1980; Kugler and Lemke 1996). Drawing heavily from empirical evidence in early modern Europe when material motives of war (such as territorial expansion) prevailed, current studies treat war as a phenomenon that is almost exclusively in the domain of hard power politics.

My dissertation challenges the current understanding of war and adds to the existing scholarship in two ways. First, I propose a theory of how cultural factors such as concern for relative status affect the dynamics of war between states. I argue that social-cultural motives matter just as much as (or in some cases, even more than) material factors in explaining wars when we consider the universe of cases. Using evidence from wars in 10th-14th century East Asia, I find that material motive (measured as drive for more territory) only explains a fraction of wars in East Asia’s international system of hierarchy. Instead, culturally derived motives such as concern for relative status in the tribute system played a central role in determining the terms of war settlement and their durability. And states were often willing to forego significant material gains in exchange for cultural gains. The findings of this study add a new ‘cultural’ dimension of war that has been receded to the backdrop. Exploring how culturally derived motives alter the strategic calculations of war widens the scope of current theories that heavily focus on material factors.

Second, I introduce new systematic evidence to the field of IR about a time and region that is almost completely understudied. I bring an originally constructed dataset of wars in East Asia between 918-1368 C.E. (Historical East Asian War Data, v4.0, Lee and Kang) The current dataset (v3.0) covers the years of 1368 to 1842 (Kang et al 2019) and the new dataset (v4.0) extends 450 years and adds 986 new entries. This dataset builds on previous version by relying on two key sources in Chinese and Korean languages: 中国历代战争年表 *(Chronology of Wars in China Through Successive Dynasties)* and 한민족전쟁통사 *(Chronology of Wars of the Korean People)*. By incorporating sources in multiple languages, this dataset widens the locus of inquiry to be truly regional in nature to study all the major actors in the system. Moreover, by adding nearly 1,000 new entries of armed conflicts spanning more than 450 years, this dataset offers a unique and new piece of evidence that allows for a systematic analysis of East Asian history for future social science inquiries.

Additional research that I have planned for this dissertation project mainly pertains to evidence gathering for data collection and case studies. First, I plan to improve the quality of the dataset that I have gathered in two aspects. I plan to get another coder to replicate the coding using my codebook. This will greatly enhance the reliability of the current dataset. In addition, I plan to incorporate additional language sources. Current dataset is built with primary sources in two languages: Chinese and Korean. And I plan to add Japanese or Vietnamese sources which will allow me to triangulate information and make the dataset truly regional. I have already located a potential Vietnamese source: 欽定越史通鑒綱目 *(The imperially ordered annotated text completely reflecting the history of Viet)*, and I am in the process of searching for a Japanese source.

Second, I plan to gather evidence for qualitative case studies by visiting historical archives in Korea and China. From quantitative analysis, I have identified two specific wars that warrant deeper investigations: Goryeo-Liao War of 993, and Goryeo-Mongol War of 1235-1259. These two wars constitute ‘crucial cases’ for my theory as their terms of settlement included high cultural cost and almost no material cost. And I believe a careful and thorough historical analysis of these two wars will help illuminate the causal mechanism through which cultural motives affect war. I have located two main archives that hold the relevant materials: “Jangseogak Archives (藏書閣)” in Korea, and the “First Historical Archives of China (中國第一歷史檔案館)” in China.

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