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Towards the Process of Civilisation in East Asia: Applying and Extending the Theory of Civilising Processes to China, Korea and Japan

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Abstract

The question of how to examine civilising processes in East Asia has become an important yet challenging one in figurational sociology. While figurational sociologists have considered this question for decades, relatively few scholars have actively applied and tested the theory of civilising processes to examine the *longue durée* of historical and contemporary developments in China, Korea and Japan. Further research could provide an important means of refining and extending our understanding of how long-term processes have developed in these countries. In addition, it may broaden the theory's methodological, analytical and empirical scope beyond Europe. This article contributes to this ongoing endeavour by proposing broad approaches to examining civilising processes in East Asia. Specifically, it outlines possible approaches to investigating different patterns of psychogenetic and sociogenetic change in China, Korea and Japan. Since applying, testing and refining the theory is a vast and complex undertaking, the article also highlights key theoretical, methodological and analytical challenges and proposes both general and bespoke approaches to addressing them.

Keywords: Norbert Elias; Civilising Processes; East Asia; China; Korea; Japan

Introduction

For decades, the question of examining civilising processes in East Asia has been an important focus within figurational sociology. Figurational sociologists have long reflected on this question. As Mennell (1996: 117) observes:

> Can long-term processes comparable with those described by Elias for Europe be found in other historic cultures of the world? The question is an important and challenging one. It can be used to reorient the way we look at the development of non-European historic cultures, both in guiding new research and in

> reassessing already familiar historical evidence. Such research can also serve as a major test of the basic sociological propositions underpinning Elias's theory.

Given the scale and complexity of civilising processes, research conducted in East Asia offers an important opportunity to refine and extend our understanding of how such processes unfold over the long term. It may also open new avenues for investigating the distinctive shifts and counter-shifts that occurred in comparison with those identified in Western Europe (see Mennell, 1989; Dunning and Mennell, 2003; Dunning and Hughes, 2013).

A small number of sociologists, both figurational and non-figurational, have undertaken this important task. Beyond East Asia, notable studies have examined civilising processes in Africa (see Reicher et al., 2022), Brazil (see de Souza and Marchi Júnior, 2017), Cambodia (see Broadhurst et al., 2015; 2018), Singapore (see Stauth, 1997), and Thailand (see Jory, 2021), thereby broadening understanding of civilising processes beyond Western Europe. Within East Asia itself, however, relatively few studies have explored the topic in depth. Aside from research focusing on particular cases or specific aspects of civilising processes (see, for example, Ikegami, 1995; Arnason, 1997; Koh, 2002; Brandtstädter, 2003; Kim, 2006; Ohira, 2014; García, 2019), only two major studies have examined civilising processes in East Asia comprehensively. The first, by Stebbins (2009), employs an Eliasian perspective to analyse Chinese history; the second, by Lau (2022), applies the theory directly to examine civilising processes in Japan from the sixth to the twentieth centuries. Together, these studies have made significant contributions to understanding civilising processes in East Asia. Nevertheless, a clear gap remains in the development of a systematic framework for analysing and comparing civilising processes across East Asian societies. Addressing this gap is important not only for advancing research in East Asia but also for evaluating the broader applicability of the theory beyond Europe.

This article argues that examining civilising processes in East Asia requires a systematic approach that extends beyond the theory's original European foundations. It contends that analyses of psychogenetic and sociogenetic change in China, Korea and Japan must take account of their distinctive historical, social, political, cultural and economic contexts. Rather than assuming a unilinear model of development, the analysis adopts a multilinear perspective that recognises the different processes shaping the habitus, or second nature, of these societies. Since Mennell (1996) first outlined ways of applying the theory to East Asia, focusing primarily on China and Japan, a substantial body of new historical and sociological evidence has emerged that warrants renewed consideration. Equally important is an examination of how these historical trajectories continue to shape contemporary social, political, cultural and economic developments at the global, regional and local

levels, particularly in the context of rising tensions between East Asia and the West and changing power relations among China, Korea and Japan. These developments provide an important opportunity to evaluate Elias's theory beyond its European context and to identify areas where further refinement may be required.

The article proceeds in four stages. It begins by providing a brief overview of the theory of civilising processes, introducing the key concepts and analytical tools developed by Elias. It then considers the principal theoretical, methodological and analytical challenges associated with applying the theory to East Asia, including questions of unilinear development, Eurocentrism and cultural relativity, before proposing ways of addressing them. The article subsequently identifies broad psychogenetic and sociogenetic developments in China, Korea and Japan and compares their respective patterns of civilising processes. Finally, it emphasises that the aim is not to provide a comprehensive account of civilising processes in East Asia but rather to present a preliminary framework for future research. By identifying potential psychogenetic and sociogenetic developments, discussing major theoretical challenges and proposing criteria for comparison, the article seeks to establish a foundation for future comparative research on China, Korea and Japan.

The Theory of Civilising Processes

The theory of civilising processes was created in the 1930s. Developed by Norbert Elias (1897–1990), the theory presents an understanding of the transformation of Western Europe from a historical-sociological perspective. In *On the Process of Civilisation* (2012), he investigates psychogenetic changes, which are the psychological structures of the individual, and sociogenetic changes, which are the social structures of society, from the medieval period to the modern period (Mennell, 1989; Fletcher, 1997; van Krieken, 1998; Linklater and Mennell, 2010; Dunning and Hughes, 2013). Through this, he found that shifts in social structures, such as governance, commerce, urbanisation and so forth, contributed to changes in the individual, such as behaviours, emotions and conduct, leading to greater self-regulation in a spiralling process (Mennell, 1989; van Krieken, 1998; Linklater and Mennell, 2010; Dunning and Hughes, 2013). Most importantly, these processes are unplanned, meaning they are gradual processes shaped by social conditions in a particular direction. The following sections explain how psychogenetic and sociogenetic processes intertwine to form what are commonly known as 'civilising processes'.

Psychogenetic changes are the psychological aspects of the civilising process. The aim of examining psychological structures is to understand how aspects of behaviour, emotion and habitus, or second nature, shift in a particular direction. Through the study of manners, using 'manners books' from the thirteenth century to

the eighteenth century in Britain, France, Germany and Italy, Elias (2012) traced long-term changes in standards of behaviour, emotion and conduct. From his analysis, there were visible changes in outward bodily functions, such as eating, drinking, defecating and sleeping, that shifted in a particular direction (Elias, 2012; Mennell, 1989; van Krieken, 1998; Linklater and Mennell, 2010; Dunning and Hughes, 2013). As societies changed, standards of conduct that were once deemed 'acceptable' became 'unacceptable', which led to greater regulation that shifted people's external constraints towards self-constraints. However, psychogenetic changes occurred in tandem with sociogenetic ones.

