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Title	Legitimising International Orders: The Symbolic Dimension of Surrender
Type	Article
URL	https://knowledge.lancashire.ac.uk/id/eprint/56223/
DOI	https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210525101046
Date	2025
Citation	Koutsoukis, Alexandros (2025) Legitimising International Orders: The Symbolic Dimension of Surrender. Review of International Studies (RIS). ISSN 0260-2105
Creators	Koutsoukis, Alexandros

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210525101046>

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Legitimising international orders: The symbolic dimension of surrender

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(Received 17 July 2024; revised 1 May 2025; accepted 11 May 2025)

Abstract

This article argues that the role of surrender in shaping international legitimacy has been largely overlooked – particularly its symbolic dimension. Challenging dominant views that reduce victory and defeat to moments of rupture, it adopts a long-term, relational perspective, reframing surrender as embedded in ongoing processes that shape and reshape legitimacy over time. It explores how symbols that become central during surrender – including foreign and domestic leaders – can mediate tensions between coercion–consent, pride–stigma, autonomy–dependence, while fostering social cohesion across domestic and international societies. Drawing on case studies, process sociology, complexity theory, the English School, and Thucydides, it demonstrates how the symbolic management of surrender can lead to path dependencies that influence state-formation, a defeated state's identity, and regional integration. Emphasising the fluidity and political weight of symbolic meanings, it advances a relational understanding of hegemonic legitimacy. In doing so, it links the origins of legitimacy to its continuous development and critiques both simplistic victor's peace narratives and process-reductive histories. Ultimately, it illuminates not only the challenges but also the symbolic opportunities for constructing legitimacy in an interdependent world – underscoring that power endures through its symbolic anchoring in meaning and, with it, the hope for reconciliation despite defeat.

Keywords: English School; hierarchy studies; legitimacy; process sociology; surrender; symbolic politics

Creating a new order after major wars is, as Wolfers aptly put it, 'one of the ticklish tasks of diplomacy'.¹ The two world wars left little doubt about the truth of this statement, and more recent events – the fall of the Soviet Union and Putin's invasion of Ukraine – only underscore its relevance. These moments force victors to grapple with a critical dilemma: should peace be punitive or conciliatory? The answer ties ideals of international order to their practical outcomes: peace-making and legitimization.

Scholarship on the origins of international orders has echoed these concerns, and as the liberal international order faces increasing delegitimation, new research is revisiting its origins stories² and the challenges tied to particular modes of legitimization.³ At stake is whether the pursuit of a

¹ Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays in International Politics* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), p. 137.

² G. John Ikenberry, 'Reflections on after victory', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 21:1 (2019), pp. 5–19.

³ George Lawson and Ayse Zarakol, 'Recognizing injustice: The "hypocrisy charge" and the future of the liberal international order', *International Affairs*, 99:1 (2023), pp. 201–17; John J. Mearsheimer, 'Bound to fail: The rise and fall of the liberal international order', *International Security*, 43:4 (2019), pp. 7–50.

relatively consensual legitimacy after major wars is a practical possibility or an unattainable ideal. While much of this literature focuses on how victors construct legitimacy, the perspective of the defeated is often overshadowed by victor-centric analyses, encapsulating the idea that, as the old adage goes, ‘history is written by the victors.’⁴ How the defeated navigate post-war transitions – whether through subordination, resistance, or symbolic adaptation – remains understudied and could offer critical insights into the foundations of international order and socialisation.

The historical record suggests that symbolic politics in surrender can meaningfully shape post-war legitimacy. The surrender of the confederate forces at Appomattox Court House at the end of the American Civil War, for example, was accompanied by symbolic gestures of respect that played a key role in transforming the Philadelphian system⁵ into a legitimate domestic order, fostering long-term American unity.⁶ This contrasts with more recent examples, such as the fall of Saddam Hussein’s statue in Baghdad in 2003, where decision-makers and media misinterpreted a symbolic act, assuming that the Americans would be welcomed as liberators.⁷ These cases underscore a broader issue: while the symbolic dimension of surrender can contribute to reconciliation and order-building, great powers – particularly in recent history – do not always appreciate its full significance, often treating it instrumentally and out of context.

A similar gap is evident in debates on how the legitimacy of international order is shaped after moments of defeat. Robert Gilpin⁸ saw the dynamics of hegemony as more contingent than A. F. K. Organski and George Modelski, emphasising the role of prestige and legitimacy. However, this view of legitimacy has been critiqued as too static and victor-centric by scholars such as John G. Ikenberry,⁹ who argue that hegemonic rationality and self-binding through international institutions plays a key role in socialising and legitimising international orders. Constructivist perspectives, as exemplified by the works of Richard Ned Lebow and Henry R. Nau,¹⁰ underscore the

⁴ Alexandros Koutsoukis, ‘Challenging Victor Bias and Status Quo Bias in Realist Accounts of Surrender: Re-Reading Three Cases of Surrender from the Peloponnesian War’, unpublished PhD dissertation, Aberystwyth University, 2017.

⁵ The United States at that period was between an interstate confederation and a state, but not a state; Daniel H. Deudney, ‘The Philadelphian system: Sovereignty, arms control, and balance of power in the American states-union, circa 1787–1861’, *International Organization*, 49:2 (1995), pp. 191–228 (p. 193).

⁶ Elizabeth R. Varon, *Appomattox: Victory, Defeat, and Freedom at the End of the Civil War* (Oxford University Press, 2013). I would like to thank the editor in charge for suggesting this example. Let me add that symbolic politics are not merely conciliatory in nature; they can also enflame divisions. Leaders like Vladimir Putin seem to be well aware of this. Putin has weaponised symbolic politics to exacerbate tensions, framing the Soviet Union’s implosion as a form of surrender to the West. As he argued in December 2024, ‘We were heading towards a complete total loss of our sovereignty’; BBC News, ‘Putin Challenged on His 25-Year Rule of Russia’, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BBZPqf_zM4, accessed 6 January 2025. By promoting such narratives, Putin justifies policies that intensify domestic grievances and international antagonisms.

⁷ Alex von Tunzelmann, ‘The toppling of Saddam’s statue: How the US military made a myth’, *Guardian* (8 July 2021); ProPublica, ‘The toppling: How the media created the iconic fall of Saddam’s statue’, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDu7bXqx8Ig>, accessed 6 January 2025. I would like to thank one of the reviewers for recommending this example.

⁸ For realist works that tend to see legitimacy as the result of victor’s peace, see Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1981); William C. Wohlforth, ‘The stability of a unipolar world’, *International Security*, 24:1 (1999), pp. 5–41; Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, ‘International relations theory and the case against unilateralism’, *Perspectives on Politics*, 3:3 (2005), pp. 509–24; William C. Wohlforth, ‘Gilpinian realism and international relations’, *International Relations*, 25:4 (2011), pp. 499–511; John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2001); Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Addison-Wesley, 1979); Randall L. Schweller, ‘The problem of international order revisited: A review essay’, *International Security*, 26:1 (2001), pp. 161–86; Randall L. Schweller, ‘Organised anarchy: Revisiting G. John Ikenberry’s after victory’, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 21:1 (2019), pp. 63–70.

⁹ For liberal works that focus on institutionalisation, liberal norms, and rational socialisation, see G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton University Press, 2001); G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan, ‘Socialization and hegemonic power’, *International Organization*, 44:3 (1990), pp. 283–315; Charles Kupchan, *How Enemies Become Friends: The Sources of Stable Peace* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ See for example Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); Richard Ned Lebow, *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Henry R. Nau, *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy* (Cornell University Press, 2002).

influence of identity, culture, or status hierarchies in shaping legitimacy. The English School, particularly Ian Clark,¹¹ has called for a more dynamic understanding of hegemony that accounts for the links between hegemonic legitimacy and the hegemonic periphery. Hierarchy studies¹² have continued on this relational perspective, with scholars like Ayşe Zarakol demonstrating how intersubjectivity and stigma shape legitimacy in international relations.

Despite this movement in a relational and intersubjective research direction, the role of the defeated and the associated *symbolic politics* remain constrained by a limited view of social time. While critiques of victor's peace and the static snapshots of hegemony typical of realism have emerged,¹³ the framing of victory or defeat as 'big bang'¹⁴ moments in the emergence of international systems remains largely unchallenged. This segmentation of history, focusing on the period after victory or after defeat, perpetuates a methodological bias that can be described as 'after-ism'¹⁵ – a temporal perspective that disregards the continuities leading up to these pivotal moments. To build more relational accounts of hegemony and legitimacy, it is not enough to reject 'timeless, placeless models of social change'.¹⁶ A deeper engagement with historical and sociological contexts is needed¹⁷ to understand structural changes within the broader continuities of time.¹⁸

For this reason, this article engages with process sociology. It offers a long-term relational mode of analysis and incorporates the role of symbols as emergent means of societal orientation and change. It focuses on the connections between historical trends, events, and symbols, laying the groundwork for more synthetic accounts of international ordering. The emphasis on processes that shape and develop the complexity of social and political life aligns with complexity theory¹⁹ and the English School, which are also employed below. Andrew Linklater has provided the basis for such synthesis with his long-term view on social processes and symbols²⁰ to explain transformations in

¹¹Earlier English School works did not have such a dynamic approach; Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester University Press, 1977), pp. 61–2. However, Clark and others have been addressing this blind spot; Ian Clark, 'Towards an English School theory of hegemony', *European Journal of International Relations*, 15:2 (2009), pp. 203–28; Ian Clark, 'Bringing hegemony back in: The United States and international order', *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944–), 85:1 (2009), pp. 23–36; Ian Clark, *Hegemony in International Society* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Barry Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations: The Societal Approach* (Polity, 2014); Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Yannis A. Stivachtis, 'Interrogating regional international societies, questioning the global international society', *Global Discourse*, 5:3 (2015), pp. 327–40; Shogo Suzuki, *Civilization and Empire: China and Japan's Encounter with European International Society* (Routledge, 2011).

