JNAH, vol. 21, no.1 (Winter 2024): 47-78
doi.org/10.23037/JNAH.2024.21.1.003

A Shortcut to a Dead End: Locating Joseon Korea in Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Grand Strategy

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Abstract

After a series of domestic pacification campaigns, during the fourth lunar month of 1592, Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 launched an invasion of the continent in order to realize the next stage of his grand strategy: for Japan to become the regional hegemon. Hideyoshi's grand strategy is best conceived of as a hegemonic "grand principle" that he consciously held and followed. It is clear that Hideyoshi needed to bring Joseon Korea into Japan's sphere of influence—either voluntarily or involuntarily—before tackling the current hegemon, Ming China. Hideyoshi employed an oscillating approach towards Korea. He was flexible and pragmatic concerning interim measures, as long as they did not obviate the achievement of his long-term goals. The result was a pattern of escalation and de-escalation, from negotiation via coercion to violence and back again. Hideyoshi was trying to force the Koreans to rethink their place in East Asia. Hence, Korea represented the trigger, but not the primary motivation for the war. In short, Korea was central to, but not the apex of, Hideyoshi's hegemonic grand strategy. This paper presents a fresh interpretation of Hideyoshi's international motives, goals, and actions, and in particular, Korea's position within his grand strategic vision.

Keywords

Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Grand Strategy, Joseon Korea, East Asian War of 1592-1598, Hegemony, Ming China

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Introduction

After a decade-long series of pacification campaigns, during the fourth lunar month of 1592, Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉, *taikō* 太閤 (i.e., Retired Regent to the Emperor) of Japan, launched an invasion of the Asian mainland. The East Asian War (1592-1598), which encompassed two separate invasions and protracted intra-war peace negotiations, concluded six years later with Hideyoshi's death and the complete withdrawal of Japanese troops. Over the centuries, historians have posited a multiplicity of theories to elucidate the causes of this conflict, including psychological, (domestic) political, economic, strategic, and cultural motives. This paper will argue that the war in Korea was but the next stage in Hideyoshi's grand strategy to bring about a new hegemonic order in East Asia.

Hideyoshi desired three things above all else: to be the hegemon of a new regime, for the Toyotomi regime to be the hegemon of Japan, and for Japan to become the regional hegemon. In other words, rather than discrete events, Hideyoshi envisaged the pacification of Japan as a concomitant to the domination of Asia. Unlike previous research on this topic, this paper examines Hideyoshi's vision for East Asia by placing the war in a wider context, and, in particular, locating Joseon Korea within his hegemonic grand strategy. In doing so, the focus remains firmly on Japanese perspec-

tives, although other points of view are alluded to. This study poses four fundamental questions: what role did Hideyoshi imagine for Joseon Korea in his grand strategy? Why was Korea the target of Hideyoshi's grand strategy? Why did Hideyoshi's approach to Korea oscillate between diplomacy and war? And finally, to what extent was the invasion of Korea responsible for the failure of Hideyoshi's grand strategy?

In order to address these questions, it is first necessary to explain two contested concepts, namely, grand strategy and hegemony. Although no universally accepted definition of grand strategy exists, it is often referred to as the "highest form of statecraft."[1] This is because grand strategy must be long term in scope, embrace every sphere of government activity to meet a defined objective, and proactively attempt to shape international events rather than simply react to them.[2] It must also ensure that means and ends are well aligned. In broadening the strategic mindset to embrace war preparation and mobilization, securing the peace as well as war fighting, and by incorporating political, economic, and diplomatic policymaking, the concept of "grand strategy" appears especially pertinent to any study of Hideyoshi's invasion of Korea. This paper adopts political scientist Nina Silove's notion that there are three distinct conceptions of grand strategy: "grand plan" (a deliberate, detailed plan devised by individuals), "grand principle" (an organizing principle that is consciously held and used by individuals to guide their decisions), and "grand behavior" (a long-term and interrelated pattern in state behavior).[3] Due mainly to a lack of detail, Hideyoshi's grand strategy is best conceived of as a hegemonic "grand principle" rather than "grand plan" and further refined through the Toyotomi regime's actions ("grand behavior").

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1 Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Cornell University Press, 2014), 1.

2 Saki Dockrill, "Britain's Grand Strategy and Anglo-American Leadership in the War against Japan," in *British and Japanese Military Leadership in the Far Eastern War 1941-1945*, edited by Brian Bond and Kyoichi Tachikawa (Frank Cass, 2004), 7; Paul Kennedy, *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (Yale University Press, 1991), 5.

3 Nina Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy,'" *Security Studies* 27, no. 1 (2018): 29, 49.

At its core, hegemony is a form of domination incorporating both material and nonmaterial aspects, a hybrid of hard and soft power.[4] Hegemony is more broad-based and invasive than primacy, yet usually narrower in scope and more tolerant of difference than empire. A hegemon establishes norms and rules and then supervises their functioning to impose peace.[5] Hegemony thus requires of the aspiring hegemon not only a preponderance of material resources and a sense of mission, but also a measure of international influence and self-restraint.[6] Hegemons employ a number of mutually reinforcing methods to achieve authority over others: leadership to inspire compliance, legitimacy to justify compliance, inducements to encourage compliance, coercion to enforce compliance, and sometimes violence to impose compliance.[7] Yet, a degree of consent from the subjugated is also necessary. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Ming China was the undisputed hegemon of the East Asian region, until Hideyoshi attempted to supplant it.

Korea's Role in Hideyoshi's Grand Strategy

Hideyoshi possessed only fragmentary knowledge of Korea, but as his domestic pacification campaigns progressed, Hideyoshi's attention increasingly turned to the continent. His first priority was to manage his relationship with Korea. Yet, in Hideyoshi's mind, Korea's status was rather low in the East Asian pecking order. He was presumably aware that, while simultaneously sending tribute to Ming China, the Koreans also provided free foodstuffs to Tsushima annually.[8] Thus, Hideyoshi appar-

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4 Michael Mastanduno, "Incomplete Hegemony: The United States and Security Order in Asia," in *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features,* edited by Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford University Press, 2003), 144-46.

5 Robert Gilpin, *War and Changes in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 29-31.

6 Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch, "Hegemony," in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* 6, edited by Audrey Kobayashi (Elsevier, 2020), 357-62; Mastanduno, "Incomplete Hegemony," 145.

7 Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 3.