Sociogenetic changes are the broader structural changes in society. The purpose of studying social structures is to understand how these broad changes have influenced the direction of the civilising process. Within his study, Elias (2012) examined how state formation processes played a role from the medieval period onwards. By examining the rise and fall of centrifugal and centripetal forces, including external and internal pacification, he showed how certain groups of people became increasingly dependent on those above them, which led to reduced conflict and greater interdependency for survival (Mennell, 1989; Linklater and Mennell, 2010; Dunning and Hughes, 2013). Coupled with the growth of populations, towns, urbanisation, trade and so forth, this became a spiralling process that shifted behaviours, emotions and habitus in a specific direction.

Overall, understanding civilising processes requires considering both psychological and structural changes. As Elias (2012) summarises, there is a clear trend marked by increasing social differentiation, density and complexity, leading to longer chains of interdependence. As societies increase in density, as expressed by population growth and urbanisation, relationships become more complex because people are bound together. When people are bound together, they are required to align their behaviours and emotions with others, creating a more stable and continuous form of social control. Therefore, people are driven to regulate their conduct in more nuanced and consistent ways.

Key Challenges in Applying the Theory to East Asia

When examining the theory of civilising processes, several issues require attention before it can be applied in practice. First introduced in the 1930s and later 'rediscovered' in the 1970s and 1980s, the theory attracted both supporters and critics, who debated its relevance. Elias's advocates argue that the theory is adaptable across a range of societies because it provides a framework for analysing the development of complex societies. Conversely, critics argue that it cannot be applied universally because of its unilinear, progressive and Eurocentric assumptions. While these arguments differ in detail and emphasis, there is general agreement on the need to

test, develop and refine the theory in multiple contexts. This section highlights three main criticisms: unilinear evolution, Eurocentrism and cultural relativism.

The Question of Unilinear Evolutionary Development

The first criticism directed against the theory is the argument for unilinear evolutionary development. Based on their interpretation of the theory, critics argue that the process Elias describes takes a unilinear form, appearing as a straight line of development towards the better. Critics argue that Elias suggests the changes follow an irreversible pattern from 'barbarism' to 'civilisation' that takes place at the same time, at the same rate and in the same way, with exactly the same causes and consequences in every country in Europe (Buck-Morss, 1978; Bauman, 1979; Giddens, 1984; Lasch, 1985; Goody, 2002; 2006). By suggesting this form of development, critics have proposed that Elias formulated a simple theory of 'progress' that expresses a form of 'Western triumphalism'. This criticism, however, has been refuted by defenders of Elias, who argue that critics have misinterpreted the theory.

A common rebuttal to this criticism is the presence of multilinear development within the civilising process. Contrary to the claims made by his critics, Elias occasionally suggested that there are numerous fluctuations, characterised by 'spurts' and 'counter-spurts', across various strands of development. As Fletcher (1997) explains, it is more appropriate to view Elias's theory as multilinear because he traces different strands of social development, ranging from commercialisation to industrialisation, which are woven together in a complex conceptual web. This defence illuminates the operation of the theory. As other defenders have argued, these multilinear developments also occurred at different times, at different rates and in different ways because they are unequal (Mennell, 1989; Fletcher, 1997; Dunning and Hughes, 2013). In fact, there are beginningless processes because there is no zero point in the civilising process. Since there are no definite starting or ending points for processes to occur, different waves of 'civilising' and 'decivilising' tendencies permeate the civilising process. Therefore, contrary to the claims of his critics, Elias accounts for the various shifts in Europe because his theory does not align with a 'progressive' or 'evolutionary' stance.

By examining this criticism in an East Asian context, it is easy to discern an apparent unilinear development in China, Korea and Japan. On a superficial level, both psychogenetic and sociogenetic changes seem to move in a single direction. For example, in Chinese and Korean psychogenetic and sociogenetic changes, there appear to be signs of unilinear development, whereby one thinker extends the thought of another, and one dynasty builds on the previous dynasty in a seemingly unilinear way. This, nonetheless, is a misleading assumption. On a deeper level, both psychogenetic and sociogenetic changes operate in multiple directions, with spurts

and counter-spurts occurring to varying degrees. For instance, Chinese and Korean psychogenetic and sociogenetic changes include multilinear developments grounded in one thinker rejecting another's ideas, or in short- and long-term processes of centralisation and decentralisation in state formation. Therefore, when examined more closely, East Asia reveals distinct spurts and counter-spurts that occur at different scales, times and rates.

The Question of Eurocentricity

The second criticism levelled against the theory is the argument that it is Eurocentric. Based on their interpretation of the theory, critics argue that the civilising process celebrates the power and progress of the West. Critics contend that, because the civilising process focuses on Europe, the theory is intended to explain how and why Britain, France and Germany became superpowers with global empires spanning the world, thereby expressing their 'superiority' over those they colonised in the name of 'civilisation' (Goody, 2002; 2003; 2006; McVeigh and Rolston, 2009; Pepperell, 2016). Through this criticism, critics have suggested that the theory does not account for developments in different countries. Critics are highly sceptical of Elias's findings and dismiss the theory because of its supposed connection to nineteenth-century 'Victorian evolutionism', which attempts to justify Western colonialism and expansionism. This criticism, however, has been countered by several defenders of Elias, who argue that critics have not understood the finer points of the theory.

A common refutation of this criticism is to characterise the theory as 'Euro-centred' rather than 'Eurocentric'. As a 'Euro-centred' theory, its arguments can be applied beyond the European arena. As Dunning and Hughes (2013) argue, although Elias's theory is centred on Europe, it is not 'Eurocentric' in exemplifying European or Western 'triumphalism'; on the contrary, it is an observation-based theory that seeks to develop an understanding of different processes rather than generate value judgements. This clarifies that the theory is centred on Europe without being exclusive. As other defenders have argued, Elias consistently stressed that a similar process could be found outside Europe (Mennell, 1989; Dunning, 2002; Liston and Mennell, 2009; Linklater and Mennell, 2010; Dunning and Hughes, 2013). In fact, in a brief analysis, Elias (2012) remarked that the Chinese have undergone the longest civilising process of all, indicating that the civilising process can vary in length and scope when examined beyond the European arena.

Through this line of argument, Lau (2022) has applied the theory to examine Japanese civilising processes and introduced several refinements for examining other East Asian societies, including the use of cultural arts as evidence of psychogenetic changes and the adoption of primary and secondary states in state formation processes. Furthermore, Chong (2017) and van Krieken (2025) contend that civilising processes provide a comparative framework for examining interconnected global

trajectories of civilisation and decivilisation, with non-Western societies offering equally important insights into long-term social development. Thus, they challenge interpretations of Elias's theory as inherently Eurocentric. Therefore, contrary to the claims of his critics, Elias provides a framework that can be applied to countries beyond Europe.