¹²They include a diverse group of scholars, some of whom focus on the interplay between power, legitimacy, and intersubjective meanings. Janice Bially Mattern and Ayşe Zarakol, 'Hierarchies in world politics', *International Organization*, 70:3 (2016), pp. 623–54 (p. 627); Ayşe Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Rebecca Adler-Nissen, 'Stigma management in international relations: Transgressive identities, norms, and order in international society', *International Organization*, 68:1 (2014), pp. 143–76.

¹³Jervis in Robert Jervis, Henry R. Nau, and Randall L. Schweller, 'Institutionalized disagreement', *International Security*, 27:1 (2002), pp. 174–85.

¹⁴Brieg Powel, 'The "Mesopotamian trap": From the "first" international to dynamic multiplicity', *International Theory*, 16:3 (2024), pp. 321–53, offers an illuminating discussion on the problem of 'big bang' historical moments, drawing in part on Norbert Elias, as this article does below.

¹⁵On the related problem of anachronism and presentism, see Andrew Linklater, 'Symbols and world politics: Towards a long-term perspective on historical trends and contemporary challenges', *European Journal of International Relations*, 25:3 (2019), pp. 931–54 (p. 934); Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 18–19.

¹⁶Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (Russell Sage Foundation, 1984), p. 2.

¹⁷John M. Hobson, 'Reconfiguring Elias: Historical sociology, the English School, and the challenge of international relations', *Human Figurations*, 1:2 (2012).

¹⁸Norbert Elias, *The Symbol Theory* (Sage, 1991), pp. 20–1, 30.

¹⁹Robert Jervis, *Systems Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton University Press, 1997). I would like to thank one of the reviewers for pushing me to engage more clearly with complexity theory.

²⁰Other works have emphasised the role of symbols in world politics, but not as systematically as Linklater. A growing but still somewhat sporadic body of literature in international relations has focused on the role of symbols and symbolic politics in shaping state legitimacy and international order. See indicatively in Linklater, 'Symbols and world politics', p. 933; Paul

international society. While corresponding studies of surrender are absent, historical analyses of war and surrender, inspired by classic thinkers such as Thucydides, have been interpreted through a processual lens²¹ and are used here to refine this process sociological approach to surrender. A long-term perspective, it is argued, is rewarding for understanding the relationship between the origins of international orders and the development of their legitimacy.

The article highlights the key role of symbols in shaping how societies manage broader historical processes – such as modernisation, liberalisation, or westernisation – and how these transformations affect the evolving relationship between the state, its society, and the victor. This relational dynamic is not confined to the moment of defeat; it extends into the post-war period through the continuous development of symbolic politics, which provides frameworks for reinterpreting the past, adapting emotional attachments, and reshaping national pride. Revamped pride resonates not merely because it invokes the past, but because it acquires legitimacy through symbolic and emotional investment. Though entangled with hierarchies of status and processes of stigmatisation, national pride is not reducible to them – it is part of a wider emotional and symbolic reworking of the social fabric.

Within this symbolic terrain, leaders – foreign and domestic – may come to retain or obtain symbolic functions – mobilising, binding, or orientating society in relation to the world. A process sociological framework of analysis, though, does not portray them as autonomous agents with magical abilities or *prime movers* standing outside history. Rather, it understands them as figures shaped by long-term social transformations, constrained or enabled by the socio-political landscape of their time, and articulating collective efforts to navigate uncertainty.²² Their symbolic influence lies in their capacity to mobilise shared emotions and reorient collective ideal self-images in response to rupture. As Elias writes, ‘in order to be accepted...they have to correspond more or less to a leader-image which belongs to the tradition, the culture of those whom they wish to lead’, though this image ‘can be changed through the acts and behaviour of individual leaders, especially when they are successful’.²³

This dual movement – grounded in tradition but open to revision – is particularly acute in moments of surrender, occupation, or external pressure, where leaders must preserve a sense of continuity while guiding societies through normative and emotional shifts. Their impact on legitimacy, therefore, depends on their ability to reflect and refract evolving collective ideals without severing the symbolic threads that sustain historical identity. The case studies, accordingly, treat leaders not as uniquely persuasive or incomparable individuals, but as symbolically embedded actors – whose statements and actions mediate the balance between continuity and change by articulating or reorientating group charisma, mitigating group disgrace, and shaping the emotional and

Musgrave and Daniel H. Nexon, ‘Defending hierarchy from the moon to the Indian Ocean: Symbolic capital and political dominance in early modern China and the Cold War’, *International Organization*, 72:3 (2018), pp. 591–626. War studies, though valuable, have only touched on the symbolic dimension of defeat, focusing on how symbols can push societies ‘to accept compromise or even defeat’; Lewis A. Coser, ‘The termination of conflict’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 5:4 (1961), pp. 347–53 (p. 353). More recent contributions, such as Barry O’Neill, *Honor, Symbols, and War* (University of Michigan Press, 1999), have examined honour and face in the symbolic politics of war, but fail to account for how symbols and rhetoric extend beyond direct interactions to shape broader political narratives and orientations. Research on the particularities of heroism, trauma, and memory has helpfully examined the multifaceted role of symbols of defeat, pivotal events, or modern heroes as symbolic resources in framing collective understandings of the past and shaping domestic identities: Veronica Kitchen, ‘Heroism and the construction of political community’, in Veronica Kitchen and Jennifer G. Mathers (eds), *Heroism and Global Politics* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 21–35; Emma Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Steven Mock, *Symbols of Defeat in the Construction of National Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

²¹Alexandros Koutsoukis, ‘Thucydides and social processes: Beyond tragedy’, in Howard Williams, David Boucher, Peter Sutch, David Reidy, and Alexandros Koutsoukis (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of International Political Theory*, vol. I (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), pp. 47–68.

²²Norbert Elias, *The Court Society* (University College Dublin Press, 2005), p. 133.

²³Norbert Elias, *The Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Polity Press, 1996), p. 343.

normative horizons through which change becomes meaningful. This framework also guides the language used in the case studies, which emphasises the symbolic and relational significance of leaders' actions – even when they are described in terms such as 'heroes', 'gods', or credited with foresight – reflecting how such figures were perceived and how successful they were within their social environment.

Symbolic politics, therefore, functions as a fundamental orientational mechanism across time. It enables societies to navigate crises, adapt their identity, and reposition themselves in relation to international society and hegemonic projects. When surrender leads to the legitimisation of a narrative of national transformation – as in Japan after WWII – it can critically impact not only domestic legitimacy but also the legitimacy of regional international society. The transformative impacts of surrender thus hinge on how societies come to terms with it, as well as the role the surrendered country plays within the hegemonic project and the opportunities it creates for the latter.

This underscores the need for a reconceptualisation of surrender as a socially embedded and symbolically mediated process. This article thus challenges the conventional, process-reductive view of surrender as merely the moment of defeat, with its implications for national pride, shame, and loss of agency, with which it is so often conflated in modern international relations. Instead, it treats surrender as a distinct – though related – construct that has more to do with the reframing and adjustment of domestic norms in reaction to changes in the international political context, with the capacity to feedback and impact the international system in turn.²⁴ Specifically, it argues that surrender is best understood as a distinct relational process with a symbolic dimension,²⁵ embedded within long-term social processes, while also marking a critical turning point in political and historical trajectories.

While this article offers novel insights into how symbolic politics shape international legitimacy, it is important to remember that not all instances of surrender are the same. As discussed below, the surrender of Japan in WWII offers an important case of symbolic politics influencing the development of international legitimacy, in particular the liberal international order in East Asia. Yet, this should not lead to overgeneralising conclusions. Each surrender has unique historical attributes. It is essential not to treat surrender as a one-size-fits-all process. However, it is equally important not to lose sight of the continuity of historical trends and the political struggles that shape their direction – struggles that cannot be understood without considering surrender as both a turning point and a relational process.²⁶

The article proceeds in three parts. Section one introduces a process sociological interpretation of surrender and its implications for international legitimacy, focusing on the role of symbols in post-war order-building. Section two develops this framework through a re-reading of Thucydides' account of Brasidas, analysing how symbolic politics shaped legitimacy in the Peloponnesian War. Section three examines Japan's surrender in WWII, exploring how Hirohito's role and American post-war strategies fostered both domestic cohesion and regional legitimacy. The conclusion reflects on how these historical cases illuminate the symbolic dimension of surrender and its role in navigating tensions between pride and stigma, and autonomy and dependence. It also discusses the added value of a long-term processual perspective in advancing debates on hegemony, hierarchy, and legitimacy, while offering cautious reflections on contemporary global challenges.

²⁴ I would like to thank one of the reviewers for this phrasing.

²⁵ By 'relational process', I am referring to the social, interpersonal, institutional, and symbolic elements involved in how the process of surrender unfolds, including negotiations, public pronouncements, and the symbolic politics of the moment.