8 Atobe Makoto 跡部信, "Toyotomi seiken no taigaikōsō to chitsujokan" 豊臣政権の対外構想と秩

ently concluded that the Sō family of Tsushima wielded some authority over Korea, and consequently would easily yield to him if threatened.[9] In short, Hideyoshi shared the enduring Japanese supremacist attitude towards Korea. Nam-lin Hur even asserts that "Hideyoshi had always regarded Korea as a far-off part of Japan or its vassal."[10] This theory can most clearly be seen in a letter dated 1593.11.5, which Hideyoshi addressed to Kōzankoku 高山国:

> …Korea has been our vassal since ancient times, however, they turned their back to us. On the day of the invasion of China, they rebelled. Thus, we ordered our generals to punish them…[11]

Yet, before 1590, when discussing Korea, Hideyoshi invariably did so in the same breath as Ming China, which strongly suggests that he saw the Koreans as foreigners. Nevertheless, it seems that Hideyoshi also underestimated the filial bonds linking Joseon Korea and Ming China. Indeed, some scholars go so far as to claim that Korea may have helped shape the norms of the Sinocentric world order.[12] Their historical, cultural, political, and economic ties were certainly much stronger than those with Japan.

Having acknowledged the authority of the Sō over Tsushima, Hideyoshi changed tack and used them as intermediaries, thereby delegating responsibility for restoring official diplomatic relations with Korea. On 1587.6.15, Hideyoshi stressed the importance of orchestrating a

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序観, *Nihonshi kenkyū* 日本史研究 585 (2011): 78; Hur Nam-lin, "Japan's Invasions of Korea in 1592-98 and the Hideyoshi Regime," in *The Tokugawa World*, edited by Gary P. Leupp and Demin Tao (Routledge, 2022), 41.

9 *Sō-ke monjo* 宗家文書, 1587.6.15, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi Chōsen shinryaku kankei shiryō shūsei* 豊臣秀吉朝鮮侵略関係史料集成 1, edited by Kitajima Manji 北島万次 (Heibonsha, 2017): 18-19.

10 Hur Nam-lin, "Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Effort of Retreat and the Ending of the East Asian War," *Chinese Studies in History* 52, no. 1 (2019): 71.

11 *Sonkeikaku komonjosan* 尊経閣古文書纂, 1593.11. 5, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi monjoshū* 豊臣秀吉文書集 6, edited by Nagoya-shi hakubutsukan 名古屋市博物館 (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2020), 154.

12 Choi Inho, "'Chinese' Hegemony from a Korean Shi Perspective: Aretocracy in the Early Modern East Asia," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 22, no. 3 (2022): 348-52.

visit by King Seonjo 宣祖 to Japan to have him swear allegiance, while threatening punishment if he refused.[13] This "forced diplomacy" was a technique that Hideyoshi had perfected during his domestic pacification campaigns.[14] Hideyoshi gave daimyo and others a chance to swear allegiance; those that refused were shown no mercy when their territory was invaded.

By the spring of 1589, Hideyoshi was losing patience. He demanded that by the summer, daimyo Sō Yoshitoshi 宗義智 personally cross to Korea and persuade King Seonjo to agree to come to Japan. Otherwise, the decision had already been made to send troops, with daimyo Konishi Yukinaga 小西行長 and Katō Kiyomasa 加藤清正 to lead the vanguard.[15] Towards the end of 1589, King Seonjo and his court ultimately decided to dispatch a mission to congratulate Hideyoshi for pacifying Japan.[16] Even though they arrived in Kyoto on the 21st of the seventh month of 1590, the Korean envoys did not receive an audience with Hideyoshi until the eleventh month, due to his participation in the campaign in Odawara 小田原.[17] Hideyoshi chose to interpret the envoys' presence as evidence of Korean acceptance of their status as his vassals, a declaration of fealty.[18] Hideyoshi's assessment was not entirely unreasonable. It resembled the process by which daimyo swore allegiance to Hideyoshi, and therefore he assumed that the Koreans would join him in confronting the Ming, or at least not obstruct his mission.[19] Yet, the Koreans believed that they had made no such commitment, and Hideyoshi's assumptions derived from a mixture of cultural misunderstanding and wishful think-

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13 *Sō-ke monjo*, 1587.6.15, 18-19.

14 Nakano Hitoshi 中野等, *Hideyoshi no gunrei to tairiku shinkō* 秀吉の軍令と大陸侵攻 (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2006), 16, 28; Miki Seiichirō 三鬼清一郎, *Toyotomi seiken no hō to Chōsen shuppei* 豊臣政権の法と朝鮮出兵 (Seishi shuppan, 2012), 41.

15 *Shigaku* 史学 4-3, 1589.3.28, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi monjoshū* 4, 6.

16 *Seonjo sillok* 선조실록, 23/20a.

17 Fujii Jōji 藤井譲治, *Tenkabito no jidai* 天下人の時代 (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2011), 101.

18 *Kōun zuihitsu* 江雲随筆, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi Chōsen shinryaku kankei shiryō shūsei* 1, 61-62; Atobe Makoto 跡部信, *Toyotomi seiken no kenryoku kōzō to tennō* 豊臣政権の権力構造と天皇 (Ebisu kōshō shuppan, 2016), 197.

19 Fujii, *Tenkabito*, 102.

ing or self-delusion.

Seeking to capitalize on their perceived newfound loyalty, Hideyoshi now sought to recruit Korea as a fully-committed ally. In his reply to King Seonjo, Hideyoshi emphasized his desire to:

> …unite all of East Asia. I will go straight to the Ming and spread Japanese customs and manners to the four hundred provinces, and I will exert my influence over all of China. We will impose Kyoto's [Japanese] rule there forevermore. Korea, you have taken the initiative to come to Japan and sworn allegiance to me, so there is no reason to be alarmed. When we send troops to Ming you are to lead the men, which will strengthen the bonds between us.[20]

During 1591, Sō vassal Yanagawa Shigenobu 柳川調信 and monk-diplomat Keitetsu Genso 景轍玄蘇 accompanied the Korean embassy back to Hanseong 漢城. Keitetsu informed the Koreans that the Ming had long refused Japanese tribute and Hideyoshi resented this. Thus, he claimed that Hideyoshi would like to borrow a road through Korea the following year to offer tribute to the Ming.[21] Keitetsu reassured the Koreans of their safety if they acted as an intermediary to help resume Sino-Japanese tribute trade, but warned that refusal would invite the ravages of war to their shores. Most scholars believe that Keitetsu had altered Hideyoshi's words, but Atobe Makoto argues that Koreans serving as guides or scouts and opening a road to the Ming were not contradictory ideas, and both phrases originated with Hideyoshi.[22] Yet, even if Atobe is correct, the language Keitetsu used vis-à-vis Ming China was recast from invasion to paying tribute. This implies that the Sō did not entirely embrace Hideyoshi's priorities.

Hideyoshi's diplomatic correspondence clearly reveals the hierar-

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[20] *Konoe-ke monjo* 近衛家文書, 1590.11, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi monjoshū* 4, 273-74.

[21] *Seonjo sujeong sillok* 선조수정실록, 25/4a, 25/11a-11b.