The Question of Cultural Relativity

The third criticism levelled against the theory is the argument for cultural relativism. Critics debate whether it is appropriate to think of civilising processes in terms of 'civilising', 'decivilising', 'civilised', 'uncivilised', or other such terms. Critics argue that Elias proposed an ethnocentric theory because the concept of 'civilisation' cannot be distinguished from 'native' and 'scientific' categories and assumes a position strongly bound up with Western norms, prejudices and feelings of superiority (Blok, 1982). Through this criticism, critics claim that the theory fails to demonstrate that the 'native' category cannot be transformed into a 'scientific' category, owing to a lack of argumentation. Unable to move beyond these categories, they found the theory 'offensive' because it illustrates how one powerful group legitimises its dominance over other groups in a relatively derogatory way. This criticism, however, has been disputed by defenders of Elias, who argue that critics have only a superficial understanding of the theory.

A common repudiation of this criticism is that the relationship between 'native' and 'scientific' concepts in the theory remains a social-scientific question. This is because a rigid line cannot be drawn between the 'native' and 'scientific' understandings embedded in the concept of 'civilisation'. As Mennell (1989) points out, Elias strongly rejects the idea that social theory can be based on rigid, timeless and clearly defined dichotomies. Rather, he contends that ideas in the social sciences develop gradually over extended periods, beginning with everyday practical understandings and continuously improving through ongoing research until they become more detached, less influenced by imagination and external values, and more closely aligned with social realities. This argument suggests that the distinction between 'native' and 'scientific' concepts cannot be reduced to a single category. In particular, within Europe, the concept of 'civilisation' is used in many different ways. Over time, the meaning and value of 'civilisation' change because the behavioural and emotional associations with the concept also shift. Consequently, contrary to the claims of his critics, Elias is not an ethnocentric theorist who assumes a single position in which the West is seen as 'superior' and others as 'inferior'.

By examining this criticism, several questions arise in relation to the East Asian context. When tracing the civilising process in China, Korea and Japan, similar ethnocentric problems may be encountered. For example, according to Lau (2022), when examining the uses of the concept of 'civilisation' in Japan, the 'native' and

'scientific' categories become distorted because Japan is viewed as a 'unique' country that has achieved a sense of 'civilisation' equal to that of the West. This view has been expressed in a particular brand of scholarship known as *nihonjinron* (Theory of Japaneseness) literature, which portrays the Japanese as 'superior' to their Asian counterparts, particularly China and Korea. Irrespective of this view, the difficulty poses a challenge to attempts to 'decode' the 'native' and 'scientific' categories in East Asia, given the complexities they present to Western scholarship.

The key challenges discussed above should not be taken as grounds for abandoning Elias's theory in East Asian contexts. Rather, they highlight the need for careful historical and comparative investigation. Existing research on China, Korea and Japan suggests that many of Elias's central concerns (i.e. habitus formation, control of violence, state formation processes, balance of power and chains of interdependence) remain highly relevant beyond Europe. At the same time, East Asian historical trajectories may raise questions that require the refinement or extension of Elias's theory. The task, therefore, is neither to apply Elias uncritically nor to reject the framework outright, but to examine how its analytical tools can illuminate East Asian developments and, in turn, how East Asian experiences might contribute to the further development of figurational sociology. With these considerations in mind, the following section outlines potential ways to investigate civilising processes in East Asia.

Addressing Key Challenges in Applying the Theory to East Asia

Among the criticisms and counter-criticisms presented by scholars, the common ground they share is the need for the successful application, testing and extension of the theory. Throughout his life, Elias never claimed that his theory was complete, as he consistently emphasised the need for further elaboration and refinement. There are at least four ways in which the theory can be built upon:

1. By testing and elaborating the theory through further studies of Britain, France and Germany.
2. By studying civilising and state formation processes in other Western countries, such as America, Australia, Canada and so forth.
3. By studying civilising and state formation processes in non-Western countries, such as China, Japan, Korea and so forth.
4. By building on existing knowledge through studies of specialised subjects, such as fire, food, art, literature, leisure and sport.

These are different ways of applying and testing the theory, each requiring a set of general criteria or measuring rods to chart the course of the civilising process (see further Dunning and Hughes, 2013). There are at least three proposed sets of general criteria or measuring rods, which I will now briefly discuss in turn.

The first is the proposed set of criteria introduced by Elias himself. Across his works, he outlines four criteria that require accurate calibration and refinement to facilitate comparison. This is stated by Elias (2006: 237–238) as follows:

> One of the simplest of these criteria is the number of routine contacts which people of different classes, ages, and sex have at one stage of social development as compared to another. Others are the number, length, density and strength of the chains of interdependence which individual people form with others within a time-space continuum at a certain stage as compared to earlier or later stages. A standard criterion … is the central balance of tensions in a society: the number of power centres increases with a growing differentiation of functions; inequality in the distribution of power – without disappearing – is reduced. Lastly, these criteria include the level of three fundamental controls of people in society – the control of humans over extra-human natural events, the control of people over each other, and the control of each person over himself or herself. They too change in a characteristic manner from stage to stage, though certainly not by a simple increase or decrease.

This passage outlines the general criteria researchers should consider when investigating the civilising process across different settings. Because various variables interact, this requires careful tracing of psychogenetic and sociogenetic threads of development.

The second is the proposed set of measuring rods introduced by Stephen Mennell. As part of presenting a possible measuring rod, he suggested plotting changes on an imaginary graph with two axes representing psychological and structural changes. The following conceptualisation from Mennell (1989: 232–233) outlines the principle:

> One scale or axis would concern the structure of development of social interdependencies, including the division of social functions and state formation. The second scale or axis would relate to the civilising of behaviour and changes in personality structure, so conceived of as a sequential order, in which development takes place in a discernible direction. One test of his theory may be thought of as involving the plotting of changes of personality structure and changes in social structures against each other on the relevant scales. Each plot would be dated, and the more closely a regression line could be fitted, and the more consistently were later dates more distant from the origin than earlier ones, the better would it be for Elias's hypothesis. A random scatter of date plots would negate the theory.

This outline details the workings of the measuring rod. When drawing a graph or plotting single or multiple cultural areas, however, care must be taken, as several chart points are required to account for multiple differences. Rather than thinking in

two dimensions when plotting a graph on X and Y axes, it may be useful to think in three dimensions, with a graph composed of X, Y and Z axes when charting civilising processes.

The third is the proposed set of criteria introduced by Cas Wouters. Expanding on the original criteria outlined by Elias, he added seven criteria to make them universally applicable to all cases involving the civilising process. As listed by Wouters (2014: n.p.), these are:

1. The balance of competition and cooperation
2. The balance of external social controls and internal ones or self-control
3. The balance of power
4. The balance of formalisation and informalisation
5. The lust-balance of lust and intimacy or sex and love
6. The we-I balance
7. The balance of involvement and detachment

These seven balances are crucial for tracing the civilising process across different settings because they serve as a guide for conducting research. Their overall contribution is to provide a higher level of synthesis and integration that accounts for the different questions that may arise.

