

# European Journal of International Relations

<http://ejt.sagepub.com/>

---

**The Plasticity of Identity under Anarchy**  
*European Journal of International Relations* 2009 15: 37  
DOI: 10.1177/1354066108100052

The online version of this article can be found at:  
<http://ejt.sagepub.com/content/15/1/37>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



[Standing Group on International Relations of the ECPR](#)

**Additional services and information for *European Journal of International Relations* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://ejt.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://ejt.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

**Citations:** <http://ejt.sagepub.com/content/15/1/37.refs.html>

# The Plasticity of Identity under Anarchy

JEFFREY W. LEGRO  
*University of Virginia, USA*

---

Why do national identities usually endure but sometimes radically change? Much of the time, identity socializes or constrains leaders to act in patterned ways. Occasionally, however, leaders are able to dramatically alter those self-images. This article offers a general argument for varying identity plasticity. It brings together organizational theory and social theory to demonstrate how ideas about means to goals can in certain circumstances change how states see themselves. I examine the plausibility of this explanation in cases of continuity and change in Japan's identity in the 19th century and the Soviet Union's identity in the 20th century — in both instances challenging the common wisdom that identity was a direct product of international pressures. The argument suggests the importance of synthetic explanations — i.e. concrete generalizable propositions on how ideas and power interact in specific ways to influence the evolution of national identity.

KEY WORDS ♦ change ♦ constructivism ♦ ideas ♦ identity ♦ synthetic theory

---

---

Nations typically cling to their identity — i.e. a traditional sense of self — in a complex world. Yet with rapid communication and travel, new security challenges, and border-blind economic flows, such identities are pressured to adapt and change. How that tension is resolved shapes foreign policy, national development, and world politics. In some instances, national identities endure despite outside pressure or incentives — think here of Maoist China from 1950 to 1975, the Soviet Union from 1920 to 1985 or the United States up to World War II. Yet in others, dramatic change occurred as it did in Deng's China or in Germany and the United States after World War II. The puzzle: when can we expect national identities to be malleable and when will they be relatively resilient to change?

For much of the International Relations literature this question is hardly considered. Many scholars see little leverage in identity as a concept. Certainly states adopt labels and positions but according to these skeptics, they do so due to more basic factors — most prominently the pressures of anarchy such as security challenges or the incentives of globalization (e.g. Mearsheimer, 2001; Frieden, 2006). Identity in this view has a high plasticity — it is all product and not at all producer.

The problem with this answer is that a wide range of influential studies have done much to show the way that national identities affect politics within, between, and among countries in ways that defy factors such as international balances of power, functional economic needs, and the desires of leaders.<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, identity is a potent entity not prone to reformation even as other things change. Yet we know that identity does sometimes undergo dramatic transformation, even if that change is not a simple reflection of external forces. The challenge then is somehow accounting for this variation in plasticity — identity is malleable at some times, rigid and unyielding at others.

Constructivist scholars, who have paid the most attention to identity, have responded to this challenge in two ways. First they have offered broad, often illuminating, conceptualizations of how identities change (Kratochwil, 1989; Onuf, 1989; Wendt, 1999; Risse, 2000). The issue with such metaformulations is that they offer no concrete scheme on when change versus continuity is likely. Second, scholars have done a variety of highly skilled and contextualized studies of identity continuity and change — for example those on the Middle East, the United States, China, the Soviet Union, and Japan (Barnett, 1998; Campbell, 1998; Johnston, 1995; Hopf, 2002; Katzenstein, 1996a). The problem with these is that while they tell us much about change in a particular circumstance and time period, they do not formulate and test generalizable propositions that can be used to a priori explain continuity and change elsewhere. What Chandra and Laitin wrote in 2002 still holds true today: ‘There is no unified theory, one that goes beyond particular case studies of identity change, of why and how such change occurs.’

This article attempts to bridge the gap between macro logics and micro accounts by offering a general argument to explain both identity inertia and transformation. National identities are multidimensional and my focus in what follows will be on a specific facet that appears particularly central to a sense of nation — i.e. *international identity* or how states see themselves in relation to international order.<sup>2</sup> Here the reference point for identity is not a specific ‘other’ country or enemy, but international order itself — i.e. the dominant rules, institutions and norms that characterize the international system. Great powers adopt profiles in international politics that endure for

long periods of time but sometimes radically change — with dramatic consequences both for their own political development and the world.

Indeed, contemporary international politics have been consumed by consideration of exactly such a possibility. Might a growing China become a rebel intent on overturning the international system it has increasingly embraced since 1979? Might Japan alter its long-standing pacifism? Will Russia embrace a new expansionism? Answering these questions requires some general understanding of the sources of change and continuity in the international profiles of states.

I argue that understanding identity change and continuity requires bringing together two types of ideas typically studied separately in different literatures: (1) identities (from social theory) and (2) collectively held *policy ideas* about means or routines to achieve goals (from organization theory). In this view we should reconceptualize identity not as a monolithic entity but as a collage of fossilized policy ideas — much as ‘standard operating procedures’ (SOPs) rule organizations. The plasticity of identity depends on the fate of those ideas — specifically the expectations they generate, the results encountered, and the availability of a prominent replacement idea that can over time generate a new national sense of self vis-a-vis the world. Ideas — and the logic of their evolution — thus constitute identity as much as they are derivative of it.

