Performing International Systems: Two East-Asian Alternatives to the Westphalian Order

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Performing International Systems: Two East-Asian Alternatives to the Westphalian Order

Erik Ringmar

Abstract   This article provides a framework for the comparative study of international systems. By analyzing how international systems are framed, scripted, and performed, it is possible to understand how interstate relations are interpreted in different historical periods and parts of the world. But such an investigation also has general implications—inter alia for a study of the nature of power, the role of emotions in foreign policymaking, and public opinion formation. Case studies are provided by the Sino-centric, the Tokugawa, and the Westphalian systems. As this study shows, the two East Asian systems were in several respects better adapted than the Westphalian to the realities of international politics in the twenty-first century.

The comparative investigation of international systems is a relatively neglected subfield in the academic study of international relations. Although there have been many international systems throughout history, it is the contemporary Westphalian system that repeatedly is investigated—as though it were possible to understand it purely on its own terms.[1] As a result, when comparisons occasionally are made, the Westphalian system is more often than not taken as the standard by which other international systems are measured.[2] Such presentism and Eurocentrism have made it difficult to understand the conflicts that arise when international systems come into contact with each other, but also how the legacy of earlier international systems continues to influence foreign policy decision making in today's world.[3] The lack of a comparative focus has also limited our ability to envision alterna-

1. The main exception being various contributions by the English School, see inter alia Wight 1977; Bull and Watson 1984; Watson 2009; Buzan and Little 2000; and Buzan and Little 2009. See also Bozeman 1960. A nineteenth-century predecessor is Heeren 1846.
2. Compare inter alia Watson 2009, 288–309; and Linklater and Suganami 2006, 206–21.
3. On the contemporary legacy of the Sino-centric system, see Kang 2007, 49, 54–69. On the contemporary society as "heir to the past," see Watson 2009, 299–309. On the EU, see Aroney 2007.

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tives to the contemporary world order. Even when acknowledging that the current international system is undergoing change, scholars and practitioners alike have found it difficult to think beyond Westphalia.

Addressing shortcomings such as these, this article compares the international systems of Qing dynasty East Asia, Tokugawa Japan, and Westphalian Europe. Quite apart from the empirical payoff of such an investigation, a comparative study can contribute to ongoing theoretical debates. Consider, for example, the implications for the "interpretative turn" in the study of international relations.[4] In the past couple of decades, various pioneering scholars have suggested that more attention should be paid to the ways political actors make sense of the world they inhabit. To make sense of the world is to interpret it by means of a discourse. This focus on discourse is explicit in postmodern and constructivist approaches, but it also informs empirical investigations of issues such as the nature of power and social organization, or the place of emotions and deliberation in international affairs. Yet a focus on discourse is at the same time bound to obscure many pressing research questions—notably issues of agency. After all, discourse denotes a structure of signification, a system of meaning, and as such it has no subjectivity and cannot act. Discourse in and of itself is mute, like a book on a shelf before someone reads it. As a result, interpretative approaches are badly suited to explain political events and, by implication, changes in the international system.

The obvious solution is to add an agent. If discourse is a structure, social explanations can proceed by investigating the ways in which agents draw on discourse and employ it in their deliberations.[5] In order to explore this question, however, it is never enough to simply explicate the meanings that discourse contains—we must also explain *how* meanings mean. We have to explain how a certain book came off the shelf, as it were, and came to be interpreted in a certain fashion. Even if, for example, we agree that "anarchy is what states make of it," it still remains to be explained how the meanings attached to anarchy were made. Between passive structures and active agents, in other words, there must be some process, some set of events, through which discourse came to be activated and made available for public as well as individual deliberation. We could refer to this process as the "pragmatics" of discourse.[6]

A social performance constitutes such a pragmatics.[7] By staging a performance before the fellow members of their society, social actors are able to put their society's shared meanings into action. The actors borrow meanings from discourse, reaffirm these meanings through their performance, and then return them to discourse as the audience interprets the events staged before them. In this way a social performance comes to have both pedagogical and constitutive functions.

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4. Neufeld 1993. On similar "turns" in other social sciences, see Rabinow and Sullivan 1987.
5. Alexander 1988, 311–16. For international relations applications, see Dessler 1989.
6. "Pragmatics," in linguistics, refers to a speaker's communicative intentions and the strategies by which listeners interpret what those intentions are. Compare Davis 1991, 10–11.
7. Alexander 2006a, 29.

It reminds the audience members of how their society works and which rules aid and constrain their actions, but the performance also help them reimagine and recreate those meanings and rules.

During the past couple of decades, performance metaphors have successfully been employed in a number of social sciences, including anthropology and sociology, but with few exceptions such investigations have not been conducted by scholars of international relations.[8] This is surprising given that international politics provides a quasi-theatrical setting—a "world stage"—where states and other actors often are said to act and interact "before the eyes of the world."[9] Taking this metaphor seriously, it should be possible to compare international systems by contrasting the respective performances through which the logic and meaning of each system is performatively represented. Such performances are not necessarily peaceful to be sure, and the discourse shared by the participants may be severely limited, yet as long as the actors have regular interaction with each other, and sufficient impact on each other's actions, they are nevertheless performers on the same stage.[10]

The suggestion is consequently that the international systems of Qing dynasty East Asia, Tokugawa Japan, and Westphalian Europe can be compared by studying the performances staged in each respective system.[11] We will take our seats in the audience, as it were, and observe the respective plays as they unfold before us. In the process we are likely to learn, *inter alia*, how each system is conceptualized, which rules guide and constrain actors, how power is distributed, how space is defined, and on what terms recognition is granted and withheld.[12] In this way, we have a means of understanding each system in its historical context, but also a way of analyzing its legacy in the contemporary world.

Three International Systems

The seventeenth century was a time of unprecedented upheavals at both ends of the Eurasian landmass.[13] In China, the Ming were overrun and occupied by the

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8. Examples from anthropology and sociology include Goffman 1959; Geertz 1985; Geertz 1980; and Turner 1975. Contributions from historians include Turner 2001; Huizinga 1988, especially 15–56; and Burke 2005.

