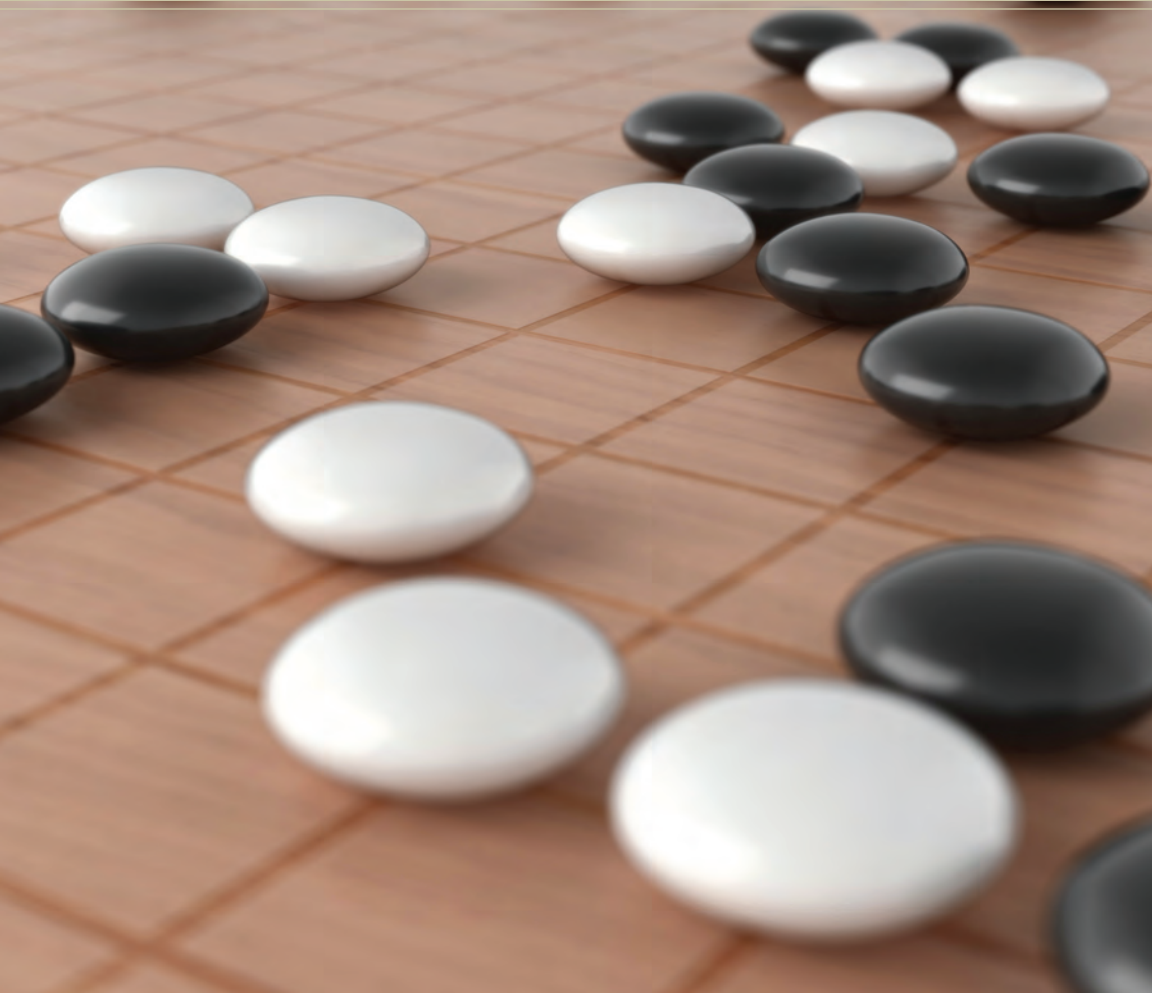


STRATEGIC ASIA 2016–17

**UNDERSTANDING  
STRATEGIC CULTURES**  
*in the Asia-Pacific*

EXECUTIVE BRIEF



EDITED BY ASHLEY J. TELLIS, ALISON SZALWINSKI, AND MICHAEL WILLS



# STRATEGIC ASIA 2016–17

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*The EXECUTIVE BRIEF of*

STRATEGIC ASIA 2016–17

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**UNDERSTANDING  
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*Edited by*

Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills

*With contributions from*

Jiun Bang, Alexis Dudden, Colin Dueck, Isabelle Facon,  
Christopher A. Ford, Ian Hall, David C. Kang,  
Yohanes Sulaiman, and Ashley J. Tellis



THE NATIONAL BUREAU *of* ASIAN RESEARCH  
*Seattle and Washington, D.C.*

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## About Strategic Asia

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STRATEGIC ASIA 2016-17

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CHAPTER HIGHLIGHT



## Chapter Highlight

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# Understanding Strategic Cultures in the Asia-Pacific

Ashley J. Tellis

*This is an abridged version of the Overview from Strategic Asia 2016–17: Understanding Strategic Cultures in the Asia-Pacific. For the complete chapter, visit the NBR website at <http://www.nbr.org>.*

That the security behavior of states is deeply shaped by their culture has been a prominent idea since the very beginning of Western political theory. In his epic history of the Greco-Persian wars, for example, Herodotus sought, among other things, to explain the causes of Greek victory as “the fruit of wisdom and strong law.”<sup>1</sup> The Athenians, in Herodotus’ reflections, derived their strength from their democracy, which nurtured equality, freedom, and a quest for excellence. The Spartans, in contrast, acquired their power from being enslaved to the law, a bondage that was so indenturing that they trembled before its obligations. As Herodotus had the deposed Spartan king Demaratus tell the Persian emperor Xerxes, the Spartans feared the law “much more than your men fear you. They do whatever it bids; and its bidding is always the same, that they must never flee from the battle before any multitude of men, but must abide at their post and there conquer or die.”<sup>2</sup> In Herodotus’ judgment, these cultural traits, which were unique to the

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<sup>1</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. A.D. Godley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), 7.102, available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0126>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.104.

Greeks, enabled them to muster the courage that made it possible for their smaller armies to defeat the much larger Persian forces marshaled by Xerxes.