This argument rejects the notion that identities and ideas are simply side products of material constraints, be they geography, the balance of power, or national wealth. Yet these factors are nonetheless important. What is needed therefore is a synthetic account of how international power interacts with prevailing national ideas to shape outcomes. E.H. Carr (1964) pointed to the importance of both power and ideas in his landmark study *The Twenty Years Crisis*.<sup>3</sup> Yet Carr offered little in terms of the specific ways the two work together to promote specific outcomes. He could not explain why some ideas (e.g. Marx’s) succeeded while other efforts to promote new ideas (e.g. Wilson’s) failed (Carr, 1964: 4, 8). He also struggled with explaining change and continuity (Carr, 1964: 208–23). A new generation of scholars has taken up these matters, grappling with the very same challenges often in the very same metatheoretical way (Jackson et al., 2004).<sup>4</sup> This article contributes to that debate by moving beyond the broad claim that power and ideas matter. It gives more specific propositions on how they work together, in a variety of different national settings, to shape identity change and continuity.

I illustrate the plausibility of the argument in two intriguing cases from very different eras, regions, and cultures: Tokugawa Japan and the Soviet Union. They both offer distinct instances of identity continuity and change. If an explanation can account for varying outcomes in both cases despite their dramatic dissimilarities, there is reason to believe it may have broader generalizability as well.

A necessary beginning is to flesh out what identity is and how it varies in international politics. The second section lays out the general explanation of that variation. The third section explores this argument in the cases of Tokugawa Japan and the Soviet Union. The conclusion addresses the implications for studying identity in world politics.

### *Definitions and Concepts*

Although commonly associated with individuals, identity in what follows refers exclusively to the collective self-image of groups, specifically that of the nation-state. Most discussions of national identity recognize that states do not have a single monolithic identity but instead distinct multiple facets of identity that are activated in different contexts and issue areas. Thus the United States is a democratic, great power, Western, wealthy, liberal, capitalist, NATO member, internationalist country — with different views and actions depending on what issue context is invoked.

Scholars typically separate identity from other ideational categories such as culture, norms, or ideas.<sup>5</sup> Here I will focus on the differences and relationship between identity and dominant ‘collectively-held’ policy ideas within nations about how to achieve interests. Identity is about self-image, ideas about particular repertoires of behavior or means to achieve goals. Identity may indeed shape the interests and perspectives of actors, but that does not mean it informs actors how to achieve interests or fulfill identities. For example, in the traditional model of rational action, explanation requires an understanding of goals (which many see as shaped by identity) and beliefs about how to achieve goals (Elster, 1986).

Different authors have used concepts similar to policy ideas — e.g. causal ideas (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993), policy legacies (Weir and Skocpol, 1985), and policy paradigms (Hall, 1993: 279).<sup>6</sup> In each of these terms, the focus is on a collective wisdom about appropriate action that need not vary with the functional demands of particular circumstances. Due to the domestic politics of ideas and international uncertainty, nations do not update ideas in simple rational and unitary actor Bayesian terms (Boulding, 1968: 2–3, 9; Legro, 2005: 24–8). Yet societies also are not ‘cultural dopes’ following a rote ‘logic of appropriateness’ (March and Olsen, 1989) without any regard to consequences. Instead, it is often the case that these ideas are to some degree politically contested and open to reflexive group assessment.

Typically, policy ideas and identity are studied separately and their interaction left unexamined. Yet a basic insight of organizational theorists is how ‘standard operating procedures’ dominate organizational personalities — especially when the organization has a broad ambiguous goal — e.g. ‘provide security’. Such theories of action can become thickly tied to how groups

see themselves (Selznick, 1957: 14–16, 38–42; Selznick, 1966: 181; Wilson, 1989). For example, the British Navy adopted a battleship fleet strategy to provide security for the island nation. Yet the dominance of that strategy became the central identity of the Navy — so much so that Britain was slow to recognize the clear functional problems of the battleship mentality in the age of the submarine and long-range bomber (Legro, 1995: 62–80).

Similarly the policy ideas of states can in some circumstances become such a standard reference point for action that they take on a value in their own right and define self-image. Policy ideas fuse into identity. States become what they do. This is an organizational approach to understanding national identity. Nations, after all, are both a wide-ranging organized bureaucracy and an aggregation of social groups. Connecting those two realities is the link between policy ideas and identity.

To focus the discussion and analysis, what follows is limited to a specific dimension of national identity — that is, *international identity* or how states view their standing in international order. International order corresponds to Bull's notion of international society based on the dominant rules and organizing principles of the international system, typically as configured by the most powerful countries. Since 1700 these rules at the global level have been dominated mostly by Western nations (Bull, 1977, Bull and Watson, 1984; Buzan and Little, 2000). Even during the Cold War when the Soviet Union and China attempted to construct an alternative order, the Euro-American system provided the dominant rules and principles.

There are three ideal types of identity a nation might have towards international order which I label here as 'trustee', 'hermit', and 'rebel'. These three types of course do not preclude other types of international orientations, but they offer a reasonably comprehensive starting point for how states relate to overall order. Each of the three is generally associated with a dominant policy idea.

The first is that of *trustee* where the state largely accepts and supports the dominant rules and norms of the international system. This tends to be the image of 'normal' countries in world affairs. Trustee identities are linked to policy ideas that prescribe acceptance of, cooperative participation in, or mutually agreed reform of, the prevailing international society (e.g. Japan today).