²⁶ The article aligns with John Hobson's call for a "temporally relativist" or "constitutive" reading of history...as a means to rethink theories and problematise the analysis of the present, and thereby reconfigure the international relations agenda. John M. Hobson, 'What's at stake in "bringing historical sociology back into international relations"? Transcending "chronofetishism" and "tempocentrism" in international relations', in Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (eds), *Historical Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 3–41 (p. 5).

Process sociology, international relations, and surrender

The literature on the legitimisation of international orders after great power wars highlights victory and defeat as pivotal moments marking new periods in the life of states and international society. It has advanced arguments about socialisation from various perspectives, including the role of liberalism and the values underpinning international society. However, even as newer arguments depict the effects of international anarchy on legitimisation as more flexible than neorealist viewpoints suggest, they continue to rely on a problematic periodisation. For instance, while Zarakol rightly critiques realist and liberal frameworks for treating the ‘power dynamic...as completely independent and *a priori* to the socializing process’, her focus on the period following defeat risks overlooking the longer-term trajectories shaping and emerging from these turning points.²⁷

This oversight is notable given that hierarchy studies underscore the importance of linking international order with pre-existing socio-political relations.²⁸ Similarly, commonalities with the English School are evident, as both literatures emphasise the role of intersubjective meanings in generating legitimate hierarchies or hegemony.²⁹ Ian Clark, for example, argues that understanding international hegemony requires viewing consensual legitimacy as a ‘necessary part of it rather than an optional extra’ and shifting attention ‘away from the attributes of the putative hegemon, and the resources at its command, towards the perceptions and responses of the “followers”’.³⁰

Collectively, these works explore hegemony, consent, and intersubjective meanings while acknowledging, albeit partially, the importance of historical trajectories. At stake, therefore, is how we conceptualise socialisation in relation to time, turning points like victory and defeat, and the interplay between coercion and consent. Process sociology provides valuable insights into these issues, offering a robust foundation for a more comprehensive theoretical synthesis.

Norbert Elias’ work is particularly helpful here even though he did not specifically address the process of surrender and its implications. Elias examined what he terms *adaptation crises* and *reality shocks*, embedding them within long-term developmental processes and offering a broader understanding of socialisation and time. *Adaptation crises* arise from the challenge of adjusting to ‘growing interdependence with other nation-states together with an emphasis on power politics’,³¹ and surrender exemplifies this challenge. The accompanying *reality shock* impacts ‘national we-images and the patterning of emotions and strategies’ and is shaped by ‘the rigidity of the particular [self-perception or] we-image involved’.³² Groups struggle not just to maintain power but also to preserve ‘their own pride and self-respect’,³³ raising the question of how a nation sustains ‘its pride...despite its changed power position’.³⁴ This dynamic underscores that surrender is not merely a moment of defeat but also a profound reconfiguration of self-perception and identity.

To fully understand this reconfiguration, pride must be situated within long-term processes of socialisation. While the literature has examined the related motives of esteem, self-esteem, and status, as well as their implications for legitimacy within a cultural framework,³⁵ their interplay still requires deeper exploration to discern whether they drive competitive or cooperative behaviour.³⁶ States may seek status and standing or strive for ‘good standing’ within valued clubs,³⁷ often navigating the stigma of defeat to reposition themselves in new hierarchies.³⁸ Yet, these perspectives

²⁷ Zarakol *After Defeat*, p. 14.

²⁸ Bially Mattern and Zarakol, ‘Hierarchies in world politics’, p. 631.

²⁹ Bially Mattern and Zarakol, ‘Hierarchies in world politics’, p. 629.

³⁰ Clark, ‘Bringing hegemony back in’, p. 27.

³¹ Jonathan Fletcher, *Violence and Civilization: An Introduction to the Work of Norbert Elias* (Polity, 1997), p. 154.

³² Fletcher, *Violence and Civilization*, p. 72.

³³ Fletcher, *Violence and Civilization*, p. 72.

³⁴ Fletcher, *Violence and Civilization*, p. 106.

³⁵ Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations; Why Nations Fight*.

³⁶ Robert Jervis, ‘Fighting for standing or standing to fight?’, *Security Studies*, 21:2 (2012), pp. 336–44 (p. 339).

³⁷ Jervis, ‘Fighting for standing or standing to fight?’, p. 343.

³⁸ Zarakol, *After Defeat*; Adler-Nissen, ‘Stigma management in international relations’.

alone do not fully explain why such behaviours and emotional realignments come to feel ‘natural’ and ‘convincing’ to individuals and societies.³⁹

The need for a stable identity to manage anxiety-inducing crises – such as surrender – is undeniably significant,⁴⁰ and it likely contributes to the perceived ‘naturalness’ of renewed pride. However, this raises the question of how such pride evolves. Norbert Elias’ critique of static subject–object relationships⁴¹ offers a crucial lens, emphasising that identity and its associated emotions, including pride, are not fixed but are continually reshaped through generational adaptation and knowledge acquisition. This processual perspective enriches our understanding of how long-term socialisation shapes emotional orientations in ways that seem ‘natural’ and deeply rooted, illuminating how moments of surrender can both challenge identity and simultaneously plant the seeds of renewal.

Elias’ concept of state-formation is particularly helpful for grasping both continuity and change in instances of surrender. It helps us conceive the contradictory normative codes of states not as a defect but rather as an adaptation response that enables people to feel pride in their past as well as their new identity. As states develop from earlier forms of statehood – such as kingdoms – to modern nation-states, they obtain hybrid blends of aristocratic or nativist norms alongside liberal or humanist principles – a dynamic Elias⁴² describes as the duality of normative codes. Even the most nationalist governments, for instance, frequently pay at least lip service to solidarist principles associated with ‘humanity’ or ‘civilisation.’⁴³ These hybrid codes reflect as well as influence the ongoing interplay between tradition and modernisation, pride and shame, and domestic and international pressures, shaping how states adapt over time.

Elias’ insights into symbols deepen our understanding of these dynamics. Symbols are not merely tools of communication but also repositories of social knowledge, enabling societies to navigate the complexities of human interdependencies and long-term processes.⁴⁴ Humans are uniquely able to imbue objects, narratives, persons, or rituals with profound emotional significance, transforming them into symbols that bridge past experiences, present realities, and future aspirations. Although symbols can take on various shapes, forms, or meanings, they do so within the constraints of symbol complexes, which connect them to broader societal frameworks.⁴⁵ This dual role of symbols – as products of human evolution and instruments of social standardisation – highlights how symbols orient societies, foster cohesion, and shape collective memory, ultimately influencing survival and state-formation.⁴⁶ Crucially, Elias links symbols to processes of knowledge production and state-formation, emphasising their role in reflecting and mediating power struggles among groups competing to control their transmission and development.⁴⁷

Andrew Linklater extends these process sociological insights by emphasising the role of symbols in navigating the duality of normative codes of nation-states. Symbols, such as shared narratives, myths, and memories, are central to the integration of diverse communities while fostering solidarity with broader ideals of humanity and civilisation.⁴⁸ This symbolic mediation is crucial for

³⁹ Helmut Kuzmics, ‘Embarrassment and civilization: On some similarities and differences in the work of Goffman and Elias’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 8:2 (1991), pp. 1–30 (p. 29).

⁴⁰ Trine Flockhart, ‘Is this the end? Resilience, ontological security, and the crisis of the liberal international order’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 41:2 (2020), pp. 215–40.

⁴¹ Norbert Elias, ‘A diagnosis of present-day sociology’, in *Essays III: On Sociology and the Humanities, Collected Works*, vol. 16 (University College Dublin Press, 2009 [1983]), pp. 99–106 (p. 104).

⁴² Elias, *The Germans*.

⁴³ Linklater, ‘Symbols and world politics’, p. 949.

⁴⁴ Elias, *The Symbol Theory*, pp. 136, 141, 145.

⁴⁵ Linklater, ‘Symbols and world politics’, p. 945.

⁴⁶ Elias, *The Symbol Theory*, pp. 2, 4, 93.

⁴⁷ Elias, *The Symbol Theory*, pp. 136–42; Elias, ‘A diagnosis of present-day sociology’, p. 135; Linklater, ‘Symbols and world politics’, pp. 938–9.

⁴⁸ Linklater, ‘Symbols and world politics’, p. 934.

managing the duality of normative codes, balancing nationalist interests with universal principles, and shaping legitimacy both at the state level and within international society.⁴⁹

For instance, the dynamics of international legitimacy and identity adaptation are exemplified in the Ottoman Empire's selective approach to modernisation and westernisation. Ottoman elites debated what to adopt from Europe while resisting pressures to internalise inferiority and, thus, retain a sense of pride.⁵⁰ Symbolic politics played a central role in these developments, as symbols like the caliphate mediated tensions between tradition and modernisation.⁵¹ The Ottoman Empire's selective adaptation to European and Islamic traditions enabled elites to retain agency and legitimacy amidst global power asymmetries.

As Clark⁵² argues for a more nuanced, dynamic understanding of international legitimacy, process sociology's relational mode of analysis – attuned to pride, normative codes, symbols, and long-term processes – provides a pathway forward. It views pivotal events, such as surrender, not as isolated moments but as part of a broader, interconnected historical trajectory.⁵³ It is a perspective that aligns with insights from complexity theory and path dependence, which have challenged static views of hegemony and legitimacy.⁵⁴ These approaches also offer insights on historical change as shaped by evolving interdependencies, accounting for deviations, feedback loops, and emergent shifts.⁵⁵ Process sociology, therefore, not only helps explain how shifts in legitimacy occur but also illuminates the partially unplanned nature of these changes across time. To build more comprehensive and dynamic accounts of legitimacy, we must consider not only the immediate aftermath of surrender but, more crucially, its long-term impact on the evolution of international legitimacy.