9. The main IR applications to date concern studies of terrorism, see Weimann 2005; Alexander 2006b; and Adler 2010. The work on "performativity," inspired by J. L. Austin and Judith Butler are applications of postmodern approaches that in effect are highly suspicious of theater metaphors. See Campbell 1998; and Weber 1998. On Austin's antitheatrical prejudice, see Austin 1962, 21–22.

10. This retains the core of Bull's definition of a "system of states." Bull 1995, 9, 10–11. It is not possible to stipulate "sovereign" political entities here since that would prejudice the definition in favor of the Westphalian system. Watson, for that reason, talks about "diverse communities of people, or political entities." Watson 2009, 13.

11. See Ringmar forthcoming.

12. This list of research tasks expands considerably on Linklater and Suganami 2006, 189–222.

13. See, for example, Reid 1990.

Manchus; in Japan, the Sengoku period came to an end in a series of epic battles; in Europe, the Thirty Years' War brought devastation and death on a previously unimagined scale. But the seventeenth century was also a time when a new political order was established. The Qing dynasty pacified and brought prosperity to China and established peaceful relations with its neighbors; the Tokugawa regime incorporated its rivals, and select foreign states, in a loose political framework in which it too was peaceful and prosperous; and in Europe, the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) established a new security order based on national sovereignty and balances of power.

Although the Manchus occupied Beijing in 1644, it took another few decades before they had firm control over the rest of the country.[14] Peace was achieved as the new rulers took over the administrative system and the armies of the conquered regime. In relations to outsiders too the Qing relied on Ming-era institutions but with some distinct additions of their own. For centuries, relations with foreigners had been regulated through the so-called tributary system—a set of rules, established and enforced by the imperial court, which obliged foreign nations to send delegations to the Chinese capital at fixed intervals. During the Ming era, there had been 123 political units participating in this system; during the Qing era, the number was smaller but a core group of states regularly undertook missions: Korea, Siam, the Ryukyu Islands, Annam, Sulu, Burma, Laos, and Malacca. There were also European countries on the list: Holland, Russia, Portugal, the Papacy, and Great Britain.[15] The only exception to these rules involved relations with tribes to the north and the west of China—Xinjiang, Mongolia, and the Central Asian steppes, including Russia—who the Chinese sought to control in more Machiavellian ways, including marriage alliances, *divide et impera* tactics, and direct military campaigns.[16]

It is easy to see what the Chinese gained from this setup. Through the tributary system, the validity of their worldview was internationally recognized. The uncouth foreigners showed up and submitted themselves to the emperor's vision of the world. But the system had advantages for the foreigners too.[17] Whenever a new ruler ascended the throne of a tributary state, he sent an envoy to China to obtain a mandate from the imperial court. Once he had received his insignia he became the unquestionable sovereign of his country, recognized by the emperor of China himself. Although the trip to China was also an excellent opportunity to engage in trade and the delegations often brought goods with them to sell, it would be incorrect to view the missions merely as trade delegations. The recognition they granted had a great symbolic value both to the Chinese state and to the foreigners.

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14. Watson and Bozeman both limit their discussion of China to the Warring States period. Neither of them address Qing dynasty China. For an IR application, see instead Kang 2010a and 2010b.
15. The classical treatment is Fairbank 1942. For an update and partial amendment, see Crossley 1999, 223–80; and Elliott 2009, 125–42.
16. This is a point emphasized in the "New Manchu History." Elliott 2001.
17. See Fairbank 1942, 133; and Fairbank and Teng 1941, 138–39.

The Sino-centric international system, in other words, was both hierarchical and centripetal with China and its emperor located at a center that the constituent units of various kinds and sizes encircled in increasing distant orbits.[18] Yet the ritual submission to the emperor did emphatically not imply political suzerainty. The emperor did not claim sovereignty over the system as a whole and the constituent units were free to carry on their affairs much as they pleased. In the vast majority of cases, once the missions went home, the foreigners were not heard of again until the next time they showed up for a ritual visit. "In reality his Majesty possesses but little actual power in those northern regions beyond the Great Wall," said one European visitor, Garnet Wolseley, in describing the relations between China and Mongolia in 1860. "But by a judicious exercise of condescension and a certain undefined assumption of authority, he is able to maintain a nominal sovereignty over those countries," and he "succeeds in having his supremacy recognised by the annual visit of a deputy from the Grand Lhama bringing some trifling tribute."[19]

To call Japan an *international* system sounds like a contradiction in terms. While Japan became a unified sovereign country after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the country pacified by the Tokugawa family after the battle of Sekigahara in 1600 was not unified.[20] Instead Japan remained divided into about 250-plus regions, the *han*, each led by their respective leader, the daimyo. The Tokugawa family controlled the largest of such regions and the largest cities, and other regions were their close allies, but over many *han*—at times more than three quarters of them— they had no direct influence.[21] The respective daimyo raised their own taxes; had their own armies, police forces, legal and educational systems; and pursued independent social and economic policies. In fact, the *han* even had their own currencies, and at the end of the Tokugawa period there were hundreds of separate forms of exchange in circulation. Although the shoguns reserved the right to put down peasant rebellions wherever they occurred, their military power was restricted by the fact that they could not tax more than their own territory.[22] More than anything, in other words, Tokugawa Japan illustrates the contingency of the distinction between the domestic and the international. To insist on a sharp demarcation between the two, we can conclude, is a Westphalian prejudice.[23]

What kept Tokugawa Japan together was a small set of regulations regarding military matters that applied equally to all regions, involving, for example, restrictions on military installations and rules preventing alliances through marriage.[24] Most notoriously, however, the institution of *sankin kotai*, "alternate attendance,"

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18. Elliott prefers the metaphor of a "canopy" that protects states from inclement political weather. Elliott 2009, 129.
19. Wolseley 1862, 220–21.
20. Ravina 1995, 997–1022.
21. Jansen 2002, 42.
22. Ravina 1995, 1001–3.
23. Ronald Toby discusses Japan's relations with the non-Japanese world in a number of works, see inter alia Toby 1977 and 1991.
24. Jansen 2002, 56–57.

required the daimyo to reside in Edo every second year and to keep their families there on a permanent basis.[25] During much of the Tokugawa period approximately 30 percent of Edo's population constituted such official hostages. In addition, the *sankin kotai* system also facilitated governance by imposing a shared cultural and social framework on the daimyo and their retainers.[26] Apart from the first generation of leaders, all future daimyo were born in Edo and growing up there they naturally came to identify with the culture and the social mores of the capital.[27] Moreover, they all participated in the same national system of prestige.[28] The *han*, daimyo, and all samurai were ranked in relation to each other and were granted positions and status in a social pecking order that was Japan-wide in scope.