Herodotus' *Histories* is much more than a simple narrative that describes the course and outcome of the conflict between the Greek city-states and the Persian Empire. Rather, it remains a deeply philosophical reflection that investigates not merely how the greatest powers of his age came into conflict but also how their political regimes were shaped by their worldviews, values, and psychology, all of which affected these states' behavior in the context of their specific political rivalries and material capabilities.<sup>3</sup>

This tradition of explicating the outcomes of security competition through, among other things, cultural attributes was entrenched by Herodotus' immediate successor Thucydides, whose epic analysis of the Peloponnesian War came to constitute, as he had hoped, "a possession for all time."<sup>4</sup> Although Thucydides self-consciously set about distinguishing his own work from that of Herodotus by noting its "absence of romance," he nonetheless extended the tradition established by the latter by also explaining the conflict between Athens and Sparta through more than simply material variables. To be sure, he enshrined one of the foundational insights of political realism for generations to come when he declared that "the real cause [of the Peloponnesian struggle] I consider to be the one which was formally most kept out of sight: The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Lacedaemon, made war inevitable."<sup>5</sup> Despite thus signaling the importance of the tangible distribution of power for explaining the conflict, Thucydides proceeded to explore its underlying causes, which he found rooted in the disposition of the two antagonists: the spiritedness of Athens and the passivity of Sparta. The spiritedness of Athens, which Thucydides' Pericles would celebrate in his Funeral Oration, was manifested in the way the polity "present[ed] the singular spectacle of daring and deliberation, each carried to its highest point, and both united in the same persons." The conviction of the Athenians that "vengeance upon their enemies was more to be desired than any personal blessings" is what gave rise to their greatest institutions and achievements, and finally an empire that "forced every sea and land to be the highway of [its] daring, and everywhere, whether for evil or for good, [has] left imperishable monuments behind."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Sara Forsdyke, "Herodotus, Political History, and Political Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus*, ed. Carolyn Dewald and John Marincola (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 224–37; and Joel Alden Schlosser, "Herodotean Realism," *Political Theory* 42, no. 3 (2014): 239–61.

<sup>4</sup> Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley (New York: Random House, 1951), 1.1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.6.



This ethos, in Thucydides' reflection, remained the consequential reason not only for the emergence of Athens as a great power but also for its descent into hubris and the cataclysm it provoked in the form of the Peloponnesian War. Hundreds of years after Thucydides, Machiavelli similarly explained Roman greatness in terms of strategic culture. Incarnating Petrarch's maxim that "all history is the praise of Rome," Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* approvingly concluded that a preoccupation with civic *virtù*—that "competitive pursuit of excellence, expressed in a penchant for turning virtually all social activities into contests with winners, losers, prizes, and trophies"—underwrote Rome's unquenchable thirst for glory and in time created its vast and admirable empire.<sup>7</sup> From Machiavelli onward, a succession of thinkers in the West—including individuals as diverse as Carl von Clausewitz, Max Weber, and Ruth Benedict—explored culture as a key to understanding various social phenomena. Hence, it should not be surprising that armed conflict, perhaps the most troublesome of all human behaviors, has also proved to be appealing territory for cultural exploration in contemporary times.<sup>8</sup>

## Strategic Culture and Modern Social Science

Given the distinguished history of analyzing international competition through cultural explanations since antiquity, it may seem surprising that modern studies of strategic culture have not turned out to be entirely persuasive.<sup>9</sup> Strategic culture is understood in this volume as referring to those inherited conceptions and shared beliefs that shape a nation's collective identity, the values that color how a country evaluates its interests, and the norms that influence a state's understanding of the means by which it can best realize its destiny in a competitive international system.<sup>10</sup> Given that these concepts bear on national security managers as they make choices about how to respond internally and externally to their strategic environment, it

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<sup>7</sup> Mark Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 40.

<sup>8</sup> For a useful overview of how culture has been conceived in classical social theory, see Philip Smith and Alexander Riley, *Cultural Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 6–21. The treatment of culture in various contemporary disciplines is surveyed in Lynn Hunt, "Introduction: History, Culture, and Text," in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 1–22. The role of culture in explaining issues relating to armed conflict in the postwar period is masterfully examined in Michael C. Desch, "Culture Clash: Assessing the Importance of Ideas in Security Studies," *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998): 141–70.

<sup>9</sup> Desch, "Culture Clash."

<sup>10</sup> Jeannie L. Johnson, "Strategic Culture: Refining the Theoretical Construct," Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), report prepared for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, October 31, 2006, 5.

would be hard to deny that strategic culture matters. How exactly it matters, however, has proved harder to describe.

For the classical theorists from Herodotus to Machiavelli, integrating strategic culture into their larger analyses was not particularly problematic because their philosophical investigations of social behavior naturally accommodated multiple layers of causation. Thus, for example, their explanations, which incorporated unique cultural variables such as the collective devotion to law or the national restiveness that attains consummation in worldly glory, did not neglect material elements such as the balance of military capabilities or relative national power, nor did they discount individual motivations such as fear, honor, greed, or interest. In other words, the ancients understood that all political phenomena were by their nature complex and, hence, doing analytical justice to them required a layered understanding that subsumed a multiplicity of causes.<sup>11</sup>

The modern descendants of classical theorists, however, have had a harder time in accommodating strategic culture as a worthwhile cause because of their commitment to reductionist explanations. These approaches, which are viewed as the hallmark of “positivist” social science, invariably require culture and its related concepts or hypotheses to be defined precisely, something that has often proved difficult because of the inherent elasticity of these ideas.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, it is not clear whether the notion of culture, however defined and even if applicable as a good explanation in specific cases, can be universalized sufficiently to produce “covering laws” of the kind required by social scientific approaches that model themselves on the natural sciences.<sup>13</sup> Finally, even if the previous problems can be overcome, a more challenging difficulty facing cultural explanations in contemporary social science is that the outcomes to be explained must be demonstrably attributed solely or primarily to strategic culture over and against any other

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<sup>11</sup> Ashley J. Tellis, “Reconstructing Political Realism: The Long March to Scientific Theory,” *Security Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 3–94.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald Rogowski, *Rational Legitimacy: A Theory of Political Support* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 13.

<sup>13</sup> The concept of covering law is elaborated systematically in Carl G. Hempel, “Aspects of Scientific Explanation,” in *Aspects of Scientific Explanation and Other Essays in the Philosophy of Science* (New York: Free Press, 1965), 331–496. For a good overview of how positivist social science seeks to explain various phenomena through different kinds of covering law explanations, see Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968). It should be noted, however, that those who reject the possibility of scientific explanation derived from universal laws approach the subject of culture in a different way. For example, Clifford Geertz, one of the most creative and pioneering scholars of culture, argued that “the analysis of [culture is] not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning,” a judgment that with qualifications fits into the sociological tradition earlier established by Max Weber. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5; and Thomas Burger, *Max Weber’s Theory of Concept Formation: History, Laws, and Ideal Types* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1976).

variables, such as the balance of power or the purposive choices of state leaders in the context of competitive politics. The inability to provide such unique attribution creates problems of “overdetermination”—when two or more sufficient and distinct causes produce the same effect—which, in turn, diminishes the attractiveness of strategic culture as a useful explanation.<sup>14</sup>

The quest for a parsimonious explanation—a distinguishing characteristic of contemporary social science—threatens the viability of strategic culture as a self-sufficient explanation of competitive political behavior because frequently various political outcomes can just as readily be accounted for by other variables. This did not pose any insurmountable difficulty for the ancients because their political investigations were not scientific in the contemporary sense of the term. The emphasis in current social science on establishing hard causality, however, threatens hypotheses based on strategic culture if they cannot provide distinctive explanations that lie beyond the reach of other competing accounts of the evidence.

