

# Constructivism in Security Studies on Pacific Asia: Assessing Its Strengths and Weaknesses\*

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*In the last decade or so, security scholars have paid attention to non-material factors in trying to make sense of the varied behavior of states in Pacific Asia. Although they do not totally reject material rationalism, constructivists have found it inadequate or misleading and sought to prove that ideational factors help shed better light on states' security policies. Constructivism on security in Pacific Asia has at least three variants: Cultural realism, social interactionism, and historical culturalism. Cultural realists build their theories on the concept of strategic culture, emphasizing the role of central decision-makers; social interactionists stress the importance of socialization; historical culturalists pay considerable attention to cultural change in domestic political attitudes. This paper asks whether constructivism, one of today's most influential competing paradigms, has supplanted or supplemented realist perspectives on national security. As the latest challenger in security studies, constructivism has become a general approach in security studies, but still needs to prove itself further before*

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*it can claim to be superior to realism. This paper also suggests what its proponents should do to improve their social theories and further shows that constructivism should be treated essentially as a theory of difference, which implies that states are most likely to behave in ways that conform to balance-of-threat logic.*

**Key words:** *constructivism, cultural realism, social interactionism, historical culturalism, security studies, Pacific Asia, realpolitik*

The end of the Cold War is said to present a powerful blow to realists, particularly power transition theorists, who predicted that bipolarity would endure, but that if it were to collapse, the world would witness a violent power transition among the leading states in the system. The Cold War came to an end, but without any bloodshed between the superpowers. Realists, such as John Mearsheimer, rushed to predict that "we will soon miss the Cold War"<sup>1</sup> and that regional institutions, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), would soon fall apart.<sup>2</sup> Non-realist scholars likewise rushed to defend their optimistic visions for the future: NATO, they said, remains robust and has even evolved into a "Transatlantic security community."<sup>3</sup> It should come as no surprise then that serious consideration for the role of cultural theory in contemporary security studies has emerged yet again,<sup>4</sup> and has now gained recognition worldwide.

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1. John Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War," *International Security*, 19, 3 (1990), pp. 5-56. Reprinted in Michael Brown, et al., eds., *Theories of War and Peace* (Cambridge, MA & London, UK: The MIT Press, 1998). This paper uses the reprinted publication.

2. See also K. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security*, 18, 2 (1993), pp. 44-79. Some realists have now pronounced NATO "dead." See William Pfaff, "Allies look to the EU for future security," *International Herald Tribune*, May 11-12, 2002, p. 4

3. See, for instance, Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds., *Security Communities* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998); John Ruggie, *Constructing World Polity* (London, UK: Routledge, 1998); optimists continue to see the relevance of NATO. See Joseph Nye, "NATO remains necessary," *International Herald Tribune*, May 16, 2002, p. 7; Vaclav Havel, "The alliance continues to play an irreplaceable role," *International Herald Tribune*, May 20, 2002, p. 8.

4. See According to Michael C. Desch, there are three waves of cultural theories in national security studies: the WW II, Cold War and post-Cold War periods. See Michael

Constructivist attacks on realism's failure to explain the changing nature of world politics or predict its direction has not taken place in the Western sphere alone. By the early 1990s, constructivism also began to challenge realist thinking on security in Pacific Asia,<sup>5</sup> as more and more attention was devoted to making sense of security practices by states in Pacific Asia.<sup>6</sup> In Northeast Asia, constructivists have found their most fertile empirical ground in Japan and China, the two major regional powers, whose behavioral patterns are starkly different: China remains militaristic, but post-War Japan has exhibited anti-militaristic tendencies. There are also genuine differences between regions. States in Northeast Asia have failed to institutionalize their cooperation, but

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C. Desch, "Culture Clash: Assessing the Importance of Ideas in Security Studies," *International Security*, 23, 1 (Summer 1998), pp. 144-150; see also Alastair I. Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 4-22.

5. Realism in East Asian security studies is still alive and well, however. See Paul Dibb, "The Strategic Environment in the Asia-Pacific Region," in Robert D. Blackwill and Paul Dibb, eds., *America's Asian Alliances* (Cambridge, MA & London, UK: MIT Press, 2000); Paul Dibb, *Toward a New Balance of Power in Asia*, Adelphi Paper, 295 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1995); Aaron Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security*, 18, 3 (1993-1994), pp. 5-33 and Richard Betts, "Wealth, Power and Instability: East Asia and the United States after the Cold War," *International Security*, 18, 3 (1993-1994), pp. 34-77. Reprinted in Michael Brown, et al., eds., *East Asian Security* (Cambridge, MA & London: The MIT Press, 1996); Barry Buzan and Gerald Segal, "Rethinking East Asian Security," *Survival*, 36, 2 (1994), pp. 3-21. Reprinted in Michael T. Klare and Y. Chandrani, eds., *World Security: Challenges for a New Century*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

6. A growing number of scholars in the field of International Relations have argued that ideational factors help explain state behavior in East Asia. See Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the problem of regional order* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001); Amitav Acharya, *The Quest for Identity: International Relations of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 2000); Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); P. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); P. Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Postwar Japan* (Ithaca, NJ: Cornell University Press, 1996); P. Katzenstein and N. Okawara, "Japan's National Security: Structures, Norms, and Policies," in Michael Brown, et al., eds., *East Asian Security*, *op. cit.*; Thomas Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Thomas Berger, "From Sword to Chrysanthemum: Japan's Culture of Anti-Militarism," *International Security*, 17, 4 (1993), pp. 119-150; Alastair I. Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, *op. cit.*; Chalmers Johnson, "The State and the Japanese Grand Strategy," in Richard Rosecrance and Arthur Stein, eds., *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

five states in Southeast Asia have, with the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967. Contrary to realist predictions, states in Pacific Asia have since the late 1980s sought to institutionalize their cooperation by creating the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

The varied behavior of states in Pacific Asia over time has provided constructivists with empirical ammunition to make bold claims against rationalist explanations (notably realism and liberalism) built on the general assumption that state behavior is primarily driven by material forces. Although they do not totally reject material rationalism, constructivists have found it inadequate or misleading and sought to prove that ideational factors help shed better light on states' security policies.

This paper basically asks whether constructivism, one of today's three most influential competing paradigms in Stephen Walt's view,<sup>7</sup> has supplanted or supplemented realist perspectives on national security. Constructivism on security in Pacific Asia has at least three variants: Cultural realism, social interactionism, and historical culturalism. Cultural realists build their theories on the concept of strategic culture, emphasizing the role of central decision-makers; social interactionists stress the importance of socialization; historical culturalists pay considerable attention to cultural change in domestic political attitudes. This paper shows that, as the latest challenger in security studies, constructivism as a general approach in security studies still needs to prove itself further before it can claim to be superior to realism. This paper also suggests what its proponents should do to improve their social theories and further shows that constructivism should be treated essentially as a theory of difference, which implies that states are most likely to behave in ways that conform to balance-of-threat logic.

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7. S. Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories," *Foreign Policy* (Spring 1998), pp. 29-46.

## What Unites Constructivists!

What unites constructivists who have studied Pacific Asia? A quick review of this intellectual trend may be helpful. As an approach to security, constructivism is a new paradigm, which from the early 1980s tended to be ethnocentric in its analytical focus on strategic relations between the two superpowers—both the United States and the Soviet Union. Until the late 1980s, however, this approach had not significantly influenced Pacific-Asian security studies, although it had arisen before. Southeast Asia was in fact the region that put to the test the assumptions and methodology of rational choice theory, a theory that became popular in the 1950s and early 1960s. Soon this theory encountered new challenges, especially after the U.S. ‘defeat’ in the Vietnam War in the 1970s. Realist theories of deterrence and coercion then came under scrutiny. Academic attention turned toward discursive factors (domestic contexts and cultural variables) that were believed to help make sense of the U.S. loss in the war and the Soviet Union’s strategic advantage vis-à-vis the United States. Constructivism had also permeated security studies in Southeast Asia a bit earlier, although it remained peripheral until the early 1990s.<sup>8</sup> Before that, as Richard Higgott argues, “Even the most sophisticated and conceptually oriented policy analyses of contemporary development and change in the Asia-Pacific region ignore the significance of underlying ideational questions.”<sup>9</sup>

By and large, constructivists are united by their common rejection of structural-realist assumptions and propositions. They question the realist assertions that states are the principal, unified, and rational actors in international politics,<sup>10</sup> that some may strive to become great

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8. See Sorpong Peou, “Realism and Constructivism in Southeast Asian Security Studies Today: A Review Essay,” *The Pacific Review*, 15, 1 (2002), pp. 119-138.