Thucydides is remarkably useful in helping us construct a processual reading of surrender that aligns with these considerations. Much like process sociologists – and other relational thinkers⁵⁶ – would later, Thucydides demonstrates a sensitivity to processes of state-formation, through both the civilising process and the transformative potential inherent in instances of surrender.⁵⁷ He engages with the political processes of decision-making⁵⁸ and identity-formation,⁵⁹ while also shedding crucial light on the symbolic politics of surrender.⁶⁰ Symbolic politics in Thucydides has often been overlooked, dismissed as mere rhetoric, or analysed narrowly in terms of the specific historical context and the truthfulness of discourse, in particular surrender episodes.⁶¹ However, reading Thucydides with an emphasis on long-term social processes enables us to see the bigger picture and develop a broader perspective. It reveals surrender as a turning point embedded in a broader, interconnected historical trajectory.

Surrender, then, is not merely an endpoint but a critical juncture embedded within long-term developmental trajectories. It triggers adaptation crises and reality shocks, compelling states to renegotiate their position within interdependent systems. Process sociology's emphasis on interdependencies, the orientational function of symbols, and the co-evolution of societal norms offers a valuable framework for understanding how surrender plays a key role in the reshaping of

⁴⁹ Linklater, 'Symbols and world politics', pp. 948–9.

⁵⁰ Andrew Linklater, *The Idea of Civilization and the Making of the Global Order* (Bristol University Press, 2020), p. 180.

⁵¹ Ali Murat Kursun, 'Socialisation in Regional International Societies: Turkey and the Middle East', unpublished PhD dissertation, Aberystwyth University, 2023, p. 215.

⁵² Clark, 'Bringing hegemony back in', pp. 35–6.

⁵³ Elias, *The Symbol Theory*, pp. 1, 99.

⁵⁴ Jervis in Jervis et al., 'Institutionalized disagreement'.

⁵⁵ Paul Pierson, 'Not just what, but when: Timing and sequence in political processes', *Studies in American Political Development*, 14:1 (2000), pp. 72–92; James Mahoney, 'Path dependence in historical sociology', *Theory and Society*, 29:4 (2000), pp. 507–48; Andrew Abbott, 'Transcending general linear reality', *Sociological Theory*, 6:2 (1988), pp. 169–86.

⁵⁶ See for example Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (eds), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge University Press, 1985); Hobson, 'What's at stake'.

⁵⁷ Koutsoukis, 'Thucydides and social processes'.

⁵⁸ Ilias Kouskouvelis, *Thucydides on Choice and Decision Making: Why War Is Not Inevitable* (Lexington Books, 2018).

⁵⁹ Maria Fragoulaki, *Kinship in Thucydides: Intercommunal Ties and Historical Narrative* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶⁰ Koutsoukis, 'Thucydides and social processes'.

⁶¹ Simon Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides: Volume II: Books IV–V. 24* (Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 47–8.

domestic and international legitimacy. The interplay of pride, stigma, and symbolic reframing is central to these transformations, highlighting how surrender mediates shifts in power and identity. Consequently, surrender must be understood as both an event and a relational process with a symbolic dimension – its meaning and impact shaped by historical constraints and the ambiguous interplay of material, ideational, and emotional factors. To refine this perspective concretely, we now turn to a synoptic case study from Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, where the symbolic politics and emotional dynamics of surrender come vividly to life.

Brasidas and the surrender of northern Greek city-states in the Peloponnesian War

The Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) was a protracted conflict between the Athenian Empire and the Peloponnesian League, led by Sparta. Chronicled by Thucydides, the war was marked by intense military campaigns, shifting alliances, and deepening rivalries among Greek city-states. Sparta's northern campaign, led by General Brasidas, was a bold and unexpected move aimed at weakening Athens by inciting revolts among its allies in northern Greece. The campaign's key events – including the surrender of Acanthus, Amphipolis, and other city-states – not only shifted the balance of power but also modulated the war's trajectory, setting in motion political realignments few had foreseen.

The socio-political context of ancient Greece during this period was characterised by intense rivalry, a series of civil wars, and a complex network of alliances. City-states (poleis) frequently found themselves torn between pro-Athenian and pro-Spartan factions, each competing for dominance. Often, these internal conflicts invited intervention from greater powers, escalating local disputes into full-blown civil wars. Against this backdrop, the act of surrender carried profound implications: it was not merely a military capitulation, as it is sometimes considered to be, but an act with symbolic repercussions that could redefine a city's identity and allegiance. Surrender could lead to shifts in political power, social structures, and cultural affiliations, making it a significant aspect of the broader war dynamics.

General Brasidas of Sparta developed a grand strategy that combined military coercion with inspirational diplomacy. His approach revolved around a carefully crafted speech, which he adapted as he moved from city to city seeking their surrender. Hornblower⁶² calls this Brasidas' political blueprint, and Thucydides judged it an example of exquisite oratory (4.84). Brasidas' strategy stands as a striking example of what self-restraint in foreign policy – grounded in the recognition of the weak – can achieve, offering a sharp contrast to the Athenian ideology of pure power exemplified at Melos.⁶³

Specifically, Brasidas' speech focused on upholding Greek civilisation standards, while combining inspirational appeals with the strategic use of intimidation. He reassured northern Greek city-states of his willingness to exercise self-restraint in violence, earning him a long-lasting pro-Spartan reputation. He emphasised Panhellenic norms such as respect, autonomy, and oath-keeping, and convinced states of his protective capabilities. He framed his threats against those who would not follow him not in the name of Sparta's strength but rather in the name of defending Hellenic civilisation against betrayal in those extraordinary times. He also acknowledged the diverse political regimes across city-states but chose to act as a unifier rather than a figure who would exploit and deepen social divisions. In a part of his speech, Brasidas argues:

And if any of you have personal fears which make you wary that I might hand over the city to one group or another, you can trust me absolutely in this... That would be worse than foreign rule, and for us Spartans, so far from gratitude for our efforts and an enhanced reputation, the

⁶²Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, p. 49.

⁶³Koutsoukis, 'Thucydides and social processes', pp. 50–2.

result would be a blackening of our name. We would be manifestly bringing on ourselves the very same charges which are the basis of our continued war against the Athenians. (4.86)⁶⁴

This came as a surprise to some citizens who had invited him or expected him to support their faction, but it also earned him a reputation as a decent and honourable man (4.81).

The process of surrender, with Brasidas and his army outside city walls demanding surrender and participation in a Panhellenic mission of liberation from Athens, may sound hypocritical. Yet recent research has advanced a rounder view of Brasidas' strategy.⁶⁵ There are good reasons to see Brasidas as having a genuine transformative vision for the Hellenic world – a vision that cannot be understood outside the context of the Hellenic civilising process,⁶⁶ and Brasidas' effort to shape it.

The civilising process as described in the first book of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* consists of the essential unplanned process of state-building over the course of centuries that includes pacification, a refinement on manners, political transformations, self-restraints on violence and new political identifications (1.1.2–1.21.2).

Brasidas' actions can be seen as operating within – and actively seeking to further – this broader process. When Brasidas is asking the ancient Greeks to trust him, he builds on the significance of religious oaths as symbols that bind societies to their decisions – symbols with profound inter-subjective meaning across the Hellenic world. His ability to extract these oaths⁶⁷ from the Spartan establishment, indicative of his standing in Sparta, must have impressed the city-states in northern Greece.⁶⁸ This aspect of his speech was worthy of the Panhellenic ideals he invoked, and likely made him appear as a potent agent of change within Spartan domestic politics. To trust in Brasidas, therefore, appears to have been understood as another development in Hellenic civilisation – affirming Hellenic autonomy and self-restraint, with Brasidas and Sparta perceived as the proper torchbearers of these ideals. Indeed, positive reputations of Brasidas and Sparta following this campaign endured for decades.

Brasidas' campaign confronted the harsh reality of Greek city-states often falling into civil war when choosing sides between Athens and Sparta. These two great powers represented democratic and oligarchic politics respectively, each upholding distinct normative codes about the citizen's role in political life, yet both anchored in shared ideals of state autonomy and Hellenic civilisation. In this polarised environment, struggles over loyalty and identity deepened, setting the stage for Brasidas' distinctive appeal.

Brasidas' foresight lay in orienting the northern Greek city-states towards more inclusive identities grounded in the Hellenic civilising process, rather than particularistic or nativist identities. What might seem like propaganda to outsiders was, for those within the same civilisation, a reinvigoration of valued and trusted principles. His ability to blend coercion with consent during the surrender process demonstrated a keen understanding of power politics, as well as emotional and civilisational intelligence. This approach allowed the weaker states in the North to take pride in Brasidas' achievements, recasting them as aligned with their own autonomy and civilisational belonging.

The ideals of Hellenic civilisation were woven together through a new political programme. Articulated through exquisite oratory, demonstrated in courageous military campaigns, and advanced as a shared struggle for liberation from Athens and for domestic unity, this programme

⁶⁴The article uses the translation from Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* (Oxford University Press, 2009), and follows the traditional reference style according to book and paragraph.