The second type of identity is *hermit* where a country sees itself as an outsider on a unique path of development. It believes that the way to deal with international order is to remain outside and apart from the international system. This was the case with Tokugawa Japan, it was somewhat true of interwar America and Stalin's USSR in the 1920s, and it has been the case with Myanmar and North Korea today.

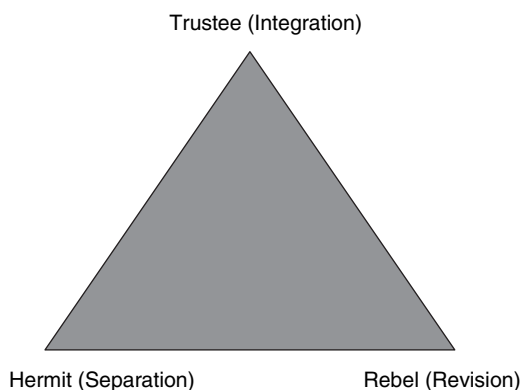
A final ideal type is *rebel* — referring to those countries that see themselves not as trustees but instead as transformers of the dominant rules and

practices in the international order. Rebel identities reject the dominant norms and embrace system transformation as the means to fulfill national interests (e.g. Napoleonic France).

No state perfectly represents any of these three ideal types. Actual international identities are typically at least some mix of types — for example, states may be revisionist in some respects but more supportive of the international rules on others. States in principle could occupy any point in the triangular field in Figure 1. In practice, however, they are likely to be attracted to one of the three vertices because of the linkages between issues and institutions that make it hard to hold diametrically opposed positions in too many different arenas. Thus it is possible to identify important countries as more or less a particular overall type in a specific era. So for example, Germany was primarily revisionist towards the dominant order in Europe in the 1930s; France in contrast accepted and promoted that system. One can categorize type through analysis of national symbols, collective memories, bureaucratic practices, educational requirements, and the speeches and language of leaders — i.e. indicators of how a country sees itself in the international system (Smith, 1991: 14–15).<sup>7</sup>

The aim is not to categorize a country as exclusively a trustee, hermit, or rebel, or to argue the desirability of any of the ideal positions. Instead it is to chart distinct shifts in the identity trajectory of a particular state over time through very different identities. ‘Change’ in this study therefore refers to a significant alteration in the way a state conceives of its relations with the world. Continuity refers to a basic stability of such concepts. The challenge is to explain why states have (and have not) made notable swings away from an existing identity and towards a new one.

*Figure 1*  
Three Ideal Types of International Identity  
(Related Policy Idea)



### *The Plasticity of Identity: The Literature*

International identities are difficult to change, and yet sometimes shift radically. Three broad arguments in the literature address this phenomenon.

The first view is that identity is highly plastic and malleable and largely spurious to other causes. Realism, for example, sees identity as a product of pressures under anarchy. To the extent that it is stable, such stability results from the continuity of the underlying sources such as the balance of power or the strategic needs of the state (Mearsheimer, 2001).

A second approach is a monolithic culturalist view that portrays identity as defining interests and behavior and ultimately reinforcing itself. Here identity is treated as self-reproducing — it never changes or at least does so inexplicably. This vision seems to offer a good guide for stable periods, yet misses a key dynamic by ignoring change that obviously does occur.

Another variant pursued by most constructivists argues that the interaction between structures (such as collective identity) and people within those structures both reproduces and transforms them (Giddens, 1979). This view, however, raises a ‘plasticity paradox’: when is it one versus the other? As Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 1) put it, ‘if identity is everywhere, it is nowhere. If it is fluid, how can we understand the ways in which self-understandings may harden, congeal, and crystallize?’ One solution to this dilemma is to appeal to the power of creative social agents who are able to persuade others to reshape collectively held orthodoxies. While there is much to these studies, ultimately they hinge on defining what is persuasive independent of the outcomes (i.e. change in collective, not just in some or even many individual, ideas) and that has been a difficult task (Dessler and Owen, 2005).

Constructivists have offered two broad responses to the plasticity paradox. The first resolves it by an appeal to basic principles. For example, Alex Wendt’s *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999: 318–36; 365–6) sees identity continuity and change as a product of interaction with others and the social learning that occurs in that process. Depending on how one is treated by others, identity can change. Yet it is not clear what drives alter and ego in one direction or another or whether the likely outcome will be the reproduction of prior identities or new identities. Wendt’s aim is a metatheory for how change in national identities might alter the nature of international anarchy. Yet in terms of change in specific identities, he also acknowledges that his account is incomplete because he explicates neither the ‘master’ (international level) variables that shape identities nor the domestic sources of national identity.

Other scholars have also grappled with the problem of change through an opposite micro-strategy that relies on careful empirical documentation in specific cases and situations. For example, Peter Katzenstein (1996a: 204) offers



a penetrating analysis of how Japanese norms and identity shaped Japan's thinking and policy over time. In contrast to Wendt, he explores primarily the domestic sources of identity. Yet for Katzenstein, general explanations of identity are only possible in stable periods. When conditions are fluid and identity is prone to malleability, Katzenstein concludes that we can only *describe* what happened in that particular situation. This reliance on idiographic explanation, featuring historical contingency and thick description, is widespread when scholars address identity change.<sup>8</sup> There is of course much to be gained from such a form of analysis. But if the aim is some general explanation of what drives identity change and continuity, a different scheme is needed.