9. Richard Higgott, “Ideas, Policy Networks and Policy Coordination in the Asia-Pacific,” *The Pacific Review*, 7, 4 (1994), p. 368.

10. See K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979), p. 85; Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 116-123; J. Thompson and S. Krasner, “Global Transactions and the Consolidation of Sovereignty,” in E. Czempel and J. N. Rosenau, eds., *Global Changes and Theoretical Challenges: Approaches to World Politics in the 1990s* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989).

powers while others may not do so due to structural constraints,<sup>11</sup> and that less powerful states tend to balance against the strongest in the international system. Waltz, for instance, wrote: "Balance of power theory leads one to expect that states, if they are free to do so, will flock to the weaker side. The stronger, not the weaker side, 'threatens them...Even if the powerful state's intentions are wholly benign, less powerful states will...interpret them differently.'" <sup>12</sup> Moreover, social constructivists would seriously call into question the realist generalization that "states [especially great powers] similarly placed behave similarly despite their internal differences."<sup>13</sup>

Constructivists have charged that structural realism even fails to explain the 'hard case' of *realpolitik* in Pacific Asia. Johnston, for instance, finds the theory unconvincing or unable to solve some empirical puzzles posed by the study of China's *parabellum* or 'hard *realpolitik*' behavior. One of his main contentions is that structural realism tends to focus on state behavior explainable in the context of incentives and constraints created by particular configurations of power (or distributions of state capabilities) within international anarchy. According to Johnston, evidence shows that different structural conditions do not explain states' *realpolitik* behavior. Anarchical multipolar power relations differ from bipolar ones, which also differ from unipolar ones, but none explains the persistence of *realpolitik* in China. Although none enjoyed the presence of a supreme

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11. As Waltz puts it: "Some countries may strive to become great powers; others may wish to avoid doing so. The choice, however, is a constrained one. Because of the extent of their interests, larger units existing in a contentious arena tend to take on system-wide tasks." K. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *op. cit.*, p. 55; see also K. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security*, 25, 1 (Summer 2000), p. 34.

12. K. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *op. cit.*, p. 74. Waltz continues to maintain this claim in a more recent article. As he puts it: "In international politics, overwhelming power repels and leads others to try to balance against it. With benign intent, the United States [as the world's only superpower] has behaved and, until its power is brought into balance, will continue to behave in ways that sometimes frightens others." K. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *op. cit.*, p. 28; see also Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security*, 17, 4 (1993), pp. 5-51. Reprinted in Michael Brown, et al., eds., *Theories of War and Peace*, *op. cit.*

13. K. Waltz, "International Politics Is Not Foreign Policy," *Security Studies*, 6, 1 (Autumn 1996), p. 54.

authority regulating relations among states, these different anarchical international systems do not fall into the same anarchical type. If structural realism is eternally valid, the level of concern with survival within the unipolar system should be lower than levels of threat in either multipolar or bipolar systems, since the strongest state or "empire could afford to ignore or buy off...low-level threats."<sup>14</sup> That is, the strongest state needs not resort to the use of violence as much as if it were less powerful. But this was not the case with the ancient Chinese empires, which tended to exhibit an offensive, coercive behavior whenever at peak periods of power.

Other constructivists who have studied Japan have also criticized structural realism for its baseless prediction that Japan would become a normal great power with greater military capabilities,<sup>15</sup> including a nuclear capability, and for failing to account for the persistence of Japanese antimilitarism. Since the Meiji Restoration, the traditional objectives of Japan's military security policy rested on the relationship between a wealthy nation and a strong military. Since 1945, however, Japan has represented a historical anomaly, showing no correspondence or correlation between possession of economic and technological power and military might. The persistence of Japanese antimilitarism is evident throughout the Cold War period and after. Political leaders in Tokyo have consistently sought to pursue an unusually guarded and low-key approach to defense and security policy. They have sought to minimize the size of the national armed forces as well as placed stringent limitations on the types of weapons the latter may acquire and the missions they may perform. Time and again, so goes the argument, the subsequent Japanese governments have opted for nonmilitary solutions to external military threats,<sup>16</sup> and have become increasingly

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14. Alastair I. Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 266

15. K. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *op. cit.*; Christopher Layne, *op. cit.*; Chalmers Johnson, "Japan in Search of a 'Normal Role' ," *Daedalus*, 121, 4 (Fall 1992), pp. 1-33; Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000); George Friedman and Meredith Lebard, *The Coming War with Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

16. Yoshihide Soeya, "Japan: Normative Constraints Versus Structural Imperatives," in Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *op. cit.*; P. Katzenstein, ed., *op. cit.*; P. Katzenstein, *op. cit.*; P. Katzenstein and N. Okawara, *op. cit.*; Thomas Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism, op. cit.*; Thomas Berger, "From Sword to Chrysanthemum," *op. cit.*

engaged in multilateralism.

Peter Katzenstein and Thomas Berger are among those who find realism unable to make sense of Japan's behavior, differing as it does from that of other states that exist under the same structural constraints or opportunities. To them, structural realism cannot make sense of this distinct culture: international structures thus do not determine the state's security and defense policy decisions. During the Cold War, even following the weakening of the American position in Pacific Asia and the growth of a Soviet military presence in the late 1970s, Japanese antimilitarism remained unchanged. Japan stayed the course by choosing not to adopt a more independent defense posture, despite its formidable military potential measured in terms of economic and technological prowess and the size of its population. Japan has instead deepened its military alliance with the United States. Japan's continued dependence on the protection of the United States still does not explain Japanese antimilitarism; otherwise, during the Gulf War, which threatened its economic interests, Tokyo should have succumbed to U.S. pressure to play a more active military role in world affairs. The United States has not been a direct influence on Japan's traditional militarism, either. "American hegemony may have been a necessary condition for the emergence of Japanese antimilitarism," Berger contends, "but it almost certainly was not a sufficient cause of the phenomenon."<sup>17</sup>

Other constructivists, such as Amitav Acharya, find further fault with structural realism, largely because they believe that states in Southeast Asia have so far proved somewhat successful in mitigating balance-of-power politics; they have institutionalized their cooperation by forming ASEAN and by turning it into a 'security community.'<sup>18</sup>

While they do not buy into the structural realist argument that international anarchy and the distribution of power alone determine state behavior, constructivists go farther than liberals to explain behavioral change. Economic interdependence may help explain Japan's anti-realist behavior, but this alone is not a sufficient condition

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17. Thomas Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

18. Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, *op. cit.*; Amitav Acharya, *The Quest for Identity*, *op. cit.*



for explaining such cultural changes. Other liberal states, such as Sweden, Switzerland, and Singapore, which are comparatively dependent on overseas raw materials and equally oriented toward international trade, are less anti-militaristic than Japan. ASEAN emerged at a time when levels of economic interdependence remained low. To this day, constructivists maintain that the ASEAN members have not become more deeply linked in economic terms. Japan's security and defense policy also shows few signs that it has been a free rider, as is often charged by liberals: its refusal to share the United States' international military burden has less to do with the level of its willingness to pay for its own security. After all, Japan made substantial financial contributions (approximately US\$ 11 billion) to the U.S.-led Gulf War. But Japan did not dispatch even a token force to the Gulf. The fact that Japan has become democratic cannot adequately explain its antimilitarism, either. Other democracies, such as the United States, France, and Great Britain, are demonstrably more willing than Japan to use force to achieve their ends. As shall be discussed, constructivists who have studied Pacific Asia contend that cultural and historical forces provide better clues to account for dissimilar security policies.