Although the three approaches discussed above cannot be examined in detail because of space constraints, these criteria and measuring rods provide a useful framework for investigating civilising processes beyond Europe. Rather than assuming a uniform or universal developmental trajectory, they offer a set of analytical tools for examining and comparing changing patterns of social interdependence, state formation, behavioural regulation and habitus development across different societies. At the same time, applying these criteria to East Asian cases raises important questions about the extent to which Elias's concepts require extension or refinement when confronted with distinct historical and civilisational trajectories. The task is therefore not simply to determine whether China, Korea and Japan conform to a European model of development, but to examine how psychogenetic and sociogenetic processes unfolded within their own historical contexts and what implications these experiences may hold for the further development of the theory. With these considerations in mind, the following section identifies several avenues for investigating civilising processes in East Asia, focusing on China, Korea and Japan.

Seeking Evidence in East Asia

Applying and testing the theory in East Asia is a momentous task. While considerable attention has been given to other non-East Asian societies, such as America (see

Mennell, 2007), East Asia remains relatively underdeveloped, a fact that warrants further examination. As Mennell (1989: 237) states:

> The best test – urgently needed – of whether the specific pattern of development first sketched for Western Europe represents a more generally valid model would be to investigate other historical civilisations – India, China, Japan for instance. Superficial differences in etiquette would of course be observed – developments in table manners towards the use of chopsticks rather than knives, forks and spoons, or the persistence of eating with fingers, would not in themselves undermine Elias's thesis. It would, however, be necessary to show that the basic shifts in the balance between external constraints and self-constraints in the social habitus of individuals was correlated with the social web becoming more extensive and complex.

To chart civilising processes in East Asia, a comprehensive historical and contemporary analysis of China, Korea and Japan is crucial. After reviewing the major theoretical debates surrounding the extension of Elias's framework beyond Europe, the next step is to explore how these processes can be studied in this region. This discussion is not intended to provide definitive explanations of psychogenetic and sociogenetic developments in these countries. Rather, it identifies promising avenues for research, potential sources of evidence and important historical processes that future comparative studies may examine in greater detail.

The Case of Chinese Civilising Processes

For over 3,500 years, the Chinese have developed a civilisation and culture recognised as among the oldest in the world. Situated on the mainland of East Asia, China was gradually shaped by successive dynasties, each with distinct social structures, political institutions and cultural practices that established the country as a dominant civilisational centre in the East. From the Shang dynasty (1600–1050 BCE) to the People's Republic of China (1949–present), China experienced continuous cycles of unification and reunification, prosperity and conflict, and enduring institutional transformations that profoundly influenced patterns of social, political, cultural and economic development in Chinese society (Gernet, 1982; Roberts, 1999; Gascoigne, 2003; Clements, 2019; Wood, 2020). Although each dynasty left a distinct mark on Chinese history, the formation of the Chinese habitus and state was characterised by complex, intertwined processes. The following discussion considers how psychogenetic and sociogenetic changes might be identified in the Chinese case.

Two of the most significant studies of China from an Eliasian perspective are those by Brandtstädter (2003) and Stebbins (2009). On the one hand, Brandtstädter's (2003) work focuses on contemporary social transformations and demonstrates how

figurational concepts can be used to analyse shifting power relations and social dynamics in rural China. On the other hand, Stebbins (2009) argues that Elias's theory remains applicable despite the apparent challenges posed by China's long periods of imperial continuity and relative stability. Rather than representing an exception to the civilising process, the Chinese case is interpreted as a distinctive developmental trajectory that can be examined through Eliasian concepts of state formation, interdependence and social development. Both studies illustrate the applicability and usefulness of Elias's theory in Chinese contexts. More importantly, they suggest that China's distinctive historical trajectory need not be treated as an exception to Elias's theory but rather as an opportunity to examine how long-term state formation, changing interdependencies and shifting power relations developed under conditions different from those found in Europe. The present approach builds on these contributions but differs in its primary concern with identifying how long-term psychogenetic and sociogenetic developments might be investigated in China.

Psychogenetic changes in China are evident in Chinese thought and practice. The closest equivalent to the European 'manners books' examined by Elias are Chinese classical texts, grounded in Daoism, Confucianism, Legalism, Mohism and Buddhism, that codified 'ideal' behaviours, emotions and habitus among the Chinese. Drawing on the ideas of key Chinese philosophers and thinkers such as Laozi (trad. sixth century BCE), Confucius (551–479 BCE), Mozi (470–391 BCE), Mencius (372–289 BCE), Zhuang Zhou (369–286 BCE), Xunzi (310–235 BCE) and Han Fei (280–233 BCE), works such as the 'Four Books', comprising the *Dàxué* (*Great Learning*), *Lúnyǔ* (*Analects*), *Zhōngyōng* (*Doctrine of the Mean*) and *Mèngzǐ* (*Mencius*); the 'Five Classics', which include the *Shūjīng* (*Book of Documents*), *Shījīng* (*Book of Poems*), *Yìjīng* (*Book of Changes*), Lǐjì (*Book of Rites*) and *Chūnqiū* (*Spring and Autumn Annals*); and other treatises such as the *Zhōu lǐ* (*Rites of Zhou*), *Yílǐ* (*Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial*) and *Xiàojīng* (*Classic of Filial Piety*), contributed to the formation of Chinese thought and practice that endured for centuries (de Bary et al., 1960; Hsiao, 1979; Nylan, 2001; El Amine, 2015; Clements, 2019; Wood, 2020; Jaivin, 2022). For example, the following passages from Confucian texts spanning the Spring-Autumn period (770–481 BCE) to the Song dynasty (960–1279) illustrate psychogenetic changes:

> A young man should be a good son at home and an obedient young man abroad, sparing of speech but trustworthy in what he says, and should love the multitude at large but cultivate the friendship of his fellow men. (From *Lúnyǔ* (*Analects*), 206 BCE-220 CE, Confucius, translated by D. C. Lau in Confucius, 1979: 59-60)

And:

> A gentleman differs from other men in that he retains his heart. ... Suppose a man treats one in an outrageous manner. Faced with this, a gentleman will say

> to himself, "I must be lacking in benevolence and courtesy; how else could such a thing happen to me? (From *Mèngzǐ* (*Mencius*), fourth century BCE, Mencius, translated by D. C. Lau in Mencius, 2003: 94)

And:

> The humane man forms one body with all things comprehensively. Righteousness, decorum, wisdom, and good faith are all [expressions of] humanity. [One's duty] is to understand this truth and preserve humanity with sincerity (*ch'eng*) and seriousness (*ching*), that is all. (From *Erh Ch'eng Ch'üan-shu* (*Complete Works of the Two Ch'engs*), 1606, Ch'eng Hao, translated in de Bary et al., 1960: 504-505)

Within these works, each addressed the growing emphasis on cultivating behavioural control, emotional regulation and the internalisation of standards of moral conduct in restraining violence in everyday life, offering preliminary evidence of psychogenetic changes that may be examined alongside broader sociogenetic transformations in Chinese society. Moreover, the other works noted above served as guides to personal ethics, family relations and social conduct among elites before being disseminated across different social classes. Over time, these works played a crucial role in shaping behaviours and emotions, thereby contributing to the long-term development of the Chinese habitus. However, when analysing psychogenetic changes, it is important to recognise that, although classical texts present rich historical evidence of changing behaviours, emotions and habitus among the Chinese, they were often reinterpreted and revised by Neo-Daoist, Neo-Confucian and Neo-Mohist scholars throughout the centuries, radically altering certain meanings of the original texts. Thus, a detailed comparative analysis of both the original texts and their later interpretations is needed to trace the development of the Chinese habitus successfully.