## The Relevance of Strategic Culture in Explaining National Behavior

This volume, *Strategic Asia 2016–17: Understanding Strategic Cultures in the Asia-Pacific*, explores the dominant ideational frames of reference that are prevalent in key Asian states. It thus serves as a companion to *Strategic Asia 2015–16: Foundations of National Power in the Asia-Pacific*, which examined the capacity of various Asian states to produce power through a study of their resource base and their state and societal performance insofar as these bear on the generation of military capabilities.

The studies assembled in this volume are authored on the assumption that strategic culture matters insofar as it constitutes the intangible element of an overarching context that shapes how key national elites, particularly the decision-makers within the countries examined here, understand their strategic environment and the value, purpose, use, and limitations ascribed to their national power—including the application of coercive force—in competitive politics. To modify Ann Swidler’s conception of how culture operates in action, strategic culture shapes outcomes both by “providing the ultimate values toward which action is orientated” and by “shaping a repertoire or ‘tool kit’ of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of overdetermination, see W.C. Wimsatt, “Robustness, Reliability and Overdetermination,” in *Scientific Inquiry and the Social Sciences*, ed. M. Brewer and B. Collins (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981), 124–63.

‘strategies of action.’<sup>15</sup> These cognitive frames are transmitted across time merely as a result of a nation’s continued persistence, though it is likely that conscious social transference also plays a critical role in many, and certainly in all modern, societies. Consequently, all nations, by the very fact of their existence, possess a strategic culture, with the only difference between them being the degree of consciousness about their ideational inheritance, the extent of deliberation characterizing its reproduction, and the sensitivity with which it is applied to policy. Examining a nation’s strategic culture, therefore, requires attention to both formal and informal modes of representation that includes a focus on words and actions as well as on all other implied and explicit understandings.

By its very nature, strategic culture manifests itself at diverse levels in a political community: at the level of state, society, and individual. Because of its interest in international politics, this volume will pay special attention to the worldviews of the decision-making segments involved in managing national security, obviously on the assumption that these outlooks are shaped by the ideational inheritance, contestation, and reproduction prevalent in the wider social milieu. The social construction of strategic culture through these processes also highlights the fact that all ideational frames intended to understand the reality of security competition are never static, even when they appear stable. Rather, their incarnation, being owed to the complex interaction between inherited ideas, intra-societal negotiations, state-society bargaining, and the strength of state interests, illuminates the social bases of their generation while highlighting the possibilities of evolution or change.

Despite this expansive view of strategic culture, the ontological assumption underlying this volume remains fundamentally materialist in that it presumes that tangible capabilities are still fundamental to explaining the widest range of outcomes in competitive international politics. Yet the recognition that physical capabilities enduringly matter does not preclude a role for those ideational elements inherent in the concept of strategic culture. This is because the character and the pace of accumulation of material instruments, and the manner of their use—especially when manifested as military capabilities—are shaped by a cognitive inheritance that is possibly unique to every nation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (1986): 273.

<sup>16</sup> How ideas in this sense are linked to material outcomes is explored in Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

The rationalist methodology of Popperian social science insists that all observation of the material world is “theory-laden,” meaning that it requires some a priori concepts to help the observer make sense of perceived reality.<sup>17</sup> On this account, treating strategic culture as a methodologically preexistent, but not necessarily unchanging, intellectual frame that helps decision-makers interpret their security environment is essential for the proper understanding of how state managers make decisions about the production and application of national power and the ends to which it may be directed. Explaining even the palpable realities of international politics—the subjects naturally encompassed by any materialist ontology—thus requires an idealist component in its epistemology if it is to satisfactorily account for how states acquire and pursue power in the arena of competitive international politics.<sup>18</sup>

As such, strategic culture serves at the very least as part of the “thick description”<sup>19</sup> of national actions that, when appreciated in their complexity and nuance, contribute toward addressing the question posed by Colin Gray, “What does the observed behavior mean?”<sup>20</sup> At its most ambitious, strategic culture might actually offer possibilities for explaining or even predicting state behavior in the manner intended by covering law models of scientific knowledge. Yet even when successful on this count, its superiority as a social-scientific approach will be determined not only by the verisimilitude of its prognoses in any given case but also by how well it meets the other criteria for good theory, such as comprehensiveness, parsimony, and fecundity.<sup>21</sup>

Incorporating strategic culture in this fashion opens the door to resolving what is often viewed as the antithesis between broadly realist approaches to international politics, which usually employ strict or loose

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<sup>17</sup> The distinction between Karl Popper’s approach and that of positivist social science hinges on this key issue: the positivists believed that scientific laws could be derived solely from experience through induction; Popper not only demonstrated the fallacy of induction as a means of producing scientific knowledge but, following Kant, established that all observation statements (as well as empirical experiments) presuppose prior theory, thus permitting the introduction of deductive logic as a tool of falsification to produce scientific knowledge. See Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 93–111. For a systematic summation of Popper’s rationalism as applied to social science, see Ashley J. Tellis, *The Drive to Domination: Towards a Pure Realist Theory of Politics* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1994), 18–80.

<sup>18</sup> In a logical sense, then, strategic culture functions as the Kantian “synthetic a priori” in larger social-scientific explanations of state action, even when this activity is concerned entirely with the material realities of power and its application either within or outside the state.

<sup>19</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Colin S. Gray, “Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back,” *Review of International Studies* 25, no.1 (1999): 49–69.

<sup>21</sup> See the discussion in Imre Lakatos, “Falsificationism and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes,” in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 91–196.

rational choice methods of reasoning, and cultural explanations, which often take the form of *sui generis* accounts.<sup>22</sup> If rational state behavior is viewed as culturally conditioned in some way—in that the identity of a nation, the values it prioritizes, and the norms of behavior it judges to be desirable all shape how decision-makers approach the tasks of producing and utilizing power in international politics—then it might be possible to integrate instrumental rationality to explain different kinds of outcomes. These include the lags between structural change and the alterations in state behavior, the failures of states to respond to structural constraints, and the successful pursuit of specific national preferences in the face of weak external hindrances, as Michael Desch has insightfully argued.<sup>23</sup> But it would also explain a much broader range of state behavior, including the differences in styles of statecraft, the choice of particular national strategies, and even the transformation of some configurations of power as a result of determined state action precipitated by unique endogenous ideational factors. If rationalist explanations of political realism can in fact incorporate strategic culture systematically, then the resulting hypotheses would have utility not merely for explaining puzzling outcomes—as is the case now when strategic culture often becomes an “explanation of last resort” that is “turned to when more concrete factors have been eliminated”<sup>24</sup>—but also for explaining the uniqueness of every individual case that is necessarily recessed when the larger regularities of international politics are otherwise satisfactorily explained by the realist research program.