While seeking to reject both realism and liberalism as rationalist approaches to security, constructivists do not identify themselves with other post-positivists, despite the fact they both are often lumped together as part of the critical approach to security.<sup>19</sup> Although constructivists, post-modernists, feminists, and neo-Marxists/Gramscians are part of a family of theories that unite them on the basis of their common concern with how world politics is "socially constructed,"<sup>20</sup> they do not form a single theory.

The constructivist works under review are not intellectually rooted in neo-Marxism. Berger seeks to bridge the institutional and the political-cultural literatures by paying attention to the influence of élites and élites bargaining in domestic politics and by proposing "a pluralist model of culture formation without necessarily resorting to

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19. See John Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," in Michael Brown, et al., eds., *Theories of War and Peace*, *op. cit.*, pp. 368-380.

20. Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," in Michael Brown, et al., eds., *ibid.*, p. 416.

Gramscian notions of intellectual hegemony.”<sup>21</sup> Johnston also does not argue from a Gramscian perspective based on the role of political élites, who rely on strategic culture as the ideological tool of their political hegemony. As he notes, the use of culture by strategic élites as their strategic instrument “implies that...[they] can escape from, or rise above, strategic constraints that they themselves manipulate.” But élites are also “socialized in strategic culture they produce” and “can be captured by the symbolic discourses they manipulate.”<sup>22</sup> Although at York University, Acharya did not cite any of his colleagues who are leading Gramscianists, such as Robert Cox and Stephen Gills.

### **Cultural Realism: China as a Case for Militaristic Behavior**

The literature on strategic culture, a variant of constructivism in security studies on Pacific Asia, is distinct; it contends that strategic choices are shaped by cultural factors. Alastair Iain Johnston is one of the most sophisticated constructivists who have advanced “cultural realism.” According to this perspective, states make strategic choices largely based on formative ideational legacies, whose formation and development can be traced empirically and whose impact on strategic choice can be weighed against other material factors. State élites or national decision-makers make strategic decisions on the basis of ranked strategic preferences derived from central paradigmatic assumptions about the nature of conflict and the enemy that they share collectively.

Based on a hard case examining China’s Ming period (1368-1644) that can also be explained by realists, Johnston challenges the long-held conventional wisdom that its traditional strategic thought is uniquely anti-militaristic. Chinese history is in fact replete with wars. A total of 3,790 recorded wars occurred from the Western Zhou (ca. 1100 BC) to the end of the Qing dynasty (1911). In the Ming period, the average number of external wars per year was 1.12.<sup>23</sup> China during

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21. Thomas Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism*, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

22. Alastair I. Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

the Mao and post-Mao eras was not anti-militaristic, either. He cites Mao's words, such as war was "the politics of human bloodshed" whose objective was to "preserve oneself and destroy the enemy."<sup>24</sup>

What explains Chinese militarism? According to Johnston, whose study is heavily based on the *Seven Military Classics* as the main objects of his analysis, patterns of China's strategic behavior are consistent with those strategic preferences held by Chinese decision-makers. By strategic preferences, he means China has three different grand strategies: accommodation, defense, and offense. These strategies are part of two Chinese strategic cultures: one is an idealized or symbolic culture; the other, an operational *parabellum* culture. The first culture tends to put Chinese history in a positive light by confirming the Chinese preference for minimal violence embodied in such concepts as "not fighting and subduing the enemy" found in the Confucian-Mencian tradition. In reality, this culture has not been put into practice. The *parabellum* culture, however, has become more dominant and has had a nontrivial effect on strategic choice, primarily because of its emphasis on the use of force as the best way of eliminating security threats. This preference is also tempered by an explicit sensitivity to one's relative capacity to act against the enemy. Johnston hypothesizes that a state would tend to act in a more offensive, coercive manner when the capacity of the enemy to threaten its security is low and when its capacity to mobilize military resources is high. Offensive strategies are also heavily mediated by the concept of absolute flexibility (*quan bian*), which makes central decision-makers sensitive to the relationship between changes in capability and opportunity as well as the likely efficacy of this strategy.

The Ming dynasty evidently adopted the security strategy consistent with the pattern predicted by a *parabellum* strategic culture. Ming decision-makers preferred a more offensive use of force to static defense and accommodation, which were seen as strategies of last resort to be used only when China was unable to mobilize resources for offense. Post-1949 China's use of force against other states also appeared to be related to improved relative capabilities. This warlike culture has proved to be resilient.

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24. *Ibid.*, pp. 255-256.

From this strategic cultural perspective, material capabilities matter, but only to the extent that they are treated in instrumental terms based on certain interpretations by central policy decision-makers. In the case of China, the *parabellum* strategic culture determined how material capabilities were used in response to the way Chinese decision-makers perceived the nature of conflict and the perceived nature of their enemy—for example, the Mongols as “sheep and dogs.” Material capabilities alone do not drive them into adopting militarism in the way informed by the realist logic of anarchy. How changes in relative capabilities are interpreted matter much: “By themselves...changes in relative capabilities in the context of anarchy cannot account for *realpolitik* behavior. Rather, they require a *parabellum* strategic culture as a precursor.”<sup>25</sup>

Although China’s “strategic culture is not self-evidently unique, or different from certain strains in Western *realpolitik* thought and practice,”<sup>26</sup> it is the byproduct of socialization within a certain historical period. In other words, the strategic culture was transmitted from the formative periods across time. The *Seven Military Classics* played a central role in military education. This was the case during the Ming period, when a military-examination system began in 1387. The study of the *Seven Military Classics* was not limited to professional military officials; many high officials (top court officials and various emperors) also studied them. The classics also “provided the textual and intellectual basis for much of the extensive writing on military affairs in the Ming period.”<sup>27</sup> Mao Zedong himself had also been influenced by this strategic-cultural wisdom, seen in his rejection of such Confucian-Mencian axioms as “not fighting and subdue the enemy.”<sup>28</sup> The *parabellum* culture continued to influence strategic choices adopted by Mao’s successors, who viewed conflict in zero-sum terms and were far more likely than political leaders of any other states to use force to settle disputes.

Cultures are persistent but changeable. The cultivation, preservation, and application of the *parabellum* culture have much to do with

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25. *Ibid.*, p. 264.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

Chinese decision-makers' concern with the problem of credibility. Any sign of weakness would, at a minimum, undermine the credibility of China's future politico-military actions, and might, in the worst case, encourage foreign aggressiveness.<sup>29</sup> Unlike structural realism, which does not acknowledge the possibility of change over time, cultural realism recognizes this possibility. If the *parabellum* paradigm is cultural, hence historically contingent, it can be transformed. In Johnston's view, change takes place slowly: "If strategic culture does change, it does so slowly, lagging behind changes in 'objective' conditions."<sup>30</sup>

Empirically, cultural realism's strength lies in its ability to explain the impact of *parabellum* culture on the strategic behavior of China, a country that continues to be perceived as intimidating or threatening smaller countries. China maintains territorial claims in the South China Sea and has been portrayed as a revisionist power in Pacific Asia. China continues to threaten Taiwan with the use of force if the latter chooses independence. Johnston agrees with Roderick MacFarquhar, "the Chinese are no less concerned with the use of military power than any other civilization—a that scholars have traditionally disputed because...they misread the Chinese classics." Johnston also agrees with Warren Cohen who confirms Johnston's analysis that "generational change will not guarantee a kinder, gentler China." To the extent that China still prepares for war, cultural realism has predictive values.