[22] Atobe Makoto 跡部信, "Bunroku-Keichō no eki ni okeru Hideyoshi no mokuhyō to taigai ninshiki" 文禄・慶長の役における秀吉の目標と対外認識, *Nihonshi kenkyū* 日本史研究 726 (2023): 6-7.

chical vision that he pursued internationally, with Japan at the summit of his putative regional order. This assertion was apparently based upon the existence of the Japanese emperor, the superiority of Japanese culture as the "land of the gods," Hideyoshi as the "sun child" following the "will of the gods," and Japan's military prowess. Hideyoshi may have started to believe his own propaganda. Reliant on second-hand information, which inevitably meant that something was "lost in translation," and since his trusted intermediaries also lied or constructed their own versions of the truth, this was diplomacy tainted by misinformation.

Confirmation of Hideyoshi's perception of Korea as part of the Japanese hegemonic order came in the form of rules for troop behavior in Korea (as well as the islands of Iki and probably Tsushima) promulgated by Hideyoshi during the first month of 1592:

> 1. Soldiers whether of high or low in rank, committing violent acts or causing disorder.
> 2. Arson.
> 3. Giving commoners and farmers demands beyond their means.
>
> The above mentioned articles are strictly forbidden, and anyone who does not follow these rules will be swiftly and severely punished.[23]

According to Nakano Hitoshi, such documents imply that the Toyotomi regime saw the recipients as allies, who were expected to follow his orders and fulfil their role as a channel between Japan and China.[24] Yet, Hideyoshi still appeared unsure of the Korean stance on the forthcoming war against Ming China.[25] On 1592.1.18, Hideyoshi dispatched a letter to Sō Yoshitoshi declaring that he would send large numbers of troops through Korea in order to invade Ming China.[26] The Sō were given until

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[23] *Katō monjo* 加藤文書, 1592.1, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi Chōsen shinryaku kankei shiryō shūsei* 1, 163-64; *Matsuura monjo* 松浦文書, 1592.1, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi monjoshū* 5, 112.

[24] Nakano Hitoshi 中野等, *Bunroku-Keichō no eki* 文禄・慶長の役 (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2008), 27.

[25] Atobe, "Bunroku-Keichō no eki," 7.

[26] *Sō-ke monjo* 宗家文書, 1592.1.18, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi monjoshū* 5, 106-107.

the third month to win Korean approval. If they accepted Hideyoshi's ultimatum, their safety and land would be guaranteed, but if not, then Japan would eradicate them. As late as 1592.3.13, Hideyoshi declared that:

> …In the unlikely event that the Koreans object to our plans, move all of our troops to the islands near Korea and ready the boats…If this comes to pass, it goes without saying that the men of Kyushu, Shikoku, and Chūgoku will cross the sea…[27]

Nakano concludes that Hideyoshi had not necessarily given up all hope of Korean compliance, rather his fundamental strategy still assumed the Korean king would allow Japanese troops to pass through Korea.[28] An eternal optimist, Hideyoshi dispatched a final mission on the eve of the invasion in the hope of cementing hegemony over Korea without a fight.[29] Hideyoshi might have settled for benevolent neutrality, but the Joseon court was unwilling to compromise Korean sovereignty. In this scenario, Hideyoshi's preconception was only abandoned after Konishi Yukinaga's landing during the fourth month of 1592 was met with Korean resistance. Assuming Hideyoshi understood Korea to be part of Japan's sphere of influence after 1590, by opposing Japanese landings it had become a "rebellious province," as Sajima Akiko attests.[30]

Perhaps there was a degree of ambiguity in Hideyoshi's mind about where his domains should end and foreign land begin, or he simply may not have acknowledged any limits to future expansion. If Korea's status

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[27] *Mōri-ke monjo* 毛利家文書, 1592.3.13, in *Dai Nihon komonjo iewake monjo* 大日本古文書家わけ文書 8, no. 3, edited by Tokyo teikoku daigaku bungakubu shiryō hensanjo 東京帝國大学文学部史料編纂所 (Tokyo teikoku daigaku, 1922), *143-48.*

[28] Nakano Hitoshi 中野等, "Karairi (Bunroku no eki) ni okeru Katō Kiyomasa no dōkō" 唐入り(文禄の役)における加藤清正の動向, *Kyūshū bunkashi kenkyūjo kiyō* 九州文化史研究所紀要 56 (2013): 44..

[29] *Seisei nikki* 西征日記, 1592.3.12, 1592.4.7.

[30] Sajima Akiko, "Hideyoshi's View of Chosŏn Korea and Japan-Ming Negotiations," in *The East Asian War, 1592-1598: International Relations, Violence, and Memory*, edited by James Lewis (Routledge, 2015), 95.

was initially unclear, this would explain why he repeatedly sought confirmation and clarification. Furthermore, if Hideyoshi believed that Japan and Korea were now in a hegemonic relationship, would he not have expected more communication from them, perhaps even tribute missions? Yet, Hideyoshi must have realized before the invasion that the Koreans were not committed to his cause. Hence his orders to dispatch further delegations could also be interpreted cynically as attempts by Hideyoshi to intensify the pressure on the Koreans to change sides before launching the invasion.

At the same time, Korea also served as a role model in Hideyoshi's wider diplomatic efforts to establish Japanese regional hegemony. Even before Korea allegedly swore allegiance to Hideyoshi, Hideyoshi had started using this "fact" to entice others to do the same via his vassals. For example, the Shimazu 島津 of Satsuma 薩摩 drafted a letter to the Ryukyuan king, dated 1588. 8.12, stating that:

> Already from Korea we have received a letter and before long they will agree to present themselves to us. There is talk that Ming China and the various countries of *nanban* will send envoy ships to Japan too. On account of this, it would be impolite if your country did not also come…[31]

Moreover, in Hideyoshi's first dispatch to Luzon, dated 1591. 9.15, he stated that:

> …The distant lands of Korea and Ryukyu have decided to submit to me. Currently, I desire to conquer Ming China as this is the will of the gods. As of now, your country has yet to dispatch an envoy to Japan and thus I will send a large force to conquer you…I have not yet ordered the attack, but if the envoy is delayed I will dispatch my troops there with

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[31] *Shimazu-ke monjo* 島津家文書, 1588.8.12, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi Chōsen shinryaku kankei shiryō shūsei* 1, 27.

> haste…[32]

Once the war in Korea had commenced, Korea became a negative example to scare others into compliance. Hideyoshi's second document to Luzon, often dated 1592.7.21, stated that:

> …While advancing on China, the Koreans opposed us and thus we are now subjugating Korea. Our soldiers should already be at the border of China…if you do not keep your promise to come to Japan, even though you are far away we will punish you. Let Korea be a warning to you.[33]

In short, Hideyoshi's aggressive diplomacy was not confined to Korea, and indeed it served as a prototype which set the standard for this phase of regional hegemony building.