⁶⁵Koutsoukis, 'Thucydides and social processes', p. 60; Casey J. Wheatland, 'The general as statesman: The virtues of measuredness and daring in Thucydides' account of Brasidas', *Perspectives on Political Science*, 49:2 (2020), pp. 117–24 (p. 2); Matthew A. Sears, 'Brasidas and the Un-Spartan Spartan', *Classical Journal*, 116:2 (2020), pp. 173–98 (p. 187); Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, pp. 47–8.

⁶⁶Koutsoukis, 'Thucydides and social processes'.

⁶⁷Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, pp. 47–8; Thucydides 4.86.

⁶⁸Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, p. 50.

struck a chord with many ancient Greeks. Their pro-Spartan orientation continued to resonate, according to Thucydides, even after ‘the Sicilian affair’ (4.81).

To understand the reorientation of the northern Greek state-societies one needs to grasp the emotional impact Brasidas developed, who was able to emerge as a hero or a founding figure. His actions were not merely responses to immediate military necessities but were deeply embedded in Greek cultural practices that expressed, strengthened, and institutionalised loyalty within these societies. Alliance patterns and revamped ideals ensued.

Following their surrender, cities like Acanthus and Amphipolis underwent significant transformations. Previously part of the Athenian Empire, they now had to navigate their redefined status under Spartan influence. This transition involved shifts in political structures, public rituals, and civic identity, all actively mediated through symbolic politics:

Acanthus and Scione which were binding the domestic authorities squarely to Sparta, were reinforcing their domestic authority and were institutionalising the legacy of Brasidas. The Acanthians dedicated a treasury at Delphi with the following inscription: ‘Brasidas and the Acanthians [sc. dedicated this treasury] from [sc. the spoils of] the Athenians’ (Hornblower 1996, 285). The Scionians welcomed Brasidas with a ritualised honorific welcome as if he was a hero or victor in the games (4.121) and the Amphipolitans changed the origins story of their city and institutionalised a cult of Brasidas as a hero and as the founder of their city (5.11). Fragoulaki, sees in these ritualised behaviours ‘the transformative power of rituals of intercommunal kinship’ and ‘these communities’ negotiation and definition of ethnic identities.’⁶⁹ These rituals were central in the Greeks’ efforts for the maintenance, or transformation, of their states. The transformation of states and of a sense of Greek-ness are woven together both in the Archaeology [section of Thucydides’ text] and in Brasidas’ campaign. All these processes represent the dynamic social context that Brasidas found himself in and tried to influence by accelerating, quelling or inspiring parts of it.⁷⁰

Brasidas’ approach to war and diplomacy exemplified a sophisticated blend of military and political strategy. He adeptly leveraged the Greek civilisational ideal of liberation to inspire and mobilise the Northern Greeks, positioning Sparta as a liberator rather than a conqueror. This framing was pivotal in reshaping the identities of the surrendered cities, fostering a sense of common fate and solidarity with Sparta. The symbolic act of taking oaths and the public declarations of liberation were instrumental in this transformation, highlighting the role of symbols and rituals in the integration of these city-states into the Spartan sphere of influence.

The interplay of coercion and persuasion is central to understanding the symbolic power acquired by Brasidas. This power developed in relation to the consent, admiration, and degrees of pride⁷¹ felt across various city-states as they navigated ancient normative codes, social cleavages, opposing hegemonic pressures, and support for widely appealing ideals both locally and regionally. Triggered by his inspiring recurrent rhetoric, sustained by his military campaigns and moral character,⁷² and solidified by public rituals in the city-states, his influence spread across northern Greece, setting in motion a path-dependent political trajectory. Had Brasidas survived the war and bolstered his influence within Sparta, these dynamics might have further evolved. His key achievement was transforming processes of surrender from mere confrontations into opportunities that fostered unity and stability in the name of the Hellenic international society in northern Greece.

While the symbolic transformations in alliance politics during Brasidas’ time were short-lived – disrupted by the war’s unpredictability and his untimely death – their lasting impact on Sparta’s reputation and Brasidas’ symbolic resonance remains significant. These episodes illustrate how,

⁶⁹Fragoulaki, *Kinship in Thucydides*, p. 19.

⁷⁰Koutsoukis, ‘Thucydides and social processes’, pp. 63–4.

⁷¹On how symbolic acts in ancient Greece were linked to continuing collective pride, see Simon Hornblower, *Thucydides and Pindar: Historical Narrative and the World of Epinikian Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 133.

⁷²Wheatland, ‘The general as statesman’, pp. 117–24.

even in a classical context, symbolic labour tied to surrender can play a key role in the reconfiguration of domestic and regional legitimacy. A similar dynamic is visible in Japan's surrender in WWII, which offers a chance to examine how surrender functions as a turning point – embedded in long-term developmental trajectories and normative tensions – generating feedback loops between symbolic acts, political blueprints, and the broader struggle to legitimise both domestic and regional international orders.

Emperor Hirohito and the surrender of Japan in WWII

The surrender of Japan in WWII marked a profound development in its socio-political transformation, shifting from an imperialist to a pacifist state and becoming a key ally in the US-led regional international society in East Asia. To fully comprehend these changes and the interplay of coercion and consent, it is crucial to examine the role of Emperor Hirohito and the development of the Japanese state since the Meiji Restoration. This case study illustrates that despite American occupation, the Japanese found pride in their national history and the transformative process led by the emperor, which had significant repercussions across East Asia, reinforcing the legitimacy of the regional international society.

The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 delivered a catastrophic blow to Japan, accelerating its path to surrender. However, the narrative of Japan's surrender cannot be reduced solely to these devastating events. The American decision to permit the retention of Emperor Hirohito, a deeply ingrained symbol of Japanese identity and national unity, proved pivotal. This approach to a conditional rather than strictly unconditional surrender – often seen as a concession – underscores the critical role of national symbols in preserving societal cohesion during moments of profound upheaval and defeat. Far from undermining the victor's position, this decision facilitated a more stable transition and underscored the delicate interplay between symbolic politics and the pragmatics of post-war reconstruction.

Japan's official surrender in September 1945 was first signalled by Emperor Hirohito's radio address on 15 August. In this message, the emperor combined existential concerns with a sense of national continuity and pride, acknowledging the suffering of the Japanese people while appealing to their traditional values and sense of duty. Post-war, Hirohito played a key role in reforms that reshaped Japan,⁷³ while the successful management of symbolic politics within Japan influenced the United States' broader strategy of shaping symbolic and geopolitical dynamics in East Asia. This approach helped legitimise the regional international society, encouraging allies to support the US socio-economico-political project and increasingly view Japan as a partner rather than an adversary, carving a path-dependent process where interlocking domestic reforms, symbolic politics, and geopolitical strategies reinforced this reorientation.

In his surrender rescript,⁷⁴ Emperor Hirohito expressed a desire to maintain *kokutai*, referring to the essence of the national polity or the fundamental character and identity of Japan.⁷⁵ This concept is deeply rooted in the traditional and cultural continuity of the Japanese state, centred around the emperor. The rescript thus served as a bridge between past traditions and the new socio-political realities, facilitating a smoother transition for the Japanese populace.

The phrase 'enduring the unendurable and suffering what is insufferable' encapsulates the spirit of *gaman*, a Japanese term signifying enduring hardship with patience and dignity.⁷⁶ This call for

⁷³ John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2000).

⁷⁴ Emperor Hirohito, 'Hirohito Surrender Broadcast' Tokyo (15 August 1945), available at: Nuclear Museum, 'The Jewel Voice Broadcast', available at: <https://ahf.nuclearmuseum.org/ahf/key-documents/jewel-voice-broadcast/>, accessed 17 July 2024.

⁷⁵ Paul Varley, *Japanese Culture* (Tuttle Pub, 1984), p. 233; Yoshio Sugimoto (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Japanese Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 48; Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (Harper Perennial, 2001), p. 653.

⁷⁶ Varley, *Japanese Culture*, pp. 9, 304; Stephen S. Large, *Emperor Hirohito and Showa Japan: A Political Biography* (Routledge, 1992), p. 129.

steadfastness and resilience was crucial in maintaining internal strength and resolve amidst the humiliating circumstances of surrender. It fostered a sense of unity and perseverance among the Japanese, encouraging them to focus on long-term recovery and honour.

The emperor's message extended beyond political surrender, tapping into moral and cultural perseverance. By appealing to the deeply ingrained value of enduring hardships for the greater good, he invoked national pride and unity. This emotional appeal was instrumental in helping the Japanese look beyond immediate humiliation and concentrate on rebuilding and honour.

Emperor Hirohito framed the surrender as a necessary step to prevent the 'total extinction of human civilization.' This appeal to universal values and the preservation of life resonated with the Japanese ethos of valuing life, resilience, and continuity. It continued an older Japanese practice of adapting its civilisation to the demands of power imbalances and external fears, acknowledging that certain traditions or orientations to the world become unsustainable.⁷⁷ Hirohito's appeal went beyond strategic reasoning, as he presented himself as the embodiment of the nation's suffering, transforming his agony into a shared burden.⁷⁸ This emotional and symbolic resonance not only strengthened the ethos of resilience but also underpinned the legitimacy of Japan's integration into the Western-led international order.