In Europe, meanwhile, peace was reestablished through the principles symbolized by the Treaty of Westphalia that in 1648 concluded the Thirty Years' War.[29] The "Westphalian system," as the European solution has come to be known, granted the rights of sovereignty and self-determination to each constituent unit. As a result each state was free to pursue its own interests without interference from others. Moreover, each state, as a state, was considered equal to each other, much in the way liberal political theory considered all individuals, as individuals, to have the same value. The result was a decentralized political order without central authority in which conflicts were a constant threat and often enough a reality. Never being able to trust their neighbors, each state was forced to prepare for war.

Despite its centrifugal tendencies, the Westphalian order constituted a system—an "anarchical society"—in which the constituent units interacted with each other in a regular and regulated fashion.[30] Various institutions were established through which conflicts were mitigated and occasionally resolved. Economic conflicts, though sometimes a matter of "national interest," were increasingly dealt with through the logic of markets; military conflicts were dealt with through the formation of alliances and balances of power; and political conflicts were dealt with through diplomacy, including regular Europe-wide conferences and an elaborate system of diplomatic representation where each participant in the system maintained representatives stationed in the capitals of all others.[31]

A Few Theoretical Props

Consider next how these international systems could be compared. On the most basic ontological level the three systems are modeled in quite distinct ways—they

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25. Hall 1991.
26. See Hall 1974, 39–49; and Ikegami 1995, 158–63.
27. Jansen 2002, 128.
28. See Hall 1974, 39–49; Ikegami 1995, 193–94; and Jansen 2002, 96–126.
29. Among a large literature, see Watson 2009, 182–97; and Bozeman 1960, 438–522. A historian's assessment of the actual Westphalian Treaty is provided in Osiander 2001 and 2007.
30. Bull 1995, 51–73. Compare Watson 2009, 198–213.
31. Mattingly 1937.

are differently *framed*.[32] A frame, like the frame of a picture, frames something; that is, it sets something off from the surrounding context. We could think of the framing as the arrangement of the furniture in a room, or the building of a set for a movie, which provides a setting where action of some kind subsequently can take place. Situations can also be framed with the help of concepts. By invoking a metaphor, a situation can be set off from its context and defined as a situation of a certain kind.[33] The metaphor provides a model of reality, as it were.[34] Our three international systems provide examples: the Westphalian system is an "anarchy," the Sino-centric system a "hierarchy," and while Tokugawa was anarchical in political terms it was, socially speaking, strongly hierarchical.

To know more about the action taking place within each system, we need to investigate the *vocabularies* that each frame makes possible.[35] Vocabularies provide words for interpreting things—an interrelated set of terms through which meaning, value, and reason are attributed to the world. The vocabulary is intersubjective, a social fact, and it is handed down to us by a shared tradition to which each successive generation adds its respective neologisms. Uninterpreted facts matter too of course—we can be killed by a bomb without understanding why—but reality must nevertheless be apprehended in language before it can influence our thoughts and our actions.

We draw on vocabularies when assembling *scripts*.[36] A script provides individuals and groups with roles and goals, with lines to read, with instructions for how to act and for "how to go on."[37] The script tells us who we and others are, what relations are between us, and how people in our society are expected to interact with each other. Scripts differ in how constraining or enabling they are. Some scripts are largely ritualistic and allow little freedom of interpretation whereas others give actors a lot of scope to improvise.[38] Even when improvising, however, we are constrained by social conventions regarding intelligibility. We can choose whether, but not how, we make sense.

Consider the relationship between the way international politics is framed and the way it is scripted. Relations between political entities may be framed as an "anarchy," but how anarchy is interpreted depends on the stories we tell about

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32. Goffman 1986, 21–39, on performances, 124–55. Compare Burke 2005, 36; Apter 2006, 221, 224, provides a number of examples. On the framing of "issues" in international politics, see Keck and Sikkink 1999. This performative perspective is further developed in Ringmar forthcoming.

33. Lakoff and Johnson 1980. For applications to the study of politics, see Carver and Pikalo 2008. IR applications include Beer and de Landtsheer 2004; Drulák 2006; and Marks 2011.

34. See Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 25–32; and Pepper 1961, 84–114.

35. See Geertz 1985; Alexander 2006a, 58–59; and Alexander and Smith 2001. Compare constructivist approaches among IR theorists, as discussed by, inter alia, Adler 1997; Hopf 1998; and Guzzini 2000.

36. See Alexander 2006a, 58–64; and Giesen 2006, 348–52. For illustrations, see Apter 2006, 224–25, 232–33.

37. "How to go on," translates "jetzt kann ich fortsetzen." Wittgenstein 2001, 179.

38. See Apter 2006, 227; and Giesen 2006, 350–53.

it—on how anarchy is emplotted.[39] It is, for example, common to think of international relations as a tragedy in which states, although they wish to promote peace, are condemned to assure their own security, thereby perpetuating the fears that lead to armaments and war. Another plot structure is romance, which identifies heroes and villains and describes international relations as a story of how the hero conquers the villain and wins his reward.[40] But international politics can be emplotted as a comedy too, much like Molière's *comédies de mœurs*, where conflicts are a matter of unfortunate misunderstandings that can be resolved if we only are given a chance to talk things over and sort out our differences. Or international politics may be interpreted satirically—satire being a genre that makes fun of and subverts the other three plot structures in the manner of Grimmelshausen or Joseph Heller.