The important point is that such a “thin” rational choice approach, which is willing to admit that strategic culture could shape the expected utility of different choices as a result of some deeply held beliefs, would permit observers to understand the variations in national responses to interstate competition.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, although all nations most susceptible to the rigors of anarchic competition would end up pursuing similar but not necessarily identical strategies of power maximization—an outcome that is best accounted for by the standard covering-law-like explanations of political realism—strategic culture will have made an important contribution to both

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<sup>22</sup> For an excellent conceptual discussion of this issue, see Sun-Ki Chai, “Rational Choice and Culture: Clashing Perspectives or Complementary Modes of Analysis?” in *Culture Matters: Essays in Honor of Aaron Wildavsky*, ed. Richard J. Ellis and Michael Thompson (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 45–58.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of some of these outcomes, see Desch, “Culture Clash.”

<sup>24</sup> Eric Herring, “Nuclear Totem and Taboo” (paper presented at the BISA annual conference, Leeds, December 15–17, 1997), 8, cited in Theo Farrell, “Culture and Military Power,” *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 3 (1998): 409.

<sup>25</sup> The distinction between “thick” and “thin” rational choice theories is well explicated in Michael Hechter and Satoshi Kanazawa, “Sociological Rational Choice Theory,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 23, no. 1 (1997): 191–214.

intellectual comprehension and successful policymaking if it could explicate how the preferences and causal beliefs of a state shape the uniqueness of its competitive response.

A good understanding of this kind offers theoretical benefits as well. Beyond providing a textured appreciation of any given state's response to international rivalry—details that are invariably lost in “extensive” explanations that attempt to do justice to numerous cases over space and time—such “intensive” scrutiny of a particular state's behavior could stimulate new hypotheses that explain, among other things, how national institutions mutate as a result of the interaction of external and internal pressures, thus further improving our understanding of international politics. If the focus of strategic culture, therefore, rests in the first instance on providing the best understanding of a specific nation's security behavior, rather than attempting to provide abstract universal generalizations that are trained on “the realist edifice as [a] target,”<sup>26</sup> it could serve as a vital complement to rational choice formulations of political realism, even if it cannot substitute for the latter entirely.

The chapters that follow in this volume are informed by several generations of theorizing on strategic culture, but they do not wade into the academic debates that have surrounded the concept since its inception. These debates continue endlessly, and there is still no consensus on the operational definition of strategic culture, its methods and objects of inquiry, or its scope of explanation. Further complicating matters is the fact that scholars using the notion of strategic culture as an explanation usually seem motivated more by a desire to refute political realism than to demonstrate that cultural explanations can in fact advance our understanding of international politics even if they do not serve as genuine alternatives to realist theories.<sup>27</sup> Attempting to adjudicate these issues lies beyond the province of this volume. Instead, the studies gathered here are aimed primarily at helping policymakers and interested students of Asia understand how ideational factors color the choices of the major Asian states in regard to procuring and using power in international politics. This objective is consistent with Alastair Iain Johnston's judgment that “done well, the careful analysis of strategic culture could help policymakers establish more accurate and empathetic understandings of how different actors perceive the game being played, reducing uncertainty and other information problems in strategic choice. Done badly, the analysis of strategic culture could reinforce stereotypes about strategic dispositions of

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<sup>26</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, “Thinking about Strategic Culture,” *International Security* 19, no. 4 (1995): 41.

<sup>27</sup> See the discussion in Peter J. Katzenstein, “Introduction: Alternative Perspectives on National Security,” in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1–32.

other states and close off policy alternatives deemed inappropriate for dealing with local strategic cultures.”<sup>28</sup>

## Surveying Asia’s Strategic Cultures

Shaped by this intellectual heritage, the chapters in this volume examine for each country strategic culture as a product of three broad sets of variables. The first consists of macrosocietal factors, such as geographic location, history, culture (meaning the cumulative deposit of beliefs, values, and symbols of a community that are transmitted across generations), and ethnography. The second encompasses statal characteristics, such as the nature of the domestic political regime, the type and relative capabilities of the economy, the ambitions and worldviews of the elites, and the broad character of state-society relations. And the third includes intrastatal elements, such as the nature of civil-military relations, the robustness of strategic planning and decision-making institutions, and the effectiveness of the national security bureaucracy.

When examining these sources, insofar as they contribute to the creation, sustenance, and reproduction of strategic culture, the authors of the individual chapters have also paid attention, to the degree possible and relevant, to three specific tasks. One such task is identifying the founding myths, classic texts, and other ideational or social influences (such as religion or caste) that might distinctively shape the cognitive inheritance of a particular nation as expressed in terms of identity, values, and norms. A second is assessing what seems invariant and what might be changing (or seems susceptible to change) because of the transformations in historical, cultural, political, or economic circumstances, as well as what might be the perceived impact of such changes on the evolving strategic culture. Finally, a third task is identifying the elements within a country that run against the grain of the dominant strategic culture, the reasons for their persistence, and the conditions under which they might prevail and with what consequences—in other words, identifying the dissident or subaltern traditions that illustrate the diversity of social elements, even if within an otherwise hegemonic strategic culture. In so doing, these studies do not pretend to be able to uncover specific causal linkages between a country’s ideational inheritance and its strategic behaviors—a goal that seems to have eluded even the best theorists of strategic culture thus far. Rather, they offer insights about how the symbolic inheritance and constructs of a nation shape its predispositions and, by extension, color its approach to security competition in international politics.

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<sup>28</sup> Johnston, “Thinking about Strategic Culture.”



Taken together, the chapters convey the remarkable diversity of strategic cultures in Asia, which span the range from highly developed and consciously articulated traditions, as in China, to more embryonic efforts at self-reflection, as evidenced in Indonesia, with many variants in between. Christopher Ford's study of China emphasizes the fact that there is a distinctive Chinese national style "rooted in a uniquely ancient history and political-cultural continuity that legitimates a special and privileged role for Beijing in world affairs as a peace-loving power at the civilizational center of mankind." However, this vision of China, which is viewed as invariant and durable, being built on claims of virtocratic power, masks the country's strong propensity to use force both domestically and internationally as a way of protecting elite or national interests in any disputes involving power. This ready willingness to use force, which is always visualized reflexively as defensive and justified to the outside as principled, corroborates the most distinctive characteristic of Chinese strategic culture—namely, the reality of "Confucian flesh" covering "realist bones." This "'exacerbated realism' of moralistic coercion" underlies many of the distinctive traits of Chinese foreign policy behavior. As Ford notes, much of this ready willingness to use force in moralistic garb is driven by the interests of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in preserving its hegemony over power at home through, among other things, asserting China's claim to primacy abroad. As he argues, a "model of authority" that "is conceptually monist...cannot concede real pluralism and fears alternative loci of virtue." It can be used, however, to "justify CCP autocracy, demonstrate the virtue of the party's leadership, articulate civilizational foundations and precedents for the regime's dreams of status and glory in the international arena, and discredit alien Western values that the regime finds distasteful or threatening" en route to pursuing foreign policies with "power-maximizing geopolitical implications."