The role of Emperor Hirohito and the symbolic dimension of Japan's surrender cannot be fully understood without embedding them within Japan's long-term state-formation process and its impacts on ongoing tensions between tradition and modernity. Beginning with the Meiji Restoration in the nineteenth century, Japan undertook a transformative journey of modernisation, democratisation, and westernisation. This restoration was not only a domestic renewal of the imperial system but also a strategic response to fears of Western imperialism and colonialism, characterised by reciprocal adaptation.⁷⁹ While westernisation was initially met with enthusiasm by modernists enchanted by the West, traditionalists became increasingly sceptical of Western influence.⁸⁰ This social cleavage between traditionalists and modernists deepened over time, influencing Japan's state-formation and evolving national identity.

During the Meiji era, state-led reforms introduced Western institutions and practices to modernise Japan's military, economy, and governance structures. Concepts such as *bunmei* (civilisation) symbolised openness to Western ideals, while *bunka* (culture) signified more traditionalist values. As Japan's democratic institutions developed in phases beginning in the 1890s, they became a platform for competing visions of modernisation.⁸¹ However, by the early twentieth century, traditionalist disillusionment with the West gained momentum in society and in politics, culminating in ultranationalism and militarism during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s till the Japanese surrender.⁸²

Japanese intellectuals also played a crucial role in state-formation by shaping symbolic politics through the adaptation and reinterpretation of European concepts of civilisation to align with Japanese cultural values. As Linklater argues, this intellectual adaptation allowed Western influences to be reshaped in ways that fit the Japanese socio-cultural framework, giving rise to uniquely Japanese interpretations of Enlightenment ideals, such as *bunmei*.⁸³ This reciprocal influence not only modernised Japan's institutions but also placed significant pressure on traditional elites to navigate the coexistence of modernisation and cultural preservation.

This trajectory of transformation highlights the persistent tension within Japan's dual normative codes. Traditionalists sought to emphasise Japan's unique cultural identity and resisting external influences, while modernists advocated integration with Western norms. These tensions shaped

⁷⁷ Linklater, *The Idea of Civilization*, pp. 161, 164.

⁷⁸ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*.

⁷⁹ Linklater, *The Idea of Civilization*, p. 165.

⁸⁰ Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton University Press, 1987).

⁸¹ Wai Lau, *On the Process of Civilisation in Japan: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), p. 356.

⁸² Lau, *On the Process of Civilisation in Japan*, pp. 359–64.

⁸³ Linklater, *The Idea of Civilization*, pp. 2–3; Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (Columbia University Press, 2019), p. 26.

Japan's approach to war, democracy, and modernity, creating a hybridised identity that Emperor Hirohito inherited and sought to integrate differently during the post-WWII period.

Following Japan's surrender, Hirohito consciously practiced symbolic politics. He redefined his role from a divine sovereign, legacy of the Meiji Restoration, to a paternal figure aligned with democratic values. This shift was reinforced by consistent practices of great symbolic value.⁸⁴ His public appearances, speeches, radio messages, and tours across Japan (1946–52) allowed people to see and hear Hirohito as a real person and not as god.⁸⁵ These practices bolstered the symbolic transformation of Hirohito and trust in the political transition, and mitigated resistance to American-led reforms.

Critics may argue that occupation, the necessity for survival, liberal ideals, or stigma were the primary drivers of Japan's transformation. However, the post-surrender pattern of Japan's identity transformation was not foreign to its state-formation process, though addressing it in a way that preserved Japanese pride was once again critical – a mission Hirohito consciously undertook. In the name of democratisation, he considered abdicating,⁸⁶ yet he also saw himself as both a monarchical symbol and the heart of his democratic people. His influence lay in how he actively navigated these long-standing tensions at a moment when symbolic clarity and emotional resonance were essential to national reorientation.

An interview with Vice Grand Chamberlain Kinoshita provides a revealing glimpse into Hirohito's perspective on democratisation. When asked about the emperor's thoughts on Japan's democratisation, Kinoshita explained, 'His majesty thinks that to democratize Japan is to carry out thoroughly the spirit of the imperial house ever since antiquity. That is to say, for the emperor, the heart of the imperial house is the heart of the people, and the way to democratize Japan is to make this spirit thoroughgoing.' He further elaborated that the imperial house must become 'the spiritual center of the people rather than the center of politics', ensuring that 'politics by the people for the people is not wiped out from this country'.⁸⁷ While the emperor's formal powers appeared to narrow, they appeared to expand in influence through their symbolic resonance – a view to which Kinoshita responded affirmatively. This vision positioned Hirohito as the symbolic heart of the Japanese people, reflecting an ideal collective self-image that made Japan's integration into international society feel both innovative and continuous with its past.

Furthermore, the Japanese people had alternatives in the aftermath of defeat. Had Hirohito been put on trial or discredited, they might have sought revenge on the occupiers or turned to communism amid widespread food shortages and welfare issues. Hirohito's role was pivotal in steering the nation away from such paths. Just as in his surrender message, he addressed these challenges by emphasising community and mutual support.⁸⁸ His considerable respectability softened communist opposition to him – if not the imperial system itself⁸⁹ – suggesting a symbolic influence that exceeded formal authority.

Hirohito's symbolic role extended beyond domestic politics, as his endorsement of Article 9 of the new constitution – enshrining Japan's pacifist identity – helped orient the nation's self-image towards peace and democratic reconstruction. This support carried particular significance given resistance from traditionalists, who sought to revise the constitution and restore Japan's military strength.⁹⁰ After the late 1940s, as Japan began to rebuild under the United States' shifting occupation policies that prioritised economic recovery and anti-communist measures, and into the early 1950s during the intensifying Cold War with the Korean War,⁹¹ the ideological clash

⁸⁴ On the link between process sociology and practice theory, see Kursun, 'Socialisation in Regional International Societies.'

⁸⁵ Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*.

⁸⁶ Large, *Emperor Hirohito and Showa Japan*, pp. 141–2.

⁸⁷ Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, p. 579.

⁸⁸ Large, *Emperor Hirohito and Showa Japan*, p. 143.

⁸⁹ Large, *Emperor Hirohito and Showa Japan*, p. 143.

⁹⁰ J. A. Stockwin, *Governing Japan: Divided Politics in a Resurgent Economy* (Blackwell, 2008); Dower, *Embracing Defeat*.

⁹¹ Robert Jervis, 'The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 24:4 (1980), pp. 563–92.

between traditionalists and modernists became increasingly pronounced.⁹² While modernists embraced democratisation and westernisation, Hirohito's embrace of a 'people's emperor' symbolism and his effort to balance the emotional strain of defeat with a vision of cultural pride and renewal played a pivotal role in fostering societal unity. This unity strengthened the public's embrace of the pacifist identity symbolised by Article 9, bolstering resistance to efforts to re-mystify the emperor and revise the constitution,⁹³ which could have fuelled regional fears of Japanese militarism. Simultaneously, pro-American attitudes improved, despite ongoing tensions over sovereignty and regional security dynamics that emerged with the Korean War.⁹⁴ The sustained influence of Hirohito's symbolic leadership thus helped sediment a pacifist 'we-ideal' – an emotionally anchored and socially constructed orientation towards the world that continues to shape Japan today.

The American occupation, led by General Douglas MacArthur, heavily relied on Hirohito's symbolic influence to achieve its objectives. Initially viewed with suspicion, Hirohito's role evolved into a cornerstone of the US strategy to stabilise Japan. MacArthur, as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) in the occupation of Japan, recognised Hirohito as a figure capable of commanding the loyalty and respect of the Japanese people, facilitating both Japan's orderly surrender and the occupation's objectives.⁹⁵ According to Brands, being 'pro-MacArthur increasingly meant being, at least, implicitly pro-emperor'.⁹⁶ Hirohito's endorsement of democratic reforms and his active role in shaping public opinion not only bolstered the domestic legitimacy of the American-led occupation but also reassured the American public of Japan's genuine transformation.

This shift in perception was decisive. Initially seen as a 'symbol of much that seemed "wrong" with Japan at the start of the occupation', Hirohito, within months, came to embody 'American hopes for remaking that nation'.⁹⁷ The emperor's symbolic leadership strengthened social and political forces advocating for a more lenient treatment of Japan, aligning with growing optimism about Japan's role in a liberal international order. American beliefs in the possibility of building a more liberal world were bolstered by these perceptions of success. Ultimately, Hirohito's symbolic role in fostering a consent generation on the road to democracy exceeded MacArthur's expectations,⁹⁸ underscoring the orientational power of symbolic leadership within the shifting webs of interdependence that shaped Japan's occupation, post-war state-formation, and emerging relationship with the world.

The United States strategically presented Japan as a blueprint for successful socio-economic transformation within its broader Cold War strategy.⁹⁹ Post-war reconstruction, rapid economic growth, and a pacifist identity framed Japan as a cornerstone of East Asian stability and a counterweight to communist expansion, embodying the promise of liberal democracy and free-market capitalism. As Bridoux¹⁰⁰ argues, the reinvention of Hirohito and the rejection of militarism established a new national ideology grounded in peace, securing the Japanese population's consent to

⁹² Yukio Maeda, 'The effect of changing political contexts on public opinion in Japan, 1945–2020', in Robert J. Pekkanen and Saadia M. Pekkanen (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 263–80.

⁹³ Large, *Emperor Hirohito and Showa Japan*, chapters 6 and 7.

⁹⁴ Ming-Chang Tsai and Seio Nakajima, 'Imagining America: The origins of Japanese public opinion toward the United States in the Cold War', in Yoneyuki Sugita (ed.), *Social Commentary on State and Society in Modern Japan* (Springer, 2016), pp. 117–39.

⁹⁵ Large, *Emperor Hirohito and Showa Japan*, chapter 6.