If the *Seven Military Classics* deeply influenced Chinese strategic thinking, what had influenced or inspired the authors in the first place? If the earliest military-strategic text known as Sun Zi Bing Fa indeed appeared around 500 BC, one would like to know what had motivated the writer to produce this work. Is it possible that the author's strategic thinking may have been inspired by the fact that the strong did what they could to dominate the weak? The number of independent Chinese states declined from two hundred in the eighth century BC to only seven in the late fifth century.<sup>31</sup> From where did Chinese leaders, who

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29. *Ibid.*, p. 215.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

31. Dun J. Li, *The Ageless Chinese: A History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978), p. 50, 59, cited in Stephen Van Evera, "Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War," *International Security*, 22, 4 (Spring 1998), p. 87.

had ruled ancient China before Sun Zi's text appeared in the sixth century, learn to conquer one another? How do we explain wars during and after the Western Zhou era (after 1100 BC)? Chinese realism does not appear to be unique. Roughly at the same period in Greece, a world apparently unknown to China, Thucydides wrote an account of the Peloponnesian War (431-415 BC) advancing the argument based on the concept of relative power. His thesis is as follows: "the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept."<sup>32</sup>

Cultural realism seems effective in refuting Waltzian realism but remains vulnerable to neo-classical and offensive realism. Neo-classical realists have advanced the argument based on the concept of relative power: the growth of power gives rise to the magnitude and ambition of states' foreign policies. If culture is what determines state behavior, American liberal culture fails to explain why the United States now seems to have fallen into the trap of empire. As William Pfaff puts it: "The [American] political class and bureaucracy have become addicted to international power. They want more. The question is whether the people will follow."<sup>33</sup> Fareed Zakaria, a neoclassical realist, also observes that states do not respond to external threats, nor do they behave aggressively in times of insecurity. For instance, "when confronted by real threats...the United States usually opted to contract its interests," but "greater security bred greater activism and expansion."<sup>34</sup> According to Gideon Rose, "neoclassical realists assume that states respond to the uncertainties of international anarchy by seeking to control and shape their external environment."<sup>35</sup> States' policy actions and ambitions are scaled back only when their relative power recedes. Although it seems compatible with neo-classical realism, offensive realism stresses that the anarchical structure of the

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32. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans R. Warner (New York: Penguin 1972), p. 402. This book is not listed in Alastair Iain Johnston's bibliography.

33. William Pfaff, "Empire isn't the American way," *International Herald Tribune*, April 9, 2002, p. 10.

34. Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 11-12, cited in Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics*, 51 (October 1998), p. 163.

35. Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *op. cit.*, p. 152.

international system alone drives states to maximize relative power aggressively and relentlessly. Great powers always seek to expand their relative power, strive to become regional hegemons when possible, and seek to prevent others from achieving this goal.<sup>36</sup>

Johnston would prove neo-classical and offensive realists wrong, however, if he could show that change toward a counter-*realpolitik* ideology is still a possibility in China. In his more recent work, he seeks to do just that: *realpolitik* ideology and practice ought to be changeable when state agents engage in counter-*realpolitik* socialization. He hypothesizes how change can take place peacefully by concentrating his analytical efforts on two micro-processes of socialization, persuasion and social influence, which are capable of eliciting pro-social behavior. In a nutshell, persuasion is at work when the persuader can convince an actor (the persuadee) with preferences and beliefs to conform to those within a social environment. How the actor gets persuaded depends on the merits of arguments, on the legitimacy of the relationship between the persuader and the persuadee, and on the inherent characteristics of the persuadee. Because actors are social status maximizers, they care about their social status, honor, and prestige. Social influence can thus promote pro-social behavior when it involves social rewards (which can be acquired psychologically from such things as backpatting) and sanctions or punishments (rooted in psychological anxiety from opprobrium). From this social influence perspective, membership size does not matter as much as some liberals think. In fact, as Johnston puts it, "more may be better. Status backpatting and opprobrium effects are likely to be stronger when 'audience' or reference group is larger."<sup>37</sup>

Also noteworthy is the fact that Johnston's socialization theory remains quite distinct from threat-based defensive realism. To make persuasion and social influence as independent variables explaining peaceful change and pro-social behavior, the observer/theory builder must show that neither material side-payments nor threats are present or must not be part of the persuadee's decision to conform to pro-social

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36. John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (London & New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

37. Alastair I. Johnston, "Treating International Institutions as Social Environments," *International Studies Quarterly*, 45 (2001), p. 512.

norms.<sup>38</sup> Socialization theory is thus fundamentally knowledge-based, not threat-based.

### **Social Interactionism: ASEAN as a Case for Pro-Social Behavior**

Johnston's socialization theory has not been put to the test but can empirically benefit from insights found in the work of social interactionists, who have studied South Pacific Asian security. Amitav Acharya represents this perspective,<sup>39</sup> which has been praised as theoretically sophisticated, trailblazing, and intriguing by leading constructivists. In his intellectual enterprise, he seeks to show that material side-payments and threats may be important in the early process of pro-social norm or identity building, but once built collective identity remains durable, even in the absence of any threats.

Acharya's work shows the impact of norms on state behavior by relying on evidence to show that states in Pacific Asia have the potential to transcend *realpolitik*. By the early 1990s, for instance, ASEAN had emerged as a "nascent security community." The concept of a 'security community' means that member states rule out war against each other and when in conflict seek to settle their differences in a peaceful manner, although they may not do so with non-member states. According to him, "by the early 1990s [the ASEAN] members could claim their grouping to be one of the most successful experiments in regional cooperation in the developing world. ASEAN has played a role in moderating intra-regional conflicts and significantly reducing the likelihood of war."<sup>40</sup> Its members have not been bogged down in an arms race driven by the usual security dilemma dynamics, nor have small states—Singapore and Brunei in particular—grown increasingly vulnerable to the larger member states next-door.

For Acharya, ASEAN reliance on norms for collective action and its identity-building initiatives gave rise to security-community building in the region. The ASEAN norms are both legal-rational (non-use of

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38. *Ibid.*, p. 510.

39. I have discussed his work more extensively in "Realism and Constructivism in Southeast Asian Security Studies Today: A Review Essay."

40. Amitav Acharya, *The Quest for Identity*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.



force, non-interference, regional autonomy, and avoidance of military pacts) and socio-cultural (consultations and consensus and a preference for informality over legalistic mechanisms). ASEAN member states' behavior was generally norm-consistent. The norms of non-interference and non-use of force have been practiced. Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia led to an outcry from ASEAN, which also showed a willingness to negotiate with Vietnam rather than to form a military alliance against it. The ASEAN policy toward new state applicants for membership was also consistent with the norms of non-interference. The group did not heed the call by Western powers to reject the application of Burma due to its human rights violations.

ASEAN collective identity, in Acharya's view, is another crucial aspect of community building in Southeast Asia. ASEAN is an imagined community with a "pacific tradition," but much of its commonality and shared consciousness was disrupted by colonial rule. He traces the 'we feeling' back to the social process within the region in the post-colonial period. "The ASEAN Way itself resulted not so much from preordained cultural sources"; it "emerged not only from the principles of interstate relations agreed to by the founders of ASEAN, but also from a subsequent and long-term process of interaction and adjustment."<sup>41</sup> Norms and identity resulted from incremental socialization. Regionalization is shaped by élites, who think regionally, as well as by social interactions. After World War II, efforts were made to restore "cultural unity" and "regional coherence" in the larger pan-Asian or Afro-Asian context (allowing leaders to meet one another), but not to create a regional identity. Although these efforts made good steps toward regionalism at the time, it was the 'ASEAN Way' that "has been at the core of efforts to build a Southeast Asian regional identity in the modern era."<sup>42</sup>

For Acharya, ASEAN also inspired the idea of a Pacific-Asia community. The concept of *cooperative security* emerged, with a principal focus on the need "to establish habits of dialogue" and to encourage states' participation based on the ideas of inclusion and informal communication. At the initial stage of the ARF formation,

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41. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

42. Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

leaders of the member states had little expectation that the new enterprise would succeed. Doubt soon crept in. So many former foes needed to find new common ground on so many complex issues. Potentially explosive issue areas included military build-ups, the Korean crisis, rival territorial claims in the South China Sea, and the future of war-torn Cambodia, none of which could be easily resolved. From the ASEAN point of view, this was the most ambitious project in its 27-year history; it was not an international security forum of like-minded states; small and major powers inside and outside the region gathered together for the first time to launch such a multilateral security dialogue.