Regardless of how he saw the Koreans, Hideyoshi still expected their obeisance. Korea was always the primary target of the international phase of Hideyoshi's grand strategy, but it was only ever a means to an end, since his ultimate goal was for Japan to replace Ming China as the hegemon of East Asia. Some historians disagree, arguing that Korea represented the full extent of his objectives, yet they struggle to explain why, between 1585 and 1597, Hideyoshi frequently discussed his desire to subjugate both China and Korea.[34] Furthermore, this objective was not confined to official documents sent to his vassals, or to foreign polities where diplomatic niceties might intervene, but is also found in personal

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[32] *Chōsen seibatsuki* 朝鮮征伐記, 1591.9.15, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi monjoshū* 5, 81.

[33] *Nanzen kyūki* 南禅旧記, 1592, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi monjoshū* 5, 236-37.

[34] Jeong Gu-bok 정구복, "Imjin waeran-ui yeoksa-jeok uimi: Imjin waeran-e daehan Han-Il yangguk-ui yeoksa insik" 임진왜란의 역사적 의미: 임진왜란에 대한 한일 양국의 역사인식, *Han-Il yeoksa gongdong yeon'gu bogoseo* 한일역사 공동연구 보고서 2 (2005): 194-95; Hur Nam-lin, "Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Invasion of the Chosŏn Kingdom, 1592-1598," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, edited by David Ludden (Oxford University Press, 2020), 6; Luís Fróis Report, 1586.10.17, in *Iezusukai Nihon nenpō ge* イエズス会日本年報 下, translated by Murakami Naojirō 村上直次郎 (Yūshōdō shoten, 1969), 149-50; *Myōman-ji monjo* 妙満寺文書, 1587.5.29, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi monjoshū* 3, 133-34; *Nabeshima monjo* 鍋島文書, 1587.10.13, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi monjoshū* 3, 175-76; *Shigaku* 4-3, 1587.10.14, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi monjoshū* 3, 178.

correspondence with his wife and adopted daughter. As Hori Shin observes, confusion over Hideyoshi's intentions has arisen because the aim of the war was the invasion of Ming China, but the actual battleground was Korea.[35]

As early as 1587, it was apparent that Hideyoshi had drawn a clear temporal distinction between Korea (short-term target) and China (long-term goal). In other words, Hideyoshi's goals vis-à-vis Korea and Ming China were not identical. From Korea, he demanded subservience, or at least an acknowledgement of his regime's pre-eminence. In part, he may have been punishing the Koreans for their "rebellion" or refusal to submit, but he also aimed to confirm Korean loyalty. In contrast, Hideyoshi sought to weaken the Ming so that their hegemony ultimately would collapse. It could even be argued that Hideyoshi invaded Korea primarily as a means to force Ming to the negotiating table. He subsequently made unrealistic demands as part of a diplomatic strategy to achieve what he really wanted, namely, peace, order, and trade under a *Pax Nipponica*.

In essence, Hideyoshi sought two levels of recognition: he wanted the Koreans to acknowledge Japan as their hegemon, but he also desired Ming consent to recognize the Koreans as inferior to Japan. It is easy to think that the East Asian War was only about Japan acquiring higher status than Korea, but it is important to note that this does not mean that Hideyoshi was acquiescing to a secondary position beneath Ming within the East Asian hegemony.

Korea as the Target of Hideyoshi's Grand Strategy

There are ongoing debates surrounding Hideyoshi's motives for invading the continent. The most prominent theories are related to personal motives: grief and pent-up anger at the death of his son, craving international recognition, megalomania, belligerence, destiny, or merely fulfilling Oda Nobunaga's ambition. Next come domestic political motives: dis-

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[35] Hori Shin 堀新, *Tenka tōitsu kara sakoku e* 天下統一から鎖国へ (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2010), 128.

tracting the daimyo, land to reward his followers, or wanting to use the prestige and glory of the invasion to impress his vassals and further cement his authority. In addition, there are economic motives, such as attempting to re-establish official trade relations with Ming China, and strategic motives, including a response to the Iberian advance into Northeast Asia, or drawing inspiration from the Portuguese and Spanish, or trying to reorganize East Asia.[36] It is striking that none of these theories are limited or specific to Korea.

Hideyoshi prioritized Korea because of geographical, strategic, diplomatic, and logistical factors. Geographically, Korea became the chosen route because of the geological position it occupied between Japan and China. Strategically, Hideyoshi probably targeted Korea because it was a significant element in Ming regional hegemony and thus could serve the same purpose for Japan. Hideyoshi's diplomatic initiatives while not limited to Korea were primarily focused on the Koreans because he believed them to be a soft touch due to their alleged dissatisfaction with the Ming and preexisting relationship with Tsushima. Finally, Hideyoshi prioritized Korea logistically because it was close to Japan and the intervening islands—Iki and Tsushima—also facilitated access.

Yet, the choice of Korea as the initial target of Hideyoshi's overseas expansion was not inevitable; other potential alternatives for an assault on the Ming existed, either more obliquely via Ryukyu, or more directly through an assault on the Chinese coast. The southern route, targeting minor players in the region, would have been slower but possibly easier. Nevertheless, given the geographical, strategic, diplomatic, and logistical realities, the Korean route would have seemed the most sensible option at the time.

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[36] Hirakawa Arata 平川新, "Supein to Porutogaru no Nihon seifukuron o megutte" スペインとポルトガルの日本征服論をめぐって, *Rekishi hyōron* 歴史評論 815 (2018): 86; Fukaya Katsumi 深谷克己, *Higashiajia hōbunmeiken no naka no Nihonshi* 東アジア法文明圏の中の日本史 (Iwanami shoten, 2012), 95-99.

Hideyoshi's Oscillating Approach to Korea

Rather than simply recounting the course of events during the East Asian War, this paper seeks to explain why, under Hideyoshi's leadership, Japanese policy towards Korea alternated between coercive diplomacy and extreme violence. Japanese behavior responded to certain triggers, some of which were counters to Korean actions, but underneath it is possible to discern a more coherent objective of building regional hegemony, which may be defined as a blunting strategy.

As seen above, Hideyoshi was willing to contemplate a diplomatic solution to gain allies, albeit primarily through the use of threats, bluster, and brinkmanship. This was similar to his domestic practice, only resorting to violence if his target did not submit. To be successful, an aspiring hegemon must be able to convince other states of the value of subservience; employing either coercion, consensual inducements, or assertions of legitimacy.[37] China was the hegemon of East Asia because Korea, Ryukyu, Vietnam, and others acknowledged the legitimacy of its authority and hence consented to Ming leadership. Domestically, Hideyoshi was able to gain legitimacy by manipulating the emperor, and coercing the consent of the daimyo, but it was a mistake to presume that he could easily transplant the same techniques to the continent in a rather different cultural context.