⁹⁶ Hal Brands, 'The emperor's new clothes: American views of Hirohito after World War II', *The Historian*, 68:1 (2006), pp. 1–28.

⁹⁷ Brands, 'The emperor's new clothes', p. 28.

⁹⁸ Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, p. 545; Dower, *Embracing Defeat*.

⁹⁹ Jennifer M. Miller, *Cold War Democracy: The United States and Japan* (Harvard University Press, 2019).

¹⁰⁰ Jeff Bridoux, *American Foreign Policy and Postwar Reconstruction: Comparing Japan and Iraq* (Routledge, 2010), chapter 5.

the American vision of Japan as a democratic exemplar and bolstering US supremacy both regionally and globally. This narrative not only shaped Japan's domestic transformation but also projected Hirohito's post-war Japan as a symbol of success, peace, and stability to its East Asian neighbours, where perceptions of Japan remained complex and deeply influenced by its imperialist past.

Understandably, other regional states were not initially convinced of Japan's transformation. Hirohito's symbolic politics, while instrumental domestically in reconciling pride in Japanese traditions with its new hybrid identity and the stigma of defeat, faced scepticism in the Asia Pacific, where the retention of the emperor was met with suspicion. This unease reflected broader doubts about Japan's role in the new liberal international order. For example, Australia expressed dissatisfaction with US policy regarding Hirohito, viewing him as a lingering symbol of militarism.¹⁰¹ Similar scepticism was evident in South Korea, where unresolved issues such as the 'comfort women' – Korean women forced into sexual slavery during Japan's occupation – fuelled enduring societal resentment. Likewise, atrocities committed by Japanese forces in Australia and the Philippines during World War II, including brutal treatment of prisoners of war and civilian populations, contributed to regional distrust of Japan's new identity as a peaceful democracy.

These historical grievances underscored the challenges Hirohito and the US-led occupation faced in reshaping Japan's regional image. Addressing this deep-seated mistrust was essential for Japan's reintegration into East Asia and for legitimising the emerging regional order. Hirohito encapsulated this transformative process during his historic 1971 visit to America, stating: 'Together with the Japanese people, I constantly lay to heart that all the Presidents of the United States and her government and people have given us unstinted assistance, materially and morally, after the end of the war in the restoration and building up of our country. I take this opportunity to express my most sincere gratitude for it.'¹⁰² With this statement, Hirohito symbolised Japan's identity as a Western-aligned, democratic, non-revanchist, economically prosperous, and morally rehabilitated nation – key attributes that facilitated its growing integration and acceptance in East Asia.

The US–Japan relationship was forged at the intersection of symbolic politics, economic aid, and strategic realignment. The Dodge Plan (1949), a US-backed financial and monetary policy, stabilised Japan's economy, laid the groundwork for its 'economic miracle' of the 1950s and 1960s, and enabled its remilitarisation in response to Cold War tensions. The Treaty of San Francisco restored Japan's sovereignty while requiring it to deliver reparations to Allied Powers, and the Security Treaty between the United States and Japan (1951) ensured the continued presence of US military bases in Japan post-occupation.¹⁰³ Together, these measures bolstered Japan's role as an anti-communist bastion in East Asia and as a strategic partner of the United States.

Reparations payments, spanning from 1955 to 1977 and involving agreements with forty-nine nations, helped build trust and symbolised Japan's commitment to peaceful economic cooperation. The bilateral agreements with Burma (1954) and the Philippines (1956) marked early steps towards regional reconciliation, acknowledging wartime actions while fostering economic collaboration. Although historical grievances persisted, these reparations demonstrated Japan's efforts to integrate into the regional community.

Prince Akihito's and Princess Michiko's 1962 visit to the Philippines, followed by their 2016 visit as Emperor and Empress,¹⁰⁴ extended Hirohito's symbolic politics and reinforced the path

¹⁰¹ Brands, 'The emperor's new clothes', pp. 6–25; Kiyoko Takeda, *The Dual Image of the Japanese Emperor* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1988).

¹⁰² Emperor Hirohito, 'Speech to the United States of America', Anchorage (26 September 1971), available at: Richard Nixon Foundation, *Emperor Hirohito of Japan Steps Foot on Foreign Soil (First Time!)* (2015), available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbVWAjUPQDk>, accessed 17 July 2024.

¹⁰³ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*.

¹⁰⁴ Kihara Satoru and Satoko Oka Norimatsu, 'Political Agenda Behind the Japanese Emperor and Empress' 'Trei' Visit to the Philippines', *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* (blog) (1 March 2016), available at: <https://apjif.org/2016/05/kihara>, accessed 6 January 2025.

dependencies it set in motion in shaping the modernisation of Japan and its imperial institution. As the first imperial family member to marry a commoner, Akihito symbolised the gradual democratisation of imperial tradition. Their visits reinforced Japan's evolving pacifist and collaborative self-image, framing reconciliation as an ongoing process of rebuilding trust and mutual recognition, rather than merely fulfilling legal or financial obligations. These practices highlighted Japan's commitment to fostering post-war relations based on peace, cooperation, and shared values – laying symbolic foundations for durable ties between Japan and the Philippines.

While popular resentment lingered in some countries, regional elites, particularly conservative ones, increasingly prioritised the anti-communist struggle over historical grievances, making Japan's changing regional role more palatable. This gradual reorientation was reinforced by segments of the population who embraced forms of pro-Japanism, ranging 'from the formerly colonized to contemporary youths obsessed with Japanese popular culture'.¹⁰⁵ Japan's new international orientation, combined with a series of official apologies and selective bilateral reparations for wartime actions, contributed to rebuilding regional relations and legitimising the liberal international order under American leadership. However, these efforts often fell short of adequately addressing collective memory and historical trauma, which remained sources of emotional and symbolic tension. Apologies for colonialism and war crimes were infrequent, widely seen as insufficient, and undermined by school textbooks that downplayed wartime atrocities.¹⁰⁶

Further straining regional relations were visits by Japanese leaders, particularly conservative ones – though not Emperor Hirohito in his official capacity or his imperial family since WWII – to the Yasukuni Shrine, which honours war criminals alongside Japan's war dead.¹⁰⁷ Such contentious practices undermined the reconciliatory potential of Japan's reparations. Despite these limitations, Japan's post-war transformation and symbolic overtures – such as Akihito's visits – contributed to an evolving pattern of cooperation and helped reshape the regional order by fostering emotional reconciliation and reconfiguring normative expectations about Japan's role in international society.

Alongside regional symbolic dynamics, Japan's strategic relationship with the United States, forged during the Cold War, has also faced periodic tensions, particularly since the 1970s. Economic disputes over trade imbalances and market access created friction, but these challenges never escalated to a rupture, reflecting Japan's enduring reorientation towards the West and alignment with US interests.¹⁰⁸ More recently, Japan's decision to significantly increase its defence budget by 2027 and desire to develop counter-strike capabilities signals a response to evolving regional security challenges. However, this shift has been carefully managed to maintain public trust. As Kawai¹⁰⁹ notes, 'Public support for the new measures increasingly hinges on the government's ability to communicate their absolute necessity convincingly', demonstrating the resilience of Japan's pacifist ideals even amid security recalibrations. These developments underline that Japan's post-war framework, while robust, remains embedded in long-term processes of symbolic negotiation and societal adaptation.

The interplay of these tensions underscores that the legitimacy of international orders is not achieved through singular events or static frameworks but through ongoing, historically situated negotiations – symbolic, domestic, and international. Japan's post-war transformation, shaped by the symbolic dimension of surrender, highlights how symbolic politics – such as Hirohito's leadership, reparations agreements, and strategic alignment with the United States – mediated and reconfigured enduring tensions between pride and shame, autonomy and dependence. While these symbolic efforts helped anchor Japan within a US-led regional order, the persistent tensions

¹⁰⁵ Leo T. S. Ching, *Anti-Japan: The Politics of Sentiment in Postcolonial East Asia* (Duke University Press Books, 2019), p. 13.

¹⁰⁶ Jennifer Lind, *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2010).

¹⁰⁷ Mark R. Mullins, *Yasukuni Fundamentalism: Japanese Religions and the Politics of Restoration* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2022).

¹⁰⁸ Richard Holbrooke, 'Japan and the United States: Ending the unequal partnership', *Foreign Affairs*, 70:5 (1991), pp. 41–57.

¹⁰⁹ Daisuke Kawai, 'Japan's Defence Budget Surge: A New Security Paradigm', RUSI Commentary (2 December 2024), available at: <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/japans-defence-budget-surge-new-security-paradigm>.

between modernists and traditionalists, partial reparations, and contested apologies demonstrate that legitimacy is not fixed but subject to evolving interpretations. Process sociological works argue that ‘domestic and international politics cannot be regarded as separate domains but have interacted with each other to produce fundamental changes in human society’.¹¹⁰ Similarly, this brief case study of post-war Japan illuminates the role of surrender in influencing both domestic and international politics. Its symbolic dimension has played a key role in shaping Japan’s evolving integration into – and the legitimization of – regional international society.

Conclusion

This article argues that to understand the impact of surrender on the legitimization of international orders, a long-term, relational perspective is essential. Surrender should be treated not as a static break between war and peace but rather as a turning point within ongoing processes of legitimacy-building, linked to domestic socialisation, international hierarchies, and hegemonic ordering.