The script, finally, is *performed*.[41] From the medieval French *parformer*, meaning "to do, to carry out, to accomplish," a performance concerns the way a script is staged and enacted.[42] While frames, vocabularies, and scripts are quite impersonal and belong to all and to no one in particular, the performance is the achievement of a particular actor. A performance is an event; it takes place before our eyes as a certain world is mise en scène and dramatically represented—that is, "made present again."[43] The performance is delivered by actors and received by audiences. Some audiences are imaginary, others are right in front of us. The size of the audience depends on how many people we can reach and this in turn depends on the medium through which the performance is transmitted. To the extent that the performance is successful, the audience identifies with the events that take place before them and recognizes the actors as convincing and thereby as legitimate.[44]

This is consequently the pragmatics through which discourse is put into action and meanings are represented. Individual actors borrow interpretations from discourse, perform them faithfully or imaginatively, and then return them to discourse as the audience interprets the events staged before them. In the process, the audience members are reminded of how their society works and which rules aid and constrain its actors, but it also creates and recreates those same rules. The social performance explains how things come to make sense and how society understands itself.[45] We may of course doubt whether social performances thus understood play a role in international relations. After all, a performance requires actors

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39. Wendt 1992. On emplotment, see Frye 1971, 158–242; and White 1975, 5–12. For an IR application, see Ringmar 2006, 403–21.

40. For an interpretation of U.S. foreign policy as a quest, see Lawrence and Jewett 2002; and Jewett and Lawrence 2004.

41. See Alexander 2006a, 63–76; Giesen 2006, 353–57; and Apter 2006, 226–28.

42. Rey 2000.

43. Giesen 2006, 337–38.

44. See Alexander 2006a, 54–57; and Csikszentmihalyi 2000, 53–54. On the recognition of state actors, see inter alia Ringmar 2008; Wendt 1999; and Lindemann and Ringmar 2011.

45. This is what Turner discusses as "social drama." Turner 1975, 33–45, 78–79. Compare Geertz 1980, 121–36; and Alexander 2006a, 51–54.

who care sufficiently about each other to participate in the same play, and it requires an audience who is cohesive enough to pay attention to the same stage. International systems, some have suggested, are insufficiently social—insufficiently society-like—for sociological concepts such as these to apply to them.[46] Instead of trying to settle this issue in theoretical terms, however, we can investigate the question empirically.

Three International Performances

Qing dynasty China was a thoroughly ritualistic society. Apart from the rituals practiced in the family, there were a large number of state rituals presided over by the emperor himself and much of his time was taken up placating spirits and ancestors, praying at shrines, and making offerings.[47] According to the official ideology, the emperor had a personal responsibility for performing the rites that kept heaven and earth in harmony with each other and if some natural calamity were to occur it was regarded as a direct result of him failing in his ritual duties. Playing his part in this cosmic drama, the emperor represented not only the Chinese people but mankind at large before the powers of heaven. This was why he could lay claims to being a universal ruler.[48]

Receiving foreign visitors was an important part of the ritual. By showing up at China's doorsteps, the foreigners acknowledged the cultural supremacy of China and by bringing tributes, they expressed their thanks to the emperor for his role in maintaining the cosmic order.[49] To give tribute was a great privilege graciously bestowed on the foreigners and the means by which they were admitted to share in the benefits of China's civilization.[50] These tributary visits were always governed by the same protocol.[51] Each foreign mission was not to exceed one hundred men of whom only twenty were allowed to proceed to the court. On their way to the capital, each delegation was fed, housed, and transported at the emperor's expense and in the capital they stayed in the official "Residence for Tributary Envoys" where they were given a statutory amount of silver, rice, and fodder. Both coming and going they were accompanied by imperial troops who simultaneously protected them and controlled their movements. A few days before the audience, the envoys were debriefed by court officials who asked detailed questions about their countries of origin and their respective rulers.[52] The tributary gifts were then

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46. This includes both scholars, like Waltz 1979, and practitioners—see Hurrell 2002.
47. Fairbank 1942, 131–32. On the cultural and ritual background in ancient China, see Zhang 2001. A recent treatment is Kang 2010a and 2010b.
48. Crossley 1999, 38, 51.
49. Quoted in Fairbank and Teng 1941, 159.
50. Ibid., 138.
51. Most comprehensively introduced in Chun 1989.
52. Staunton 1797, Vol. 2, 134.

inspected and the foreign diplomats were instructed in the etiquette to be followed in his imperial presence.

On the day of the audience, the foreign emissaries were woken up very early—perhaps at 3 a.m.—and taken to the court where they were given tea and sweetmeats and required to wait for several hours. When the moment finally arrived, the envoys were led into the audience hall where they saw a throne placed on an elevated platform upon which the emperor was seated although, as during the audience of the British diplomat George Macartney in 1793, he sometimes was hidden behind a screen. As Macartney recalled, suddenly, "slow, solemn music, muffled drums, and deep-toned bells were heard at a distance."[53] Then the music stopped and "several persons passed backwards and forwards, in the proscenium or foreground ... as if engaged in preparing some *grand coup de théâtre*." When the music began again, "instantly the whole Court fell flat upon their faces before this invisible Nebuchadnezzar."[54] The ritual they performed was the koutou—the "three kneelings and the nine head-knockings." As a Russian diplomat, Count Ismailoff, described it in 1720:

> they all went down on their knees, and, after the lapse of a few minutes, bent their heads thrice to the ground. After this all arose upon their feet, then again kneeled and prostrated themselves three times. In this manner they kneeled thrice, and performed nine prostrations.[55]

This was the ritual means by which the foreigners repaid their host for his hospitality and inserted themselves into the Chinese political and cultural order.[56] Once the audience was completed, the various delegations were treated to a banquet where, as a sign of particular benevolence, they might receive food from the emperor's table or maybe a fish from one of his lakes.[57] Once they had been wined and dined, the foreign delegations were rather unceremoniously told to return home.

Japan had an emperor too but during the Tokugawa period he was entirely sidelined and it was instead the shogun in Edo who held political power, but, as we saw above, the shogun's power was severely circumscribed. Like the Chinese emperor, the shogun held audience at his court where the format, copied from China, was as ritualistic as the original. In Edo too the visitors were asked to "move on their hands and feet humbly and silently" toward the shogunal throne, and Engelbert Kaempfer, a German naturalist who accompanied a Dutch mission to Edo in 1691, called the proceeding "very awful and majestic."[58] However, the ceremony lacked the cosmic significance of its Chinese counterpart. Every second year when the daimyos appeared in Edo, they paid a visit to the shogun following the pre-

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53. Macartney 1908, 314–15.
54. Ibid.
55. Quoted in Rockhill 1905, 28.
56. Pritchard 1943, 164–65.
57. Compare Braam 1798, 193–94.
58. Kaempfer 1906, Vol. 1, 89.

scribed protocol, and the occasional foreign visitor did the same, but the atmosphere was clearly more relaxed than in Beijing. The shogun, Kaempfer reported, ordered the Dutchmen "to walk, to stand still, to compliment each other, to dance, to jump, to play the drunkard, to speak broken Japanese, to read Dutch, to paint, to sing, to put our cloaks on and off."[59] In this way, said Kaempfer, "we must suffer ourselves to contribute to the Emperor's and the Court's diversion" for two whole hours.