How the 'ASEAN Way' that has promoted such counter-*realpolitik* behavior or a collective identity among the member states came into existence is a matter of debate. For Acharya, several aspects of the "ASEAN Way" found their way into the making of the ARF."<sup>43</sup> The ARF members hold annual ministerial meetings and have organized a number of inter-sessional meetings of senior officials and working groups, but it has no master plan, permanent secretariat, secretary-general, or professional staff.

Acharya somewhat validates Johnston's socialization theory that *realpolitik* is socially constructed, historically contingent and changeable: social interactionism shows how socialization promotes a counter-*realpolitik* culture that is not primarily contingent upon threats. He does not argue that threats do not matter. One major observation he has consistently made is that norm creation and identity building did transpire in the context of perceived threats from within and without national boundaries. Such threats can serve as a triggering device for social interactions and did give rise to ASEAN regionalism. He provides ample evidence to show that military threats from outside the ASEAN region help explain ASEAN unity. The formation of ASEAN also took place at the height of the Cold War, characterized by the rivalry between two superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. By the mid-1960s, the Vietnam War had escalated due to U.S. involvement and threatened regional stability in Southeast Asia. Soon after, the United States had failed and the Nixon Doctrine called "on

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43. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

America's regional allies to assume greater responsibilities for their own security."<sup>44</sup> ASEAN held its "historic summit" one year after the U.S. withdrawal from Indochina in 1975,<sup>45</sup> a further step toward security cooperation. The communist victories in Indochina further "rekindled fears in ASEAN of Hanoi's old plan for an Indochina federation."<sup>46</sup>

Once built, collective identity may be durable, even in the absence of threat. This explains why Acharya anticipates the day when *realpolitik* will be buried once and for all. ASEAN sought "to use multilateralism to moderate and maintain a stable balance of power" and saw "multilateralism not as a substitute for U.S. military supremacy and its bilateral alliances, but as a necessary complement to the latter."<sup>47</sup> Multilateral security dialogues were seen as another strategy that could "supplement" a balance-of-power approach.<sup>48</sup> In the short term, multilateralism "may help shape the balance of power by providing norms of restraint and avenues of confidence building among the major powers." In the long term, "it may even enable states to transcend the balance of power approach."<sup>49</sup> Balance-of-power politics is thus subject to transformative logic.

Acharya makes no claim that the process of security community building is linear or progressive. He even claims that his theory can also explain why the ARF has disappointed strong supporters, such as Australia and Canada, which have now reduced their expectations. He would agree with the assessment that the "constructivist predictions of a security community for North Eastern Asia are obviously some way from coming to pass."<sup>50</sup> He even concedes that, "the ARF is a victim of the general sense of disillusionment with the fledgling experiment with multilateralism and institution building in the Asia-Pacific region." Inspired by the ASEAN model based on "soft-regionalism," the ARF has in recent years come "under intramural pressure to modify its

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44. Amitav Acharya, *The Quest for Identity*, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

45. Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

50. Michael J. Finnegan, "Constructing Cooperation: Toward Multilateral Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia," *Asian Perspective*, 23, 1 (1999), p. 89.

habits" and "would have to look for new frameworks and procedures."<sup>51</sup>

If collective identity came under challenge, Acharya would contend that it is because states are confronted with factors other than the absence of threats. Important to note is the point he makes with regard to the rise and decline of security communities that remain 'subject to the quality of social interaction. Quality is measured in terms of habit-forming normative behavior. An increased pace/magnitude of socialization can undermine the quality of interaction or contribute to the decline of nascent security communities. The expansion of ASEAN from five to ten members, for instance, can pose a serious social challenge to ASEAN's collective identity, especially when new members are "previously 'unsocialized' actors," who "could impose new psychological burdens on the community and test its capacity for intra-mural conflict resolution."<sup>52</sup>

A closer reading of Acharya's work further shows that peaceful interaction remains his key concept, but this process does not occur in an ideological vacuum. Liberal ideology matters in shaping ASEAN collective identity. ASEAN norms and collective identity evidently resulted from economic liberalism. Although they downgraded the Western model of liberal democracy, the founding ASEAN regimes were anticommunist and "pro-Western" and adopted "market capitalism" with a commitment to "the system of free enterprise" and a high degree of openness to the capitalist world economy. Richard Stubbs shows how liberal reformers in ASEAN states began to dominate in the late 1980s, thus paving the way for further regional economic cooperation.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam had refused to join ASEAN until after they began to liberalize their economies. Although Acharya's work does not stress the importance of a shared democratic identity among the states of ASEAN, he acknowledges that liberal democracy is a prerequisite for successful community building. Burma's interest in regionalism, "ended with the

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51. Amitav Acharya, "Realism, Institutionalism, and the Asian Economic Crisis," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 21, 1 (April 1999), pp. 15-16.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

53. Richard Stubbs, "Signing on to Liberalization: AFTA and the Politics of Regional Economic Cooperation," *The Pacific Review*, 13, 2 (2000), pp. 297-318.

54. Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

collapse of its democratic experiment in March 1962.”<sup>54</sup> “Burma provides the clearest case, where the retreat of democracy dampened the prospects for regional cooperation in Southeast Asia.”<sup>55</sup>

Social interactionism has intellectual merit but remains inadequate as a coherent theoretical framework: it simply overestimates the power of socialization. The ‘ASEAN Way’ of doing things has some obvious limits. If Acharya truly believes that ASEAN has been successful because its members have developed dependable expectations for peaceful change, new evidence is not quite encouraging. Both Burma and Thailand, for instance, recently engaged in a war of words over a series of armed clashes along their border and accused each other of aggression and supporting drug traffickers.

Acharya could of course defend his theory by asserting that Myanmar as a new member of ASEAN remains “unsocialized” and thus incapable of adhering to the “ASEAN Way.” But this logic would do damage to his theory that socialization matters significantly, because he has to this day maintained that the ASEAN members *from day one* have always co-existed peacefully. The question is why Myanmar remains “unsocialized,” despite the fact it has had numerous domestic security problems, which should have given the military junta more incentives to cooperate with Thailand.

As powerful as it seems, social interactionism remains indistinguishable from balance-of-threat realist theory,<sup>56</sup> which could be identified as close to the constructivist camp. Nowhere does Acharya show that states in Pacific Asia balance against material power or political hegemony. Sources of threat include the lack of a shared liberal ideology. One major problem with social interactionism is the theory’s inability to separate out the process of social interaction and states’ perceptions of threat. Up till now, the members of ASEAN have not operated in an environment free from threats, both within and from without the national boundaries. Throughout the 1980s Soviet “hegemonism made the ASEAN countries realize the need for a united purpose to the new form of great power rivalry.”<sup>57</sup> Some ASEAN

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55. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

56. Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

57. Amitav Acharya, *The Quest for Identity*, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

members also feared Chinese expansionism. Post-Cold War ASEAN identity still remains deeply rooted in "the growing military and economic power of China," which "evoked the *most immediate* concern in Southeast Asia," as well as in "the fear of Japan's re-militarisation."<sup>58</sup> After the terrorist attacks on the U.S. in September 2001, top government officials of the ASEAN members have met to promote security cooperation to fight international terrorist activities in the region.<sup>59</sup> All this cannot be attributed to the power of socialization.

Whether ASEAN's identity will continue to grow strong in the absence of threat remains to be seen. If we examine another variant of constructivism, to be discussed next, it is far from clear that cooperative behavior can last very long without threats.

### **Historical Culturalism: Japan as a Case for Anti-Militarism**

While China has maintained a militaristic culture and the states in Southeast Asia have institutionalized regional cooperation, Japan has developed a new culture: antimilitarism. Constructivists can thus claim that only they can explain historical anomalies better than structural realists can. Historical culturalism focuses more on domestic factors in explaining Japan's post-war antimilitarism and rejects any view associated with the rise of Japanese nationalism, domestic support for remilitarization of security policy, and the growth of an independent military-industrial base. Peter Kantzenstein, Thomas Berger, and others have devoted considerable attention to policy analysis by taking their cues from a number of theoretical insights by peering deeply into the domestic structure of the state and the role of norms and ideas in politics.