In theory at least, the Koreans had options. They could either have continued to adhere to what was presented as the tired old Ming order, or opted to join the vigorous and new Toyotomi hegemony. To succeed, Hideyoshi knew that he needed to drive a wedge between the Koreans and the Ming. Hideyoshi hoped that the Koreans felt oppressed by, or at least disenchanted with, the Chinese. However, the Korean court was culturally and ideologically predisposed to favor the Ming, and Hideyoshi was unable to manufacture consent because he offered few, if any, in-

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[37] Deborah L. Haber, "The Death of Hegemony: Why 'Pax Nipponica' Is Impossible," *Asian Survey* 30, no. 9 (1990): 892, 894, 899; Doshi, *The Long Game*, 3.

ducements to tempt them to defect. Furthermore, Hideyoshi preferred to deliver ultimatums, so he must have appeared blunt and unsophisticated in the eyes of the Koreans and Chinese. Such an approach proved counterproductive. In short, having tried but failed to advance his hegemonic goal through diplomatic means, Hideyoshi lost patience and resorted to large-scale direct intervention. Nevertheless, the fact that Hideyoshi intended to spare the life of the Korean king indicates that he retained a degree of optimism in eliciting Korean consent.[38]

Although the Japanese were able to make significant territorial advances in the first few months of the campaign, organized guerrilla bands quickly spread across Korea. Initially, the Japanese underestimated these "righteous armies," but they remained a thorn in Japan's side.[39] Fearing Ming intervention, as early as 1592.4.28, Konishi Yukinaga had attempted to initiate peace talks with the Koreans and demanded the king's return to Hanseong in order to consummate Japanese hegemony. The Koreans briefly appeared responsive, perhaps as a delaying tactic, but once the Japanese presented an ultimatum—either fight with us against the Ming or face the consequences—the putative talks proved abortive.[40]

Moreover, by the fifth month of 1592, naval forces led by the Left Naval Commander of Jeolla Province 全羅道 Yi Sun-sin 李舜臣, were wreaking havoc on Japanese supply lines in the south. This obstructed access to the west coast of Korea, which prevented the Japanese from stockpiling supplies for the assault on Ming China.[41] Naval losses

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[38] Sajima, "Hideyoshi's View of Chosŏn Korea," 95; *Kuroda-ke monjo* 黒田家文書, 1592.4.25, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi monjoshū* 5, 160-61.

[39] Tani Tetsuya 谷徹也, "'Toyotomi no heiwa' to Jinshin sensō"「豊臣の平和」と壬辰戦争, in *Nihon kinseishi o mitōsu* 1. *Rettō no heiwa to tōgō*: *kinsei senki* 日本近世史を見通す 1. 列島の平和と統合: 近世前期, edited by Makihara Shigeyuki 牧原成征 and Mura Kazuki 村和明 (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2023), 54.

[40] Kim Mun-ja 金文子, "Toyotomi seikenki no Nichi-Min wagi kōshō to Chōsen" 豊臣政権期の日・明和議交渉と朝鮮, *Ochanomizu shigaku* お茶の水史学 37 (1993): 27-30; *Seisei nikki*, 1592.5.14, 1592.5.16.

[41] Hur, "Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Invasion," 5; Yi Min'ung, "The Role of the Chosŏn Navy and Major Naval Battles during the Imjin Waeran," in *The East Asian War, 1592-1598: International Relations, Violence, and Memory*, edited by James Lewis (Routledge, 2015), 123, 126-27; James Lew-

spurred Hideyoshi to order the Japanese to avoid sea battles and concentrate their ships in coastal waters to protect key sea lanes.[42] As the war progressed, the Japanese strategy of procuring military supplies locally became increasingly difficult; a situation worsened by their failure to capture Korea's granary belt (i.e., Chungcheong 忠清 and Jeolla 全羅 Provinces).[43]

By the eighth month of 1592, leading daimyo fighting in Korea gathered in Hanseong to discuss these problems, which contributed to a growing sense of foreboding.[44] Battlefield reversals and growing food shortages prompted elements within the Japanese leadership in Korea to pursue a negotiated settlement with the Ming. Financial pressures and similar logistical problems meant that the Ming were also receptive to a quick resolution. For Nam-lin Hur, apart from the lack of food, it was the "Japanese desire to save face and eliminate a threat to domestic political stability" that pushed Japan to attempt a diplomatic resolution.[45] Yet, the last straw was the order given by Song Yingchang 宋応昌 (Ming Commissioner of War) to set fire to Japanese army warehouses in Hanseong containing two months' food supplies.

Unfortunately for all concerned, the intra-war peace negotiations were to drag on for three-and-a-half years before ending inconclusively. Although the precise timing of the negotiations' breakdown is still debated, it is clear that the ceremony investing Hideyoshi as "king of Japan" went well. Thus it could not have been the reason why, as was previously

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is, "International Relations and the Imjin War," in *The East Asian War, 1592-1598: International Relations, Violence, and Memory*, edited by James Lewis (Routledge, 2015), 265-67.

42 *Wakizaka-ke monjo shūsei* 脇坂家文書集成, 1592.7.14, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi monjoshū* 5, 230; Yi, "The Role of the Chosŏn Navy," 126, 129.

43 Nakajō Kenta 中條健太, "Hideyoshi no Chōsen shinryaku ni okeru hyōrō mai chōtatsu ni tsuite" 秀吉の朝鮮侵略における兵粮米調達について, *Historia* ヒストリア 165 (1999): 50.

44 *Kuroda kafu Chōsen jinki* 黒田家譜朝鮮陣記, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi Chōsen shinryaku kankei shiryō shūsei* 1, 715-16.

45 Hur Nam-lin, "Works in English on the Imjin War and the Challenge of Research," *International Journal of Korean History* 18, no. 2 (2013): 63-65; Kim Bong-hyeon 金奉鉉, *Hideyoshi no Chōsen shinryaku to gihei tōsō* 秀吉の朝鮮侵略と義兵闘争 (Sairyusha, 1995), 275.

claimed, Hideyoshi became furious and returned to war.[46] Recent Japanese scholarship instead points to a two-stage process: Hideyoshi lost his temper not once but twice.[47] First, when he learned that a Korean prince had not accompanied the Korean envoys sent to Japan, and again when he received the Ming demand for the complete withdrawal of Japanese troops from the peninsula and to destroy their remaining castles.[48] Yet, Atobe strongly maintains that the peace negotiations did not fail due to a lack of territorial gain. Indeed, he asserts that Hideyoshi may have believed peace with Ming had been achieved and it was only peace with Korea which had failed.[49] Hur agrees that Hideyoshi's anger and resentment seems to have been primarily directed against Korea.[50]