Sociogenetic changes in China are evident in the dynastic shifts that characterised Chinese state formation. Each dynasty brought distinct institutional changes that affected the social, political, cultural and economic spheres of everyday life. From the Shang dynasty (1600–1050 BCE) to the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), the Chinese experienced notable shifts from unification and centralisation to fragmentation and decentralisation (Gascoigne, 2003; Jaivin, 2022). During long periods of centralisation, such as under the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), the Tang dynasty (618–907) and the Song dynasty (960–1279), there were significant transformations in everyday life, ranging from the expansion of imperial bureaucratic administration (e.g. the imperial examination system) to the reduction of provincial elites' powers (e.g. courtisation). These were accompanied by shorter periods of decentralisation, such as the Three Kingdoms period (220–280) and the Five Dynasties and Ten

Kingdoms period (907–979), which caused violent disruptions (e.g. rebellions) and institutional breakdowns (e.g. civil wars) throughout the country (Roberts, 1999; Wood, 2020). This shift between centrifugal and centripetal dominance not only shows how a high level of centralisation and bureaucratisation emerged, but also demonstrates fluctuations in the balance of power, monopolies of violence and taxation, and patterns of growth. However, when analysing sociogenetic changes, while there is a clear pattern of centrifugal and centripetal dominance in Chinese state formation processes, different dynasties either inherited, modified or abolished existing social, political and cultural institutions to suit the objectives of the new dynasty, creating uneven state formation processes in China. Therefore, a systematic analysis is needed to understand how broader long-term changes, alongside periods of breakdown and violence, contributed to the rise and fall of the Chinese state.

Nonetheless, this development raises crucial questions about violence and decivilising processes in China. Throughout the cycle of centralisation and decentralisation, marked by shifts in dynastic rule, there were both short-term and long-term breakdowns of the state. During short-term breakdowns, such as the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864), the Chinese Civil War (1927–1949) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the state experienced temporary regressions into violence because existing controls were disrupted. By contrast, during long-term breakdowns, such as the overthrow of the Mongol-led Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) by the oppressed Han Chinese from 1351 to 1368, the state experienced prolonged regressions into violence because existing controls were abolished. The significance is that acts of violence and state breakdowns unfolded over several generations, and recovery took several more generations (Mennell, 1989). Though the lack of space prevents further discussion, the point for future examination is to explore how dynastic changes produced long-term breakdowns in effective controls and how intermittent events produced short-term regressions into violence.

The Chinese case presents a challenging and important examination of civilising processes through Elias's theory. At the psychogenetic level, classical philosophical and religious traditions contributed to changes in behaviours, emotions and habitus, while at the sociogenetic level, repeated cycles of centralisation and decentralisation shaped balances of power, monopolies over violence and taxation, and chains of interdependence. Similar developments can be identified in Korea and Japan, though they followed distinct historical trajectories. Whereas Korean and Japanese developments were shaped in part by adapting Chinese influences, Chinese developments emerged largely through indigenous processes. Consequently, the Chinese case provides an important comparative reference point for understanding civilising processes across East Asia. In addition, it suggests that philosophical and religious traditions may have played a more prominent role in psychogenetic and sociogenetic developments than Elias originally emphasised.

The Case of Korean Civilising Processes

Over 2,500 years, the Koreans created a distinct civilisation and culture, which is acknowledged as one of the most enduring traditions in East Asia. Located on a peninsula between China and Japan, Korea was continuously shaped by external and internal forces, which introduced unique social frameworks, political systems and cultural identities that contributed to Korea's regional civilisational developments. Between the Gojoseon period (400–108 BCE) and the Division of Korea (1945–present), external forces characterised by foreign invasions and occupations, and internal forces defined by local conflicts and transformations, significantly influenced the direction of social, political, cultural and economic life in Korean society (Lee, 1984; Savada and Shaw, 1992; Lew, 2000; Seth, 2019; Song et al., 2019). While various external and internal forces influenced Korean history, the development and transformation of the Korean habitus and state were shaped by a complex mix of interwoven processes that are difficult to distinguish. The following discussion considers how psychogenetic and sociogenetic changes might be identified in the Korean case.

An early attempt to engage with Korea from an Eliasian perspective is presented by Koh (2002). Drawing comparisons between European civilising processes and Confucianisation processes in Korea, Koh (2002) argues that Confucian teachings in Korea encouraged forms of behavioural and emotional control resembling those described by Elias in Europe. While recognising important historical and cultural differences between Europe and Korea, he further suggests that Korea offers a valuable opportunity to examine the applicability of Elias's theory beyond a European context. More importantly, Koh's (2002) analysis highlights the potential to examine Confucianisation processes alongside civilising processes, raising broader questions about the relationship between cultural traditions, changing patterns of self-restraint and long-term state formation outside Europe. Building on this insight, the present approach shifts attention to identifying concrete psychogenetic and sociogenetic changes in Korea and to establishing how these could be studied using historical sources on changing habitus, patterns of state formation, power dynamics and the lengthening of chains of interdependence.

Korean psychogenetic changes are evident in religious thought and moral practice. The closest equivalent to the European 'manners books' examined by Elias are Korean religious and classical texts, grounded in Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism and originating in China, that shaped Koreans' behaviours, emotions and habitus. From the fourth to the eleventh century, Buddhist thought guided Koreans, and religious figures such as Wŏnhyo (617–686) and Hyech'o (704–787) interpreted and reinterpreted Chinese Buddhist scriptures, with their interpretations later

contributing to the development of the *Palman Daejanggyeong* (*Eighty Thousand Tripitaka Sutra*) and *Daebanggwang Bulhwaeom Gyeong* (*Avataṃsaka Sutra*), to emphasise emotional restraint in pursuit of spiritual transcendence (Lee and de Bary, 1997; Koh, 2002; Seth, 2019). The following excerpts from Buddhist scriptures and writings emphasise this approach to emotional restraint and spiritual transcendence:

> [I]f practitioners can contemplate reality in this way with a repentant attitude, it is not possible to commit the four grave offenses and five heinous acts, just as empty space cannot be burnt by fire. However, if you are not careful/mindful ... you will still go to hell (*niraya*) ... Therefore, before Buddha in the ten directions, you should feel profound shame and remorse and perform this repentance. (From the *Taesŭng yukchŏng ch'amhoe* (*Mahāyāna Repentance of the Six Senses*), Seventh Century, Wŏnhyo, translated in Cho, 2013: 45)

And:

> [H]ere are five commandments for the laymen: serve your sovereign with loyalty; attend your parents with filial piety; treat your friends with sincerity; do not retreat from the battlefield; be discriminating about the taking of life. Exercise care in the performance of them. (From the *Haedong kosŭng chŏn* (*Lives of Eminent Korean Monks*), 1215, Kakhun, translated in Lee and de Bary, 1997: 45-46)

These Buddhist writings show the growing importance of the individual's emotional restraint and spiritual discipline away from violence. Rather than focusing on physical controls over behaviour and emotions, they emphasise shame, repentance, non-violence and responsibility to encourage individuals to regulate their conduct and achieve spiritual enlightenment. Most importantly, they suggest that religious traditions may have played a more significant role in shaping habitus than Elias originally suggested. However, from the late thirteenth to the nineteenth century, Neo-Confucianism shaped Korean thought, and Neo-Confucian scholars, such as Paek Munbo (1303–1374), Chŏng Tojŏn (1342–1398), Yi Hwang (1501–1570) and Yi I (1536–1584), produced revised accounts of Confucianism in texts such as the *Ch'ŏkpulso* (*In Rejection of Buddhism*), *Sŏnghak chipyo* (*Essentials of the Learning of the Sages*) and *Chungyong kangŭibo* (*Supplement to Lectures on the Doctrine of the Mean*) for the Korean intellectual elite to regulate social conduct and relationships through moral discipline and filial piety (Lee and de Bary, 1997; Koh, 2002; Seth, 2019). The following passages from Neo-Confucian texts highlight behavioural and moral restraint:

> If the body is not trained, it is not possible to regulate the house. Why do I say this? If in serving my father I do not exert myself to be filial, my son will do to me as I have done to my father. ... Therefore, only if I make myself stand on faultless

> ground will everyone among father and son, elder brother and younger brother, husband and wife, be equally correct. (From *Pohanjae chip* (*Collected Works of Sin Sukchu*), 1487, Sin Sukchu, translated in Lee and de Bary, 1997: 324)

And:

> When the feelings of joy and anger, sorrow and pleasure, have not yet been aroused, the perfect genuineness of our mind-and-heart is quiet and unmoved … Therefore, one should always apply oneself to preserving and nurturing it so that the Great Foundation may be established and serve as the master of our interaction with others and the myriad changing developments of life. (From *Hoejae chip* (*Collected Works of Hoejae*), 1605, Yi Ŏnjŏk, translated in Lee and de Bary, 1997: 348)

These Neo-Confucian texts suggest a growing emphasis on curbing immoral and violent behaviours and conduct that could be seen as damaging to the 'virtuous' character of the individual. While early Neo-Confucian writings focused on displaying 'correct' conduct, such as proper forms of filial piety, later writings increasingly stressed the regulation of mental states, such as self-regulating violent thoughts, which became part of everyday life. Most significantly, this also suggests the important role that state ideologies played in shaping habitus beyond that initially emphasised by Elias. Both Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism disseminated codified norms of behaviour, emotions and conduct to foster the social and spiritual cultivation of the mind. In fact, these codified modes of behaviour and emotion produced by Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism contributed to the idea of a 'virtuous society' based on order, morality, propriety and self-cultivation, which guided everyday conduct and social relations between different social classes and played a crucial role in the formation of the Korean habitus.

However, when examining psychogenetic changes, Korean Buddhist figures and Neo-Confucian thinkers emphasised spiritual and moral dimensions. Rather than merely adopting Buddhism or Neo-Confucianism from China, they adapted and reinterpreted these writings to suit their civilisational needs. Despite presenting rich historical evidence of changes in behaviour, emotions and habitus in Korea, it must be noted that early Korean Buddhist scriptures and Neo-Confucian texts differed significantly from later ones. Therefore, analysis of these religious and philosophical texts requires rigorous comparison to chart how earlier texts were refined and extended in light of existing social, political and cultural conditions in Korea, thereby avoiding generalisations based on the Chinese experience.

Korean sociogenetic changes can be analysed through the formation of the centralised bureaucratic state that characterised Korean state formation processes.

Between the Three Kingdoms period (57 BCE–668 CE) and the Joseon dynasty (1392–1897), centrifugal and centripetal pressures exerted dominance at both external and internal levels, shaping the development and maintenance of the Korean state. Externally, centrifugal pressures arose from invasions and occupations by Chinese, Mongolian and Japanese forces that transformed Korea into a semi-autonomous tributary state, generating tensions as it attempted to conform to the practices of its occupiers (Barnes, 2013; Seth, 2019; Huang and Kang, 2022). Internally, centripetal pressures from powerful civil and military families exerted significant regional and local influence, shifting the balance of power (Seth, 2019; Huang and Kang, 2022; Kim, 2023). Both centrifugal and centripetal pressures contributed to the formation of a centralised state because Koreans sought to create a state capable of resisting external domination by China and Japan and consolidating internal control over violent clans. Driven by the need to balance foreign pressures with domestic divisions, the development of a centralised imperial bureaucracy, supported by Buddhist and Neo-Confucian ideologies and by elites capable of organising society, provided the necessary institutions for a centralised bureaucratic state to emerge. This allowed the state to regulate elite power, monopolise violence and taxation, standardise administrative practices and strengthen military organisation, thereby enabling the management of external threats and reducing internal competition, which reinforced the resilience and cohesion of the state.

However, when examining sociogenetic changes, the Korean state, rather than following a Chinese model, was heavily influenced by dominant state ideologies grounded in Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism. Despite evidence suggesting that Korean state formation processes followed a classic formula consisting of the gradual monopolisation of violence and taxation, state ideologies played a major role in shaping social, political and cultural institutions because Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism each held that their ideas were the ‘ideal’ way to develop and maintain the state, producing ideological tensions and conflicts between them. Thus, a meticulous analysis of the different patterns of power, authority and interdependencies is required to understand how they shaped external pressures and internal struggles that contributed to Korean state formation processes from an Eliasian perspective.

Nevertheless, the Korean case raises a significant issue regarding the relationship between the control of violence and decivilising processes. During periods of increased violence, such as the Mongol Invasion (1231–1259), the Japanese Occupation (1910–1945) and the Korean War (1950–1953), effective controls, power balances and interdependencies that bound Koreans were eroded, thereby contributing to changes in habitus. Especially since Korea was a civilisation founded on strict Buddhist and Neo-Confucian moral controls, the decline in morality stemming from competing perspectives fostered a 'permissive society' that not only

loosened the chains of interdependence but also temporarily relaxed moral controls to a significant extent (Mennell, 1989). Although space constraints prevent me from discussing this further, the general point of extension is to identify how particular violent periods or events contributed to the breakdown of the state, existing controls over violence and power dynamics.