Instead it was the annual trips of the 250-plus daimyos to and from Edo, required by the *sankin kotai* system, that was the focus of public attention.[60] These grand affairs took the shape of long processions that in the case of the larger daimyo could include up to 2,500 people, and that for distant regions might take up to fifty days to complete.[61] Worried about a buildup of military forces in Edo, and concerned about the costs involved, the shoguns periodically sought to restrict the number of soldiers a daimyo could bring, but the restrictions had little effect. For the *han* it was a matter of prestige to send as many men as possible and often they would hire temporary laborers to swell the ranks just as the procession entered Edo or the home capital. This, the spectators were supposed to conclude, is a particularly powerful daimyo hailing from a particularly distinguished region.

Clearly the processions were a spectacle no one wanted to miss. When entering a new *han*, the traveling delegation was met by local officials who "offered us everything which could be useful to us during our voyage," and who accompanied them until they entered the next *han* where the representatives of that prince came to offer the same services.[62] The roads were swept clean—or, in the summer, watered to keep the dust down—and decorative sand was piled up along the sides.[63] In villages and towns along the way, the processions were greeted by large crowds and ushers commanded people to get down on their knees as a sign of respect.[64] Aware of the attention they attracted, the daimyo and their retainers did their best to put on a good show. The soldiers would crouch together and walk in synchronized goose steps, and at particular points along the way they would look sideways at the people in an impressively intimidating fashion. The lance-bearers were particularly admired and the tallest and most handsome men were usually picked for this task.[65] When they passed the capital of some local daimyo, the occasional Europeans were, much as in Edo, asked to dance and perform various other apish tricks.[66]

59. Ibid., 93.
60. Constantine Vaporis's work is seminal. See Vaporis 1997 and 2005.
61. Jansen 2002, 131.
62. Thunberg 1794, 336–37.
63. See Kaempfer 1906, Vol. 4, 150; and Thunberg 1794, 337–38.
64. See Fortune 1868, 42; and Thunberg 1794, 336–37.
65. Vaporis 2005, 29–30. Compare Kaempfer 1906, Vol. 1, 102–3.
66. Kaempfer 1906, Vol. 1, 97, 155.

Consider Europe next. In early modern Europe, the metaphor of the world stage, the *theatrum mundi*, was a common way to make sense of social interaction.[67] Often it was invoked, in Shakespearean fashion, to denote the superficiality and vanity of human pretensions, but in addition the metaphor was used in political contexts including attempts to make sense of the emerging international order. In the Westphalian system, the state was a sovereign, self-directing entity constrained only by the actions of other states. The state was an "actor," that is, on "the world stage." Yet if the world was a stage, the stage could also become a world. This was never more the case than in the masques regularly performed at European courts.[68] In these plays, the actors would sometimes dress up in the roles of different countries to illustrate the political dynamics of the day, and occasionally the rulers themselves would take to the stage. In France, Louis XIII and XIV regularly donned leotards and joined the *ballet de cour* in political dramas, and in England, Elizabeth I would dress up as Bellona and attack a treacherous enemy or as Pax and conclude an honorable peace.[69]

Yet it was diplomatic practice that provided the most obvious theatrical settings.[70] The assembly hall of an international congress resembled a stage on which the diplomats, representing their respective countries, acted and interacted with each other. The performances staged here often ran into difficulties. Since each diplomat, for purposes of the performance, was the country he represented, the way he was treated was also the way his country was treated. Diplomats, as a result, were ever-conscious of matters of precedence and standing. Since the states formally were equal and there was no predetermined ranking between them, conflicts were bound to occur. Manuals on diplomatic practice provided extensive discussions of how diplomats should be treated, seated, and addressed but often the arrangements broke down, resulting in delays, squabbles, and occasional fisticuffs. The theatrical quality of international politics was never more obvious than in 1645, during the negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Westphalia, when Charles Ogier, the leading French diplomat, staged a *ballet de la paix* in Münster in which the fellow dancers were the members of the French negotiating team.[71]

The Three Performances Compared

Comparing the three performances, we find that they were framed through a particular conceptualization of space. Space, in the Westphalian system, was territo-

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67. See inter alia Christian 1987; and Ringmar 2008.
68. Orgel 1975, 10–11, 55–61.
69. On the French kings, see Franko 2003. On Elizabeth I, see Orgel 1975, 55–61.
70. Compare diplomatic handbooks such as Foster 1906; and Satow 1917.
71. Grimm 2002. On the ballet that René Descartes staged for Queen Christina of Sweden in 1648, see Watson 2004. See also Ringmar 2008.

rial and atomistic.[72] Here borders were crucial since they determined the size and shape of a state, which people it included and excluded, and the resources it possessed. On Westphalian maps, the territorial claims of states were mutually exclusive and taken together were entirely exhaustive of the territory available. Corresponding to this either/or conception was a binary notion of sovereignty: each state either had complete sovereignty over a certain piece of land or none at all. Sovereignty made each state inviolable but as a result, relations between states became objects of constant negotiations.

By contrast, in the Sino-centric system, space was relational rather than territorial.[73] Here the geographical area a state occupied was less important than its relationship to the state in the center of the system. Everyone was watching the action taking place in front of them, as it were, and no one cared much about what went on behind their backs. Sovereignty in a relational system is not a binary notion and land can have several masters or no master at all. Sovereignty, that is, can be shared and functionally divided or made relative to the time and place in which it comes to be asserted. What mattered in the Sino-centric system were relations between the units rather than the units themselves. Since relations were non-negotiable, the only question was which unit should occupy which role. In all these respects, Tokugawa Japan was a mix of Westphalian and Sino-centric principles.[74] Each *han* was territorially defined and on contemporary maps its borders were carefully delineated, yet there was no notion of formal equality and in practice, the system was strongly hierarchical with each region occupying a distinct position in the social order.