A historical anatomy of surrender allows us to observe both coercion and consent in its unfolding. The symbolic dimension of politics – frequently overshadowed by the mystique of victory – is key to understanding how consent and legitimacy emerge. Surrender shapes the evolution of domestic norms in response to changes in both domestic and international political contexts, with the capacity to feed back into and impact the international system in turn. Leaders, both foreign and domestic, often play a crucial symbolic role in legitimising such shifts. They influence the meaning of symbol complexes and historical narratives, and thus the transformation of state–society relations and the state itself. Ideational constructs about identity and legitimacy are better seen as dynamic states of equilibrium that emerge and shift over time through processes – such as state-formation, westernisation, and liberalisation – across multiple levels of analysis – individual, domestic, and international.¹¹¹

The effectiveness of symbolic leadership depends on two interrelated sets of factors. First, its potential is shaped by the historical continuities modulated during surrender, the victor’s willingness to allow or accommodate this role, and the strategic choices leaders make in performing it. Second, its effectiveness in legitimising new orders – both domestically and internationally – is tied to the legacies leaders leave in shaping symbolic politics and state transformation, the victor’s international ordering project, and regional perceptions of its legitimacy. These factors interweave and co-evolve, adding further complexity to how legitimacy is either consolidated or contested in international relations.

Legitimacy is not simply imposed but negotiated over time through symbols and historical narratives, which also shape the way international relations evolve. The post-surrender process is marked by a double movement of legitimacy – one that facilitates reconciliation and integration, while also preserving historical identities that may later fuel tensions. Symbolic politics contribute to not only domestic legitimacy but also the endurance or contestation of international legitimacy, making them central to both the formation and transformation of international orders. By illuminating continuity and change, legitimization and contestation, this article hopes to have offered a groundwork for a more synthetic relational theory of hegemonic legitimacy, from a long-term perspective that integrates both historical origins and ongoing processes. There are, thus, significant intellectual returns that might be gained from a more systematic integration of the origins of international orders with their evolution.

The article has demonstrated these arguments by blending insights from the relational mode of analysis found in process sociology, complexity theory, and the English School. The process sociological concepts of *adaptation crises* and *reality shocks* were used to frame surrender within broader

¹¹⁰ Andrew Linklater and Stephen Mennell, ‘Norbert Elias, the civilizing process: Sociogenetic and psychogenetic investigations – an overview and assessment’, *History and Theory*, 49:3 (2010), pp. 384–411 (p. 408).

¹¹¹ I would like to thank one of the reviewers for helping with the phrasing in this paragraph.

social processes, highlighting the challenges of interdependence amid power politics. Thucydides' analysis of Greek city-states politics has been fruitful in illuminating how pride was reoriented through symbolic politics to legitimise greater interdependence after surrender. This transition, seen in Japan's WWII surrender, was mediated by Emperor Hirohito's symbolic role, which actively embodied national pride while helping navigate the tension with societal shame, fostering consent for American occupation and orienting the reconfiguration of Japan's identity. This shift, blending modernisation with traditional elements, reinforced Japan's integration into the US-led East Asian international order, illustrating how symbolic politics shape both domestic cohesion and international legitimacy.

Surrender, as seen here, does not mark a clean break from the past – as the victors would wish – but rather forms part of a continuous trajectory of national and international change. This perspective directly challenges '*after-ism*' – the methodological tendency to overstate post-war rupture while overlooking the long-term social processes through which surrender's meaning and impact on legitimacy are negotiated. This has broader theoretical implications.

The article does acknowledge realist critiques of unilinear views of history often associated with liberalism,¹¹² but rejects their event-centric and cyclical perspective, which reduces history to repetitive cycles of great wars and new beginnings. It underlines the importance of long-term processes, path dependencies, and feedback loops, highlighting how moments like surrender serve as transformative sites from which symbolic politics can emerge and, over time, modulate intersubjective meanings and international hierarchies. This avoids throwing out the baby with the bathwater by recognising the flaws in unilinear histories while advancing a more nuanced, *processual*, and complex understanding of legitimacy.

This perspective supports arguments that international order does not emerge solely from anarchy but is shaped by deliberate political projects of ordering.¹¹³ Yet, it diverges from their rationalist underpinnings,¹¹⁴ since it emphasises how long-term processes and the symbolic dimension of surrender can enable or reinforce these political blueprints. By fostering complex relationships between hegemonies and their regional constituencies, these symbolic dynamics illuminate the evolving nature of international hierarchies, aligning with recent scholarship that sees hegemonic orders as dynamic sites of contestation, cooperation, and negotiation rather than static constructs.

Building on this appreciation of political blueprints, embedded in long-term historical processes, this article demonstrates the malleability of national pride and cautions against studies of international socialisation that risk overcorrecting materialist and rationalist perspectives. Broadly, it aligns with the analytical advancements in the literature on international hierarchies and intersubjectivity,¹¹⁵ and English School views of hegemony, legitimacy, and international society.¹¹⁶ However, given different dispositions towards the role of common values in shaping international society,¹¹⁷ the focus on stigma,¹¹⁸ status,¹¹⁹ and pride remains crucial and warrants further exploration. These concepts tend to offer a more social and relational understanding of international order. Therefore, it is vital to avoid reductive interpretations of the pride–stigma dynamic or overly static conceptions of status hierarchies that neglect the fluidity and adaptability of pride as explored here.

¹¹² Schweller, 'The problem of international order revisited'; 'Organised anarchy'.

¹¹³ G. John Ikenberry and Daniel H. Nexon, 'Hegemony studies 3.0: The dynamics of hegemonic orders', *Security Studies*, 28:3 (2019), pp. 395–421.

¹¹⁴ Ikenberry, *After Victory*; 'Reflections on after victory'.

¹¹⁵ Bially Mattern and Zarakol, 'Hierarchies in world politics', p. 629; Ayşe Zarakol (ed.), *Hierarchies in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹¹⁶ Clark, *Hegemony in International Society*; Linklater, 'Symbols and world politics'.

¹¹⁷ Adler-Nissen, 'Stigma management in international relations'; Richard Ned Lebow, 'Thucydides the constructivist', *The American Political Science Review*, 95:3 (2001), pp. 547–60 (p. 559); Linklater, 'Symbols and world politics'.

¹¹⁸ Zarakol, *After Defeat*.

¹¹⁹ Lebow, *Why Nations Fight*; O'Neill, *Honor, Symbols, and War*.

While this article has focused on cases such as Japan to explore the dynamics of symbolic politics and their influence on international legitimacy, the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia invites cautious reflections on how adaptation crises and turning points may reshape international society. Although the conflict remains unresolved at the time of writing, its eventual outcome will likely have profound implications for international politics. Symbolic politics will, arguably, play a decisive role in Ukraine's post-war trajectory, influencing its aspirations for pacification, democratisation, and westernisation. Emerging symbols – such as Zelensky's portrayal as a modern Churchill and Ukraine's framing as the frontline against contemporary authoritarianism – exemplify the power of symbolic politics in shaping Ukraine's identity and ambitions. Yet these transformations must contend with internal societal tensions and the fractured unity within the West,¹²⁰ complicating Ukraine's integration with the West. In particular, these same symbols risk polarising divisions in Western publics, reinforcing either nationalist anxieties or liberal commitments to transnational solidarity and cooperation. Compounding this ambiguity are the differences from the case of Japan. Ukraine is unlikely to surrender to Moscow and, following any peace treaty or armistice, is more likely to continue its westward integration rather than turn towards Russia. In other words, the development of these tensions will also shape the trajectory of two ongoing long-term processes central to the war and its ending: westernisation and derussification. We cannot presuppose an eventual stable equilibrium or the exact hybrid identity of Ukraine after the war. Yet, the reality shock and crisis of adaptation at war's end, and how people navigate them, should not be downplayed, if we are to better understand Ukraine's evolution and the broader struggles over the legitimisation of the West, if not the liberal international order at large.

Such reflections leave us with a final insight – one that speaks to not only defeat and recovery but also the quiet architecture of international order itself. Power may force the terms of surrender, but legitimacy grows through how its meaning is reworked – across time, through pride, and within the symbolic fabric of international order. It is woven not from force alone, but from symbols, stories, and the shared sense of recognition that gives meaning across generations. Though anchored in the past, these foundations are continually reworked – most profoundly through adaptation crises such as surrender, where pride and identity are put to the test. And pride rebuilt, especially after defeat, is rarely pride restored; it is something tempered, reimagined – perhaps even more enduring. In its reinvention lie the subtler strength of legitimacy, the renewal of recognition, and the hope for a more sustainable international order.

Video Abstract. To view the online video abstract, please visit: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210525101046>.

Acknowledgements. I would like to thank Andrew Linklater, with whom I worked as a postdoctoral research assistant on symbols and world politics in 2018, for intellectual guidance, and Alexander Mack for helpful suggestions; Cornelia Navari and Jack R. Basu-Mellish for organising the 2024 Power and Legitimacy in International Society EWIS workshop in Istanbul, Turkey; the workshop participants for their comments; and the editor and three anonymous reviewers of *RIS* for their valuable and constructive feedback on earlier versions of this paper. All mistakes and questionable choices remain my own.

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¹²⁰ Alexandros Koutsoukis, 'The War in Ukraine: A Process Sociological Perspective on How We Got Here', *E-International Relations* (1 April 2023), available at: <https://www.e-ir.info/2023/04/01/the-war-in-ukraine-a-process-sociological-perspective-on-how-we-got-here/>, accessed 6 January 2025.