Japan's domestic political structures matter, because they have made

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58. Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 144 (Italics added).

59. In their summit meeting in November 2001, ASEAN's leaders declared war on terrorism and agreed to take joint action to combat it. On May 7, 2002, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines agreed to implement tough measures against terrorism. Later in the same month, ASEAN held a special ministerial meeting on transnational crime, which included combat against international terrorism.

it virtually impossible for the military establishment, which had enjoyed a powerful role until the end of World War II, to re-emerge and dominate the political decision-making process. The Japanese system of government consists of various institutional procedures that circumscribe military professionals' access to the centers of political power. Policy arenas of inter-ministerial coordination have been institutionalized that "constrict prime ministerial leadership, and they shape the policy process dealing with security affairs."<sup>60</sup> Civilian control over the military establishment remains tight. There is also a strong bias against any military interpretation of security matters. The military system as a whole remains underdeveloped: it lacks mobilization plans, a military court system, emergency legislation, a civil defense system, rules for engaging the enemy, and so on.<sup>61</sup> Social and legal norms thus matter significantly: they determine security and military policies.

Japanese public attitudes toward security matters has further reinforced a culture of antimilitarism; they favor passive over active stance, alignment with the United States over a policy of equidistance between the two superpowers, political dependence over autonomy, and minimal over extensive military spending. The overwhelming majority of the Japanese do not feel threatened by the Soviet Union/Russia, favor economic strength, peaceful diplomacy, and a low-key consensus approach, and do not think very highly of the military establishment. Japanese pacifism defined in terms of their support for minimal defense remains in line with the government's interpretation of the meaning of Article 9 of the Constitution. The public has refused to amend Article 9. In short, Japanese civil society has played an effective role in keeping the military at bay.

These social norms also have a complex interplay with legal norms, which have been shaped by the historical lessons of World War II and have since played a pacifying role in Japan. Article 9 of the Peace Constitution, in particular, "renounces war as a sovereign right of the nation, repudiates the use of force as means for settling international disputes, and does not recognize the right of belligerency of the state."<sup>62</sup>

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60. P. Katzenstein and N. Okawara, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 278.

These domestic political structures and social as well legal norms have illustrated the rigidity of Japan's security policy and kept Japan from becoming a great nuclear power. Japan has steadfastly refused to send its military forces in combat roles overseas.

This perspective is reinforced by Thomas Berger's work on Japanese antimilitarism. His historical/cultural, but not anthropological,<sup>63</sup> approach to security and defense policy left him convinced that Japan's domestic politics after forty years of antimilitarism has to be understood in light of virulent domestic political opposition to militarism. Lessons drawn from Japan's troubled past best explain such antimilitarism. On the one hand, antimilitarism remains deeply rooted in the Japanese perception of being victimized by wartime military leaders' blind ambitions. Collective Japanese memories of the militarist takeover in the 1930s and the subsequent disastrous decision to go to war with the United States in the early 1940s still haunt the minds of contemporary Japanese.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, the Japanese "also felt victimized by the United States and other foreign nations which [in their view] had conducted a ruthless campaign of conquest in order to increase their own power." The Japanese have since developed "an iron determination to avoid a repetition of past mistakes."<sup>65</sup> At the institutional level, they created elaborate systems of rules and regulations aimed at curtailing the size and scope of the military. On the level of collective memory, they have also engaged in political struggles over the meaning of recent history.<sup>66</sup> Japan's antimilitarism is a culture not only supported by Japanese public opinion but also shared by large segments of the country's political and economic élites. Despite the various sub-cultures—particularly Right-idealism, Left-idealism, and Centrism—promoted by different groups within Japanese society, a convergence of different views on Japan's national identity

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62. *Ibid.*, p. 284.

63. The anthropological or sociological approach tends to examine deeper structural characteristics of a given society, such as its personality, religion, and primary socialization.

64. Thomas U. Berger, "From Sword to Chrysanthemum: Japan's Culture of Anti-militarism," in Michael Brown, et al., eds., *East Asian Security*, *op. cit.*, p. 301; Thomas Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism*, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

65. Thomas Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism*, *ibid.*, p. 7.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 7.



and its mission in world affairs emerged. By the 1980s, even traditionally pro-defense conservatives had come to view "Japan's alleged cooperative, mercantile, and essentially nonmilitary culture as its most distinctive feature."<sup>67</sup> These domestic groups have thus come to share similar beliefs and values concerning defense, despite the fact that their deep-seated differences over other issues remained.

What this national convergence means is that the various domestic groups with political/military sub-cultures have agreed not only on the role of the armed forces and the pacifist constitution, but also on the need to maintain the Japan/U.S. military alliance. One implication is that the rising fears that Japan may choose to unsheathe its sword once again are largely misplaced. Japan is unlikely to seek to become a major military power that will threaten the security interest of the United States or those of its neighbors. This is the case in the short to medium term because of Japan's culture of antimilitarism, which would make it unlikely for Japan to take up the slack if the United States were to reduce its commitment to Pacific-Asian security. This culture has consolidated to the point where it "is no longer a hothouse plant that would wither and die the moment American commitment to Pacific Asian security affairs weakens."<sup>68</sup>

For now anyway, the historical-cultural variant of constructivism provides a powerful critique of structural realism advanced by Kenneth Waltz. Japan has yet to acquire nuclear weapons towards the goal of replacing the United States as the world's dominant power. Nor does it now show any aspiration to be a world hegemon.

But Berger acknowledges that cultures are not static: they "can and do change, but usually they do so in an evolutionary fashion. Dramatic change only occurs when the type of behavior that a culture produces no longer meets its basic needs."<sup>69</sup>

Closely examined, this historical-cultural perspective is similar to balance-of-threat realism. Japan's antimilitarism appears to depend on liberal ideology, the role of liberal leadership, and degrees of external threat. Liberalism does not determine everything, of course. But the

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67. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 301.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

Japanese people would not have internalized antimilitarism without this ideology having been 'imposed' on it, or had it remained an authoritarian or imperial state. One could imagine the kind of culture Japan might have adopted if it had been defeated and occupied by the Soviet Union or China. More closely examined, this historical/cultural perspective reveals that structural factors also matter. When faced with an aggressor, Japan would first seek to appease it, but would then look to the United States if this policy failed. On the back of the Japanese mind, the United States remains the final source of assurance. Moreover, Japanese antimilitarism is not a *fait accompli*: this culture does not rest on the absolute guarantee that it will never degenerate. If neither appeasement nor dependence on U.S. protection worked, Japan would be compelled to consider a dramatic expansion of its military capabilities, including the acquisition of nuclear weapons. In Berger's words, antimilitarism is likely to erode "if the United States allows the Cold War alliance structures to decay."<sup>70</sup>

If Japan remains a 'faithful' military ally of the United States its security and military policy cannot be *fully* understood in terms of either domestic pacifism and liberal ideology or both. There is ample historical evidence of Japan's bandwagoning behavior revealing its historical tendency to ally with Western great powers. The following are telling: Japan in British-U.S. hegemony from 1900 to 1922, in U.S.-British hegemony from 1922 to 1941, (and of course in U.S. hegemony from 1954 to 1970 and in U.S.-European hegemony since 1970). The only exception was when Japan sought to become the hegemon in Pacific Asia in the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s.<sup>71</sup>

Liberal ideology does not provide the most powerful glue for the Japan-U.S. alliance, either. After the Cold War Japan has learned to behave more like a leader in world politics. Economically, Japan has sought to balance the United States and other industrial powers.<sup>72</sup> Tokyo has also become more willing to take its initiatives in UN

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70. Thomas Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism*, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

71. Bruce Cumings, "Japan and Northeast Asia into the Twenty-first Century," in Peter J. Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraiishi, eds., *Network Power: Japan and Asia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 146.

