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ABSTRACT

Although power transition theory offers a powerful model of international conflict, scholars have not adequately operationalized the theory's key variable of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the status quo. We argue that status dissatisfaction is an important component of a rising state's overall dissatisfaction with the system. We apply our revised power transition framework to the 1894–1895 Sino-Japanese War. Japan's revisionist foreign policy was driven by economic and security threats posed by China's control over Korea, dissatisfaction with Japan's place in the China-dominated East Asian hierarchy, the hope for recognition as a great power by the West, status-related domestic pressures, and by belief change that was endogenous to shifting power. Despite several earlier crises, Japan made the decision for war only after it had achieved parity with China, which is consistent with power transition theory's hypothesis that under conditions of shifting power, parity is a necessary condition for war.

The rise of China and its uncertain implications for Sino-American relations and international stability has generated renewed attention to power transition theory. The theory emphasizes the dynamics of shifting power and posits that the probability of a major war is greatest when a rising and dissatisfied challenger approaches power parity with the leading state in the system.[1] China is clearly a rising power, and many expect it to approach parity with the United States in the next few decades.[2] Is China dissatisfied?

Andrew Q. Greve is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at Rutgers University. Jack S. Levy is a professor on the Board of Governors at Rutgers University.

[1] A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), chap. 14. Power transition theory has been refined in A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), chap. 1; Ronald L. Tammen et al., *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (New York: Chatham House Publishers, 2000); Douglas Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). See also Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Gilpin's theory of hegemonic transitions and war is a theoretically rich contribution, but it has not led to a sustained empirical research program comparable to that following Organski's formulation. Consequently, we devote most of our attention to the Organski research tradition, though we highlight some aspects of Gilpin's theory that are absent in the Organski tradition.

[2] Using the GDP indicator of power, as did Organski and Kugler, analysts generate a range of estimates. Jin Kai, using Goldman Sachs economic forecasts ("The Long-Term Outlook for the BRICs and N-11 Post Crisis," *Global Economics Paper* 192), estimates Sino-American parity in GDP by 2027. Jin Kai, *Rising China in a Changing World: Power Transitions and Global Leadership* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 33. For different scenarios of a Sino-American transition, see David P. Rapkin and William R. Thompson, *Transition Scenarios: China and the United States in the Twenty-First Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). More skeptical of a transition is Steve Chan, *China, the US and the Power Transition Theory: A Critique* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

How would we know? By what criteria do we judge whether a state is satisfied or dissatisfied with the international system? For all of power transition theory's many contributions to the study of international conflict, it has failed to provide a satisfactory operationalization of the key concept of dissatisfaction. Further theoretical progress is critical, both because of the likelihood of a Sino-American power transition and the enormity of its potential consequences, and because of dissatisfaction's key causal role in power transition theory.

We refine and extend power transition theory by focusing on its central concept of dissatisfaction. Drawing on the growing international relations literature on status, we argue that a rising state's dissatisfaction or satisfaction with its status in the system is often a central component of its overall (dis)satisfaction with the existing system. After developing the concept of status and explicating its causal interactions with shifting power, political capacity, parity, and other power transition variables, we apply our revised power transition framework to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. We do not attempt a general operationalization of status dissatisfaction that would be valid across time and space, but the analysis of status dissatisfaction and its causal impact in a single case is a useful step towards that goal. By validating the measurement of dissatisfaction and by assessing its causal influence through process tracing, historical case studies can supplement large-N studies in enhancing our understanding of power transitions.

The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895 is a theoretically illuminating and historically important—but understudied—case, largely ignored by international relations scholars and given insufficient attention by Western historians. The war was, as S. C. M. Paine argues, a "seminal event" in East Asia. It triggered a "seismic reversal in the traditional balance of power," broke a centuries-old international harmony within the Confucian world, and marked the first time an Asian state was recognized as a great power and sovereign equal in the eyes of Europe.[3] The war was arguably the first major military campaign in Japan's nascent imperialism.[4] It set the stage for the Russo-Japanese War a decade later, and played a central role in Japan's imperialist propaganda in the 1930s.[5] It also generated territorial and political issues in East Asia that still reverberate today. The war represented a fundamental shift in Japanese attitudes towards China, from cultural

[3]S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

[4]Historians debate the precise beginnings of Japanese imperialism. William Beasley dates it to the Sino-Japanese War. William G. Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism 1894–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 1. Louise Young argues that Japanese "imperial activism" began as early as the 1870s. Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 22–29. Robert Eskildsen points to Japan's ambition to colonize the Taiwanese aboriginal territories in 1874. Robert Eskildsen, "Of Civilization and Savages: The Mimetic Imperialism of Japan's 1874 Expedition to Taiwan," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 2 (April 2002): 388–418. Paine writes that the 1894–95 war "transformed [Japan] from the object of imperialism to one of its perpetrators." Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 4.

[5]Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism*; Young, *Japan's Total Empire*.

reverence to contempt and hatred.[6] It heralded the final stages of decline of the Qing dynasty, and some have described it as the single most demeaning event of China's century of humiliation.[7] Contemporary observers foresaw the lasting impact of the war, with one writing that China had been "awakened from a sleep of one thousand years."[8]

The Sino-Japanese War serves as a good case for illustrating and further developing power transition theory. Rising Japan's dissatisfaction with its status in both the regional and global systems was a central component of its unhappiness with the status quo and a major motivation for its revisionist behavior. In fact, many historians implicitly emphasize the importance of Japan's rising power as a cause of the war, and many argue that the quest for status recognition by European powers was an important motivation driving Japan.[9] The Sino-Japanese War also illustrates the potentially important role of contextual variables in shaping the dynamics of power transitions. Developments in the larger international system, including industrialization and globalization, strongly influenced Japan's status motivations and political modernization. These interactions between a regional system and the broader global system are neglected by both standard power transition theory, which focuses primarily on the global system, and by regional power transition theory.[10]

We begin by reviewing the literature on power transition theory, including attempts to operationalize the concept of (dis)satisfaction with the status quo. We refine and extend the theory by incorporating the role of status dissatisfaction in the rising state's status quo evaluations, noting that status concerns can have an important domestic component. We then conduct a detailed case study of the Sino-Japanese War from our revised power transition perspective. We document the power shift driven by the combination of Japan's economic and military modernization, and China's culturally and politically driven resistance to change. We emphasize Japan's dissatisfaction with the East Asian status quo and its aspiration for recognition as an equal in the Eurocentric global system. We incorporate domestic politics into the analysis through their interaction effects with status dissatisfaction and other key power transition theory variables. Finally, we specify which aspects of domestic politics are consistent with the power transition research program and which are not.

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[6]Donald Keene, *Landscapes and Portraits: Appreciations of Japanese Culture* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1971).

[7]Thomas J. Christensen, "Chinese Realpolitik," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 5 (September 1996): 45.

[8]Quoted in Marius B. Jansen et al., "The Historiography of the Sino-Japanese War," *International History Review* 1, no. 2 (April 1979): 191.

[9]Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism*; John Benson and Takao Matsumura, *Japan 1868–1945: From Isolation to Occupation* (London: Longman Pearson, 2001); Stewart Lone, *Japan's First Modern War: Army and Society in the Conflict with China, 1894–95* (London: Macmillan, 1994); Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*.

[10]Recognizing multiple systems also allows for recognizing that a state can be satisfied with the regional system but dissatisfied with the global system, or vice versa. Jack S. Levy, "Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China," in *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics*, ed. Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 11–33.

Power Transition Theory

Summary of the Theory

In his original formulation of power transition theory, A. F. K. Organski argued that concentrations of power in the international system are a common pattern in international politics and conducive to peace.[11] The dominant state uses its power to create a system of political and economic structures and a set of norms that simultaneously advance its own interests and the stability of the international system. States that are satisfied with that order support the dominant state and receive benefits from doing so. Weak and dissatisfied states lack the power to change the status quo. Over time, however, differential rates of growth, driven in the last two centuries by differential rates of industrialization, lead to the rise and fall of states.

A rising state that is dissatisfied with the existing international order has an incentive to overturn that order once it has the power to do so. The probability of a major war peaks when the power of a dissatisfied and rising challenger approaches that of the leading state in the system.[12] Operationally, this occurs after the rising challenger has achieved parity, which power transition theorists define as 80 percent of the power of the dominant state.[13] The dissatisfied challenger initiates the war so that it can use its power to restructure the system, define a new set of rules, and bring the benefits it receives from the system into line with its increased power.[14] Although most analyses of power transitions focus on power, the degree of satisfaction with the status quo is a "theoretically central component."[15] In fact, some formulations of the theory treat each of these variables as a necessary condition for a major war, though others posit a highly probabilistic relationship.[16]

Whereas the definition of parity is relatively uncontested among power transition theorists, the concept of satisfaction with the status quo is more problematic, which helps to explain the narrow focus on power in most empirical studies of power transitions. Organski, in his initial formulation, engaged the issue of dissatisfaction by arguing that strong rising states "are

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[11]Organski was reacting to balance of power theory, which argues that concentrations of power are rare and destabilizing. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948).

[12]Organski, *World Politics*. Most power transition theorists define power as the product of population, productivity, and political capacity. Productivity is defined as GDP/capita, so power = gross domestic product x political capacity. This conceptualization of power is a departure from balance of power theory's primary emphasis on military power.

[13]Tammen et al., *Power Transitions*, 21.

[14]Ibid., 15–28. The assumption that the rising state will initiate a war is theoretically problematic, though ultimately this is an empirical question. If the rising state initiates the war before the point of transition (while it is still weaker), it is likely to lose, so it has incentives to wait. Anticipating this, the declining state might have incentives to initiate a preventive war before the transition (while it is still stronger), to block the rise of its adversary while the opportunity is still available. Jack S. Levy, "Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War," *World Politics* 40, no. 1 (October 1987): 83–84.

[15]Douglas Lemke and Jacek Kugler, "The Evolution of the Power Transition Perspective," in *Parity and War: Evaluations and Extensions of the War Ledger*, ed. Jacek Kugler and Douglas Lemke (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 20.