Isabelle Facon's discussion of Russia's strategic culture highlights the enduring characteristics of its national style, which she attributes to the complex "geographic, historical, and psychological circumstances" that have shaped the country's dominant leitmotif for several centuries: the quest to become, and to be treated as, a world power that is attracted to, yet often repelled by, the West. This paradoxical attitude, Facon notes, is the result of at least four polarities that have shaped the Russian worldview over time. The first is an assertive religious vision of Russia as a proselytizing Orthodox successor to Rome versus the spatial vision of itself as a vulnerable entity that needs extended territorial buffers for its survival. A second polarity is the tension between offensive and defensive foreign policies for national survival, linked in part to perceptions of domestic weakness and the character of the governing regime at different points in time. Third, Russia exhibits

alternating convictions about autarky and integration as desired routes for increasing national power. The fourth polarity is the struggle to balance national focus, interests, and policies between Europe and Asia, given that Russian power has never been potent enough to enable seamless involvement in both regions simultaneously over long periods of time. Navigating these four concurrent polarities has shaped the two characteristics that dominate Russia's strategic style—namely, the enduring emphasis on the primacy of military instruments in its national policy and the perpetual oscillation between spirited activism and torpid retrenchment in its foreign relations. These behaviors lead Facon to conclude that Russia “has always vacillated between a desire for integration with Europe and the West and wariness about the ‘importation’ of Western political values and socioeconomic ways” and will never become a full part of the West.

Unlike the studies of China and Russia, which both possess a dominant strategic culture that either legitimizes the accumulation and use of coercive power wrapped in moralism or drives the expansion of territory in order to sustain a defensive glacis, Alexis Dudden's chapter on Japan depicts a country that is genuinely struggling with two traditions of understanding security. The currently dominant vision that came to characterize Japan's national style is one that is relatively young and dates back to the end of World War II. It is a strategic culture born of defeat and nurtured by the U.S. occupation that forged, in John Dower's words cited by Dudden, an “alien constitution” that married “monarchism, democratic idealism, and pacifism.” Most remarkably, this ethos has been “thoroughly internalized and vigorously defended” by the population as a whole, which appeared content to trade “Japan's right to wage war...for U.S. security guarantees and economic stimulus.”

While this cosmopolitanism undoubtedly produced great benefits for Japan, it overlay an older, more traditional understanding that viewed Japan as a maritime state with oceanic borders serving the interests of its island people. This conception, Dudden notes, goes back to the Tokugawa era. Despite the policy failures of that epoch and the periods that followed, it nurtured a specific Japanese self-understanding, namely that the “national space in the seas around Japan is critical” for its identity, interests, and security. The resuscitation of this older idea is led by key elites who seem “committed to again orienting Japan to the sea, as it was positioned during the first half of the twentieth century.” This effort underlies the Abe administration's struggles to reform the constitution, increase Japan's contribution to the U.S. alliance system, and more generally push the country toward becoming a more “normal” nation. In short, Dudden notes, despite there being a prior moment in Japanese history when “the idea of the nation as rigidly bordered engendered Japan's collapse,” the social consensus that once “held that the

country's island nature caused its defeat in 1945" is rapidly eroding. Hence, Japan's strategic trajectory will be determined by the current struggle to define its strategic culture either "as inward-looking and tightly defined or as open-ended and engaged with the world."

David Kang and Jiun Bang's chapter depicts South Korea's strategic culture as characterized by an uncompromising quest for autonomy, which might appear odd given the fact that the country's geography positions it among states that are much richer and more powerful, such as China and Japan. Further complicating the issue is South Korea's relatively greater comfort with China and distrust of Japan—its stronger and weaker neighbors, respectively—an outcome that runs counter to the expectations of balancing postulated by some versions of realism that emphasize the distribution of materialist capabilities as determinative. To explain the distinctiveness of South Korean behavior, Kang and Bang note that Japan's 35-year colonization of Korea in the modern period, coupled with revulsion about Korea's submissiveness toward China in premodern history, led South Korean elites to construct an early twentieth-century narrative about "how masculine and strong Korea had been in the past." This vision underlies the belief that even contemporary South Korea can pursue strategic independence, while its relative comfort with China over Japan, despite the greater coercive power wielded by the former, is explained by the differences in Korean experience with the two states historically. Even when Korea was a Chinese tributary state, it enjoyed stability and tranquility, whereas the experience of Japanese occupation was cataclysmic.

As a result, Kang and Bang argue that "South Korea's strategic culture has historically viewed China as a major power to be dealt with and Japan as a threat to be defended against" because "if China was the immovable mountain under whose shadow one must live, Japan was the unpredictable and dangerous neighbor that seemed superficially placid but could snap at any time." Further, the need for China's assistance in managing the threat from North Korea today, coupled with the assurance arising from the alliance relationship with the United States, permits South Korea to pursue its policy of preserving independence vis-à-vis larger neighbors while enjoying the benefits of a close relationship with China that often enables Seoul to make common cause with Beijing in opposing the specter of Japanese revanchism.

Ian Hall's discussion of Indian strategic culture captures succinctly the conflicted attitude to power that characterizes New Delhi's conduct in international politics. The chapter views "fatalism, moralism, and activism" as three distinct, but contending, ethical traditions that left their imprint on various political epochs dating back to classical Hinduism through imperial eras (ending in the national struggle against British rule) and culminating

in the post-independence era. The behavior that dominated any given period seemed to be shaped greatly by whichever axiological vision was in ascendency at the time. The syncretism that defines Indian civilization, however, ensured that the preeminence enjoyed by any particular worldview at a given moment was insufficient to completely extinguish its competitors. As a result, every hegemony was always transient, and even when it was manifest, the dominant vision was usually tinged with elements drawn from the alternatives.