The different conceptions of space provided different settings in which the subsequent performances could be staged. Strikingly, in China and Japan, the performances took place in relation to a symbolic center that attracted and organized the units that constituted the system. The center stayed fixed and the power of the rulers was made manifest by the fact that others were made to move towards them. The Westphalian system, by contrast, did not involve movement toward a center but instead the performances took place on a confined stage. This stage, however, was itself mobile and was often in fact transferred from one physical location to another—to yet another congress, world summit, or theater of war.[75] The Westphalian stage belonged to a traveling theater company, as it were. In Europe, the actors representing their countries asserted their power by seemingly being every-

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72. See inter alia Ruggie 1993; and Kuus and Agnew 2008. On maps and pre-Westphalian conceptions of space, see Woodward 1985.

73. This, as Crossley points out, was implied by the Buddhist notion of the "wheel-turning king," and it applies to the Sino-centric international system. Crossley 1999, 223–80. As far as China itself was concerned, however, carefully delineated borders were crucial. Elliott 2000. On Buddhist conceptions of political space, see Winichakul 1997, 22–36.

74. On Tokugawa conceptions of space and territoriality, see Yonemoto 2000.

75. These movements resemble the "progresses" of medieval and early modern European monarchs, discussed in Geertz 1985, 125. On similar movements across space by Emperor Qianlong, see Elliott 2009, 78–85.

where at once; in China and Japan, the rulers asserted their power by being invisible and/or inaccessible.

But there are also important differences between China and Japan. In China, it was the audience at the imperial palace that mattered and the trips there had no particular performative significance. The delegations were limited in size and the diplomats often complained bitterly about being locked up in their vehicles and unable to see any of the country they were passing through.[76] Clearly they had no chance to show off. Instead they were used by the Chinese authorities as props in the drama staged at the imperial court. Another crucial difference is that the daimyo traveled themselves and remained in Edo for extended periods of time, whereas in the Chinese system the respective rulers stayed put and their officials went for short stints to the imperial capital. As a result, the Japanese system was periodically physically and militarily realigned while the Chinese system stayed physically and militarily the same.

The three systems were scripted entirely differently. Europe did not have one scriptwriter and instead the actors were largely improvising their parts, making things up as they went along. Not surprisingly conflicts were common. Most often the script was emplotted as a tragedy—the states were seen as tragic heroes that strove for peace but who were forced to continuously recreate the conditions that made war inevitable. At most, conflicts could be contained with the help of diplomatic alliances and balances of power. The script made use of props such as the institutions of diplomacy, international law, and balances of power. China, by contrast, had imperial authorities who wrote the script, and the emissaries who showed up in Beijing had no choice but to follow the rules. The Sino-centric script was not theatrical as much as ritualistic and it was emplotted in a comic mood. The world, according to the official Chinese interpretation, was essentially harmonious and it was only misunderstandings, a lack of virtue, or sheer foolishness that produced conflict and strife. Peace was restored when misunderstandings were removed and virtue and manners improved. In Japan, the predominant script was emplotted as a romance. The processions that crisscrossed the country gave the samurai a chance to show off their weapons and their uniforms and play at being warriors. As a result, although performances in Japan, much as in Europe, were framed as an anarchy, the romantic scripts concerned social honors instead of glory on the battlefield, and social honors could be won only in a stable and all-encompassing system of prestige. The processions made sure that each region was socially integrated with all others.

In the Westphalian system, the question of membership was a constant concern. Only by being recognized as a legitimate actor could a particular political entity establish itself as such. As a result, struggles for recognition were common and often resulted in military conflicts.[77] In the Sino-centric system, by contrast, ques-

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76. Duyvendak 1938, 223–27.
77. Ringmar 2008.

tions of membership were largely irrelevant. As long as the delegations that showed up had a letter of accreditation from their ruler, there was no reason not to include them. There were more than one hundred different tribute-bearers on the official list, and not only states but business corporations as well—like the Dutch East-India Company that sent several tributary missions to Beijing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[78] As the Chinese authorities saw it, the more people who participated, the more successful the audience.

The status of the performers differed greatly between the three systems. In Westphalian Europe it mattered greatly how the diplomats carried themselves and how they were treated. Since order among them was not predetermined, everything depended on the performances they could deliver on the day and on how they were judged by the audiences they were addressing. Since the diplomats personified the state, they had to be treated with the greatest respect. In China, by contrast, the script was given and there was no place for individual interpretations. All diplomats had to do was to show up and follow the prescribed ritual. This is why visitors to Beijing often were roughly treated and badly housed. According to the Chinese, the emissaries were merely the servants of the king who had sent them and could safely be treated as such.

The Japanese system combined features of the Westphalian and the Chinese systems. Just as on the Westphalian stage, the rulers were actors in their own right and matters of prestige and standing were constantly on their minds. Yet there was never an illusion that they shared the same status. On the contrary, the various *han* were clearly ranked and labeled in terms of their wealth and their relations of fealty, or otherwise, to the Tokugawa regime.[79] There was a given place for them in the all-Japanese social system and the processions to and from Edo were their way of laying claims to this pre-allotted social location. The system of prestige locked the daimyos in, but it also protected them from what in the Westphalian system often turned out to be a devastating military competition. In performative terms, the processions were staged consecutively, one after the other, rather than in the same place at the same time. It was only when two processions occasionally, and by mistake, ran into each other that diplomatic complications ensued.[80]

International Systems in Conflict

The way international systems have been performed can help us understand the terms on which they have come into contact with each other.[81] The Europeans

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78. See Wills 1984, 38–81, 145–46; and Duyvendak 1938.
79. Hall 1974, 48–49.
80. Fortune 1868, 43.
81. This theme has been treated by many historians. Recent contributions include Hevia 1995 and 2003; Liu 2006; and Scott 2009. Intersystemic conflicts have rarely been discussed by international relations scholars. See, however, Zhang 1991; and Suzuki 2009.

who first showed up in East Asia wanted concessions on trade and the right to proselytize but since they had no power to back up their demands they had no choice but to submit to the requirements of the established script. For centuries they were made to perform—they koutoued in Beijing and danced, jumped, and played the drunkard in Edo. According to the European understanding, if a diplomat koutoued, the state itself koutoued. According to the Chinese authorities, however, the European diplomats were not actors but simply the servants of the prince who had sent them and as such they had better koutou in the emperor's presence.[82] Besides there was nothing humiliating about such prostrations—they were simply the ritual means by which foreigners came to be included in the Sino-centric world. There was no discussion about the status of the foreign visitors since their inherent inferiority was an already independently established fact.