[16]Organski and Kugler, *War Ledger*, 51; Tammen et al., *Power Transitions*, 28. Power transition theorists do not specify the sufficient conditions for war once its necessary conditions are satisfied.

unwilling to accept a subordinate position … when dominance would give them much greater benefits and privileges."[17] Although subsequent power transition theorists have generally neglected the importance of the discrepancy between rights and benefits received and those perceived to be deserved, we agree with Organski that it is a central component of dissatisfaction with the status quo. In addition, unhappiness with the existing rules of the system is a key component of dissatisfaction, because a system's rules strongly shape the distribution of benefits. Thus, rising challengers want to replace the dominant state, "redraft the rules" of the system, and create a new order.[18]

Power transition theorists have constructed a variety of operational indicators to measure the degree of dissatisfaction, but none adequately tap the gap between perceptions of benefits deserved and benefits received.[19] Each has other limitations as well. The most commonly used indicator of dissatisfaction is the similarity of alliance portfolios.[20] Organski and Kugler argue that alliances "tighten up" as security threats increase, and that it is necessary to "develop a measure of the willingness of elites to fight."[21] The problem with this argument is that although alliance tightening reflects threat, it does not necessarily reflect "willingness to fight," which is itself vague as an operational concept. Moreover, willingness to fight does not necessarily reflect dissatisfaction with the status quo. As defensive realists emphasize, satisfied status quo powers can be driven to war by the security dilemma or by their adversaries' predations.[22] They sometimes fight because they have to fight, not because they want to fight.[23] Another problem with the alliance-portfolio measure of tightening alliances as a reflection of dissatisfaction is that it incorporates the alliance patterns of all states. This systemic indicator does not necessarily capture the significant dyadic component of an individual challenger's willingness to fight the dominant power.[24]

Woosang Kim provides a more conceptually satisfactory use of the alliance-portfolios indicator. He argues that similar alliance portfolios of the dominant power and challenger (a bilateral measure) reflect similar interests, and that the rising state

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[17]Organski, *World Politics*, 367.

[18]Organski and Kugler, *War Ledger*, 23; Tammen et al., *Power Transitions*, 9–10. For a more detailed theoretical discussion of the role of "rules changes," see Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, "Pride of Place: The Origins of German Hegemony," *World Politics* 43, no. 1 (October 1990): 28–30.

[19]For a summary of measures, see Ronald L. Tammen, "The Organski Legacy: A Fifty-Year Research Program," *International Interactions* 34, no. 4 (October 2008): 322.

[20]On alliance portfolios, see Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, "Measuring Systemic Polarity," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 19, no. 2 (June 1975): 187–216.

[21]Organski and Kugler, *War Ledger*, 38–39.

[22]Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 167–214. Examples of satisfied powers fighting—hence violating Organski and Kugler's claim that "[s]atisfied powers do not fight—include Britain in 1914 and 1939 and the United States in 1917 and 1941. Organski and Kugler, *War Ledger*, 39.

[23]A similar problem plagues the use of military buildups as an indicator of dissatisfaction. See Suzanne Werner and Jacek Kugler, "Power Transitions and Military Buildups: Resolving the Relationship between Arms Buildups and War," in Kugler and Lemke, *Parity and War*, 187–207. If your adversary builds up its armaments, you often reciprocate, even though you may be satisfied with the status quo.

[24]Choong-Nam Kang and Douglas M. Gibler, "An Assessment of the Validity of Empirical Measures of State Satisfaction with the Systemic Status Quo," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 4 (2013): 697.

benefits from the existing rules of the system.[25] One problem here is that although similarity in formal alliances may imply satisfaction, low similarity does not necessarily imply dissatisfaction. As James D. Morrow reminds us, if shared interests are sufficiently strong, alliances are not necessary to signal commitment.[26] For this reason, informal alignments based on trade or shared interests are probably a better measure of satisfaction with the existing order than are formal military alliances.

Others have proposed measuring a state's dissatisfaction based on the cost of money for that state, operationalized either as money-market discount rates or government bond rates.[27] The assumption is that a high cost of money reflects a state's relative inability to finance economic development and hence dissatisfaction with the status quo.[28] However, the high cost of money may also reflect expectations of war, which can occur between satisfied states. Thus a high cost of money does not in itself necessarily reflect dissatisfaction.

Although constructing a more valid indicator of dissatisfaction for large-N analysis is critical for a more definitive test of power transition theory, efforts to do so should be supplemented with process tracing in case studies.[29] This would facilitate a more direct measure of the rising state's dissatisfaction by focusing on the perceptions and feelings of state leaders and possibly their publics as well, and help explain variations in the perceived importance of status. Our confidence in hypotheses on dissatisfaction would be significantly increased if large-N and case-study approaches produced similar results.[30] Finally, thinking through states' dissatisfaction in particular cases might stimulate the development of more valid general indicators.

Incorporating Status Dissatisfaction

Organski's emphasis on states' unwillingness to accept a "subordinate position" in the system is conducive in principle to the incorporation of status concerns, as is

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[25]Woosang Kim, "Power Parity, Alliance, Dissatisfaction, and Wars in East Asia, 1860–1993," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 5 (October 2002): 654–71.

[26]James D. Morrow, "Alliances: Why Write Them Down?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 3, no. 1 (2000): 63–83.

[27]Bueno de Mesquita, "Pride of Place," 199; Kang and Gibler, "Assessment of Empirical Measures."

[28]Some states prefer to develop without foreign borrowing, which Matsukata Mahayoshi, the architect of Meiji-era financial reform and Japan's first finance minister, described as "submitting to foreign control." John H. Sagers, *Origins of Japanese Wealth and Power: Reconciling Confucianism and Capitalism, 1830–1885* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 122.

[29]Also worth considering, from outside power transition theory, is a network centrality indicator of status. Jonathan Renshon, "Status Deficits and War," *International Organization* 70, no. 3 (July 2016): 513–50. Note, however, that perceptions of low status are not in themselves an indicator of status dissatisfaction. Many economically and militarily weak low-status states accept the rank conferred on them. For early attempts to measure the overall level of "status inconsistency" in the international system, based on correlations between states' status as reflected by membership in international organizations and by indicators of power and wealth, see Michael D. Wallace, *War and Rank Among Nations* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1973); Manus I. Midlarsky, *On War: Political Violence in the International System* (New York: Free Press, 1975), chaps. 5–6.

[30]Similarly, Allan Dafoe et al. write that since the perceptual nature of status requires the use of proxy measures in quantitative analysis, small-N designs, which can account for "leaders' beliefs and actions," may aid causal inference. Allan Dafoe, Jonathan Renshon, and Paul Huth, "Reputation and Status as Motives for War," *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (2014): 383–84.

the conceptualization of dissatisfaction in terms of a disequilibrium between bene-fits received and benefits thought to be deserved.[31] However, subsequent research in the Organski et al. power transition research program has not developed this line of argument. This represents a missed opportunity. Power transition theorists generally conceive of the link between shifting power and war as enabled by power parity and motivated by the rising state's dissatisfaction with the material benefits the rising state receives from the system. We argue that states can be dissatisfied with intangible concerns about status as well as about the distribution of material resources. Status concerns are an additional component of dissatisfaction, although their importance varies across cases.

Scholarly interest in status concerns as sources of dissatisfaction and as causes of interstate conflict behavior has exploded in the last few years. Xiaoyu Pu and Randall L. Schweller write that "status demands are usually at the forefront of [the rising power's] dissatisfaction with the established order."[32] Yong Deng writes that a growth in wealth leads to greater demands for respect, and dissatisfaction will exist "so long as the rise of expectations outstrips the pace of actual status improve-ments."[33] Some argue that status dissatisfaction and lack of respect are among the most important causes of war.[34] In his analysis of Germany's challenge to Britain's naval dominance prior to World War I, Reinhard Wolf argues that "status ambitions … clearly prevailed over sound strategic calculations."[35] Steven Ward contends that perceptions of status immobility can lead to conflict through their domestic political effects.[36] Most of this work on rising states and status falls outside of the power transition research program. Here we explicitly incorporate status dissatisfaction into a power transition framework.

Despite "widespread agreement that status matters,"[37] scholars have only recently made progress in defining the concept and differentiating it from related concepts like honor, recognition, and reputation.[38] We follow Deborah Welch

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[31]Organski, *World Politics*, 366–67. Organski occasionally mentions status, but he does not tie it to power transition the-ory. Ibid., 7–8, 142. Organski and Kugler note in passing that dissatisfaction can be subjective and not necessarily rational to an "objective" observer. Organski and Kugler, *War Ledger*, 23.

[32]Xiaoyu Pu and Randall L. Schweller, "Status Signaling, Multiple Audiences, and China's Blue-Water Naval Ambition," in *Status in World Politics*, ed. T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 141.

[33]Yong Deng, *China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 9.

[34]Richard Ned Lebow, *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Thomas Lindemann, *Causes of War: The Struggle for Recognition* (Colchester, UK: ECPR Press, 2010).

[35]Reinhard Wolf, "Rising Powers, Status Ambitions, and the Need to Reassure: What China Could Learn from Imperial Germany's Failures," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 2 (May 2014): 196. See also Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), chap. 6.

[36]Steven Ward, "Race, Status, and Japanese Revisionism in the Early 1930s," *Security Studies* 22, no. 4 (October–Decem-ber 2013): 607–39.

[37]Renshon, "Status Deficits and War," 513.

[38]Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth, "Reputation and Status"; Tudor A. Onea, "Between Dominance and Decline: Status Anxi-ety and Great Power Rivalry," *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 1 (January 2014): 125–152; Renshon, *Fighting for Status*. Analysts generally treat status, recognition, and respect as inseparable. As Wolf argues, disrespect is a misre-cognition of an actor's status. An actor feels disrespected when others do not confirm what the actor perceives as its "rightful position." Reinhard Wolf, "Respect and Disrespect in International Politics: The Significance of Status Recog-nition," *International Theory* 3, no. 1 (2011): 107.