This article addresses the plasticity paradox in international identity by building on these two approaches in several ways. First it makes an effort to transcend the macro–micro divide on studying identity with a framework that is generalizable ala Wendt but it is also concrete enough to illuminate variation in specific cases of change and continuity as in idiographic leaning studies like Katzenstein's. Second this model will attempt to bridge the international sources of identity found in Wendt with the domestic sources of identity seen in Katzenstein.<sup>9</sup> Finally, I draw off the distinction found in both works between identity and ideas and show how the latter can be central to understanding change and continuity in the former.

### *Explaining Plasticity*

Understanding identity change requires focusing on (1) what stabilizes or destabilizes existing group ideas about appropriate and desirable action and (2) what allows the emergence and consolidation of new dominant ideas about action and eventually new identities. These are matters of domestic politics and require an explanation of what allows defenders of tradition to sustain the narratives of their favored position, while in other instances they lose as the reformers are able to institutionalize a new collective wisdom. Most simply the two sides are trying to attract the largely unmotivated and distracted center of the political spectrum to their side. The key mediating dynamic that energizes the center — and determines whether international identity is reproduced or transformed — is the relationship between ideas, the expectations they project, and results.

#### *From Rigid to Malleable: Taking Down the Old*

Identities and ideas, once established, have the inertia of tradition. Those who want to challenge tradition face significant hurdles. It is often hard for individuals to know if others desire change, and if they do, how much they will risk acting on such preferences. Lacking such information, they cannot

be sure if their own desire and efforts for change (should they exist) will have any effect. They must mount a case why the old ideas were defunct in order to rally the distracted center. This involves considerable effort, and because it threatens tradition, invites political ostracism — led by the hard-core defenders of tradition (Gilbert, 1987; Kuran, 1995).

Preexisting ideas matter in this effort as the touchstone for judgment — a focal point for collective deliberation that establishes a baseline of social expectations of what should result. Societal members then assess the outcomes of foreign policy against such baselines, helping to either sustain policies or provide possibilities to overturn them.<sup>10</sup> Critics of dominant ideas almost always exist, although their numbers will vary. Sometimes an idea will be so dominant (like ‘democracy is good’ in the United States) that critics will be few and considered wacky. At other times a dominant idea will exist even while there are many doubters of its wisdom (perhaps the applicability of deterrence to terrorist threats today). Defenders of orthodoxy inevitably trumpet the positive results while critics attempt to point out the gaps and costs. Each camp is trying to persuade the center to join its side to either reinforce or overturn the current orthodoxy (Kates and Clark, 1996: 8; Levy, 1994: 305).

Critics promoting change who are going against tradition normally have a more difficult time. If expectations of the old ideas are fulfilled there is less room for criticizing the old. If the ideas are ignored and undesirable results occur, defenders of the old ideas will be able to make political hay by stressing the dangers of ignoring their advice. Likewise, continuity is likely even when dominant ideas are ignored yet desirable results occur (suggesting the need to replace the dominant orthodoxy). It is hard to gather momentum to change collective ideas when outcomes are agreeable (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). The critics may shout but the distracted center will not be moved in happy times. Rare is the demand for the firing of a coach when the team is winning, even if the coaching is poor.

The old orthodoxy can be challenged only when events generate consequences for societies that deviate from their collective expectations *and* the consequences are starkly undesirable. In such circumstances critics will yell from the rooftops for reform and in the face of failed expectations and loss have a better chance of swinging the center to their side. These individuals will be more motivated and more likely to challenge those ideas, will believe others are of a like mind, and hence the possibilities for change are more significant.

### *From Malleable to Rigid: Constructing the New*

Even when existing ideas are delegitimized, however, change is not automatic. While there may be agreement that the old should go, reformers may

still clash over what exactly the new should be and the defenders of the old will continue rearguard actions. Such a dynamic has been systematically charted in the study of revolution (Goldstone, 1991), but it also exists in foreign policy disputes and debates. Yet in some circumstances such conflict is avoided and change does occur. Why?

The consolidation of a new dominant idea, given the collapse of the old, depends on two conditions. First is the existence of a leading replacement concept (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 157–8). Replacement ideas are generated out of the constant churning of political activism within and between countries. There might be as many potential replacement ideas as there are activists or even thinkers. But only some of these gain enough social traction to receive widespread public attention. It is the distribution of ideas with social traction that are of interest here. When there are no developed replacements, the result could be a return to the old thinking due to default (no other way forward has social support); when there are many equally strong replacements, change can also fail because of deadlock among factions (thus allowing the old to rally forces to its side).

Second, the sustainability of a new orthodoxy (when a prominent replacement does exist) often hinges on some demonstration of its efficacy. Ideas that endure do so because they appear to generate desirable results. Over time these become normalized as partisans use them to convince more and more of the disinterested center to their side and to embed them, not just as a behavioral ‘rule of thumb’, but the very essence of the state. When those notions do not fare well in their early stages, revanchists often find fertile ground to argue for a return to prior ideas—and a reassertion of old ways of thinking. Thus old identities that have become malleable and open to change can re-harden in the old inertia. Think here of the example of the United States during World War I when the country experimented with involvement in European power politics, but after the conflict returned to its traditional stance of non-entanglement due to widespread disillusionment with that intervention. Old ideas can reemerge from the ashes when a core of existing organized supporters, facing an unorganized or divided opposition and the need for some national action, rallies the center back to its side.