Emissaries of the Dutch East India Company and Jesuits sent by Rome always koutoued, and so did Portuguese and even some Russians.[83] The British, however, stubbornly refused to play their part: George Macartney did not koutou in 1793, and neither did Lord Amherst in 1816 nor Lord Elgin in 1860.[84] On the face of it this made little sense. Why would the British government equip a diplomatic delegation at great expense and undertake the half-year long trip to Beijing only to refuse to comply with the required protocol? If they really wanted concessions on trade, they really had no choice. Yet trade concessions were only a part of the British agenda. What they wanted in addition was respect. The British wanted to be regarded as equal to the Chinese; they wanted recognition on the same terms as they were given in Europe.[85] This, however, the Chinese were unable to grant them. Equality could not be combined with Chinese preeminence; sovereignty was incompatible with submission; and the tragic heroes of the European stage had no role in the Chinese comedy. Or, looking more specifically at institutional props, the Sino-centric system had no diplomats stationed at foreign courts, no international conferences, no international law, no notion of balances of power or great power concerts.[86]

The two Opium Wars, 1839–42 and 1856–60, were fought over opium to be sure but more fundamentally they concerned these intersystemic incommensurabilities. The British insisted that international relations in East Asia should be performed according to Westphalian rules while the Chinese authorities insisted on the viability of their own system. Two treaties, at Nanjing in 1842, and Tianjin in 1858, regulated commercial relations—and eventually allowed British opium exports from India—but they failed to settle the question of the basic terms of the

82. Rockhill 1905.
83. Extensively treated in ibid.
84. Pritchard 1943. On Lord Elgin, see Wang 1971. More generally on the clash between Great Britain and China from 1793 onward, see Liu 2006; and Hevia 2003.
85. See, for example, Staunton 1797, 48. More on British sensitivity and inferiority complex, see Colley 2004, 4–12.
86. Compare Kang 2007, 36–49. The list of institutions is taken from Bull 1995, 71.

interaction. The Chinese, the Europeans complained, were dragging their feet; they refused to give up their pretensions to supremacy and to admit foreign diplomats to their capital, and they continued to insist on the koutou.[87] The Chinese, the Europeans decided, were "ignorant," "stupid," and "incredibly stubborn."[88] It was only in 1860 that the Chinese finally came to their senses. In October that year, an Anglo-French military contingent first destroyed the Yuanmingyuan, the imperial palace compound north-west of Beijing, and then laid siege on the capital itself. "The destruction of the emperor's palace," said Garnet Wolseley, one of the British officers, "was the strongest proof of our superior strength; it served to undeceive all Chinamen in their absurd conviction of their monarch's universal sovereignty."[89]

After 1860, the Chinese effectively abandoned their own performance and scrambled instead to master the scripts that guided the actors on the Westphalian stage. They established a European-style foreign ministry in 1861, translated works of international law, and sent a diplomatic mission to the United States in 1868 and diplomats to London in 1877—and after 1873 they no longer insisted on the koutou.[90] Yet the imperial authorities never managed to fully switch frames and their mastery of the Westphalian scripts was incomplete at best. The model that had placed the Chinese sun at its symbolic center could not easily be traded in for a model in which China was merely one billiard ball among others following an independent path.

With the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry's Black Ships in Edo harbor in July 1853, Tokugawa Japan came under a similar attack.[91] The Americans wanted access to the Japanese market and, much as the Europeans in China, they wanted access on Westphalian terms. Although the Japanese shogun was at least as reluctant as the Chinese emperor to give in to these demands, the American intrusion became the starting point of an internal process of transformation that ended with the Meiji Restoration in 1868. The new Japan that emerged was a more dedicated member of the Westphalian system than Qing dynasty China. The Meiji leaders were also much better at using the Westphalian scripts to their own advantage. From 1894 onward they repeatedly and successfully harassed the Chinese, much as though they were a European power, and they managed to revise the unequal treaties through which the country initially had been opened up to the rest of the world.[92]

Our comparative history allows us to understand Japan's comparative success.[93] The way the Tokugawa system was performed made it resemble the West-

87. Wang 1971, 617–26.
88. A particularly vociferous attack on everything Chinese is De Quincey 1897.
89. Wolseley 1862, 281. On the diplomatic context, see also Hevia 2003, 74–118.
90. On Chinese translations of European international law, see Liu 2006, 108–39. On the development of Westphalian diplomatic institutions, see Hevia 2003, 144–55. On the end of the institution of the koutou, see Rockhill 1905, 41–49. The first Chinese diplomat to travel to the United States was an American, Anson Burlingame. Williams 1912.
91. For Perry's own account, see Perry 1856.
92. Auslin 2006, 176–200.
93. Suzuki 2005.

phalian system in a number of respects. Japan was framed as an anarchical realm but scripted as a social hierarchy, and once the power of the traditional script was weakened, the constituent units of the system began to assert their independence. The respective daimyo had a well-established capacity for independent action. This was particularly the case for some of the *han* in the extreme south—Satsuma and Choshu—which developed their own commercial contacts with other parts of the world and even began pursuing their independent foreign policies.[94] It was these regions that were behind the coup d'état that led to the restoration of the emperor in 1868.[95] The challenge for the new leaders was thus not so much to replace a traditional conception of international politics with a new one but instead to transform Japan from an anarchical system into an actor in an anarchical world. The pacification and unification of the country took until 1871, and the last anti-Meiji rebellion was not crushed until 1877, but by then Japan was a distinctly Europe-like country.[96] In fact, the Westphalian norms regarding sovereignty and territorial integrity provided just the legitimation the new regime needed to stabilize its rule.