72. Eric Heginbotham and R. Samuel, "Mercantile Realism and Japanese Foreign Policy," *International Security*, 22, 4 (Spring 1998), pp. 171-203.

reform, human rights, peacekeeping, humanitarian, disarmament, and environmental issues, all of which reveal significant deviations from U.S. policy preferences.<sup>73</sup>

The fact that Japan stays allied with the United States may also be explainable by the existence of perceived threat from other states in the region. Katzenstein and Okawara also recognize this point: "in the short to medium term, most of the governments in Asia Pacific will continue to welcome the U.S. presence,"<sup>74</sup> largely because other regional powers, such as Japan and China, are seen as less distant and less benign than the United States. Material power is not the only source of threat otherwise Japan would not have required its own protection from the United States, still the undisputed superpower in the world. Japan would also seek alternative security arrangements if the United States were "no longer thought to be sufficiently reliable."<sup>75</sup>

Historical experience matters in explaining Japanese behavior, but we like to know *how* and *why* it matters. If bad experience alone has nurtured Japanese anti-militarism, why did the Japanese seem to feel more resentful of their wartime military leaders to the extent that they largely agreed on the need to rely on U.S. protection? As noted, the Japanese also felt victimized by the United States, still seen as having "conducted a ruthless campaign of conquest in order to increase [its] own power."

A short answer to the above question is that Japan has faced some threats from states within the region. They include China and Russia, with whom Japan successfully fought the wars in 1895 and 1904-1905, respectively. Rozman notes that "Russo-Japanese relations in the twentieth century rank poorest among the great powers."<sup>76</sup> Sino-Japanese relations remain far from normal. In June 1995, Japan published a White Paper expressing concern about China's aggressive policy in the South China Sea and calling for improvement in the

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73. Takashi Inoguchi and Purnendra Jain, eds., *Japanese Foreign Policy Today: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

74. P. Katzenstein and N. Okawara, "Japan, Asia-Pacific Security, and the Case for Analytical Eclecticism," *International Security*, 26, 3 (Winter 2001/2002), p. 156.

75. K. Waltz, "Structural Realism After the Cold War," *op. cit.*, p. 34.

76. Gilbert Rozman, "Introduction," in Gilbert Rozman, ed., *Japan and Russia: The Tortuous Path to Normalization 1949-1999* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), p. 1.

Japanese forces' quality. In 1997, for instance, Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto toured Southeast Asia, where he emphasized security matters and told the Vietnamese leadership that China may become a common threat to both Japan and ASEAN. Japan's aid policy toward Southeast Asian states was also based on a broad strategic rationale: a geo-political counterweight to China.<sup>77</sup>

But Japan would be unable to count on ASEAN states' military support if it were to sever its military ties with the United States. Most of them have also preferred the United States to Japan, when it comes to security matters. While some have bilateral military ties with the United States, none has any such ties with Japan. When Japan and the United States revised their Guidelines allowing Japan to have a more active role in its "surrounding areas," Southeast Asian states, except Thailand and the Philippines, reacted with alarm. Southeast Asian states' fears of Japanese remilitarization must be put in the historical context. Japan has a history of aggression against most states in the region. Except for Thailand, the ASEAN states were subject to Japanese invasion and occupation during World War II. Unlike other Southeast Asian states Thailand did not fall victim to Japanese aggression during World War II and thus should be expected to have no serious concern about Japanese remilitarization and future aggression.<sup>78</sup>

### **Some Suggestions for Constructivists**

This review of constructivist perspectives in contemporary security studies on Pacific Asia shows that they are distinct: cultural realism, social interactionism, and historical culturalism. Some of the advantages these perspectives share include similar claims to having revealed the inadequacy of ahistorical and acultural rationalist approaches to security. Neither international anarchy nor material-

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77. Isami Takeda, "Japan and the Asia-Pacific Region," paper presented at a workshop sponsored by the International House of Japan, September 2, 1998.

78. Paul Midford, "Asian Reactions to the New U.S.-Japan Guidelines," p. 36, paper presented at the "Toward the Construction of a New Security Environment" Workshop, Sophia University, October 23, 1999.

power distributions sufficiently explain why states behave as they do: material structures are seen as failing to explain different patterns of state behavior: militarism, pro-social behavior, and antimilitarism. The cases of China and Japan illustrate the constructivist point that major powers existing in the same neighborhood in roughly similar structural conditions have behaved differently, contrary to structural realists' predictions. Chinese behavior has been more offensive-oriented, while Japan remains more defensive-oriented. Whereas China has long gone nuclear, Japan has to this day refused to go down this road.

Constructivism thus appears to stand on solid ground, as far as its ontological commitments to uncovering socially constructed realities are concerned. Leading realists who have studied Pacific Asia have, perhaps unconsciously, incorporated ideational factors into their security analyses. Paul Dobb, a leading defense analyst, goes as far as to make a forceful 'realist' claim based on ideas: "Deep-seated historical, cultural, religious, and territorial differences in Asia suggest that...the risks of armed conflict remain."<sup>79</sup> Some refer to the "humiliating history" of China as a crucial variable explaining its revisionist behavior,<sup>80</sup> and have even made a constructivist argument that the "Atlantic community" and Japan "have established an interdependent security community."<sup>81</sup>

To a large extent constructivists using Pacific-Asian states as the focus of their analyses have contributed positively to the growing literature on security studies. It is no longer sustainable to build theories based on pure rationalism. Constructivists are better than realism at taking history into account rather than adopting rational choice and game theory that is fundamentally ahistoric, acultural, and asocial. Constructivists also appear better equipped than rationalists in that they can draw on general theories whenever possible and generate plausible causal hypotheses that are worth testing. Peter Evans is wise when stating that, "No single ready-made theoretical model can provide all the tools to explain the cases [he is] interested in, but an eclectic combination offers enough leverage to make a start."<sup>82</sup>

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79. Paul Dobb, "The Strategic Environment in the Asia-Pacific Region," *op. cit.*, p. 5.

80. Barry Buzan and Gerald Segal, "Rethinking East Asian Security," *op. cit.*, p. 98.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

Katzenstein also embraces eclecticism.<sup>83</sup>

But constructivist perspectives will need to be further developed if they hope to prevail upon rationalist explanations. They will have to answer at least three basic questions: How exactly do ideational forces independently determine behavior? How much change is possible? Can progressive changes completely eliminate all sources of danger? Concerning the first question, constructivists may have to respond by overcoming the charge that they have employed poor methodologies. That is, they have committed a sin of selective bias; on Pacific Asia, they select a few separate cases that can be characterized as "most likely," "disputable," or "indistinguishable" from realism (China and ASEAN) and "premature" (Japan).<sup>84</sup> On China, it seems that cultural realism makes predictions similar to those made by realists and will not successfully combat this criticism unless Johnston succeeds in proving that change of the *parabellum* culture can take place independently of external constraints and can be empirically verifiable. Realists would also charge that it is too early to conclude that Japan will never move "back to the future." They would say they do not ignore ideational factors as such, but do not privilege them or find them particularly determining. According to Waltz, "one may expect [nuclear inhibitions in Japan] to expire as generational memories fade."<sup>85</sup> Berger shows no absolute confidence in proving that changes in Japanese culture are completely independent of material structures, such as the U.S.-led alliance. Japanese antimilitarism appears to last as long as the Japan-U.S. alliance exists. Regarding ASEAN, political realists would further dispute that its members are small states that cooperate because they respond to commonly shared threats. They would also add that small states tend to bandwagon with extra-regional great powers, since they find their neighbors too untrustworthy or weak to balance against more powerful states.<sup>86</sup>

82. Atul Kohli, et al., "The Role of Theory in Comparative Politics: A Symposium," *World Politics*, 48 (October 1995), p. 5.

83. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-15; P. Katzenstein and N. Okawara, "Japan, Asia-Pacific Security, and the Case for Analytical Eclecticism," *op. cit.*

84. On the typology of different cases, see Michael C. Desch, *op. cit.*

85. K. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *op. cit.*, p. 34.

86. As Waltz puts it: "many states have insufficient resources for balancing and little room for maneuver. They have to jump on the wagon only later to wish they could fall off." K.