Larson et al. and define status as "collective beliefs about a given state's ranking on valued attributes."[39] Status involves both club membership and relative standing within a club. Status is collective, conferred by group members and thus dependent on others' subjective perceptions. It is also relative and positional, a scarce but not strictly zero-sum good. A status hierarchy is a group of states that use each other for comparison on highly salient attributes. Status dissatisfaction is the gap between the status one believes one deserves based on one's attributes and status actually conferred by others.[40] To know when an actor is dissatisfied with its status, we need to know how that actor perceives its own "rightful place," and whether this position is confirmed by relevant others. This approach is consistent with Karl Gustafsson's, where he explains the impact of "disruptions to states' reciprocally performed routinized recognition" as a cause of relationship deterioration.[41]

Status includes both intrinsic and instrumental components. It is valued both as an end in itself (including for its psychological value) and as a means for advancing international influence, economic interests, domestic political support, and ideological goals.[42] When political leaders talk about the importance of status and prestige, it is not always clear whether they are thinking in intrinsic or instrumental terms. In the July 1914 crisis, for example, Russian leaders repeatedly stated that failure to take a strong stand in support of Serbia would lead to a significant loss of Russian status and prestige. Yet scholars debate whether Russian leaders were more concerned about status as an end in itself or its reputational value in advancing Russian strategic interests.[43]

This example of feared loss of status, along with the earlier distinction between status anxieties and status ambitions, raises the question of possible asymmetries in motivations to improve status and to prevent a loss of status. Scholars have generally neglected this question.[44] Prospect theory implies that losing status is more

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[39]Deborah Welch Larson, T. V. Paul, and William C. Wohlforth, "Status and World Order," in Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, *Status in World Politics*, 7–9.

[40]Regarding terminology, Renshon uses "status concerns" and "status deficits." Onea refers to "status anxiety" about losses in status and "status inconsistency" for actors trying to improve their status. Renshon, *Fighting for Status*; Onea, "Between Dominance and Decline," 132. For the latter, we prefer "status ambitions."

[41]Karl Gustafsson, "Routinised Recognition and Anxiety: Understanding the Deterioration in Sino-Japanese Relations," *Review of International Studies* 42, no. 4 (October 2016): 613. Japanese leaders repeatedly referred to their desire to attain their "rightful place" in the system of "civilized" states. For example, see a November 1873 speech of Itō Hirobumi, minister of industry, noted in Hirakawa Sukehiro, "Japan's Turn to the West," trans. Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, in *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 5: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 469–70. See also R. P. Anand, "Family of 'Civilized' States and Japan: A Story of Humiliation, Assimilation, Defiance, and Confrontation," *Journal of the History of International Law* 5 (2003): 1–75.

[42]On the difficulty of disentangling intrinsic and instrumental elements of status, see Robert Jervis, "Fighting for Standing or Standing to Fight?" *Security Studies* 21, no. 2 (April–June 2012): 336–44; Renshon, *Fighting for Status*, chap. 1.

[43]Arguing for the intrinsic value of status in the minds of Russian leaders are Wolf, "Rising Powers, Status Ambitions, and the Need to Reassure" and Renshon, *Fighting for Status*, 221–33. Arguing for its instrumental value are Jack S. Levy and William Mulligan, "Shifting Power, Preventive Logic, and the Response of the Target: Germany, Russia, and the First World War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40, 5 (2017): 731–69.

[44]Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko argue that "[d]eclining powers may be particularly reluctant to accept loss of status," because the possibility of such a loss represents a threat to the dominant power's positive identity and privileged position, but do not make an explicit comparison between these losses and the benefits of gaining status. Larson and Shevchenko, "Managing Rising Powers: The Role of Status Concerns," in Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, *Status in World Politics*, 35, 41.

hurtful than gaining status is beneficial. The theory assumes that people evaluate outcomes relative to a reference point, overvalue losses relative to comparable gains, and engage in risk-averse behavior when making choices among possible gains but risk-acceptant behavior when making choices among possible losses.[45] Consequently, status anxieties of declining powers should be greater than the status ambitions of rising powers, and declining powers should engage in more risk-acceptant behavior to prevent status losses than rising powers do to make status gains.[46]

These are plausible hypotheses. However, they implicitly assume that state leaders define their reference points around the status quo. This is probably correct for declining states, and possibly for rising states, at least for some leaders at some times. It is possible, however, that some rising-state leaders might frame their choices around a reference point superior to the status quo, an "aspiration level" based on expectations of positive future outcomes, social comparisons with high-status states it wants to emulate, or an earlier era in which it was in a superior position.[47] If so, the rising state would be short of its reference point and hence in the domain of losses, and would then conceive of its rise as a means to eliminate losses in status (or other values) rather than to make gains. Consequently, it would not behave much differently than a declining power concerned with its losses. Each would have a tendency toward more risk-acceptant behavior than predicted by an expected value calculus. These hypotheses are worth exploring, but that lies beyond the scope of this article given the methodological complications of identifying actors' reference points.[48]

Turning now to methodological issues relating to status, we want to emphasize that identifying status motivations and estimating their strength relative to other motivations is no easy task, even in a single historical case. We emphasize actors' perceptions rather than actions, because the same actions can reflect very different motivations. Did Germany's *Weltpolitik* and naval expansion beginning in 1897 represent a quest for status as reflected in Chancellor Bülow's comment about "a place in the sun," or did it represent a strategy to advance German strategic and economic ambitions?[49] Our task is complicated further

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[45]Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk," *Econometrica* 47, no. 2 (March 1979): 263–92.

[46]Onea, "Between Dominance and Decline," 135.

[47]Kahneman and Tversky, "Prospect Theory"; Botond Koszegi and Matthew Rabin, "Reference-Dependent Risk Attitudes," *American Economic Review* 97, no. 4 (September 2007): 1047–73; Tudor A. Onea, "Dangerous Comparisons: Social Comparison and Identifying Dangerous Rising Powers" (unpublished manuscript, National University of Singapore, 2016).

[48]For one interesting measurement strategy, designed to assess the extent to which Japanese leaders in 1941 defined their reference points in terms of the aspiration level associated with a "co-prosperity sphere," see Ariel S. Levi and Glen Whyte, "A Cross-Cultural Exploration of the Reference Dependence of Crucial Group Decisions under Risk: Japan's 1941 Decision for War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 6 (December 1997): 792–813. On reference points and other analytic issues in the application of prospect theory to international relations, see Jack S. Levy, "Prospect Theory, Rational Choice, and International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (March 1997): 87–112.

[49]Michelle Murray, "Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics: The Tragedy of German Naval Ambition before the First World War," *Security Studies* 19, no. 4 (October–December 2010): 656–88.

by the possibility that political leaders sometimes use the rhetoric of status, humiliation, and disrespect to rationalize to domestic publics actions taken for strategic and economic reasons. However, if publics are sensitive to status anxieties or ambitions, such rationalizations are themselves indicators of status concerns. We rely heavily on attributions of status motivations in secondary historical accounts if they represent a consensus of historians and if the evidence advanced in support of status attributions seems plausible. Quotes from political leaders can be revealing, particularly if similar quotes form a pattern and are present in private statements not designed for public consumption.[50] In the following case study of Japan, for example, we rely on leaders' statements about their dissatisfaction with unequal treaties imposed by the West and their exclusion from the European-centered club of "civilized" nations. We also rely on statements conveying a sense of Japanese cultural superiority over China and others.

Domestic Politics

We mentioned in passing that status dissatisfaction can have an important domestic component. If nationalistic publics believe that compromise with an adversary on a particular issue would be a national humiliation and diminish the country's status ranking, and if political leaders take a hard-line position in part because they believe that to do otherwise would mean losing domestic political support, then status dissatisfaction plays an important role through its interaction effects with domestic politics. This raises the question of whether other key power transition variables interact with domestic factors.

Organski's initial formulation of power transition theory incorporated two important domestic variables: industrialization and political capacity.[51] Robert Gilpin's hegemonic transition theory incorporates a similar logic, with differential growth rates being "the most destabilizing factor" for the system.[52] Gilpin goes beyond Organski, however, in suggesting other domestic political linkages. He emphasizes elite preferences and the shifting distribution of power among competing domestic coalitions and the impact of this shift on a state's external behavior. Gilpin further notes that domestic changes can affect leaders' political capacity to pursue foreign policy goals, and links developments such as secure property rights to increasing political capacity.[53]

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[50]Note that there is an asymmetry in observable indicators of attitudes about status. Perceptions and feelings of dissatisfaction are more likely to be articulated, by political leaders or others, than are perceptions and feelings of satisfaction. Process tracing or content analysis of documents or speeches generates more confidence that people are dissatisfied than that people are satisfied.

[51]Organski, *World Politics*.

[52]Gilpin, *War and Change*, 13 (quote), 22, 96–104.

[53]Ibid., 22, 97. Domestic variables are also central to Gilpin's treatment of the Peloponnesian War in Robert Gilpin, "Theory of Hegemonic War," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 591–613. For a useful discussion of Gilpin's insights into the importance of domestic variables, see Jonathan Kirshner, "Gilpin Approaches *War and Change*: A Classical Realist in Structural Drag," in *Power, Order, and Change in World Politics*, ed. G. John Ikenberry (Cambridge: Cambridge Univeysity Press, 2014), 131–61.

It is important to note that Gilpin's discussion of shifting domestic coalitions and foreign policy includes two distinct causal paths. The first influences foreign policy behavior directly, while the other has an impact through its interaction effects with political capacity. This is an important analytic distinction. It is sometimes said, but more often simply assumed, that power transition theory is a system-level theory.[54] It is true that all power transition theories are primarily interested in explaining systemic orders, patterns, and wars. The causal explanation for these system-level outcomes, however, varies with particular formulations of power transition theory, although shifting power is central to each of these formulations. Organski's power transition theory incorporates industrialization and political capacity, domestic variables that are closely linked to differential rates of growth in power, and thus cannot be described as a strictly systemic theory. In addition to these variables, Gilpin includes other domestic factors that have a direct impact on war and system change apart from interaction effects with industrialization and political capacity. We should note, however, that, some quantitative tests of Organski's power transition theory focus only on measures of power and make no effort to incorporate either dissatisfaction or political capacity directly into the analysis. We can describe these operationalizations of the theory as system-level models.

Having completed our summary and extension of power transition theory, we apply our framework to the processes leading to the 1894–95 war between Qing China and Japan. After an historical overview of events leading to the war and a brief examination of alternative explanations for it, we focus on the differential rates of growth between Japan and China, the subsequent power shift, Japan's status dissatisfaction, and the impact of domestic politics on each of these factors. We also emphasize the contextual effects of globalization and industrialization. We argue that Japan's status dissatisfaction provided the motivation for economic and military modernization and for changing the status quo, and that Japan's increasing relative power provided the conditions that made war a viable option.