Hall's analysis elaborates how, in the post-independence period, the three contending strategic cultures in India that remain rivalrous to this day—Nehruvian pragmatism, hard realpolitik, and Hindu nationalism—combine the older ethical traditions in different ways. Yet Hall argues that “strategic restraint,” which is a distinctive legacy of Nehruvian practice, is likely to survive even in the face of rising Hindu nationalism. This is not only because it best comports with India's material circumstances presently but because it is also consistent with the Hindu nationalist conviction that without “a unified society that displays the correct degree of manliness and muscularity with regard to both domestic and international politics... a state's military forces will never be able to fulfill their true potential.”

With perhaps the exception of China, there is no better example in this book of how a strategic culture comes to be deliberately constructed than Yohanes Sulaiman's chapter on Indonesia. Sulaiman emphasizes the fact that Indonesia's archipelagic geography and the hundreds of ethnic groups present on its numerous islands combined to prevent a shared sense of nationality from naturally developing over time. The “latent fear” that “unity could be easily undermined through policies of divide and conquer” amid such diversities led to the construction of a vitalizing founding myth: that modern Indonesia “is the successor state of the two maritime kingdoms of Srivijaya and Majapahit, which are believed to have ruled the entirety of modern Indonesia, as well as the Malay Peninsula, between the seventh and fourteenth centuries.” The prestige of the Hindu-Buddhist Majapahit rulers was so great that even the succeeding Islamic kingdoms in the archipelago sought legitimacy by claiming that they were successor states. The political creation of contemporary Indonesia by Dutch colonialism—in the form of the Dutch East Indies—provided fertile ground for the perpetuation of this founding myth as Indonesian nationalists sought to legitimize their anticolonial struggle by claiming that it was aimed at recovering the nation that existed for centuries past in a golden era once enjoyed under Majapahit rule.

While this view was rejected outside Javanese territories, it nonetheless animated the armed resistance to the Dutch colonial forces. Although Indonesian independence was not ultimately secured as a result of any

military success, the decentralized guerrilla organization that was entrenched during the anticolonial struggle provided the foundations on which military rule and interests would later come to dominate Indonesia's politics and, by extension, its political culture. The now familiar Indonesian national conviction—nonalignment—is a post-independence artifact that derives from the “free and active” narrative. As Sulaiman points out, this narrative stresses “that in order to be completely free, Indonesia must have an independent foreign policy that is unrestricted by any military pacts or alignments with great powers.” This composite edifice, which marries together a historical myth, a particular pattern of political organization, and an ideological principle of foreign policy, remains a remarkable example of how a strategic culture can be consciously constructed to serve the interests of certain elites while advancing the cause of nation-building.

In an assessment that bears some similarities to Hall's analysis of India, Colin Dueck reads U.S. strategic culture as being influenced by two strains. The dominant tradition is classical liberalism, which, anchored in an exceptionalist view of itself, emphasizes that “the United States has a special role to play in promoting a more open, democratic, and interdependent world order.” While debates persist about whether this order should be promoted by example or by force, there seems to be no doubt that the U.S. national style is characterized by a liberal worldview and rhetoric that incarnates many of the ideals of the European Enlightenment both in its aims and in the role imagined for reason in political life. Having said this, however, Dueck clarifies that the prevalence of liberal ideals has by no means undermined the ability of the United States to pursue its own interests. Rather, it would be “a mistake to suggest that U.S. strategic culture renders the conduct of effective international strategies impossible. Historically, the United States has often had considerable success in promoting its own position and interests abroad.”

If there has been any conspicuous constraint on the pursuit of U.S. interests, it is less the presence of liberal ideals and more the persistence of “a preference for limited liability,” which gives rise to a second strain of U.S. strategic culture. When combined with “ambitious, classically liberal international goals,” the desire to limit liability often creates the “contradictions or gaps between ends and means” that are prominent features of U.S. national security strategy. The common view from abroad of the United States as a country that often seeks grand objectives internationally but remains unwilling to muster either the patience or the resources to realize those aims thus has some foundation in reality because of the tension that Dueck highlights as an enduring characteristic of the United States' national operating style. Furthermore, this stress is likely to survive indefinitely because the realist, progressive, and nationalist subcultures—whatever

their other differences—are united in their opposition to expensive overseas crusades designed to promote liberal values internationally. Dueck’s analysis, accordingly, adeptly explains both how the dominant liberalism of U.S. strategic culture has been formed, while being continually buffeted by other dissident traditions, and how its transformed iteration shapes the nation’s goals, strategies, and patterns of behavior.

## **Conclusion: Asian Strategic Cultures and U.S. Interests**

Although the chapters in this volume cannot provide linear causal connections between strategic culture and specific state behaviors, they do illuminate the key sources that account for the generation of strategic cultures in important Asian states and explain how these ideational frames tend to color various national attitudes toward the accumulation and use of sovereign power, including building partnerships with others and the employment of military force. When these chapters are read synoptically, the challenges posed to U.S. policy in the Asia-Pacific become discernible, even if clear behavioral consequences cannot be derived from strategic culture alone.

If the core task facing the United States in this region consists of coping with the rise of Chinese power and China’s accompanying desire to reconstitute its historic continental hegemony—which inevitably entails diminishing the U.S. role as a security guarantor in Asia—this volume’s examination of the strategic cultures of key Asian states suggests that the challenges facing Washington will be considerable. The two most important authoritarian powers in Asia, China and Russia, are characterized both by substantial coercive capabilities—in the case of the former, a still steadily expanding economy that supports a dramatic military modernization—and by strategic cultures that emphasize the offensive use of these capabilities, albeit with defensive justifications. Both states also seem inclined to preemptive doctrines, possess relatively brittle governing institutions, are increasingly drawn toward each other because of their grievances with the United States, and are embroiled in several conflicts with their neighbors, many of which are formal U.S. allies. The fact that China and Russia also possess large inventories of nuclear weapons makes the challenges of undertaking successful extended deterrence in Asia all the more burdensome for U.S. defense planners. The strategic cultures of these two countries, therefore, will give both their neighbors and the United States some pause, a disquiet that is only intensified by their burning global ambitions and possession of formidable material capabilities.

The characteristics of the strategic cultures in the democratic states examined in this volume only complicate the picture for U.S. policymakers.

Although all these states—Japan, South Korea, India, and Indonesia—are more or less unified by a peaceful strategic culture, which is a great boon from the perspective of regional stability, their more placid attitudes to security competition could make the task of managing China's rise harder than might be expected. Japanese strategic culture is cleaved between traditional realists and postmodern cosmopolitans. While the continued ascendancy of the latter might be good for Japan in many ways, it is uncertain whether the country's security and autonomy, as well as its alliance with the United States, will remain robust in the face of burgeoning Chinese power if the reforms desired by the realists cannot be realized. Japan's strategic culture may thus exemplify a cruel conundrum: what is good for its integrity may become subversive of its security, and vice versa. South Korea's greater comfort with China than with Japan further complicates the U.S. task of balancing China.