In those situations where new policy ideas take hold, such notions can become central to how the group not only understands effective and appropriate action, but also how it sees itself. In this transition, policy ideas take on a broader value, not just as a means, but as an end and even a way of being; not just a cognitive or instrumental guide, but a value that stirs passion and rage and generates lasting emotional ties. Groups develop self-images in line with what they have already done successfully and those lessons become a national history held tightly in the heart. Identity can shape subsequent views of interests and notions of appropriate action. Identities

can grow deep roots that are not easily altered even in the face of conflicting evidence (e.g. countries often heap blame on outside agents for their own political or economic shortcomings). Still, we know that deep-seated identities and ideas do sometimes change. All things being equal, the argument above offers the conditions when that is most likely to occur.

Depending on the salience of a particular issue area to political legitimacy, the impact of idea dynamics to overall identity and political order can be quite important. Thus not all policy ideas need have a visible impact on national identity (e.g. dominant notions of how to manage federal parks), yet some are likely to be more significant due to ties to other issue areas or salience to a sense of groupness. National states represent the largest group affiliation among human societies in modern times. Thus the impact of changes in international identity — where states define themselves vis-a-vis a society of states in a shrinking world — stand out as a particularly significant source of a national sense of self.

### *Ideas and Power: A Synthesis*

Ideas are the crucible of old identity and the tinder of new identity; they are critical in the politics of both change and continuity. Yet ideas are far from the whole story. A number of scholars have argued that regime type, identity, ideas, and interests are largely the product of competitive pressures in the international system. States do what they have to do, and become who they have to become, in order to survive.<sup>11</sup> In the studies that follow, I find this argument insufficient. Identity does not directly vary with international pressure, specifically the distribution of, and/or trends in, relative capabilities (i.e. ‘power’) among states. But power does matter.

Following E.H. Carr’s lead, the key is to understand how power interacts with ideas to shape identity. One general formulation is that ideas are the pivot between external pressures and domestic politics. What is needed, however, are more specific propositions on how that works. The framework outlined suggests that relative power interacts with ideas in at least two distinct ways. First, the relative power of other countries can negate the expectations generated by a state’s ideas or identity. Hence, North Korea may aspire to being a nuclear hermit, but such a vision will be difficult to sustain if China and the United States work together in opposition. Second, relative power can play a role in nurturing (or undermining) the success and consolidation of replacement ideas as a new orthodoxy. Witness the difference in Germany of US support after World War II in promoting liberal ideas (by helping liberals to succeed in their claims) versus the weak US support and collapse of liberal ideas after World War I. The key point is that the meaning of strategic pressures is assessed vis-a-vis ideational baselines and

expectations. The role of ideas necessarily depends on regular patterns of interaction with power. As new dominant ideas in particular issue areas emerge and take hold in nations they can become naturalized and difficult to replace.

Overall, then, this account of identity change (and continuity) depicts when change versus continuity is likely, it gives an account of when and how instrumental human action relates (or not) to changes in collective phenomena such as national identity, it explicates how power and ideas interact to shape outcomes, and it provides a sense of how policy ideas relate to national identity in the context of international anarchy. In a sentence, national identity change depends on the degree to which the expectations of related policy ideas are defied by events, negative consequences result, *and* some socially viable replacement idea exists and meets expectations.

### *Case Selection and Aims*

My aim in what follows is to pick two cases to illustrate the plausibility of the argument vis-a-vis a realist strategic pressure account. The necessary brevity of these cases limits interpretive depth. Instead, the central purpose is to probe the generalizability of the argument. Hence desirable cases for these aims will have the following properties.

1. strong international pressures, thus making them a ‘hard case’ for ideas.
2. different geographic and cultural settings that normally defy generalizability.
3. different historical periods to control for cross-time applicability.
4. variation in identity change and continuity.

Two relatively familiar cases fit these requirements nicely. The first is the ‘opening’ of Japan in the 19th century and the second is Gorbachev’s ‘new thinking’ revolution in the 1980s. They are commonly interpreted as illustrating the role of systemic socialization in international politics — especially in adapting to external threat and power. These cases also offer useful cross-sections of great power thinking across two centuries, and because they are so different in time and circumstances seem to stretch a general explanation of identity change and continuity — thus making them a challenge for the argument. Most important, these two cases also have intriguing longitudinal variation as they reveal significant periods of identity continuity as well. Why did Japan and the Soviet Union maintain hermit or rebel identities for so long? And why did such identities finally give way?

My claim is that viewing identity as a product of only international strategic circumstances is insufficient. In the cases that follow, change and continuity varied more closely (both in terms of correlation and causation) with the interaction of expectations, consequences, and alternative policy ideas than with the factors highlighted by the strategic adaptation approach alone. If identity is not molded by the causal mechanisms outlined earlier, if identity dynamics can be subsumed by power then the significance and plausibility of the argument is in doubt.

### *The Transformation of Tokugawa Japan*

Tokugawa Japan's international identity went through three phases between the mid- 17th and the 20th centuries vis-a-vis the European-dominated order that was becoming global (Gong, 1984). Beginning around 1640, Japan reoriented its foreign policy to a 'closed-country' approach that limited contact with Western powers and regulated its relations in Asia. Over the next two centuries, Japan increasingly embraced this hermit perspective. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, growing numbers of Western ships made contact with Japan, but all were turned away and the Government (i.e. the Tokugawa government) tightened the closed-country rules even further (Jansen, 2000: 266–7; Beasley, 1989: 272–3). The second phase began with the famous 8 July 1853 arrival of American Matthew Perry at Edo Bay, which in popular lore 'opened' Japan, but really was the beginning of a 15-year struggle (known as the 'Bakumatsu' period) over what Japan would do. The third phase came in 1868 with the onset of the Meiji restoration when Japan replaced closed-country thinking with an open-country orthodoxy that accepted most of the prevailing ways of Western international society.