The Sino-Japanese War, 1894–1895[55]

Historical Overview

China had been dominant in Asia for centuries and viewed itself as the center of civilization.[56] As Europe and North America came to form the core of a new geographic concentration of power in the world, they extended their influence by showing the potential of modernization, industrialization, and trade, as well as by

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[54]Richard Ned Lebow and Benjamin Valentino, "Lost in Transition: A Critical Analysis of Power Transition Theory," *International Relations* 23, no. 3 (2009): 389–410.

[55]The war is sometimes called the First Sino-Japanese War or the Jiawu War. In Japan, it is the Japan–Qing War.

[56]John King Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

imperial penetration. The Opium Wars against Britain (1839–42, 1856–60) and the later Sino-French War (1884–85) revealed Chinese vulnerability to Western encroachment. This system change had a profound impact on traditionally hierarchical East Asian regional relations. The Western incursions into China played a large role in setting the stage for Japan's attempt at regional hegemony.[57]

Japan's long-standing seclusion (*sakoku*) under the shoguns, which witnessed over 250 years of relative peace in Japan, ended with the 1854 opening by the United States. This event catalyzed Japan's transformation into a modern industrial state.[58] With its growing power after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan saw an opportunity to contest China for influence in Korea, a mineral-rich state and China's most important tributary. China and Japan each had allies in Korea, with China aligning with traditional conservatives associated with the Korean royal family and Japan with those committed to reform and modernization. Japanese concerns about the independence of Korea increased with Russian progress on the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, which would facilitate the projection of Russian power into Manchuria and Korea and threaten Japanese interests.[59]

Following an 1873 crisis over Korea that involved a contentious domestic debate as to the direction of Japanese policy, Japan imposed the Treaty of Kanghwa on Korea in 1876. The treaty opened three Korean ports to Japanese trade and granted extraterritoriality (exemption from the jurisdiction of local law) to Japanese persons in Korea. It also included Japan's formal recognition of Korea as an "independent" nation, a provision designed to limit Chinese influence in Korea. Korea continued to insist, however, that it was a "dependent country," subservient to China as suzerain. This dismissive attitude toward the newly formed Meiji government helped foment anti-Korean public sentiment in Japan.[60]

Subsequent disputes over judicial and trade issues led to increasing tension over influence in Korea. Japanese extraterritoriality became extremely contentious. Disputes over shipping rights and other commercial issues arose as Meiji financial reforms and subsequent economic growth produced changes in the regional economy. China, seeking a counterbalance to Japanese influence, encouraged Korea to open trade to Western nations. The United States, Britain, Germany, France, Russia, and Italy each obtained "unequal treaties" of their own in 1883–84, ending the Japanese monopoly on Korean trade.[61]

The struggle between Chinese and Japanese control of Korea led to ever-widening internal divisions in Korea. Debates over Korean loyalty to China led to the

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[57]David C. Kang, "Hierarchy in Asian International Relations: 1300–1900," *Asian Security* 1, no. 1 (January 2005): 74.

[58]Countries embracing industrialization experienced dramatically increased economic growth rates compared to countries that resisted these processes, and later-industrializing countries learned from the experiences of early adopters. Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 20, 27, 32.

[59]Roger F. Hackett, *Yamagata Aritomo in the Rise of Modern Japan, 1838–1922* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 138–39.

[60]Chushichi Tsuzuki, *The Pursuit of Power in Modern Japan, 1825–1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 67–69.

[61]Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 52.

Seoul Uprising of December 1884, in which pro-Japan reformers overthrew the pro-Chinese government in a bloody coup, only to be crushed by Chinese military intervention while Japan stood aside.[62] The ensuing crisis was resolved by the 1885 Tianjin Convention, which committed both Japan and China to withdraw troops, and to notify the other of any future military deployments to the peninsula.[63]

In 1893 Korea experienced the Tonghak Rebellion, which aimed to bring social change that would alleviate the high taxes and loan rates under which many Korean peasants suffered.[64] By February of 1894, rebels had seized a provincial capital.[65] China, upon invitation from the Korean King Gojong, sent troops to quell the rebellion. In the midst of Japan's military buildup, Kim Ok-kyun, a pro-Japanese Korean intellectual favored to lead a Japan-inspired reform mission, was assassinated in Shanghai. China's humiliating return of Kim's quartered body to Korea spurred anti-Korean outrage.[66] Motivated by increased public pressure on the government for action, and by a determination not to repeat the failure to provide adequate support for the 1884 coup attempt, Japanese high officials called for military intervention. At the cabinet meeting of 2 June, Japanese Foreign Minister Mutsu Munemitsu presented a cable from the Japanese minister in Seoul, Ōtori Keisuke, stating that the Koreans had requested Chinese military assistance.[67] Japan, claiming a violation of the Tianjin agreement regarding prior notification, landed several hundred of its own sailors in early June. A quickly negotiated truce between the Korean government and the rebels failed to stop the influx of foreign forces, and by mid-June, eight thousand Japanese troops were well-positioned to seize the capital.[68]

Support for war by many in the Diet made troop withdrawal difficult, and assuaging these political forces, along with their large domestic constituencies, limited possibilities for compromise and negotiation.[69] On 16 June, Japan proposed a joint commission with China to institute Korean reforms, but China refused, leaving the militaries of both nations deployed and without clear political direction.[70] In Mutsu's response to Wang Fengzao, Qing ambassador to Japan, he stated that the Japanese government "finds it impossible to order the retirement of those Japanese troops now in Korea."[71] Prime Minister Itō told Matsukata on 22

[62]Michael A. Barnhart, *Japan and the World since 1868* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), 14.

[63]Saya Makito, *The Sino-Japanese War and the Birth of Japanese Nationalism*, trans. David Noble (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2011), 6.

[64]Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 66.

[65]C. I. Eugene Kim and Han-kyo Kim, *Korea and the Politics of Imperialism, 1876–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 76–77.

[66]Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 97–98.

[67]Hackett, *Yamagata*, 160.

[68]Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, 67–75.

[69]Makito, *Sino-Japanese War*, 7.

[70]Hilary Conroy, *The Japanese Seizure of Korea, 1868–1910: A Study of Realism and Idealism in International Relations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 245; Tsuzuki, *Pursuit of Power in Modern Japan*, 125. On the proposal, see also Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism*, 47.

[71]Tsuzuki, *Pursuit of Power in Modern Japan*, 125.

June that there was likely "no policy but to go to war."[72] Two days later, Japanese military leader Yamagata Aritomo submitted to the cabinet a plan to seize Seoul and relocate Japanese supreme headquarters to the royal palace.[73]

On 28 June, Ōtori pressed the issue of China's suzerain status over Korea in a letter to the Korean government with an implied ultimatum, described in a telegram to Mutsu, that if recognition of suzerainty continued, "we have to take matters into our own hands…. we shall immediately besiege Royal Palace and demand explanation and apology [for] their grave violation of Article I of Kanghwa Treaty [sic]."[74] The cabinet's final decision on the use of force appeared to be forthcoming, but ongoing Western mediation efforts stood as a final hurdle to war. The Qing government had invited several foreign powers to mediate the Korean issue, but Mutsu believed that only the British-led negotiations held any promise. Despite these ongoing negotiations, Mutsu, in an 8 July telegram, advised that Ōtori "need not avoid conflict in case of actual provocation."[75] Four days later, however, on the heels of what he perceived as the failure of British negotiations, Mutsu ordered Ōtori to "take decisive steps" and "commence active movement on some pretext, taking care to do what is least liable to criticism in the eyes of the world."[76] Ōtori sent an official ultimatum with a list of demands on 19 July and gave a deadline of 22 July for the Korean reply.[77]

Mindful of the perceptions of the Western powers, Japanese forces seized the king and the capital on 23 July under the guise of a last-ditch effort at negotiations. This led to the installment of a pro-Japan government and an order expelling Chinese troops from Korea. Following the Japanese Imperial Navy's surprise attack on two of the returning Chinese warships that day, Japan formally declared war on 1 August. Japanese forces quickly ousted China from Korea, entered Manchuria by October, and soon seized Port Arthur. Itō resisted pressure from his military commanders to continue the war into China, and signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki in April 1895.[78] A week later, diplomatic pressure by Russia, Germany, and France (the Triple Intervention) rolled back some of Japan's gains from the war, including its acquisition of the Liaodong Peninsula.

Alternative Interpretations of the War

Interpretations of the origins of the First Sino-Japanese War emphasize Japan's strategic and economic interests in Korea; its quest for recognition and status

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[72]Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, 73.

[73]Hackett, *Yamagata*, 161.

[74]Conroy, *Japanese Seizure of Korea*, 250. First brackets in the original.

[75]Ibid., 253.

[76]Ibid., 253–54; Munemitsu Mutsu, *Kenkenroku: A Diplomatic Record of the Sino-Japanese War, 1894–95*, ed. and trans. Gordon Mark Berger (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1982), 37.

[77]Mutsu, *Kenkenroku*, 37–38.

[78]Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 248.

among Western powers and beliefs in Japanese cultural supremacy over Korea; and domestic political pressures. One line of argument, which is consistent with structural realism,[79] emphasizes the imperial struggle for control over Korea, its strategic territory, and its raw materials, including coal and iron.[80] This was an East Asian "great game" involving China, Japan, and, by the 1890s, Russia, which had initiated the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway to enhance its power projection capabilities into East Asia and to help it compete economically in Manchuria, Korea, and other East Asian markets.[81] Foreign control of Korea, which was "a dagger pointed at the heart of Japan," would constitute a major security threat to the latter.[82] By eliminating Chinese influence in Korea, Japan could forestall British and Russian incursion, thus counterbalancing the Western imperial powers, and in the process secure a leading position in Asia.[83]

Other interpretations, consistent with some versions of realism, emphasize a balance between strategic and economic factors. In his essay "Japan's Drive to Great-Power Status," Akira Iriye emphasizes Japan's goal of "mobilizing the resources of the whole country for economic growth and expansion."[84] John Benson and Takao Matsumura, highlighting Japan's emphasis on the priority of military spending following its economic upswing, view the war as a natural extension of the "enrich the country, strengthen the military" (*fukoku kyōhei*) slogan of the Meiji movement.[85]

Dale C. Copeland argues that Japan aimed to gain political influence over the Korean market, but more for the purpose of maintaining the status quo and averting decline than for aggressively expanding. He draws on economic realist theory, which emphasizes that states' fears of being cut off from the raw materials and trade upon which their economy and security depend leads to the goal of establishing political control over those sources of supply, which increases the likelihood of conflict with the source of the goods or with rivals.[86] Copeland argues that Japanese leaders believed that their future economic development and industrialization were dependent on Korean food imports and markets for its manufactured goods. They feared that Korea's failure to modernize and frequent interventions by China would generate constant internal turmoil in Korea, impede the development of the Korean economy, and deprive Japan of a vital market and thus a key component of its future economic development.