India's strategic culture, though steadily shifting toward greater nationalism over cosmopolitanism, cannot yet let go of its strong residual commitment to strategic restraint, which produces an ambivalence that makes the task of partnering with the United States quite challenging. As in Japan, a future nationalist hegemony in India may also transform its strategic culture in ways that make more effective strategic balancing possible, but perhaps at the cost of its success as a liberal democracy. Indonesia, by contrast, represents the opposite end of the spectrum: a determined commitment to avoid all semblances of entangling partnerships could threaten its security vis-à-vis a rising China even as Indonesia preserves the purity of its nonalignment.

Finally, there is the issue of U.S. strategic culture itself: the challenges of preserving a global regime that protects the United States' primacy vis-à-vis China or any other state derive from a continued ascendancy of the internationalist constituency within the polity. Yet this very group is under stress in domestic politics today. If its partnership with its nationalist compatriots cannot be repaired—against the opposing views of global order sometimes espoused by progressives and invariably held by isolationists—the larger question of what U.S. strategic goals in Asia ought to be could itself be redefined in ways that would undermine U.S. prosperity, power, and status in the international system. Thankfully, the future of balancing in the region will be determined not solely by strategic culture but equally by material interests. Yet because these latter equities will be discerned greatly through the prisms of the strategic cultures of the nations concerned, a successful geopolitical equilibrium in Asia will arise only to the degree that it is generated through the exercise of U.S. power and statesmanship. To the degree that a better understanding of the strategic cultures of key Asian states makes this task easier, this volume will have served its purpose of both enlarging scholarship and improving policy.





STRATEGIC ASIA 2016-17

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CHAPTER EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARIES



# Understanding Strategic Cultures in the Asia-Pacific

*Ashley J. Tellis*

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This chapter explains the theoretical evolution of the concept of strategic culture and how it can be utilized to understand national decision-making in the United States and selected Asian nations.

## MAIN ARGUMENT

That cultural attributes shape strategic decisions has been understood for centuries, but modern scientific explanations of international politics have been unable to offer adequate accounts of strategic culture. Although power and the distribution of capabilities offer the best macroscopic insights into competitive international politics, ideational factors are also relevant because even materialist explanations require such overlays at both the epistemological and substantive levels. The door is thus opened for including culture even in realist arguments, an important step in the development of scientific knowledge, because all nations have a strategic culture that manifests itself at the individual, state, and societal levels. By incorporating this ubiquitous factor into analyses of grand strategy, a better understanding of specific state behaviors can be formed, which complements the more generalized understanding typically provided by realism. When done well, studies of strategic culture can help explain how ideational factors shape the acquisition and pursuit of power in international politics.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- All states arguably have unique strategic cultures, which invariably shape their political behaviors.
- The accumulation and use of national power, including material military capabilities, are constantly shaped by historical and social context.
- By synthesizing strategic culture with the realist framework, a richer understanding of individual state behavior, which makes for more effective policy responses, is possible.

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# Realpolitik with Chinese Characteristics: Chinese Strategic Culture and the Modern Communist Party-State

*Christopher A. Ford*

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This chapter examines the official narrative and ongoing scholarly debates about Chinese strategic culture and assesses the influence of this strategic culture on China's international behavior.

## MAIN ARGUMENT

Though officials in Beijing depict Chinese strategic culture as being shaped by traditional cultural values disinclining it to force and coercion, this culture's key characteristic is actually its realism: calculations of cost and opportunity tied to the balance of power and devoted to the maximization of national power within the international system. Nonrealist factors rooted in Chinese political culture do condition aspects of behavior, such as in creating an obsession with virtue narratives and image as a component of the Chinese Communist Party's political legitimacy. Realpolitik calculation, however—and a notable willingness to use violence when the balance of forces permits—represents the “bones” that underlie the ideational “flesh” of China's strategic culture. This “realpolitik with Chinese characteristics” is more problematic than classical realpolitik because of its soaring ambition for global status, prickly and insecure moralism, inflexible fear of admitting error, and tendency to rationalize and valorize the use of force in self-defense.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- A grasp of the idiosyncratic “Chineseness” of China's strategic culture and the party's legitimacy discourse can help foreign leaders pressure the regime more effectively and avoid adopting postures that are inflammatory in unwanted ways.
- Contrary to the official narrative, quasi-Confucian “virtuocratic” traditions may not pull China in the direction of benevolently pacific policy but may instead actually worsen realism's coercive and violence-prone tendencies.
- Some of the worrying effects of this “exacerbated realism” may be attenuated if the parochial interests of the party itself could be played off against the incentives of maximizing realist power in the international arena.

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# Russian Strategic Culture in the 21st Century: Redefining the West-East Balance

*Isabelle Facon*

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This chapter examines the influence of key features of Russia's strategic culture on its international behavior and discusses the potential for Russia to focus more attention on Asia.

## MAIN ARGUMENT

Russia's strategic culture is deeply rooted in the geographic and spiritual parameters of its history. An important element of this culture has been a search for security through territorial expansion due to an absence of natural physical buffers. This expansionist tendency has been reinforced by a messianic mission tied to Russia's Orthodox path. These elements have combined to solidify the exceptionalist vision underlying Russia's claim to be recognized as a great power. Russia's vast territory, perceived security vulnerabilities, and heterogeneous population have helped entrench a centralized autocratic type of governance aiming to keep internal tensions in check while resisting external pressure through the alternation of defensive and offensive behaviors. These enduring elements of Russia's strategic culture have resulted in a wavering between feelings of superiority and inferiority toward the West, with this Western-centrism producing relative neglect of the Asian vector of foreign policy; a strong reliance on military tools in national policy; and a continuous balancing between retrenchment and engagement in international affairs.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Prolonged periods of antagonism between Moscow and Washington risk intensifying the pace at which Russia seeks partners outside the West and especially in Asia.
- Given the central place that the United States occupies in Russian strategic preoccupations, Washington must strike the right balance between asserting principles, defending interests, and protecting allies while continuing to engage Russia on a vast array of topics.
- Dialogue and engagement by the United States may ease tension and help the Kremlin take a more relaxed approach on the international stage.

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# Two Strategic Cultures, Two Japans

*Alexis Dudden*

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This chapter examines the divisions in Japan's strategic culture and assesses the implications for U.S. security interests.