The negotiations were essentially a contest over status in a hierarchical system. Hideyoshi assumed that the Ming would now regard Japan as superior to Korea, but the Chinese still sided with the Koreans and demanded more concessions from Hideyoshi. Still, the symbolic importance and emotional turmoil of the negotiating process should not be exaggerated. Obviously, status mattered, and as Atobe emphasizes, land for his followers was basically window-dressing; ultimately this was a zero-sum competition for economic, political, and strategic hegemony over

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46 *Liangchao pingranglu* 兩朝平攘錄, 1596.9.3, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi Chōsen shinryaku kankei shiryō shūsei* 3, 272; Yonetani Hitoshi 米谷均, "Yaburi suterareta? Sakuhō bunsho" 破り捨てられた? 冊封文書, in *Hideyoshi no kyozō to jitsuzō* 秀吉の虚像と実像, edited by Hori Shin 堀新 and Inoue Yasushi 井上泰至 (Kasamashoin, 2016), 280-82; Luís Fróis Report, 1596.12.28, in *Jūroku shichiseiki Iezusukai Nihonhōkokushū* 十六・七世紀イエズス会日本報告集 1, no. 2, translated by Matsuda Kiichi 松田毅一 (Dōhōsha shuppan, 1987), 316-26.

47 Yonetani Hitoshi 米谷均, "Toyotomi Hideyoshi no 'Nihon kokuō' sakuhō no igi" 豊臣秀吉の「日本国王」冊封の意義, in *Toyotomi seiken no shōtai* 豊臣政権の正体, edited by Yamamoto Hirofumi 山本博文, Sone Yuji 曽根勇二, Hori Shin 堀新 (Kashiwa shobō, 2014), 284; Sajima, "Hideyoshi's view of Chosŏn Korea," 104-105; Kitajima Manji 北島万次, *Toyotomi Hideyoshi Chōsen shinryaku kankei shiryō shūsei* 豊臣秀吉朝鮮侵略関係史料集成 3 (Heibonsha, 2017), 271; Nakano, *Bunroku-Keichō no eki*, 181-85.

48 Hwang Shin 黃愼, *Ilbon wanghwan ilgi* 日本往還日記, in *Nihon shomin seikatsu shiryō shūsei dai 27 kan* 日本庶民生活史料集成第27巻 (Sanpin shobō, 1981), 122, 124.

49 Atobe, "Bunroku-Keichō no eki," 15-17.

50 *Shimazu-ke monjo* 島津家文書, 1596.9.7, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi Chōsen shinryaku kankei shiryō shūsei* 3, 281-82; Hur, "Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Effort," 62.

the Korean peninsula. In sum, the peace talks represented a return to the diplomatic approach, and an attempt to bring about Japanese hegemony over Korea as a step towards achieving hegemony in the region. Hideyoshi did not demand that Korea surrender its sovereignty, but merely acknowledge Japan's hegemonic status.

Although plagued by misunderstanding, insincerity, and complexity, the Japanese, from their perspective, had made significant concessions to keep the peace talks on track: voluntarily repatriating the Korean princes and progressively abandoning most of the territory that they had occupied. In return, the Ming merely invested Hideyoshi as a vassal king; a title which meant nothing to him without the associated trading privileges. By refusing to grant these rights to Japan, the Ming surrendered significant leverage over Hideyoshi, which they might conceivably have used to forestall the second invasion. Ming intransigence left Hideyoshi with only extreme alternatives: unilateral withdrawal or escalation via a renewed invasion. Given Hideyoshi's predilection for risk-taking, it should have come as no surprise that he chose the second course.

Thus on 1596.9.7, Hideyoshi declared the peace negotiations over and ordered preparations for a second invasion. Yet, despite his bravado, Hideyoshi appeared reluctant to launch military operations, given the weariness of Japanese forces and perhaps the risk that they might rebel.[51] Thus, even after the negotiations with the Ming had collapsed, the Japanese fumbled for peace with Korea for another ten months. Hideyoshi's diplomatic initiatives during this period reveal that he was willing to withdraw completely from Korea, in return for tributary gifts or a princely visit, which would imply recognition of Japanese hegemony, but Joseon did not comply.[52]

Many historians believe that the second invasion was either driven

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[51] Hur, "Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Effort," 59.

[52] *Yoshihiro kōgo fuchū* 義弘公御譴中, in *Kagoshima-ken shiryō: kyūki zatsuroku kōhen* 鹿児島県史料: 旧記雑録後編 3, edited by Kagoshima-ken ishin shiryō hensanjo 鹿児島県維新史料編さん所 (Kagoshimaken, 1983), 108-109.

by a desire to punish Korea, an attempt to annex its four southern provinces, to salve Hideyoshi's wounded pride, to recoup the sunk costs, or to minimize potential domestic political repercussions.[53] Perhaps fearing that the tide had turned on the battlefield, the brutality of the second invasion was certainly designed to intimidate the enemy, but it was also an attempt to regain the initiative after the frustration of the protracted and inconclusive peace talks. Hideyoshi realized that he could not impose hegemony over Ming at this time, given his lack of leverage to coerce their consent. This does not necessarily mean that he had abandoned his grand strategic principles, but rather that he had been forced to narrow his focus. Hideyoshi was trying to finesse a weakening hand to strengthen Japan's relative position. In other words, he was again using the threat and reality of violence in Korea to press the Koreans into accepting Japanese hegemony. It was Hideyoshi's methods, not motives, which had altered.

The second invasion almost completely failed to advance Hideyoshi's hegemonic agenda. Despite enjoying some initial successes, the Japanese offensive lasted a mere six months and did not manage to advance beyond the southern part of the Korean peninsula. Food and other essential resources were in short supply, and as the Japanese will to fight waned, the daimyo risked losing control over their men.[54]

Contrary to popular belief, Kenneth Swope argues that the decision to withdraw from Korea was actually made by Hideyoshi personally and not posthumously by the *Go-bugyō* 五奉行 (the Five Commissioners) and

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[53] Hur, "Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Effort," 61; Kenneth Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 223; Atobe, "Toyotomi seiken no taigaikōzō," 72; Kim Mun-ja 김문자, "Imjin waeran yeon'gu-ui je munje: Imjin Jeong'yu jaeran balbal weon'in-e daehan jaegeomto" 임진왜란 연구의 제 문제: 임진 · 정유재란 발발 원인에 대한 재검토, *Han-Il gwangyesa yeon'gu* 한일관계사연구 67 (2020): 175; Nakano, *Bunroku-Keichō no eki*, 191; Kitajima Manji, "The Imjin Waeran: Contrasting the First and Second Invasions of Korea," in *The East Asian War, 1592-1598: International Relations, Violence, and Memory,* edited by James Lewis (Routledge, 2015), 88.