[79]John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).
[80]Benson and Matsumura, *Japan 1868–1945*, 59–61.
[81]Conroy, *Japanese Seizure of Korea*; Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism*, 45–46.
[82]Peter Duus, *The Rise of Modern Japan* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 125.
[83]Myung Hyun Cho, *Korea and the Major Powers: An Analysis of Power Structures in East Asia* (Seoul: Research Center for Peace and Unification of Korea, 1989), 51.
[84]Akira Iriye, "Japan's Drive to Great-Power Status," in Jansen, *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 5*, 758.
[85]Benson and Matsumura, *Japan 1868–1945*, 26–28.
[86]Dale C. Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 21–22. Kenneth N. Waltz, for example, argues that states want "to control what they depend on or to lessen the extent of their dependency." Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 106.

They aimed instead to stabilize Korea from within though political and economic reforms, effected if necessary through a temporary occupation. The goal was a Korea strong enough to resist foreign encroachment and to be a good trade partner for Japan.[87]

In contrast to the economic realist emphasis on state economic interests, some historians emphasize the role of private economic interests. W. G. Beasley, for example, introduces a liberal pressure group argument emphasizing the lobbying of domestic textile manufacturers for military intervention in Korea to "tip the balance against their Chinese competitors."[88] This argument has attracted little support. Hilary Conroy questions both liberal pressure group interpretations and Marxist interpretations that attribute the war to capitalism. Conroy argues that "… the conclusion is clear and unequivocal: economic factors were negligible, insufficient, unimportant. The Sino-Japanese War, though it was Japan's first big step toward annexation of Korea, was not an economic war, caused neither by Sino-Japanese trade rivalry in Korea nor by the penetration of the peninsula by Japanese capitalism."[89]

A number of scholars reject these materialist perspectives and argue that the primary cause of the war was Japan's quest for recognition and status in the eyes of the West. Stewart Lone emphasizes Japan's attempt to gain "approval for a new and equitable relationship" with the Western powers.[90] Paine argues that the war is "the story of a rising power, Japan, using the strategy of war to secure its policy objective of becoming an internationally recognized power."[91] Others emphasize the domestic component of Japanese status ambitions. Marius B. Jansen et al. highlight "the common aspiration of the Japanese people to build an independent nation, rich, strong, and free of the unequal treaties" imposed by the West.[92] Scholars also emphasize internal divisions between Japanese elites on the means to achieve these goals, with one camp advocating an "aggressive expansion over the Asian continent" and another seeking "the road of peace and democracy."[93]

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[87]Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War*, 105–6. Copeland concedes that economic realism provides an even better explanation for the Sino-Japanese than his own "trade expectations theory," in which fear that cut off trade will lead to a negative power shift induces leaders to initiate a preventive war to block a rising adversary while the opportunity is still available. We agree that Japanese leaders wanted internal political and economic reforms in Korea to minimize ongoing instability and secure the country as a viable trading partner for Japan. Their main goal, however, was to minimize the security threat that could emerge from foreign control of Korea. We also give greater weight to Japan's growing military power, which made a confrontational strategy feasible in 1894, to its growing status dissatisfaction and response to repeated humiliations, to domestic pressures, and to learning from the crises of 1876 and 1884.

[88]Beasley concedes, however, that Japanese economic interests were limited enough that they "did not constitute a sufficient reason for hostilities." Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism*, 45–46.

[89]Conroy, *Japanese Seizure of Korea*, 442–62, 484 (quote). Donald Calman, however, gives considerable emphasis to the role of private economic interests, and is highly critical of Conroy. Calman, *Nature and Origins of Japanese Imperialism: A Reinterpretation of the 1873 Crisis* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[90]Lone, *Japan's First Modern War*, 12.

[91]Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 111.

[92]Jansen et al., "Historiography of the Sino-Japanese War," 210.

[93]Ibid.

Several of these interpretations are consistent with a revised power transition interpretation of the war, and in fact help to enrich it.[94] Arguments emphasizing the struggle for dominance in East Asia, and Japan's motivations to expand its power and wealth or gain access to Korean markets and raw materials, all fit nicely into power transition theory's emphasis on shifting power. Interpretations highlighting Japan's goals of recognition and status help to explain the central power transition variable of the degree of dissatisfaction with the status quo. Arguments stressing Japan's drive for great-power status and the theme of "enrich the country, strengthen the military" fit both shifting power and an instrumental status mechanism. Domestic explanations emphasizing the influence of private economic interests, the political struggle between competing factions, or the influence of public opinion independently of status concerns, go beyond Organski's formulation of power transition theory.[95] In the following section we extend power transition theory by incorporating both status dissatisfaction and certain domestic variables that interact with the power transition variables of power shifts and political capacity.

An Extended Power Transition Theory Interpretation of the War

We begin with an analysis of the power relationship between China and Japan in the mid-to-late nineteenth century to establish whether there was a significant power shift, whether and when Japan reached approximate parity with China, and how Japanese leaders perceived the evolving power relationship. We then turn to the extent of Japan's dissatisfaction with the status quo. In the process, we analyze the impact of two interrelated system-level contextual factors, industrialization and globalization, on both power dynamics and satisfaction with the status quo. We then turn to the influence of domestic factors on the processes leading to war, either through their interactions with status ambitions or through a more direct path involving other domestic pressures on political leaders.

Power Shift: Economic Growth, Political Capacity, and Military Reforms

The narrowing power gap between China and Japan in the decades before the war of 1894 is best explained by the two countries' different circumstances and different reactions to the global transformation. Chinese leaders focused their attention on ending various foreign incursions and disputes, as well as domestic uprisings. China's defeat in the First Opium War forced its opening to the West, established its export-heavy position in the global economy, and contributed significantly to its economic woes.[96] The combination of poor economic conditions and the

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[94]Lemke offers a more explicit power transition theory interpretation but concedes that he provides only a "pseudo-empirical" analysis of the war. Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace*, 144.

[95]As noted above, Gilpin's hegemonic transition theory incorporates elite competition. See also Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), chap. 2.

[96]Lu Aiguo, *China and the Global Economy since 1840* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 17, 34–35.

absence of significant economic and political reforms stifled domestic production of military equipment and led to a continued reliance on imports of raw materials, as well as Western knowledge.

The Second Opium War (1856–60), which forced the imperial court to flee the capital, finally aroused the political sensibilities of the Chinese people and led to a concerted effort to halt Western aggression.[97] The "Self-Strengthening Movement," beginning in the early 1860s, signaled a recognition that China was no longer the "Middle Kingdom" and represented its most direct attempt at modernization in the era of Western imperialism.[98] Reforms were limited, however, by both ideological and institutional factors.[99] First, Confucian thought interprets such crises in moral terms, and calls for "moral regeneration" (primarily of the "imperial center") as a solution. Second, the arrogance of the bureaucracy and imperial house led to overconfidence and inattention towards the signs of the need for a modernization policy.[100] Dowager Cixi's efforts to rebuild the Summer Palace outside Beijing following its ransacking by the British demonstrated the great importance China placed on the symbols of its self-perceived position at the top of the world's most important hierarchy.[101] The vast sums spent on rebuilding were taken directly from the military coffers, reducing funds for reinforcing China's military capability, including a badly needed railroad in Manchuria.[102] This emphasis on premodern symbols of power, while perhaps important in maintaining domestic control, had grave consequences for the development of China's material capabilities, and ultimately were a cause of its military unpreparedness by 1894.

The Opium Wars, China's subsequent partition by Western powers, and the barriers to China's modernization had disastrous effects for its international position and undermined China's ability to deter further Western intervention.[103] Japanese leaders took notice and learned from the Chinese experience.[104] When confronted with Commodore Perry's warships in 1853, Japanese leaders, unlike their Chinese counterparts a decade earlier, embraced the "forced change" brought by Western military and economic might and initiated deep institutional reforms.[105] They quickly adopted diplomatic, economic, and military policies designed to mitigate the risk of following China's unfortunate first footsteps into global modernity.

[97]Ibid., 18.

[98]John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu, *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 11: Late Ch'ing, 1800–1911, Part 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 167–72.

[99]Richard S. Horowitz, "Beyond the Marble Boat: The Transformation of the Chinese Military, 1850–1911," in *A Military History of China*, ed. David A. Graff and Robin Higham (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 159–63.

[100]Erik Ringmar, *The Mechanics of Modernity in Europe and East Asia: The Institutional Origins of Social Change and Stagnation* (London: Routledge, 2005), 192–95.

[101]Erik Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism: The European Destruction of the Palace of the Emperor of China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[102]Arthur Lewis Rosenbaum, "The Manchuria Bridgehead: Anglo-Russian Rivalry and the Imperial Railways of North China, 1897–1902," *Modern Asian Studies* 10, no. 1 (February 1976): 43.

[103]Lu, *China and the Global Economy*, 66–67.

[104]Anand, "Family of 'Civilized' States and Japan," 22.

[105]Fairbank and Liu, *The Cambridge History of China Volume 11*, 275.