Why was Japan's hermit identity immutable for so long? Why did it become more malleable in the Bakumatsu period, yet did not change? And why did it finally give way to Japan's 'normal power' trustee self-image in the Meiji restoration?

### *International Pressures*

One explanation of why Japan abandoned its closed-country mentality attributes the change to relative power — i.e. the demands of the militarily superior Western countries in Asia in the 19th century. Faced with an inability to compete with the West and lacking its advanced technology, Japan's shift in ideas is interpreted as an effort to improve its relative position and security in a dangerous global arena.

There is no doubt that this international pressure argument captures a central part of the historical record. Without it, Japan certainly would not

have altered its course when it did. Yet it is also wanting in three respects. First, it cannot explain why Japan for so long refused options such as the copying of foreign military capabilities that would improve its relative power position and its ability to protect its autonomy. Instead, it outlawed firearms (Perrin, 1988). Moreover, Japan's relative detachment in terms of trade meant that there was no transfer of key knowledge and technologies critical to security (Howe, 1996: 70). Had Japan been more open there would have been a greater European presence from an earlier time and more Japanese would have traveled abroad and learned about the West. Such interactions would have allowed more effective transmission of information that would have helped Japan cope with the increasing European/American challenge.

Second, a power perspective cannot explain Japan's failure to collect more information on its situation and make sense of it (Jansen, 1989b: 90, 101, 106; Sukehiro, 1989: 460; Wakabayashi, 1986; Cullen, 2003: 9–10). Given what was at stake, Japan's efforts appear miniscule and not suited to the obvious threats faced, despite warnings from some within Japan (Koschman, 1987: 2–4; Harootunian, 1989: 232ff.; Jansen, 2000: 262–4). As one Japanese scholar of Western learning wrote in 1840, the Japanese 'hear the thunder and block their ears', and lacking knowledge, evaluated their security with all the 'contentment of a frog in a pond'.<sup>12</sup> The modest Japanese expansion in effort was not particularly effective at yielding good information. For example, Japan's leaders thought Holland was a major power in Europe and in 1808 believed the United States was still a colony. Even when Japan did expand its information-gathering on foreigners, it also instituted new limits and obstructions to gaining knowledge of the threat (Jansen, 1989a: 95–9).

The third gap in the realist argument for this case is it cannot tell us why Japan responded in the way it did. There was significant uncertainty about what Japan should do to deal with the Western intrusions (Beasley, 1972: 61, 90; Beasley, 1955: 23; Jansen, 2000: 280). Of the options Japan considered, all of them aimed to improve Japan's relative security, ranging from armed resistance to complete openness. For example, a Shinto priest and scholar, Hayashi Ōen argued that Japan should resist all efforts at intrusion by foreigners despite its weakness. Although initial defeats were likely, he believed that this approach would unite all samurai in a resolute resistance that would make occupation of Japan too painful to maintain by countries from so far away (Vlastos, 1995: 227). But the all-out guerilla resistance suggested by Ōen was never attempted. Why Japan chose open-country and not guerilla warfare is not explained simply by looking at Japan's relative power or the threats facing it.

### *Ideas into Identity*

International conditions and pressures of course mattered for the Japanese, but they understood their world, responded to it, and rethought it through

the lens of a long-standing self-image and a set of established behavioral principles. This is evident in the long duration of Tokugawa separatism, in the ambivalence of the Bakumatsu period, and even in the eventual change towards a new role with the emergence of the Meiji regime. In this history one sees both the relationship between ideas and identity, as well as the way that expectations and events interact to bolster continuity or spark change.

The Tokugawa founders originally adopted seclusion as a means to consolidate their political authority. Yet that policy soon became a pillar of the entire Tokugawa political and social order. To be Japanese — if it meant anything at a time when the central affiliation of most was to the local fief, not the nation — was to be separated from the broader barbarian world. This lack of contact came to be seen as natural and even a criterion of Tokugawa competence: being closed was a good thing, which a good government should ensure (Toby, 1984: 17, 230, 239–42; Jansen, 1989b: 14; Howe, 1996: 41). In short, ideas about how to provide security that favored separation from international society became Japan's unyielding international identity.

Despite increasing foreign intrusions and plentiful evidence of future danger, closed-country thinking endured because there was no public setback that could spark the social processes necessary for change. A security-minded Leviathan would have taken precautions. But Japan's identity worked against such action and the political conditions (in terms of results and expectations) did not encourage change. While foreign ships did show up, they were effectively turned away. Japan suffered no major problems during its long 18th century, ending in 1853. Thus defenders of the orthodoxy could make their case that tradition should dominate. Critics were marginalized and even stigmatized — including physical punishment and death — as happened in the 'purge of the barbarian scholars' in 1839 (Sukehiro, 1989; Wakabayashi, 1986). For the Japanese, resisting the dominant orthodoxy had stark costs simply for gaining foreign knowledge or criticizing closed-country thinking. Many of those silenced offered good arguments based on solid evidence of the threats to Japan. But the closed-country maxims privileged insularity and domestic political control over realistic adaptation to external challenges (Sukehiro, 1989: 462; Jansen, 2000: 262–263, 267–8). And in the absence of concrete failure, collective action to effect change was thwarted.

