

## *Book Review*

### **ASHIZAWA, K. (2013). JAPAN, THE U.S., AND REGIONAL INSTITUTION-BUILDING IN THE NEW ASIA: WHEN IDENTITY MATTERS. PALGRAVE MACMILLAN.**

Chrystopher S. Kim

With the U.S. government's announcement of a new pivot to Asia in 2012, U.S. and Asian foreign relations have come into sharp focus for many diplomats and policymakers. In *Japan, the U.S., and Regional Institution-building in the New Asia: When Identity Matters*, Kuniko Ashizawa examines the fundamental question of the why, how, and so what of foreign policymaking in a new analysis paradigm called "Value-Action Framework." This theoretical framework succeeds in expanding the nascent field of state identity research in International Relations.

Value-action framework consists of four parts: state identity, values, preferences, and structural attributes. Ashizawa derives the idea of state identity from psychological and social literature on individual identities, and then applies the concept to that of state identity. Analogous to individual identities, she argues that the state identities create values or "*proattitude* towards certain actions." Values then create state preferences for specific foreign policies. Once preferences are defined, structural attributes of the state then exert pressures on these preferences, resulting in concrete foreign policies.

Ashizawa's work examines qualitative case studies of U.S. and Japan attitudes toward regional institution-building, covering Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), to empirically prove the utility of the value-action framework. Her exhaustive case studies gather information from hundreds of sources including personal interviews from the people who were directly involved with the creation of APEC and ARF. The studies are comprehensive and complex, but neatly fall into the value-action framework, bolstering the operationalization of the theory.

On the other hand, occasional blemishes detract from the study. For example, Ashizawa does not adequately explain Japan's unenthusiastic response to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Asia (CSCA) initiative and other regional security initiatives by Canada and Australia, before pursuing the creation of ARF. Additionally, she uses a Congressional Research Service (CRS) report as an evidence for a U.S. national policy; although CRS reports are supposedly non-partisan, it's a stretch to conclude that the

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reports (which are just analysis reports for reference) reflect explicit U.S. government policy preferences. Finally, state identities, values, preferences, and structural attributes are clear in hindsight but the book offers little advice on how to define state identities or structural attributes. The details are also scant on how values and preferences can be derived from those identities. The only help comes in the argument that state identities are path-dependent, thus slow to change. The author acknowledges that identities change in response to internal and external pressures, but offers no solid guidelines on how to identify the signals that identities or attributes are changing.

The biggest flaw in the value-action framework is also its biggest strength—its simplicity. During the creation of APEC, Japan led the regional institution-building from behind, deferring to Australia and other states due to its state identity of the “past aggressor in Asia”; however, Japan decided to aggressively lead the creation of ARF only few years later, to the consternation of the U.S. and other Asian countries. The study does not sufficiently explain the sudden shift in Japan’s state identity. Rather, Ashizawa argues that the “dual identity of West and Asia” caused Japan to include the U.S. in the Asian regional initiatives. Although that may be partially true, the biggest reason for Japan to involve the U.S. may be that Japan required the U.S. presence as their security umbrella. Herein lies the problem—complex state agendas and world events are reduced to one or two simple attributes, too reductive to fully explain the convoluted nature of international relations.

The book leaves many questions unanswered; the process of how to define state identities, structural attributes, and preferences is missing. Throughout the inquiry, Ashizawa acknowledges the fluid and contextual-dependent nature of state identity without providing concrete guidelines on how to identify the change. Furthermore, the framework is too reductive for *detailed* policymaking. The author does limit the scope of the framework to four “provisional” applications, mostly to medium- to long-range policy planning. In doing so, the author defines a very specific role for the value-action framework. When correctly applied, the brilliance of the value-action framework lies in its insights on *broad, long-range* policymaking; however, shaky arguments occasionally mar an otherwise strong approach to solving the puzzle of foreign policymaking in Asia. Ultimately, the book’s greatest contribution lies in the qualitative study of U.S. and Japanese foreign policies to prove the relevance of state identity in the field of International Relations.

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