Japan's own moral and cultural values also shaped the response to globalization. Even a realist like Paul Kennedy acknowledges the importance of the moral and cultural character of Japan—including the role of "military honor and valor," "discipline and fortitude," and "a will to succeed"—in aiding Japan's rise to great power status.[106] This suggests the important impact of contextual and cultural variables on the key power transition variables of political capacity and differential rates of industrialization.[107] Economic policy also set Japan apart from China. The home market was the primary driver of Japanese economic expansion.[108] Rising Japanese incomes were evident in the 1890s. Beasley writes that political and economic reforms made Japan the sole country in Asia with the institutional strength to choose its own ends and work towards achieving them.[109]

Japan's increased economic and institutional capacity facilitated its military modernization.[110] Economic growth and the reform of public finances enabled Japan to increase military spending and purchase Western weaponry. The Japanese navy, previously confined to costal defense, began making huge strides by the mid-1870s. In the latter half of the next decade, Japan began to purchase British-built warships.[111] Japan contracted French advisor Émile Bertin to lead the development of Japan's first all-steel warships, which were mounted with quick-firing guns.[112] By the 1890s, military spending reached more than 30 percent of total government expenditure.[113] By the outbreak of hostilities, Japan possessed twenty-eight ships and twenty-four torpedo boats, which played a pivotal role in Japan's success in the war.[114]

The introduction of conscription in 1873 was also significant. It dealt a significant blow to the samurai class, which previously held a monopoly on force in the nation and posed the most significant challenge to the legitimacy of the Meiji government. Conscription also helped forge a national military force, capable of repelling both domestic rebellion and Western encroachment. With the aid of Western advisors, Japan's new military put down the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877, demonstrating both the domestic power of the new regime

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[106]Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), 208.

[107]For an emphasis on the social construction of military power, see Ann Hironaka, *Tokens of Power: Rethinking War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Theo Farrell, "World Culture and Military Power," *Security Studies* 14, no. 3 (July–September 2005), 448–88; John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

[108]L. M. Cullen, *A History of Japan, 1582–1941: Internal and External Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 212.

[109]Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism*, 34.

[110]Power transition theory's use of GDP as the sole indicator of power is too restrictive and neglects military power, which influences bargaining and decisions for war. Our analysis of relative military power distinguishes between land power and sea power, following Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, "Balancing on Land and at Sea: Do States Ally against the Leading Global Power?" *International Security* 35, no. 1 (July 2010): 7–43.

[111]David C. Evans and Mark R. Peattie, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1887–1941* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 9–17.

[112]Ibid., 15–16.

[113]Benson and Matsumura, *Japan 1868–1945*, 28.

[114]Piotr Olender, *Sino-Japanese Naval War, 1894–1895* (Sandomierz, Poland: Stratus, 2014); Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 7.

and its potential international influence. Calls for a military expedition against Korea, made since the beginning of the Meiji period, could no longer be rejected out of hand due to a lack of capability.

Although China's military was larger—and many considered its size an advantage—it had serious political, organizational, and technological weaknesses. Unlike the Japanese army and navy, which were modeled on their respective Prussian and British counterparts, China had no centralized national land or sea forces. Its military was a mishmash of regional forces, each loyal to its own region and fighting under its own ethnic banner. The central Manchu government deliberately weakened and underfunded these regional forces for fear that they might threaten the Manchu dynasty. These armies had no organized engineer corps, transport services, or commissariat, and troops had to find their own provisions on the battlefield.[115] Their rigid rules of engagement, designed to maintain political control from above, seriously undercut military effectiveness.[116] Because of their role in Manchu culture, bows and arrows still played an important role in the Chinese army.[117] Unlike its Japanese counterpart, the Chinese navy failed to keep up with the significant technological advances in sea power of the late nineteenth century.[118] The inspector general of the British Imperial Maritime Customs said in 1892 that "the Chinese army is still in many respects absolutely what it was three hundred years ago—merely an armed undisciplined horde."[119]

The Chinese army was designed to maintain domestic order and minimize threats to the Manchu dynasty, not to engage a foreign adversary. Its size allowed it to overwhelm a technologically inferior adversary with its numbers, as it had for centuries, but it could not seriously challenge a modern force like the one Japan had developed by the 1890s.[120] The importance of shifting power in the final decision for war in 1894 is evident from a brief comparison with earlier crises. Japanese military leader Yamagata Aritomo opposed war in the 1873 crisis because "our military preparations were incomplete," and again in 1884 because it would have been "premature" to join France in the war against China. In 1894, however, he led a united and confident Japanese military to war because, he argued, the "practical ground … against military ventures … no longer existed."[121] This behavior is consistent with the power transition theory hypothesis that parity approximates a necessary condition for war.

Status Dissatisfaction

Earlier we noted the shortcomings of existing operational indicators of dissatisfaction in capturing the gap between the benefits a challenger receives from the system and benefits it believes it deserves, and suggested that status dissatisfaction constitutes an

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[115]Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 142.
[116]Ibid., 144; Horowitz, "Beyond the Marble Boat," 162.
[117]The Japanese military replaced samurai swords with firearms in 1882.
[118]Evans and Peattie, *Kaigun*, 39; Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 143.
[119]Ibid., 148.
[120]Ibid., 145.
[121]Quoted in Hackett, *Yamagata*, 160–67.

important dimension of dissatisfaction with the status quo. In this section we argue that Japanese leaders were consumed by concerns about national status, both for its instrumental value in securing material benefits and domestic support and for its intrinsic value. As power shifted in Japan's favor, war with China eventually became a viable strategy for alleviating Japan's dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Japan's economic interest in Korea grew after it established trade ties in 1876. Finance Minister Matsukata, in a letter to Transportation Minister Kuroda Kiyotaka, impressed the need for Japan to secure "real rights and real interests" in Korea, including ports, mining rights, telegraph lines, and railways.[122] Matsukata wanted to avoid war with China but believed that Japanese troops in Korea would reinforce Japan's economic demands.[123] Contrary to economic realist arguments, however, economic interest does not fully capture Japan's motivation in pushing for Korean reform and the eventual decision for war. The corruption of the Korean government, which spurred the Tonghak Rebellion, was particularly offensive to Japanese leaders. They believed that Korea would be better off if they emulated the Japanese model of modernization and implementation of the Meiji Restoration. As Peter Duus writes, "Reform … was not merely a matter of political expediency or political advantage for Japan; rather, it would benefit the Koreans themselves … "[124]

These seemingly altruistic ideological motivations were closely tied to Japanese status ambitions. Duus argues that Japan's policies toward Korea from the start of the Meiji era stemmed from a "desire to restore national prestige and create national unity," and that "the Korean problem was a magnet for those obsessed with Japan's international status."[125] Kido Takayoshi, a Meiji statesman, wrote in 1869 of the importance of Japan's approach to Korea as a determinant of overall success in its own modernization project. He argued that an assertive Korea policy "would instantly change Japan's outmoded customs, set its objectives abroad, promote its industry and technology, and eliminate jealousy and recrimination among its people."[126] On the eve of the war, Count Ōkuma Shigenobu echoed earlier rallying cries about Japan's role in modernizing Korea. He noted that "[i]t was Japan that first opened the Hermit Kingdom to the beneficent influence of modern civilization, and Japan also introduced Korea to the world as an independent State." Japan's charge, therefore, was to "lead the little Kingdom along the path of civilization and help it to grow in prosperity and power. Thus Japan's duty is to suffer no other Power to retard the progress or endanger the independence of Korea."[127]

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[122]Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, 70.
[123]Ibid.
[124]Ibid., 72.
[125]Ibid., 30–31.
[126]Iriye, "Japan's Drive to Great-Power Status," 744.
[127]Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 115.

This sentiment about Japan's "special civilizing mission" was significantly influenced by its historical role in the East Asian regional status hierarchy.[128] Scholars have traced Japan's shifting conceptions of its regional role back as far as the fifth century, ranging between periods characterized by 1) a subservient relationship with China; 2) self-conception as an equal to China; and 3) more distance and independent authority.[129] Given Japan's historical awkwardness within the Asian hierarchy, and its skepticism that China, in its weakened state, could lead Asia into the new century, Japan quickly stepped in to assume this role.[130] This assumption stemmed in part from its historical claims to "Middle Kingdom" status, and in part to regain what it viewed as status lost during the period of seclusion.[131]

During Japan's relative seclusion during the Tokugawa period—cut off from its cultural, religious, and linguistic roots in China—the idea of Japan-as-center grew. This seed of nationalism was watered by globalization, as the leaders of the Meiji Restoration came to understand the importance of stoking the flames of national identity in restoring power within Japan and repelling imperialist pressures brought by Western countries. Barry Buzan and George Lawson write that in Japan, nationalism "acted as the glue of 'modernizing missions.'"[132] Kenneth B. Pyle argues that the new "national purpose" of the Meiji regime went beyond the acquisition of power—it was aimed at "bring [ing] Japan dignity and recognition as a first-class nation. This preoccupation was reflected in Japan's keen attention to its rank and status from the time it entered international society."[133]

The popular slogan of those leading the ousting of the shogun, *sonnō jōi*, or "revere the emperor, expel the barbarians," was replaced with *fukoku kyōhei*, or "rich country, strong military." This slogan represented the reorientation of Japanese thought and focus of society during this period toward industrial and technological development.[134] In his inaugural speech to the Diet as prime minister in 1890, Yamagata argued that in order to maintain independence,

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[128]Ibid., 116. The historical and cultural context is central to an understanding of why the Korean issue was so important in Meiji domestic politics. The ideal of Japanese supremacy was rooted in ancient myths, which influenced the failed Edo-period invasions of Korea by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1592 and 1597. See Key-Hiuk Kim, *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order: Korea, Japan, and the Chinese Empire, 1860–1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 331–32; Makito, *Sino-Japanese War*, 14–15; Tsuzuki, *Pursuit of Power in Modern Japan*, 68. By the Meiji Restoration, the myths themselves, coupled with previous failures, led to a revenge motive among Japan's warrior class, many of whom occupied positions of power in the new government. These motives were captured by the concept of *seikanron*, which describes a sacred military mission to Korea.

[129]Tsuzuki, *Pursuit of Power in Modern Japan*; Feng Zhang, *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

[130]Japanese intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi's famous 1885 essay "On Saying Good-Bye to Asia" was a response to failed attempts at reform in Korea and China. It embodied the idea that Japan's success depended on assuming a leadership role in Asia. Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 106.

[131]Kenneth B. Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity, 1885–1895* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969), 167–68.

[132]Buzan and Lawson, *Global Transformation*, 39.

[133]Kenneth B. Pyle, *Japan Rising: The Resurgence of Japanese Power and Purpose* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), 105–6.