To build better theories, constructivists would need to avoid picking a few, possibly deviant cases to solve their empirical puzzles; they should also engage in serious cross-national or institutional and longitudinal analysis, and must demonstrate that states or institutions similarly placed and under similar structural conditions behave differently. Furthermore, they may need to demonstrate that similar states behave differently at different, long historical periods under similar structural conditions. This method of scientific inquiry would empower constructivists to counter the charge that their definitions of culture are tautological and that they only tell of micro-histories at the expense of the time-tested macro-history of the world.

Unless more is done, constructivism will remain too weak to supplant realism and thus remain a theoretical approach that seeks to explain only that which is left out by the latter. There are three possible ways constructivists can counter materialist criticisms. First, they must choose more 'hard cases' (a large number of great powers), which realists claim to explain best,<sup>87</sup> and cover a very long period of time, at least one hundred years.<sup>88</sup> When non-realists challenge realists on the basis of a peaceful change in world politics they witnessed after the Cold War, Waltz simply responds: "Every time peace breaks out, people pop up to proclaim that realism is dead."<sup>89</sup> He reminds them that "realist theory is better at saying what will happen than in saying when it will happen."<sup>90</sup> Constructivists would do well if they could

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Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *op. cit.*, p. 38. Stephen Walt broaden the concept of threat to include no-material factors, such as ideology and intention, *The Origins of Alliances*, *op. cit.*

87. Major or great powers are what really explain international politics and what concern structural realists. K. Waltz, for instance, wrote: "Balancing theory does not predict uniformity of behavior but rather the *strong tendency of major states* in the system, or in regional subsystems, to resort to balancing when they have to." K. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *op. cit.*, p. 38 (emphasis added).

88. Christopher Layne, for instance, gives theorists fifty years to see which theory, realism and its critics, is the best. As he puts it: "Fifty years from now, and probably much sooner, we will know who was right and who was wrong." Christopher Layne, *op. cit.*, p. 176. George Modelski's long cycles theory reveals that each global hegemon lasted about one century: Portuguese leadership (1580-1688), Dutch leadership (1580-1688), first British leadership (1688-1792), second British leadership (1792-1914), U.S. leadership (1914-2000 or present?). See G. Modelski, *Long Cycles in World Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987) & G. Modelski, ed., *Exploring Cycles* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1987).

89. K. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *op. cit.*, p. 39.

give realists more time.

Constructivists will also need to create a good typology of such states for comparative analysis to prove that these states indeed behave differently, although similarly placed,<sup>91</sup> over a long period of time. Regionalists may then classify the different behavioral patterns of major states within a region and then use ideational variables (by ignoring anarchy, power distributions, and perceived threats) to explain them.

Second, constructivists may compare different regions by showing how major states in each region behave differently and by explaining why individual cultures matter significantly. One caveat for this comparative approach is that scholars should not get hung up on the belief that understanding each region's cultural uniqueness is the true hallmark of constructivism, and that doing otherwise would bring harm to their theory-building efforts (or would make theorists less constructivist). In my view, the ultimate task of constructivists is not only to prove that each region is culturally unique or each case *sui generis*, but also to show that material incentives or structures do not determine state behavior and that ideational changes are within empirical reach.<sup>92</sup>

Third, generalists may develop a typology of major international institutions based on the Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian cultural types,<sup>93</sup> under the same structural constraints of anarchy, and explain

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90. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

91. One can ask whether the United States would have responded to the Mongols differently from Ming China, or whether Ming China could have responded differently than the United States to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington by invading much less powerful Afghanistan.

92. Regionalists like Acharya, who call themselves constructivist and explain the cultural uniqueness of their regions, apply the concept of security community and see the need to promote human rights and Western-type democracy in the region(s) they have studied and thus believe in the virtues of Western values. Constructivism should thus be about the impact of ideas on state behavior and cultural change, rather than about cultural uniqueness, otherwise its proponents would have difficulty justifying why they tend to use the universal concept of security community as the empirical basis for measuring progress.

93. Alastair Iain Johnston argues that there exists no typology of international institutions that should be treated as international social environments but proposes to expand on the typology of domestic institutions now available. Alastair I. Johnston, "Treating International Institutions as Social Environments," *op. cit.*, p. 509. I would propose that a typology of institutions be patterned after Alexander Wendt's three cultures of anarchy (Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian). See Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International*



their functional differences. Members of the Hobbesian cultural regimes can be shown to be more prone to war than those in Lockean ones, which are still more prone to war than those in Kantian ones.

Regarding the second and third questions, constructivists will need to predict not only the possibility of change but also the extent of change that is empirically verifiable. Ted Hopf states that constructivism "does not offer any more hope for change in world politics than neorealism" and that the theory "conceives of the politics of identity as a continual contest for control over the power necessary to produce meaning in a social group."<sup>94</sup> Whether the politics of identity will transcend *realpolitik* is still a matter of speculation, but there is good reason to believe that any change that can take place is only a matter of degree. If identity politics is about states' different identities, then constructivism is a theory of *difference*, not simply of *process*.<sup>95</sup> No one should thus expect to witness a perfect harmony of future relations among nation-states. Differences do not automatically lead to interstate conflict, but they do make social actors see things and behave in different ways. Constructivists may need to set some limits for their theory-building enterprise. As noted, the existence of security communities serves as the best empirical basis by which they can prove the theoretical possibility of positive change, but perhaps only to that extent. If ideas matter, they must still be kept in check in order to prevent dominant ones making violent claims of absolute truth.

Even if every state in the world became democratic and viewed the others in a positive light, there is no reason to assert that that similarity would breed harmony of interest. Waltz makes a major concession to his critics when acknowledging that Emmanuel Kant recognized the good nature of republics as well as the danger associated with unbalanced power regardless of who wields it. In his words, "The causes of war lie not simply in states or in the state system; they are

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*Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Ch.6; it may thus be possible to classify Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian cultural institutions or regimes.

94. Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security*, 23, 1 (Summer 1998), p. 180.

95. Friedrich Kratochwil argues that constructivism is a theory of process, not substantive outcome. See his "Is the Ship of Culture at Sea or Returning?" in Yosef Lapid and F. Kratochwil, eds., *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996).

found in both.”<sup>96</sup> Liberal democracy promotes diversity based on different identities, thus making it hard to imagine a world of democracies without an effective system of checks and balances.

The political balance of material power found in neo-classical or offensive and defensive realism may need to be recast as the balance of ideational or social power, which is likely to persist even among mature democracies or within mature security communities. Rather than calling it cultural realism, one may be better off labeling constructivism as ‘social realism,’ which rests on the logic of limited transformation embedded in a tentative prediction that the politics of national identities (democratic or otherwise) will most likely remain a persistent feature of international life.<sup>97</sup>

## Conclusion

Constructivism as a general theoretical approach to security remains as diverse as realism and liberalism are, but still offers no coherent methodology that can prove most useful to researchers. This general framework is unlikely to supplant the one guided by realism unless or until its proponents devote more of their efforts to building a theory that can prove a decisive impact of ideas and cultural factors on state behavior rather than to solving few empirical puzzles. Scholars would be wise to consider adopting analytic eclecticism as a methodological approach to security theory building if they could add both ideological and historical factors as complementary variables to shed more light on states’ threat-driven behavior. It now appears safe to formulate a proposition that states in Pacific Asia tend to balance against threats that seem to have ideological and historical roots, which are unlikely to disappear any time soon as long as international anarchy remains

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96. K. Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” *op. cit.*, p. 13. To liberals, he asks this question: “Is unbalanced power less of a danger in international than in national politics?” *Ibid.*, p. 28.

97. The radical impulse to transcend conflict and politics is not new. In my view, this is not only impossible but also dangerous. The vision to build social unity has resulted in authoritarianism and totalitarianism. See Joseph Schwartz, *The Permanence of the Political: A Democratic Critique of the Radical Impulse to Transcend Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

unchanged. Scholars may thus wish to test the hypothesis that the balance of threat between democracies may be more stable and durable than the balance of threat between democracies and autocracies or between autocracies.