The Korean case presents a complex and significant investigation of civilising processes through Elias's theory. On a psychogenetic level, Koreans were exposed to substantial religious and philosophical thought and teaching, which contributed to changes in standards of behaviour, emotions and habitus. On a sociogenetic level, state formation processes grounded in Buddhist and Neo-Confucian thought reinforced control over violence, power relations and interdependencies. At first glance, Korean civilising processes may have followed a Chinese pattern. However, this is a misleading assumption. Unlike in China, where these developments were largely indigenous, Korean developments were strongly shaped by the adaptation and reinterpretation of imported Chinese religious and philosophical ideas and state institutions into distinct Korean forms. Here, Korea occupies a distinct position between China and Japan: a civilisation that not only adapted external influences from China but also remained closely connected to China because of its vulnerable geopolitical position. Subsequently, the Korean case highlights the importance of regional civilisational interactions in shaping civilising processes and suggests that external influences and internal pressures may warrant greater attention when charting Korea's long-term developments.

The Case of Japanese Civilising Processes

For over 2,300 years, the Japanese have maintained a civilisation and culture that is often regarded as 'unique' in East Asia. As an island nation located off the mainland, Japan was shaped by encounters with neighbouring countries and transformations within the country. From the Yayoi period (300 BCE–300 CE) to the Reiwa period (2019–present), the Japanese were introduced to social structures, political institutions and cultural practices from China and Europe, which were selectively borrowed and assimilated into Japanese society (Hall, 1970; Hane, 1991; Eisenstadt, 1996; Arnason, 1997; Totman, 2005; Walker, 2015; Lau, 2022). Unlike in Korea, where Chinese influences played a major role in the development of Korean society, the Japanese managed to retain their civilisational identity through complex processes that formed and maintained the Japanese habitus and state. The following discussion considers how psychogenetic and sociogenetic changes can be investigated in the Japanese case.

Two of the most meaningful examinations of Japan from an Eliasian perspective are those by Arnason (1997) and Lau (2022). Using a comparative analytical approach,

Arnason (1997) argues that the Japanese followed a distinct historical trajectory, shaped by the selective adoption of external influences from China, facilitated through Korea, which were transformed into indigenous social, political and cultural institutions. While his work offers important insights into how the Japanese controlled violence in the samurai (Arnason, 2003) and into approaches to applying a Western theory of state formation to Japan (Arnason, 1996), he further highlights the need to systematically examine the interrelationship between psychogenetic and sociogenetic changes in a strict Eliasian sense. Collectively, his contributions suggest that Japan provides an important test case for assessing both the applicability and the limitations of Elias's theory beyond Europe, particularly regarding the relationship between cultural development, state formation and changing patterns of social constraint. Building on this, Lau (2022) directly applied, tested and extended Elias's theory to examine psychogenetic and sociogenetic changes in Japan. He argues that the cultural arts, such as the tea ceremony, contributed to the courtisation of the samurai and brought about changes in behaviours, emotions and habitus. Furthermore, he explains that state formation processes in Japan, examined in terms of primary and secondary states, could precisely pinpoint where centralisation and decentralisation occurred. The present approach reiterates these insights by identifying psychogenetic and sociogenetic developments through historical sources and situating the Japanese case alongside China and Korea within a broader comparative East Asian framework.

Psychogenetic changes in Japan are evident in the cultural arts. Unlike China and Korea, where there are equivalents to the European 'manners books' examined by Elias, Japan lacks comparable 'manners books', so the cultural arts serve as an alternative, presenting physical and spiritual changes in behaviours, emotions and habitus among the Japanese. Based on the notion of achieving the *Dō* (Way), which is the cultivation of the mind and body to achieve a harmonious state through the mastery of a particular art form and skill in everyday life, the cultural arts, such as *Chadō* (Way of the Tea), *Kōdō* (Way of the Incense) and *Kadō* (Way of the Flower), developed and refined by master practitioners such as Murata Shūko (1422–1502), Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591), Gengensai Seichu Sōshitsu (1810–1877) and Okakura Kakuzō (1863–1913), were codified and passed down as oral, written and practical traditions from one generation to another (Bellah, 1985; Anderson, 1991; Hammitzsch, 1993; Kudo, 1996; Sen, 1998; Sadler, 2008; Lau, 2022). For instance, the passages below describe the principles of the tea ceremony from the medieval period (1185–1603) to the modern period (1868–present), highlighting changes in behaviours, emotions and habitus:

> And however artful one’s motions, a painful self-awareness is crucial. Overbearance and attachment simply obstruct. And yet the Way lies unattainable if there’s no overbearance at all also. A dictum of praise states: “Grow up heart’s

> master, not heart mastered" – words of an ancient. (From *Kokoro no Fumi* (*Letters of the Heart*),1488, Murata Shūko, translated in Sen 1998: 130-131)

And:

> Purity (Sei) *lies in purity of the body; in the things around us, but above all in the mind. Where there is any feeling of competition, of enmity with nature, of desire to* use *things instead of having them* be*; when anything is* wanted *purity is no longer there*. (From *Nanboroku* (*Southern Record*), late seventeenth century, attributed to Sen no Rikyū, quoted in Carr, 1961: 110)

And:

> The sympathetic communion of minds necessary for art appreciation must be based on mutual concession. The spectator must cultivate the proper attitude for receiving the message, as the artist must know how to impart it. (From *The Book of Tea*, Okakura, 1906: 107-108)

The principles found in the writings of tea masters and practitioners emphasise self-restraint and the self-cultivation of 'correct' behaviours, emotions and conduct. In fact, Lau (2022) explains that the tea ceremony, as well as other cultural arts, reveals how values and practices underpinned standards of conduct in everyday life by controlling the violent nature of the samurai, shifting them away from being warriors and towards becoming courtiers. Because these cultural arts were ritualised, practised and transmitted from master to student, they led to the physical internalisation of standards of behaviours, emotions and conduct. Most importantly, as physical actions were taught, learnt and performed in different settings, they became part of everyday practices that guided long-term behavioural and emotional regulation, demonstrating the role that cultural practices played in shaping habitus, a dynamic that could be incorporated into Elias's theory.

However, when analysing psychogenetic changes, although turning to the cultural arts in the absence of 'manners books' presents viable historical sources, there were some scattered works that loosely resembled 'manners books', which emerged earlier between the tenth and eleventh centuries and later between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The former body of work was written by prominent civil aristocrats who described how to display correct behaviours, emotions and conduct at court, while the latter was written for the general edification of women. Thus, rigorous comparisons between these various bodies of work and the different cultural arts are difficult, as they require a comprehensive approach to trace and cross-examine changes in behaviours, emotions and habitus among the Japanese.