[134]Richard J. Samuels, *"Rich Nation, Strong Army": National Security and the Technological Transformation of Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 35.

"it is not enough to guard only the line of sovereignty; we must also defend the line of advantage … and within the limits of the nation's resources gradually strive for that position."[135] Roger F. Hackett notes that the term "line of advantage" referred to an area outside of Japan's borders over which Japan sought "dominant influence," which was later clarified by Yamagata as referring to Korea.[136]

The issue of a lack of recognition entered the debate early into the new regime, with differences arising over the appropriate response to the perceived "national insult" of Korea's response to the announcement of the new government.[137] By the late 1880s, several perceived Korean violations of the Treaty of Kanghwa stoked nationalist sentiments among the Japanese public.[138] The former samurai class, now a political interest group with strong Diet representation and influence in the media, viewed an expedition to Korea to "avenge insults" as "honorable employment."[139] On the eve of the war, the public voiced a sentiment of offense at China's flouting of the 1885 Tianjin Convention for stationing troops without prior notification. In the eyes of the Japanese public, such an obvious loss of face demanded a response, further pushing leaders such as Foreign Minister Mutsu, ever mindful of the importance of the domestic legitimacy of the regime, toward a decision for war. Popular sentiment for war was stirred by the newly found sense of Japanese nationalism—again, having less to do with actual military threat, and more to do with defending the honor of the nation.

Japanese leaders were well aware of China's fate as a result of the Opium Wars—partition, occupation, and loss of territory (as in the case of Hong Kong)—and reached a strong consensus that to avoid a similar outcome Japan must gain equal status with the West.[140] Attaining equal status necessitated not only the implementation of basic nation-building practices, such as the defining of a northern border with Russia, but also the development of a constitution and domestic law that was in line with Western standards.[141]

Beyond seeing status as a means of avoiding negative outcomes, Japanese leaders saw it as a means of achieving its rightful place in the emerging international hierarchy. When opening to the West became a political reality in the middle of the nineteenth century, reformists understood the importance of pushing forward the image of Japan as a civilized equal in the eyes of their Western counterparts. Meiji leader Iwakura Tomomi and others understood that not all states were created equal in the European-dominated international system, and that to ensure its

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[135]Hackett, *Yamagata*, 138.
[136]Ibid.
[137]Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, 38–43.
[138]Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 94–106.
[139]Conroy, *Japanese Seizure of Korea*, 34.
[140]Timothy Brook and Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, eds., *Opium Regimes: China, Britain, and Japan, 1839–1952* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 71–72; Susumu Yamauchi, "Civilization and International Law in Japan During the Meiji Era (1868–1912)," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Law and Politics* 24 (February 1996): 2.
[141]Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, 29–30; Iriye, "Japan's Drive to Great-Power Status," 740; Pyle, *Japan Rising*, 86.

security Japan must join the ranks of the civilized nations.[142] Globalization brought the growing division between core and periphery in the international system into clear view. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Western powers believed that overseas expansion and the control of colonial territory signified a nation's sovereign and independent status.[143] Japanese leaders believed that their colonial control over Korea would send an important signal of Japan's rise in status as a comparable power, as well as provide the economic foundations for military power that would reinforce Japan's status ambitions.

The interest in advancing Japan's status on the world stage is evident in the decision to send Japan's first ambassadorial mission abroad in 1871–73. As Michael R. Auslin argues, Japanese leaders initiated the "Iwakura Mission" as a "first step to remaking Japan's position in the world."[144] The mission had important symbolic value for Japan as an emerging nation.[145] Although it failed in its goal of opening the discussion on treaty reform, it had practical value in socializing Japan to international norms and learning from the Western nations about modern modes of governance and nation building. In his speech in Sacramento, California in 1872 about the purpose of Japan's mission to the West, Itō highlighted the idea of achieving sovereign equality: "We came to study your strength, [so] that, by adopting widely your better ways, we may hereafter be stronger ourselves … We shall labor to place Japan on an equal basis, in the future, with those countries whose modern civilization is now our guide."[146] The early efforts to open treaty negotiations with the Western nations represented by the Iwakura Mission is emblematic of the central role in the foreign policy thinking of early Meiji leaders regarding the importance of revising the unequal treaties.

Status dissatisfaction arose among powerful factions of Japan's feudal system following the United States' gunboat diplomacy in 1853, which ushered in the era of the unequal treaties. Japanese elites shared the goal of treaty revision, but differed on whether that was best achieved through diplomacy or military expansion. The presence of foreign troops and the imposition of extraterritoriality were nearly universally viewed as an affront to Japanese independence.[147] Japanese leaders and citizens recognized that Western nations only concluded unequal treaties with states viewed as less than sovereign and were deeply concerned with how the world

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[142]Shogo Suzuki, *Civilization and Empire: China and Japan's Encounter with European International Society* (London: Routledge, 2009), 84–85.

[143]Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 2006), 98; Alexis Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 8–9; Iriye, "Japan's Drive to Great-Power Status," 727.

[144]Michael R. Auslin, *Negotiating with Imperialism: The Unequal Treaties and the Culture of Japanese Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 169–70. The Iwakura Mission can be understood as status signaling. On status signaling, see Pu and Schweller, "Status Signaling."

[145]Kume Kunitake, comp., *Japan Rising: The Iwakura Embassy to the USA and Europe 1871–1873*, ed. Chushichi Tszuki and R. Jules Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.

[146]Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 82.

[147]Iriye, "Japan's Drive to Great-Power Status," 736.

viewed their nation and its progress toward modernity. They perceived the unequal treaties more as a source of "shame and frustration" than of "danger and insecurity."[148]

Japanese leaders understood that achieving the nation's status goals would have an instrumental value in later negotiations, but their immediate goal was acceptance as an equal member of the international community. Auslin links the Japanese desire for treaty revision to "defending the ideological, intellectual, and physical boundaries between themselves and Westerners."[149] Michael A. Barnhart describes treaty revision itself as a test of Japan's ability to engage in Western-style diplomacy, which was seen as linked to status.[150] Duus writes that "symbolic and legal parity with the West through treaty revision was of the highest priority."[151] Iwakura stated that the treaties "disgraced the Japanese empire."[152] The unequal treaties, by casting Japan onto a lower rung of the international hierarchy, were inherently a source of status dissatisfaction, and all efforts undertaken to achieve revision thus inherently supported Japan's status pursuit. These nonmaterial status concerns differentiate our understanding of Japan's dissatisfaction from purely material conceptions.

Our analysis thus far has offered an explanation of the road to war in 1894 that is fully consistent with power transition theory, extended to include status dissatisfaction. Status-related dissatisfaction is both cause and consequence of increases in rising state power. The growth of Japanese nationalism and the modernization of Japan's government, each influenced by status concerns, gave Japan a vastly expanded extractive capacity. Although the factors we have discussed made war likely, a more nuanced understanding of Japanese domestic politics is necessary to provide a more complete explanation of the outbreak of war.

Domestic Politics, Diplomatic Failures, and Shifting Beliefs

Japan's two main domestic factions each shared the goal of enhancing Japan's status in East Asia and in the global system, but they differed over strategy—whether their status goals were best achieved by diplomacy or by forcefully subduing Korea and beginning the task of empire building. Disagreement over these competing visions for Japan's future was central to the domestic politics of early-Meiji Japan and continued until the early 1890s.[153] Edwin O. Reischauer describes the beginnings of this political split in the wake of Commodore Perry's 1853 visit to Japan, with "conservatives" advocating resistance to foreign influence, and "realists" (who believed resistance was futile) advocating a nation-building project designed to remake Japan in line with Western standards of sovereign nationhood.[154] Scholars

[148]Pyle, *New Generation in Meiji Japan*, 163.
[149]Auslin, *Negotiating with Imperialism*, 6–10.
[150]Barnhart, *Japan and the World*, 15.
[151]Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, 14.
[152]Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea*, 50.
[153]Barnhart, *Japan and the World*, 15; Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea*, 49–50.
[154]Edwin O. Reischauer, *Japan: The Story of a Nation*, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 95.

have described the split between these two groups as the "Great Divide," and have referred to the factions as anti- and pro-conquest, peace and war, domestic and overseas-expansion oriented, and capitalistic and feudalistic.[155]

The Iwakura Mission played an important role in catalyzing a gradual change in the beliefs of Iwakura and his allies in the reformist faction, which would continue to hold the leading position in the government until the war. In the short term, the mission led to an emphasis on the nation-building approach, based on the assumption that "Japan had to act like a great power in order to be considered one."[156] Japan imposed the Treaty of Kanghwa on Korea in 1876, but the treaty failed to secure Japan a dominant role in Korea, as demonstrated by the events of 1884, which brought renewed Chinese influence in Korea. In the crisis of the 1890s, diplomacy advocates made their last attempt at a reform effort in Korea—this, too, ultimately failed.

Negotiations with the West were equally troublesome for Japan's reformists, as diplomatic efforts through the 1870s and 1880s continued to fail to bring the desired treaty revisions and associated recognition. Opposition political parties seized this issue to rouse public opinion in opposition to the leadership. Public opinion thus continued to play an important role in the lead up to war, as noted in our earlier historical overview. Mutsu had to deal with an impassioned public that would not tolerate reducing troop levels or other de-escalatory steps.[157] These pressures vexed Mutsu, who was determined to conclude treaty negotiations with Britain before the outbreak of hostilities. In an 18 June telegram from Mutsu to Ōtori, Mutsu expressed his understanding that backing down would leave the public highly dissatisfied with the regime.[158] He later wrote in his memoirs that he "never saw any significance in the issue of Korea's reform other than its being a matter of political necessity."[159]

With the continued increases in military power generated by its military modernization project, Japan's strategy increasingly tilted toward the push for overseas expansion, empire, and war. The reformist faction also updated its position as Japan's power rose, leading to a convergence of beliefs among members of the two factions regarding the likelihood of a favorable outcome in war.[160] The victory of the prowar faction was less about intergroup politics and political maneuvering than it was about intellectual conversion of the antiwar faction based on its changing beliefs about Korean and Chinese intentions and the likelihood of a successful war outcome.[161] Thus belief change and the resolution of the domestic debate

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[155]Conroy, *Japanese Seizure of Korea*, 19. We refer to the two groups as reformists and hard-liners. Although membership in these factions was sometimes fluid, Prime Minister Itō generally led the reformist group from the mid-1880s.