## MAIN ARGUMENT

Japan is deeply divided over the issue of how best to use its first-rate military. Article 9 of the constitution forfeits the right to wage war, yet recently enacted security legislation circumvents this proscription by upholding the constitutionality of collective self-defense. Nonetheless, a majority of Japanese continue to oppose the deployment of troops overseas for combat missions. At the same time, a broader historical shift is taking place that defines Japan again as a maritime state. A strategic division manifests in this context between two views of Japan's strategic culture. The first is espoused by those who would dispatch the Self-Defense Forces abroad for combat missions. The second sees a more cosmopolitan role for Japan in Asia and the world. In the latter view, Article 9 of the constitution serves as the cornerstone of a deeply realized social contract eschewing war for dependence on the U.S. protective shield.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The outcome of the debate over the constitution will define Japan's place in both the region and the world for the foreseeable future.
- Policymakers should understand the contours of the opposing positions within Japan's policy community and society at large and take seriously the depth of commitment that Japanese citizens have to the constitutional proscription against waging war beyond Japan's borders.
- Policymakers need to recognize that the so-called history issues—the living legacies of Japan's empire and war in the Asia-Pacific—are entwined with security interests and specifically Japan's debate over the use of its armed forces.

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# The Pursuit of Autonomy and South Korea's Atypical Strategic Culture

*David C. Kang and Jiun Bang*

This chapter argues that South Korea exhibits a relatively undisputed and enduring strategic culture based on autonomy that only partially corresponds to its relative power, economic wealth, and political system.

## MAIN ARGUMENT

South Korea's strategic culture centers on notions of a proud, influential, and autonomous nation—the sources of which trace back to the premodern tributary system. Given the emphasis on charting its own course and being as independent as possible in its foreign policy, South Korea believes that choosing sides between the U.S. and China goes against its national interests. Furthermore, Seoul is more comfortable with a strong China than is often believed and more skeptical of Japan than is often expected. This strategic culture stems from differing past experiences with the two countries. Whereas South Korea enjoyed years of stability as a Chinese tributary, its cataclysmic experiences during Japanese occupation left a deep impression that Japan is not to be trusted.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- South Korea does not view its choices about grand strategy as mutually exclusive, especially between its alliance with the U.S. and engagement with China. Thus, pressure on South Korea to choose will be perceived as undermining Seoul's priorities of relative autonomy and independence.
- Given the heightened tension between the U.S. and China, the South Korean government will have to pay particular attention to ensuring that its interests—particularly those regarding North Korea—do not increasingly become hijacked by Sino-U.S. rivalry.
- South Korea views its position in Asia and the world as much through an economic as a political or security lens. Its policies emphasize trade and investment as much as political or diplomatic relations, and are designed to advance its domestic economic priorities.

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# The Persistence of Nehruvianism in India's Strategic Culture

*Ian Hall*

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This chapter analyzes India's strategic culture in terms of the cultural resources on which its strategic elite draws, the main traditions of strategic thought, and their influence on India's behavior.

## MAIN ARGUMENT

India's strategic culture is informed by ideas taken from Hindu texts, nineteenth- and twentieth-century religious revivalists, and modernist thinkers. These ideas shape three traditions of strategic thought: Nehruvianism, *realpolitik*, and Hindu nationalism. The Nehruvian tradition has been dominant since independence in 1947, underpinning a commitment to strategic restraint; the other two traditions are less influential on policy but important because of the potential alternatives they offer to Nehruvianism. Moreover, if the Hindu nationalist tradition did begin to assert greater influence over India's strategic culture, Indian behavior would likely remain restrained, as that tradition emphasizes achieving domestic social unity as a precondition for the international recognition of Indian greatness.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Although India continues to grow in economic and military power, it remains wedded to strategic restraint, underpinned by the Nehruvian tradition of strategic thought and practice, which will continue to shape its approach not just to South Asia but also to China and the U.S.
- Given that India's strategic elite remains concerned with status-seeking and recognition of civilizational greatness, and remains skeptical about elements of the contemporary liberal international order, India is unlikely to align itself fully with Western policy agendas.
- The U.S. and other states will need to allow India time to further modernize its economy, develop its military capabilities, and finesse its approach to regional security. Policy and behavioral consistency will also be required to entrench the perception in the minds of India's strategic elite that the U.S. is a credible and reliable long-term strategic partner for India.



# Indonesia's Strategic Culture: The Legacy of Independence

*Yohanes Sulaiman*

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This chapter analyzes Indonesian strategic culture by examining its origin and underlying logic and assesses the impact on Indonesian foreign policy and civil-military relations.

## MAIN ARGUMENT

Indonesia's strategic culture is influenced by a combination of three major elements. The first is a constructed past that provides a united identity for a diverse population. The second is the narrative of the struggle for independence, in which the military plays a central role. The third element is the idea of a "free and active" foreign policy that stresses nonalignment. This combination creates a strategic culture that abhors the idea of military pacts, viewing them as a threat to independence; emphasizes a defensive orientation; and fears interference by foreign countries, making the country wary of any outside power growing too strong or unchecked in the neighboring region. As a result, there is a tendency for Indonesia's foreign and military policies to underbalance against growing threats from China in Southeast Asia, especially in the South China Sea, which may detrimentally influence regional security, the unity of ASEAN, and Indonesia's own strategic interests.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Although Indonesia does welcome defense cooperation, it does not want to be engaged in military alliances and pacts for fear of losing its independence.
- The inward orientation of Indonesia's military means that it does not have much power-projection ability, which undermines the country's strategic position in the region.
- While Indonesia is a key player in Southeast Asia, the U.S. may find it difficult to involve the country in broader regional efforts to counter Chinese assertiveness.

# U.S. Strategic Culture: Liberalism with Limited Liability

*Colin Dueck*

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This chapter analyzes the central components of U.S. strategic culture, considers the historical and contemporary sources of tension in that culture, and assesses their foreign policy implications.

## MAIN ARGUMENT

U.S. strategic culture is informed by classically liberal assumptions dating back to the nation's founding. According to these assumptions, the U.S. has a special role to play in promoting a more open, democratic, and liberal international order, whether by expansion or example. Yet there has always been lively debate within the U.S. over how best to promote such an order. A strong emphasis on limited liability in strategic affairs exists alongside these liberal internationalist assumptions, modifying and constraining the country in significant ways. These dual emphases—a liberal world order pursued at a limited expense—often create tensions in U.S. foreign policy strategy, encouraging gaps between ends and means. Dissident strategic subcultures also exist, notably those of progressivism and nationalism, both of which surged to prominence during the 2016 presidential primaries. It remains unclear whether these dissident strains can be reconciled with continued U.S. support for a liberal international order.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- U.S. strategic culture tends to encourage gaps between declared liberal internationalist ends and limited forward means. These gaps have been observable even in relatively successful cases, such as the rebalancing of U.S. foreign policy to Asia.
- A central task of the next president will be to address these gaps—for example, by bolstering U.S. diplomatic, economic, and military presence in East Asia.
- The perceived failure to close the gaps between ends and means in U.S. policy toward China, in particular, will only increase the likely severity of a nationalist backlash within the U.S.









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