Perry's visit altered the situation because it publicly challenged the efficacy of closed-country ideas and Tokugawa competency. Perry, unlike other foreigners, refused to leave and had the firepower in his black ships to resist. Moreover, on his first visit, he succeeded in delivering his message from President Fillmore to the Shogun — thus symbolically breaching a key divide between official Japan and the foreign barbarians. The Japanese had gone to great efforts to avoid having official Japan exposed to foreign contact. Such contradictions to Japan's increasingly strident attempts to make seclusion



work undermined the defenders of tradition. News of the European victory over China (historic Asian hegemon) in the Opium wars especially suggested that Japan's seclusion was untenable. Yet change, despite the desperate vulnerability Japan faced, did not occur.

One of the central reasons for the 15-year period of continuity that followed was because there was no ready replacement idea. The alternative option of 'open-country' had virtually no social support when Perry arrived, in part due to the depth and hegemony of seclusion thinking. Those who studied the West were few and isolated both from the outside and other Japanese (Keene, 1969; Wakabayashi, 1986; Wilson, 1992: 40–1). As one scholar has noted, Japan was 'wrapped ... in an ideological orthodoxy so powerful that it prevented individuals and groups from acting with true creativity or independence, and for all but a small number of eccentrics on the margins of normal life, they made alternative ways of thinking unimaginable' (Howe, 1996: 70–1). With no clear new course to take, the default position was inertia: maintain the old orthodoxy unless absolutely pressed by superior force to yield in particular cases.

The 15-year Bakumatsu period was one where open-country thinking gained social support as an idea to replace the closed-country approach. This was a natural consequence of the increasing presence of foreigners, the failures of traditional methods of dealing with them, and declining Tokugawa ability to control the spread of open-country thinking. Proponents of armed opposition by conventional (not guerilla) means were undermined by the fact that Japan was not able to resist foreign power by doing so. The Western powers had developed superior tools of force during Japan's seclusion that were able to overwhelm Japan's limited defense efforts (Totman, 1980: 10, 12–14; Jansen, 2000: 315–16). The seclusion orthodoxy was eroded by the mismatch between expectations generated versus the results encountered — the Tokugawa regime failed to defend Japan's purity as the foreign presence spread with each new concession. As Japan worked harder to sustain closed-country, the results diminished. 'More and more foreign troops were being stationed in Japan. More and more foreign activities were taking place on Japanese soil: trade tourism, teaching, religion proselytizing, and arms selling' (Totman, 1980: 12; Beasley, 1989: 299–302). In the meantime, increasing contacts and information from the West bolstered the openness position in terms of the gap in Japan's abilities and the potential knowledge that could be gained through trade and travel to close it.

In 1868, the revolt against Tokugawa rule ended in the new Meiji regime that embraced openness with the Western world. Those leaders who overthrew the Government had realized in a variety of other interactions with the 'barbarians', especially the events of 1863–64 (when rebel leaders of Satsuma

and Choshu provinces attempted their own battles with Western powers but were defeated), that seclusion by conventional arms was not a viable strategy by the mid-1860s. When the rebels took control, they declared Japan an open country (Keene, 2002: 139–40).

The Meiji foreign policy orientation was ‘not a change of heart, but an avowal of ideas that had already taken place’ (Beasley, 1955: 93). Its open-country mindset was not immediately hegemonic. It was contested internally as seen in a number of opposition movements (e.g. the Satsuma rebellion). But open-country quickly gained political momentum and dominance through Meiji success in modernization and foreign policy. Hence Japan came to see itself as a normal great power engaging in normal activities of the time — including imperialism, as seen in Korea in the 1890s.

### *Synthesis*

Clearly, international pressures were involved in the transformation of Japan’s identity. Yet to explain the variation across the three periods of Japanese history, we must examine how those factors interacted with ideas in three ways.

First, closed-country thinking helped to blind Japan to the international pressures that suggested the need for change, and the dominance of that self-image stifled internal dissent. Second, closed-country expectations became the baseline for calculating change. The government’s inability to publicly fulfill them became a rallying point for both critics and supporters alike. As Jansen asserts and the new Meiji leaders recognized, ‘the old order was unsustainable when confronted by the crises of foreign affairs’ (Jansen, 2000: 331). Finally, it was the absence of a socially viable replacement idea (under the influence of the heavy closed-country orthodoxy) that helps explain the 15-year lag in change — as some Japanese battled to establish an alternative — even after closed-country had been delegitimized.

While the closed-country identity defined societal expectations, power played a central role in discrediting such expectations. It was specifically the contradiction of the unwanted Western intrusion of Japan’s isolation — based on the superior capabilities of the British, French, and American militaries — that undermined the claims that exclusion could equal security.

The varying plasticity of Japan’s identity over time — and the shift to a trustee identity — is found in the relationship between external events and prior ideas. One of the main vehicles of national Japanese (vs. fief) consciousness was the seclusion wall established between Japan and the barbarian. This was a founding principle of the Tokugawa order and it was to some degree dependent on the fulfillment of seclusion (Jansen, 1989b: 314;

Beasley, 1989: 235, 282, 287). Challenges to seclusion affected how the Japanese thought of themselves and their prevailing leaders. The undermining of closed-country allowed for a different way of dealing with the world. When open-country became the guiding policy idea of Meiji Japan and generated desirable results, it gained legitimacy as the ‘right’ way to deal with the world. More fundamentally, it also led to a very different national consciousness among Japanese and a new desired role, that of normal power, in the world (Kitahara, 1986: 54–68).