[156]Auslin, *Negotiating with Imperialism*, 196.

[157]Louis G. Perez, *Japan Comes of Age: Mutsu Munemitsu and the Revision of the Unequal Treaties* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 159–60.

[158]Conroy, *Japanese Seizure of Korea*, 247.

[159]Mutsu, *Kenkenroku*, 29.

[160]Conroy, *Japanese Seizure of Korea*.

[161]After the war, the political balance of power shifted further, as victory had awakened those not already convinced that the path to "status deserved" lay in the militaristic approach. Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 328.

about strategy were endogenous to shifting power and hence are consistent with power transition theory.

The Role of the Military

The Japanese military consistently advocated a hard-line approach to the Korean question. The growth of the independent authority of Japan's military is an important but often overlooked aspect of Japan's internal politics leading up to the war. The military, like Japan's civilian leaders, were eager to assert their country's place in the world in the eyes of the West.[162] Two general staff officers argued in the 1880s that Japan's goals should go beyond defense and preserving neutrality, which were the goals of "second-rank nations." Rather, it should build a "force capable of acting overseas," which is necessary for "taking insult from no one." They went on to say that Japan was "not looking to stand with the second-rate Western nations, but to rank with the leading powers."[163] Hackett writes that Yamagata's push for increasing the military budget was "not merely [out] of defense but of the desire to place Japan among the first rank of world powers."[164] These ideas of Japanese supremacy and the sacred military mission to Korea link personal dissatisfaction and the quest for honor by military leaders with state action in going to war.

The military played a crucial role in the final escalation to war. Yamagata viewed the prospect of war with China as an opportunity to defend the "line of advantage." As the 1894 crisis reached its height, military strategist Kawakami Soroku reminded Mutsu of China's assertiveness in the 1882 and 1884 interventions, and argued that the time had come for Japan to "take the initiative."[165] Mutsu predicted that China, which had recently dispatched five thousand troops, would continue with large deployments, but felt Itō would not agree to dispatch more than a single Japanese brigade. Thus, Kawakami suggested to Mutsu the deception of sending a combined brigade of approximately eight thousand soldiers while requesting permission to dispatch only one brigade of two thousand.[166] In addition to marginalizing both Itō and the emperor from decisions regarding troop deployments, military leaders suppressed favorable reports of the negotiations in Seoul for fear they would undercut the military option.[167]

Power Shifts, Status, and War

We have extended power transition theory by incorporating status concerns as a source of dissatisfaction with the status quo. Political leaders seek status both as a

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[162]For many of the military leaders, their experiences as young samurai at the time of the Meiji Restoration greatly informed their sense of both personal and national purpose. Hackett, *Yamagata*, 10–18.
[163]Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, 61.
[164]Hackett, *Yamagata*, 158.
[165]Conroy, *Japanese Seizure of Korea*, 242.
[166]Ibid.
[167]Ibid., 254.

means of advancing the state's strategic and economic interests and their own domestic political interests, and as an end in itself, with its psychological benefits. The instrumental components of status—which include motivations to maintain or enhance a state's credibility or reputation and assumptions that status brings security, influence, and material benefits—are fully consistent with the materialist and rationalist "hard core" of the power transition research program.[168] The intrinsic components of status go beyond that hard core. We have also broadened power transition theory's conception of power by supplementing its focus on economic power with elements of military power. In the process we have suggested some additional theoretical propositions worth exploring. One is that there is a reciprocal relationship between dissatisfaction and rising power. Rising power may increase dissatisfaction if not accompanied by an increase in ascribed status. At the same time, dissatisfaction provides an incentive for states to increase their power—through policies of economic and military modernization and augmentation of state political capacity to mobilize societal resources for state purposes.

Our empirical analysis traced the origins of the power shift between China and Japan to their differential responses to industrialization and globalization, driven in part by differences in political cultures, with China's imperial order failing to match Japan's rapid economic, military, and political transformation. We concluded that Japan's achievement of power parity with China approximated a necessary condition for its decision for war, thus confirming a key hypothesis of power transition theory. Japan's dissatisfaction with the status quo was a primary motivating factor underlying both its modernization and its revisionist foreign policy. Economic interests—in the form of access to Korean minerals, foodstuffs, and markets—and especially strategic concerns about the potential threat posed by a Korea unable to fend off outside penetration, were important components of that dissatisfaction. Equally important, however, was Japan's status dissatisfaction. Japan sought a greater role in the East Asian regional order and recognition as an equal by leading Western powers. The country's status ambitions reflected intrinsic as well as instrumental components and included the domestic political concerns of a leadership that recognized the growing nationalism of its population. Those status ambitions also reflected a political culture that emphasized Japan's centrality to the East Asian region and a nascent national identity. In the absence of this status dissatisfaction, it is significantly less likely that Japan would have gone to war with China, and certainly not in the 1890s.

Motivated by strategic, economic, and especially status concerns, Japan's political leaders made repeated attempts to revise the status quo by fostering reform in Korea, but these were rebuffed by both the Chinese and the Koreans themselves.

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[168]We use the concept of the hard core of a research program as conceived by Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 91–195. For a Lakatosian analysis of power transition theory, see Jonathan M. DiCicco and Jack S. Levy, "Power Shifts and Problem Shifts: The Evolution of the Power Transition Research Program," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43, no. 6 (December 1999): 675–704.

These repeated diplomatic failures had a significant impact on domestic politics in Japan, increasing the credibility and the power of those favoring military action to revise the status quo, and leading reformists to lose faith in the feasibility of diplomatic options and to adopt increasingly hard-line views. Military weakness prevented Japanese leaders from pursuing more coercive policies in the crises of 1873 and 1884–85, but continued economic and military modernization thrust Japan into a position of power parity with China by the late 1880s and led to the updating of beliefs about the feasibility of war. In their decision for war in response to the crisis of 1894, Japan's leaders aimed to advance Japan's immediate economic and strategic interests in Korea and, more importantly, to change the rules of the East Asian regional order and to attain status as an equal member of the emerging global system of sovereign states. The Treaty of Shimonoseki ratified Japan's territorial gains, secured economic rights on the continent and an indemnity to continue its industrialization program, advanced Japan's status as an emerging great power, and united the country domestically. Within a week, however, the Triple Intervention by Russia, Germany, and France reversed some of these gains, aggravated Japanese dissatisfaction, and ultimately contributed to the Russo-Japanese War ten years later.[169]

We have demonstrated that Japan's status concerns were a leading source of its dissatisfaction with the status quo following the opening to the West in the mid-nineteenth century, and that status ambitions provided a strong motivation for Japan's attempt to revise the status quo, first through diplomatic negotiations over Korea and then through war after negotiations failed. Other scholars, outside of the power transition research program, have produced growing evidence that status dissatisfaction has been an important motivating factor for other rising states, including contemporary China.[170] There are many dimensions of dissatisfaction, however, and we make no claim that status is the primary determinant of dissatisfaction in all power transitions. The relative causal weight of status and of alternative sources of dissatisfaction is an important question for subsequent research.

Power transition theory, revised to incorporate status dissatisfaction, provides a reasonably powerful explanation of the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1894, more powerful than alternative explanations based exclusively on power politics, economic interests, domestic politics, or pure status arguments. We gain further explanatory power by incorporating domestic politics, as they interact with status dissatisfaction and with other key power transition variables. In the 1870s, it was not clear which of two strategies would prevail—a diplomatic strategy to reform Korea and overturn the unequal treaties, or a coercive strategy involving the military subjugation of Korea and imperial expansion. However, the ongoing

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[169]Iriye, "Japan's Drive to Great-Power Status," 767. For an interpretation of the Russo-Japanese War that emphasizes the themes of power shifts, preventive war, culturally driven assessments of relative power, and bargaining, see Philip Streich and Jack S. Levy, "Information, Commitment, and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12, no. 4 (October 2016): 489–511.

[170]Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, eds., *Status in World Politics*.

economic and military modernization and the repeated failures of diplomacy, with an added push from mass-level dissatisfaction with the status quo, led the reformists to shift to an increasingly hard-line strategy.

From the perspective of power transition theory, it is important to note that this domestic division was resolved not by internal political maneuvering, which would technically be outside power transition theory, or at least Organski's formulation of it. Rather, it was a result of reformists' rational updating of their beliefs about a diplomatic solution's declining feasibility and the growing utility of a military solution in response to the continued shift in power. That is, the resolution of the domestic dispute over policy was endogenous to shifting power. This leads us to conclude that our explanation of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 is consistent with Organski's formulation of power transition theory. Domestic factors outside of power transition theory may add a richer description of events on the road to war, but the core of the causal explanation of the war of 1894–95 is consistent with power transition theory. We are not claiming, however, that status concerns are the primary component of rising states' dissatisfaction in all power transitions, or that independent domestic, bureaucratic, or individual-level factors never play an important causal role. These are empirical questions for future research.

Our process-tracing, case-study methodology facilitated the analysis of status ambitions, their cultural roots, and their domestic political linkages; of perceptions of changing power relationships (land-based, naval-based, and economy-based); of changing political capacity; and of the interactions among these variables. Many of these factors are less conducive to analysis through large-N statistical designs. Admittedly, our case-study methodology is far more limited in establishing the generalizability of our findings to other cases. We cannot answer this generalizability question in the absence of empirical studies of other cases. The relationships we have identified, particularly regarding the role of status dissatisfaction, may have been more pronounced during the first era of globalization given the historically unprecedented magnitude of economic, technological, political, and social changes, but we expect to find them elsewhere, including in the contemporary system. Yong Deng argues, for example, that for China the pursuit of international status remains "the overriding foreign policy objective."[171]

Power transition theory has made an undeniable contribution to our understanding of international conflict. The rationalist and materialist foundations of the theory nicely explain some power transitions. Many other transitions, however, require the incorporation of both materialist and nonmaterialist status concerns. Although the large-N designs of most power transition studies have been informative and ought to continue, they need to be supplemented

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[171]Deng, *China's Struggle for Status*, 8.

by process tracing in comparative case studies that facilitate the analysis of the role of status and of the many complex causal linkages involving domestic politics in power transitions.