[54] *Nabeshima-ke monjo* 鍋島家文書, 1598.5.22, in *Saga-ken shiryō shūsei* 佐賀県史料集成 3, edited by Saga kenritsu toshokan 佐賀県立図書館 (Saga kenritsu toshokan, 1958), 369-70; Swope, *A Dragon's Head*, 266-67; Hur, "Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Invasion," 18; Nakano, *Hideyoshi no gunrei,* 347-48.

the *Go-tairō* 五大老 (the Council of Five Elders). The Japanese had commenced a large-scale retreat from the peninsula by the fifth month of 1598.[55] Yet, there is some indirect evidence to suggest that Hideyoshi was contemplating a possible third invasion.[56] Tsuno Tomoaki and others argue that since Hideyoshi had ordered the construction of 250 ships, he was planning a large-scale re-deployment of troops to the continent the following year (1599).[57] This would suggest that even while critically ill, Hideyoshi had not forsaken his grand strategy. Maintaining even a toehold on the mainland might have served as a symbol of Japanese hegemonic claims or as a bridgehead for future military campaigns. Nonetheless, by the sixth month of 1598, Hideyoshi appeared ready to suspend his quest for hegemony over East Asia, at least for the time being, as he seemed willing to settle for a written apology from Korea.[58] Aware that his time was limited, Hideyoshi's focus returned to his first priority: ensuring the longevity of his regime and the succession of his son Toyotomi Hideyori 豊臣秀頼.

Hideyoshi died at Fushimi Castle on the eighteenth day of the eighth month of 1598. His death was concealed from all but a few people, although this could not prevent the Toyotomi regime from entering a slow-motion collapse.[59] The Japanese still tried to negotiate a peaceful resolution to guarantee their troops' safe evacuation from Korea, yet

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55 Yi Chin-hui, "Korean Envoys and Japan: Korean-Japanese Relations in the 17th to 19th Centuries," *Korea Journal* 25, no. 12 (1985): 26; Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Hideyoshi* (Harvard University Press, 1982), 233.

56 *Tachibana-ke monjo* 立花家文書, 1598.3.13, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi monjoshū* 7, 264-65; *Nabeshima-ke monjo* 鍋島家文書, 1598.5.22, in *Saga-ken shiryō shūsei* 3, 369-70; *Shimazu-ke monjo*, 1598.5.26, in *Dai Nihon komonjo iewake monjo* 16, no. 2, 264-67.

57 *Kobayakawa-ke monjo* 小早川家文書, 1591.4.13, in *Dai Nihon komonjo iewake monjo* 11, no.1, 365. Tsuno believes this source is from 1598.4.13. Tsuno Tomoaki 津野倫明, "Chōsen shuppeiki ni okeru zōsen ni kanseuru ichi shiron" 朝鮮出兵期における造船に関する一試論, *Sengokushi kenkyū* 戦国史研究 58(2009): 5, 9; Nakano, *Bunroku-Keichō no eki*, 240.

58 *Saishō oshō bunan* 西笑和尚文案, 1598.6.27, in *Toyotomi Hideyoshi Chōsen shinryaku kankei shiryō shūsei* 3, 942-43; Hur, "Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Effort," 66-67.

59 *Nabeshima-ke monjo* 鍋島家文書, 1598.8.25, in *Saga-ken shiryō shūsei* 3, 402-403; Nakano, *Bunroku-Keichō no eki*, 242; Hori, *Tenka tōitsu*, 128.

Ming and Korean forces continued to besiege them.[60] The last Japanese were repatriated to Hakata at the end of 1598, without having accomplished anything in the negotiations.[61] Following Hideyoshi's death, his envisaged third invasion evaporated, and the Japanese relinquished any thoughts of invading East Asia for several centuries.

Hideyoshi's oscillating approach towards Korea makes most sense when viewed as part of a hegemonic blunting strategy, that is, as a means to reduce the influence of the existing hegemon without confronting it directly.[62] Hideyoshi was flexible and pragmatic when it came to interim measures, as long as they did not obviate the achievement of his long-term goals. The result was a pattern of escalation and de-escalation, from negotiation via coercion to violence and back again, in an attempt to wrestle Korea away from the Sinocentric order and into Japan's orbit. War was therefore just one mode of pursuing hegemony, even if it was the most important because of the resources it consumed and the risks involved. Hideyoshi's blunting strategy was consistently pursued, but the regime's behavior adapted to changing circumstances, usually in response to the failure of the preceding approach. Hence, Korea represented the trigger for the war but not the primary motivation. It was seen as the first domino, a target but not the end goal.

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[60] Kitajima Manji 北島万次, *Toyotomi Hideyoshi no Chōsen shinryaku* 豊臣秀吉の朝鮮侵略 (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1995), 243-44.

[61] Nakano, *Hideyoshi no gunrei*, 382; Kitajima, *Toyotomi Hideyoshi no Chōsen shinryaku*, 258.

[62] David Kang, *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (Columbia University Press, 2010), 21; Doshi, *The Long Game*, 3.

The East Asian War's Part in the Failure ofHideyoshi's Grand Strategy

According to Hur, "Hideyoshi was very successful when fighting within Japan, but in international wars he lacked knowledge, power, experience, and foresight," and the primary reason for his regime's failure was Hideyoshi's flawed perception of Korea.[63] While accurate in most respects, this diagnosis overlooks the fact that domestically, Hideyoshi did not need to overcome a rival hegemon, whereas internationally he did.

Hideyoshi's original intention was to use Koreans as his vanguard, or at least to assimilate them before moving on to China. If either the Koreans had allied with Hideyoshi—a rather improbable assumption, but one which the Chinese also initially made—or had they only offered token resistance, then Hideyoshi could presumably have added Korean military, naval, and economic power to his own. This would have made an invasion of Ming China more plausible. In retrospect, it all appears rather fanciful, but Genghis Khan, Alexander the Great, and many other successful leaders pursued a similar snowball strategy. They acquired resources as their armies advanced, a rolling plan of imperial expansion in which the last people to be conquered became allies for the next invasion. Moreover, Hideyoshi had successfully employed this strategy during his domestic pacification campaigns, but it proved untransferable to Korea.

Hideyoshi had only launched the invasion of Korea once he felt his regime was secure, and hence believed he was not pursuing domestic and regional hegemony simultaneously. However, it could be argued that Hideyoshi's strategic miscalculation was not only due to his underestimating of Korean or Chinese strength, or overestimation of Japanese power projection capabilities, but because he thought that he could extend his domestic hegemony temporally while expanding regional hegemony geographically.

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[63] Hur, "Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Effort," 71.