Performing International Relations Theory

Let's conclude by briefly discussing a few potential implications of the preceding argument for the academic study of international relations. A study of social performances, we said, is an investigation of the pragmatics of discourse. Before something can be interpreted, it must be seen, and in practice much of what we see we are being shown. Performing is a way of showing. A performance represents an aspect of social life—it makes it "present again"—and through this re-presentation, social meanings are both made manifest and subject to creative reimagination. The performance inserts itself right between the discursive structure and the reactions of an audience. Through the performance, a book is taken off the shelf of our collective library of cultural resources, enacted as a series of emplotted events, and then returned to the shelf, often enough considerably altered.

This is not to say, however, that a performance merely has a mediating or a didactic function. On the contrary, although its meaning is derived from discourse and subject to audience reactions, the performance appears before us as a self-contained entity and a world unto itself.[97] It is just make-believe, we know, but until the final curtain the performance really does make us believe. As a member of the audience we feel compelled to watch and as a fellow actor we feel compelled to participate. As a result, we quite willingly assume a role that requires us

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94. Ericson 1979, 401–4.
95. Jansen 2002, 344–45, 365.
96. As acknowledged by nineteenth-century international lawyers. See, for example, Lorimer 1884, 336; and Oppenheim 1912, 162.
97. Huizinga 1988, 26–30.

to do and not to do certain things. We follow the script not because we necessarily are law-abiding but rather because it provides recognition of the role we have chosen, and provides our actions, and ourselves, with a sense of purpose.[98] Cooperation with others is not a problem but instead a prerequisite for the existence of the play in the first place. Conversely, cheating is not an issue to the extent that it deprives the play of meaning. The performance, we could say, is a source of governance, a means of providing order and structure to interstate relations also in the absence of a central authority or a single director.[99]

In addition, a performative perspective allows us to think about power in new ways. Social scientists, including scholars of international relations, commonly think of power as a matter of actor A making another actor B do something that B would not otherwise have done.[100] On a stage, however, power is not exercised but performed. That is, what matters is not what A can make B do but instead how such arm-twisting is interpreted by other actors and by the members of the audience. Their reaction is far more important than the action itself and their reaction is what the exercise of power ultimately seeks to influence.[101] To be powerful is less important than to appear to be powerful. "Soft power"—the power to inspire others and to lead by example—is a performative power of this kind, but so is the use of nuclear weapons or actions by terrorists.[102] There is, from a performative perspective, not necessarily a lot of difference between soft power and its harder versions.

A performative perspective can also contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of the role of emotions in international affairs.[103] Emotions are never simply there and they do not arise naturally from mere facts or events. Instead affective reactions are consequences of which roles facts and events are given in a narrative, and, often, on how this narrative is publicly performed.[104] Play-

98. See Mead on "the generalized other," in Mead 1962, 152–64.

99. Compare Bull's analogy between international society and "primitive societies" in which ritual practices, a form of performances, help establish social order. Bull 1995, 57–62. On ritual and social order, see Giesen 2006, 352–53. Game-theoretical approaches to the evolution of cooperation, such as Axelrod and Keohane 1985, pay insufficient attention to the performative aspect of all real-life games. Suggestions for how a focus on performances can supplement, or perhaps challenge, regime theory are provided in Blatter 2009, 101–7.

100. Compare Dahl's definition, discussed in Lukes 2005, 16–19. Dahl's original statement is Dahl 1957. Recent IR scholarship on power is collected in Berenskoetter and Williams 2007.

101. Compare for example the performative dimension of the military doctrine of "rapid dominance," the aim of which is "to affect the will, perception, and understanding of the adversary to fit or respond to our strategic policy ends through imposing a regime of Shock and Awe." Ullman and Wade 1996, xxiv. On "shock and awe" as applied in the Iraq War of 2003, see inter alia Halliday 2011.

102. Nye 2004. On the performative aspect of nuclear weapons and terrorist acts, see Ullman and Wade 1996, 110–15. On "representational force," see Bially Mattern 2007, 110–12, 115–17. On the performances staged by British nineteenth-century imperialists, see Cannadine 2001.

103. See inter alia Scheff 1994; Crawford 2000; Mercer 2005; Bleiker and Hutchison 2008; and Mercer 2010.

104. The narrative context in which emotions arise is discussed by constructivist IR scholars, but not the performative dimension. Contrast, for example, Ross's account of the 2001 terrorist attacks, in Ross 2006, 212–15; with Alexander 2006b; and Adler 2010. More broadly on emotions and narrative theory, see Keen 2006.

wrights and directors conspire to inspire a broad scope of affective reactions in their audiences, ranging from sympathy and pity to a desire for revenge. In addition, the performance itself is "powerful" or "gripping," meaning that the actors successfully both convey emotions to, and create emotions in, the audiences they address. As a result, international politics understood as a performance is seductive rather than deliberative. Our tears are jerked and our anger is aroused and in this way we are often made to accept conclusions that our reason on its own may have rejected.[105] This, in the end, is a more realistic understanding of the way public opinion is formed than attempts to see international politics as a detached conversation among rationally deliberating participants.

Finally, returning to our historical case studies, it is striking how several features of the Sino-centric and the Tokugawa systems would seem to make them well suited to twenty-first-century realities. What really mattered in both systems were the relations between the constituent units and not the units themselves. Both systems were relational rather than atomistic. As a result sovereignty could be shared and functionally divided without logical contradictions or made relative to the time and place in which it came to be asserted. As we may conclude, a relational conception of space fits well in a twenty-first-century world that processes of globalization rapidly seem to be de-territorializing.[106] Today, overlapping jurisdictions are increasingly a reality, making the either/or conception of sovereignty look passé. In our world too other entities than states—multinational companies or nongovernmental organizations—are politically important, much as the Dutch East-India Company played a role in East Asia. For those who are nostalgic for the Westphalian notion of self-determination, it is worth pointing out that both the Sino-centric and the Tokugawa systems allowed their constituent units a considerable amount of independence. Although a post-Westphalian alternative, the day it is needed, cannot straightforwardly be copied from these historical examples, a comparative study allows us to think more creatively about non-Westphalian ways in which the international systems of the future could be organized.

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105. An influential statement of the deliberative, Habermasian position is Risse 2000. For another performance-based critique, see Bially Mattern 2007, 116–17.
106. Compare Ruggie's project to "historicize postmodernity." Ruggie 1993, 168–74.

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