Sociogenetic changes in Japan are evident in the emergence of the imperial and warrior state that characterised Japanese state formation. Both imperial and warrior state institutions underpinned changes that affected the social, political, cultural and economic spheres of everyday life. From the Asuka period (538–710) to the Edo period (1603–1868), the Japanese state has often been seen as a single, continuous entity. On a surface level, similar to Chinese and Korean state formation processes, imperial institutions centred on the emperor were developed, providing continuity by creating an 'imagined community' that bound the Japanese to a symbolic figure (Mennell, 1996; Arnason, 1996; 1997; 2003; Lau, 2022). On a deeper level, distinct from Chinese and Korean state formation processes, this continuity was masked by the development of warrior institutions centred on a military dictator who exercised actual power (Mennell, 1996; Arnason, 1996; 1997; 2003; Lau, 2022). This resulted in a dyarchy that enabled two autonomous centres of power to coexist, compelling them to compete for monopolies over violence and taxation. In particular, although there were discernible cycles of centralisation and decentralisation, defined by constant shifts between centrifugal and centripetal forces, as well as external pressures and internal pacification, the Japanese state remained relatively intact because the continuing balance of power was sanctioned by imperial institutions and, in tandem, supported by warrior institutions.

However, when examining sociogenetic changes in Japan, early state formation processes followed a Chinese model, whereas later state formation processes fluctuated significantly and were difficult to study because of the dyarchy in place. At different points, both imperial and warrior centres gained dominance over one another, creating intense conflict and tension. Although Elias's theory remains relevant for examining the basic aspects of state formation processes, a slight modification that incorporates primary and secondary state formation to account for shifts and counter-shifts across different state formations is warranted, avoiding generalisations based on the Chinese and Korean experiences (see further Lau, 2022). Therefore, a differentiated approach is required to examine various patterns of state formation, control over violence and chains of interdependence fully.

Nonetheless, this pattern of development raises important questions about violence and decivilising processes in Japan. With the coexistence of imperial and warrior states, monopolies over violence and taxation were frequently challenged. During periods of extreme violence, such as the Ōnin War (1467–1477), the Sengoku period (1467–1600) and the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), the uneven balance of power within the state, caused by heightened insecurity and uncertainty, contributed to barbarism in the form of mass murder and war, as effective controls over violence weakened (Mennell, 1989). Despite the lack of space to discuss this further, an important point for examination is how periods of aggression temporarily shortened the chains of interdependence at an astonishing rate, producing short- and long-term

reversals towards violent behaviours and emotions, such as those displayed by the Japanese during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

The Japanese case presents an exceptionally challenging and illuminating examination of civilising processes through Elias's theory. At a psychogenetic level, the cultural arts contributed to changes in behaviours, emotions and habitus in everyday life, while at a sociogenetic level, the coexistence of imperial and warrior states produced competing centres in the state formation process that shaped monopolies over violence and taxation, the balance of power and chains of interdependence between different groups. Unlike China and Korea, the Japanese trajectory was clearly distinct. While Chinese and Korean behavioural and emotional changes were grounded in religious and philosophical thought, Japanese behavioural and emotional changes were reflected in cultural arts and practices. Likewise, while Chinese and Korean state formation followed a predictable cycle of centralisation and decentralisation marked by changes in dynastic rule, Japanese state formation was distinguished by the coexistence of imperial and warrior rule, which competed continuously for control over particular ideologies and institutions. Consequently, the Japanese case emphasises the need to examine how cultural arts and practices contributed to psychogenetic changes, and how the coexistence of imperial and warrior forms of rule may require a more differentiated approach to understanding state formation processes.

Each of the three cases suggests that psychogenetic and sociogenetic changes are best understood as reinforcing dimensions of long-term developments in East Asia. Across all three cases, there is preliminary evidence of increasing behavioural control, emotional restraint and habitus formation associated with state formation, monopolies over violence and taxation and lengthening chains of interdependence. However, these developments followed distinct historical trajectories: the Chinese case saw expanding imperial bureaucratic institutions, accompanied by a growing emphasis on ritualised conduct and self-cultivation derived from philosophical thought; the Korean case showed that the consolidation of religious and philosophical ideologies and institutions was closely connected to the internalisation of moral, behavioural and emotional restraints; and the Japanese case experienced imperial and warrior forms of regulation, reflected in cultural arts such as the tea ceremony, which cultivated refined conduct and self-restraint.

In particular, within a comparative analytical framework, these cases reveal similarities and differences in civilising processes and raise important questions about the applicability and limitations of Elias's theory. While psychogenetic and sociogenetic changes provide valuable tools for examining long-term developments beyond Europe, the three cases suggest several areas for modification. Here, the Chinese and Korean cases demonstrate the importance of philosophical and religious

traditions in shaping behaviours, emotions and habitus, while the Japanese case highlights the role of cultural arts and practices. Likewise, state formation processes followed distinct trajectories, ranging from dynastic succession in China to ideological consolidation in Korea to imperial–warrior dualism in Japan. Through periods of decentralisation, characterised by warfare, colonisation and division, the three cases further demonstrate how decivilising processes altered power relations and effective controls over violence. As a result, Elias's theory appears most fruitful when employed through a flexible comparative approach that allows East Asian experiences to contribute to its further refinement and extension.

Conclusion

The development and refinement of civilising processes in East Asia pose significant challenges. Across the Chinese, Korean and Japanese cases, I have identified credible ways to trace psychogenetic and sociogenetic changes. In China, psychogenetic developments can be studied through classical texts associated with Daoist, Confucian, Mohist and Buddhist traditions, while sociogenetic change is evident in patterns of dynastic state formation and transformation. In Korea, psychogenetic changes are reflected in Buddhist and Neo-Confucian thought, alongside sociogenetic developments tied to the gradual formation of the Korean state. In Japan, psychogenetic changes may be observed in cultural arts and practices that shape behaviours, emotions and habitus, while sociogenetic changes can be examined through the interplay between imperial and warrior states. However, these cases also reveal several theoretical and methodological challenges. Beyond the critiques of unilinear development, Eurocentrism and cultural relativism, each case presents specific empirical and analytical difficulties, ranging from sourcing and interpreting historical sources to charting and understanding uneven patterns of state formation. Therefore, analysing civilising processes in China, Korea and Japan demands a thorough historical and comparative analytical approach that considers both regional commonalities and divergences.

Overall, Elias's theory can be applied, extended and refined beyond its original European scope. Here, religious and philosophical traditions seem to play a more significant psychogenetic role than Elias initially proposed, while practices such as the cultural arts may serve functions similar to Elias's 'manners books' in shaping habitus and self-restraint. In addition, state formation processes may require greater differentiation, especially in cases marked by imperial-warrior dualism, colonisation, revolution and geopolitical division. Exploring decivilising processes also calls for a distinct approach to understanding their long-term effects on present-day developments. As a result, while further research is needed, these cases demonstrate the potential to apply and refine the theory of civilising processes beyond Europe.

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