Ironically, early Japanese victories on the Korean peninsula increased the risk of failure because it made changing tack harder. Rather than reinforcing success by deploying the 100,000 troops held in reserve at Hizen Nagoya to exploit initial triumphs, and then consolidating battlefield gains in the intra-war peace negotiations, Hideyoshi chose to reinforce failure by launching the second invasion.[64] Strategically, it might have been wiser instead to target Ryukyu or Taiwan to boost Japanese morale and disconcert the Ming.

At the operational level, both sides faced enormous logistical challenges, but the Ming enjoyed shorter and more reliable supply lines. Wartorn Korea lacked the resources to feed its own people, let alone two foreign armies. The Japanese supply train was unable to deliver sufficient food, especially when interdicted by the Korean navy. Its victories at sea were compensating for losses on land.[65] Yet, Hideyoshi had never planned to fight the Koreans at sea. Otherwise, he might have demanded better-designed ships. Furthermore, the Korean "righteous armies" remained a thorn in Japan's side throughout the war. Nukii Masayuki credits them with being "one of the most important factors frustrating the Toyotomi regime's ambition to subjugate Ming China and extend dominion over Korea."[66]

Missed opportunities abound. In changing his mind about crossing the sea to take personal command of Japanese forces in Korea, Hideyoshi not only lost his best chance to discover the state of affairs at first hand, but also precluded a major boost to military coordination, morale, and resources. Moreover, in not taking direct charge of the situation in Korea, Hideyoshi revealed the limitations of delegating responsibility when confronting the challenge of coordinating a coalition army with the commu-

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64 This included such powerful daimyos as Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 and Maeda Toshiie 前田利家. Nakano Hitoshi believes that Hideyoshi originally meant for these *daimyos* to join the invading force in Korea. For details, see Nakano, *Hideyoshi no gunrei,* 2.

65 Yi Min'ung, "The Role of the Chosŏn Navy," 126.

66 Nukii Masayuki, "Righteous Army Activity in the Imjin War," in *The East Asian War, 1592-1598: International Relations, Violence, and Memory*, edited by James Lewis (Routledge, 2015), 160-61.

nications technology of the time. It seems that there were shortcomings in conception, execution, and perhaps even commitment to the strategy. In sum, Korea was partially responsible for Hideyoshi's hegemonic grand strategy reaching a dead end, since its failure was inextricably linked to the disastrous East Asian War, yet other factors also played a part, particularly those related to Hideyoshi's personality.

Conclusion

Fundamentally, the argument presented here is that Hideyoshi invaded Korea in order to pursue his hegemonic grand strategy. Hideyoshi always knew that he needed to pacify the Koreans—either voluntarily or involuntarily—before tackling the Ming. From the start, in order to establish regional hegemony, it was vital for Hideyoshi to bring Korea into Japan's sphere of influence, regardless of whether he ultimately succeeded in conquering the Ming. In short, Korea was central to, but not the apex of Hideyoshi's grand strategy.

Hideyoshi's military preparations reveal a degree of uncertainty over whether or not he expected to have to fight the Koreans. However, it is notable that Hideyoshi was unwilling to deploy all of the military and economic strength at his disposal. Perhaps the fact that he maintained a large army at Hizen Nagoya implies either that he anticipated a short campaign or even counted on Korean forces swelling Japanese ranks in the forthcoming confrontation with the Ming. In other words, Japan fought a limited war for limited objectives in Korea, while for Korea it was a total war of survival. Hideyoshi gambled on a quick and easy victory and did not prepare for a prolonged war of attrition because he assumed that the approaches which had worked at home would work equally well in Korea. Had Hideyoshi been fully prepared from the outset to overwhelm Korea, postponing the invasion of China to a later date, the war might have turned out rather differently.

Yet, there was also a strong cultural prejudice operating in East Asia that Hideyoshi was unable to quell, despite propagating the "sun child" myth and various attempts to institutionalize consent through pro-

posed royal visits and dynastic marriage. Hideyoshi failed to anticipate the likely and actual reactions of other polities to his grand strategy. Hideyoshi underestimated the importance of Korea's role in the East Asian order, and overestimated Korean pliability, but it was his insufficient understanding of Ming China which led him to launch the invasion.

Hideyoshi must have eventually realized that he lacked the means to subdue the Ming, so he sought to lay sound foundations in Korea for subsequent campaigns. However, the peace negotiations failed to produce a platform upon which Japan could develop a new regional hegemony. Thus, it would be easy to argue that there was some attenuation in Hideyoshi's regional ambitions between the first and second invasions. Yet, the fact that the second invasion happened at all confirms that Hideyoshi had not abandoned his hegemonic "grand principle."

The Toyotomi regime's policies and behavior continued to evolve throughout the war and the grand strategy appears to have undergone some superficial tactical or temporary changes. Perhaps Hideyoshi's vision was already shifting towards a more modest Tokugawa-style hegemony, parallel to, or overlapping with, rather than supplanting, that of the Ming.[67] Hideyoshi's policy changed from Japan becoming the hegemon of the region to wanting a Japanese hegemony within the region; in other words, to transform the regional order from a unipolar into a bipolar structure. Even if Hideyoshi appeared willing to share hegemony over the peninsula, this revised approach still required Korean submission. Hideyoshi was trying to force the Koreans to rethink their place in East Asia. As his health and the situation on the battlefield deteriorated, Hideyoshi was eventually forced to shift his focus again, from maximizing power overseas to extending the Toyotomi regime's longevity. At the

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[67] Tashiro Kazui and Susan Downing Videen, "Foreign Relations during the Edo Period: Sakoku Reexamined," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 8, no. 2 (1982): 287-88; Arano Yasunori, "The Formation of a Japanocentric World Order," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 2, no. 2 (2005): 208-12; Shogo Suzuki, *Civilization and Empire: China and Japan's Encounter with European International Society* (Routledge, 2009), 47-49, 54; Kang, *East Asia before the West,* 77-81, 97-98, 123-125; Yuan Jiadong, "Satsuma's Invasion of the Ryukyu Kingdom and Changes in the Geopolitical Structure of East Asia," *Social Sciences in China* 34, no. 4 (2013): 133.

operational level, means and ends became less closely aligned, but the "grand principle" endured. Hideyoshi's horizons may have contracted, but while he lived, extending his regime's hegemony over the region remained his ultimate animus.

Hideyoshi's failure colors his legacy because he did not survive to chronicle the history of his era. This vacuum results in a somewhat distorted view of Hideyoshi, not only from the viewpoint of Korea and China—which is entirely understandable—but also from the Japanese perspective. This reflects the Tokugawa regime's need to legitimatize its rule by overwriting the Toyotomi legacy. With the benefit of hindsight, being its end point, the East Asian War is regarded as the totality or climax of Hideyoshi's grand strategy, but had he survived and managed to subdue the Koreans, the invasion may have been seen as merely a stepping stone to further expansion.

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Seonjo sujeong sillok 선조수정실록.

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