

the level of single stories and, by the end, the reader feels ‘uneasy’ about it, just like Japanese service members are said to feel about their profession.

Alessio Patalano

Lecturer in East Asian Warfare and Security
Department of War Studies
King’s College London
Strand
London Wc2R 2LS
alessio.patalano@kcl.ac.uk

doi:10.1093/irap/lcq004

Advance Access published on 9 April 2010

**Normalizing Japan: Politics, Identity,
and the Evolution of Security Practice**

Andrew Oros

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008, 304 pp.

ISBN 9780804700290 (Hardcover) \$60.00

ISBN 9780804770668 (Paperback) \$24.95

Scholars of international relations (IR) generally agree that at present Japan is not sufficiently ‘normal’ in its national security principles and behavior, as symbolized by the nation’s ‘peace constitution’ and the restraints imposed on national power projections. Scholarly experts offer, however, dichotomous views on Japan’s future trajectory. ‘Realists’ emphasizing materialistic power distribution in international politics assert that Japan is already close to discarding its post World War II pacifist identity in order to become a muscle-flexing military giant more commensurate with its international status and changing external environment. ‘Constructivists’ focusing on the resilience of social identity, on the other hand, counter that despite drastic shifts in international power dynamics, Japan is likely to maintain the core of its antimilitaristic

security institutions, as a prudent Japanese society and domestic politics remain at the core of security policy-making.

Andrew Oros's contribution to this debate is to distance himself from such a dichotomy. He does so by demonstrating the subtle process by which Japanese security policies have actually evolved *despite* concurrent maintenance of the identity of antimilitarism. The book is refreshing for students of IR, who are increasingly aware of the limitations of theoretical debates between realists who too often underestimate the significance of domestic politics, and constructivists who are well equipped to explain broad ideational continuity while much less prepared in handling policy changes.

Oros's theoretical framework incorporates the identity factor as central in Japanese policy-making as constructivists would, while also maintaining that material interests of major political actors and the international environment play an equally influential role (Chapter 1). He defines postwar Japanese security identity in terms of 'three tenets of antimilitarism' – 'no traditional armed forces involved in domestic policy-making, no use of force to resolve international disputes except in self-defense, and no Japanese participation in foreign wars' (p. 45). In Chapters 2 and 3, he explains how the central tenets came to take this particular form and were thereafter institutionalized into policy-making, despite periodical contextual reinterpretations. Subsequent chapters constitute empirical case studies in which Japanese government's policies toward arms exports (Chapter 4), use of space (Chapter 5) and the missile defense with the United States (Chapter 6) are analyzed within the proposed framework.

The conclusion Oros draws from the analysis is sophisticated and original, requiring careful tracing of his overall logic. He argues that the identity of antimilitarism, the three tenets as he regards it, is still valid. In this regard, the conclusion *seems* close to that of constructivists. However, rather than being institutionally reified, the identity has assumed its current status in Japanese policy-making through rational and self-interested contestations among major political actors, who have constantly reinterpreted and negotiated the contextual applicability of the three tenets as various opportunities from international environment and domestic political realignments arose (pp. 69, 172). While the tenets have been upheld, therefore, they have not necessarily prevented gradual evolution of particular security policies. Furthermore, this subtle process of contestation and maintenance has continued throughout the postwar

period, since the public has been reassured that the policy shifts are not a fundamental deviation from the postwar identity.

Oros extends this logic to Japanese security policies of tomorrow, concluding that it is unlikely that the three tenets will be discarded in any foreseeable future. It is because major exogenous and endogenous shocks to Japanese political system forcing a break from past practice and an adoption of new alternative identity have not yet materialized (pp. 172, 189–193). After all, Japanese themselves consider this process – experiencing security policy changes through political contestations, as long as the backbone of the antimilitaristic identity stays intact – to be already ‘normal’ (pp. 1, 6, 198). To be sure, Oros is cleverly sidestepping here academic debates on Japanese normalcy in which the central issue is the nature of Japan’s external security behavior and whether it meets some sort of international standard. In justifying his position, however, he maintains that the question we should ask is ‘not what is ‘normal’ in the abstract, but what is considered normal by Japan, and by Japanese’ (p. 3). Many would argue that even in the eyes of Japanese, the very process the author takes as normal is not seen as normal. Anxiety over the spiral of stretching the interpretation of postwar identity for the sake of maintaining a particular peaceful image increasingly is being reflected in certain social and political discourse. Despite such potential disagreements from Japanese audiences, it must be admitted that Oros, based on his definition and the analytic framework, is making a logically valid assertion.

The reviewer concurs with the author’s position that the identity of antimilitarism is likely to endure, and that contemporary academic debates have been unfortunately dominated by overly simplified notions of ‘normal’ Japan automatically meaning a past-glorifying and militaristic nightmare for its neighbors. Despite Oros’s balanced and context-sensitive analysis, however, his further elaborations on the following would have made his overall argument stronger and help the readers from possible confusion over his underlying assumptions.

Oros takes identity as a means by which political elites pursue a particular policy direction in a given security issue. Here, his definition of identity deviates from the concept as it is generally understood. In IR debates involving constructivism, Japanese security ‘identity’ rather refers to the overarching ‘postwar consensus’ of antimilitarism and the rejection of hegemonic power ambitions. This consensus – which does not

necessarily mean a literal practice of non-armament or neutrality that opposes any realistic policy evolution – has structurally governed the acceptable boundary of proper state conduct in the minds of both the mainstream Japanese politics and society beyond easy agent manipulation. Contrary to this definition, that of Oros, therefore, is strongly functional in nature, where the agency of maintaining and (re)interpreting the national principle is confined to the political sphere. His book, as a result, allots much less attention to the idea of ‘national’ and the role of society.

The reviewer wonders why security policies analyzed in the book historically crystallized in their particular forms rather than taking even more excessive evolutionary turns. While negotiations among political elites undeniably have direct policy implications, would not it be also possible that this identity of a more fundamental nature – the national ‘consensus’ – has played an influential role in the background beyond the scope of political contestations? Identity of this nature is psychologically a more abstract concept than the clearly articulated three tenets, but more powerfully binding. Such an ideational consensus embraced by both mainstream politics and society could have contributed more in setting the policy and social discursive boundaries and balancing excessive deviations, despite everyday political calculations and public opinion polls that often move about depending on particular issues. As Oros emphasizes, if policymakers must constantly ‘reassure’ the public that identity is being maintained, one could question whether or not this constitutes evidence of a more socially prevalent identity of antimilitarism normatively governing the policy realm, even before the more policy-linked wordings of the three tenets can be politically negotiated and restated by the elites.

As identity in IR debates is generally understood in terms of the above-mentioned definition, there is a potential source of confusion as to whether the policy contestations in the book are, in fact, really about identity. Despite his assertion that the book refines constructivism (p. 197), Oro’s analysis is, therefore, more geared toward making a coherent argument consistent with his own definition, rather than directly engaging constructivist accounts of Japanese security identity on the same conceptual wavelength.

Oros sheds a new light in our understanding of Japanese security policy-making with his sophisticated and highly original framework.

While certain redundancy and a somewhat defensive posture is noticeable when he makes reference to his central argument, it is understandable for scholars working outside standard approaches and facing the constant risk of being misinterpreted. The book is recommended for both experts and students, but it would be especially helpful to graduate-level students as a source of further reflection and theoretical engagement, as they seek to deepen scholarly understanding of the past, the present, and the future of Japanese security.

Seung Hyok Lee

Department of Political Science
University of Toronto
seunghyok.lee@utoronto.ca

doi:10.1093/irap/lcq005

Advance Access published on 16 June 2010