### *New Thinking in Soviet Russia*

Over a century after the Meiji Restoration, another country faced similar external pressures to alter its international strategy — again amidst heated internal politics over tradition. In the ‘perestroika’ of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev implemented ‘new thinking’ in a radical transformation of the way the Soviet government conceptualized how to engage the world and, in turn, a tenuous transformation from rebel to trustee (one that is still contested within Russia today). Why did the Soviet intention to overturn the capitalist West — a mentality that endured from 1917 to 1985 despite other doctrinal changes under Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev — give way to Gorbachev’s revolution that largely embraced the international order of the late 20th century? Why did change not occur sooner, like in the 1960s when conditions similar to the 1980s invited adaptation?

My answer begins with the way that identity figured in that record, and then considers how relative power played a role in the new doctrine. Scholars have paid considerable attention to the role of identity and ideas in this case.<sup>13</sup> What follows attempts to build on that literature by emphasizing the collective (not individual or psychological) dimension of ideas, explicating the mechanisms through which change worked, and showing how the specific details are part of a broader phenomenon not limited to the unique history of perestroika.

### *The Ideas–Identity Nexus*

Since its 1917 revolution, the Soviet Union largely assumed the role of rebel. It believed in inevitable competition between the capitalist and socialist blocs, the correlation of forces as favoring socialism, its eventual victory, and the formulation of a whole new international system (even as it took part in the existing one). In terms of ideas, Soviet thinking took concrete shape in its ‘correlation of forces’ strategy. Soviet leaders, especially Khrushchev, tweaked the doctrine, but over the years the basic principles remained

consistent. Soviet leaders posited that the best way to ensure the well-being of the country in light of the capitalist threat was the massing of power, above all, military power. This mindset expected that an accumulation and display of power would lead others to join, not counter, the Soviet bloc and would produce better relations with the West. Indeed Leonid Brezhnev, the leader of the Soviet Union from 1964 to 1982, held that it was primarily the expansion of Soviet power that explained détente with the West (Wohlforth, 1993: 188–92; McGwire, 1991: 82–3; Light, 1988: 276–90).

The decline of this ‘old thinking’ in Soviet foreign policy is found in the relationship between expectations generated by the old orthodoxy and the events and consequences the Soviet Union encountered by implementing that doctrine. If the extension and projection of Soviet military power was to be the main way to achieve security, the late 1970s and early 1980s brought results that sharply contradicted such expectations (Lynch, 1989: xxii; Nation, 1992: 284; Wohlforth, 1993: 227; Breslauer, 2002).

This contradiction was apparent in several areas. In Soviet–American relations, Brezhnev’s ‘offensive détente’ was met, not by concessions, but an equally hard line from the United States, first under Carter and then by Reagan (Garthoff, 1994: 758–61). In Europe, Soviet efforts to drive a wedge between the continent and the United States by deploying new medium-range nuclear missiles led to increased US–European solidarity and the matching deployment of US Pershing and Ground-Launched Cruise Missiles that could hit more quickly and accurately, putting Moscow at greater risk. Finally, the notion that increasing Soviet power would bring allies into the socialist camp was decimated by the widening of the Sino-Soviet split, a slipping Soviet grip on East Europe (the Polish crisis of 1980), and setbacks, not advances, in the Third World — as seen in the ‘bleeding wound’ of the Soviet Afghanistan invasion (Garthoff, 1994: 710–13; Ploss, 1986; English, 2000: 160–3; Mendelson, 1998: 109).<sup>14</sup>

Yet why were the 1980s so critical? Why had Soviet foreign policy expectations that had fallen short in earlier years, even in times when there were domestic economic problems, leadership change, and apparent windows of opportunity for innovation, not triggered change?<sup>15</sup> The early 1960s provide a useful brief comparison in answering these questions. In the first years of that decade many of the same conditions seen in the 1980s existed, yet a fundamental reform of foreign policy (and other areas) did not occur. Khrushchev had made some changes in foreign policy after Stalin’s death, but he did not alter the basic revisionist ethic of Soviet foreign policy. Khrushchev suffered foreign setbacks in the Second Berlin ultimatum, a schism with China, and the brinkmanship with the United States in Cuba (Wohlforth, 1993: 225–6). Moreover, the economy also showed trouble signs (Parrott, 1983: 181–7; Easterly and Fischer, 1995: 347; Brown, 1997: 134). So why

did these difficulties, themselves challenges to extant expectations, not spur reforms similar in magnitude to those of Gorbachev?

Several reasons related to collective expectations vs results and the distribution of replacement ideas help to explain this difference. The first is that the Brezhnev regime significantly inflated expectations regarding results from old thinking — thus making the ensuing gaps more salient politically. Unlike Khrushchev's boasts that were more rhetorical than operational, and more systematically disseminated in the West than internally, Brezhnev's themes were a central part of propaganda at all levels of foreign policy. As William Wohlforth points out, ideologists and writers during the Brezhnev era established an enormous corpus of writings and thought on how the correlation of forces was shifting in favor of socialism and how this was a force for détente and peace with the capitalist West. This edifice of expectations made the gaps of the 1980s into canyons of doubt (Wohlforth, 1993: 220–9; McGwire, 1991: 115–73).

Another reason is that the fragility of Soviet doctrine was baldly exposed when oil prices fell in the 1980s. In effect, Soviet ideas promoting geopolitical aggressiveness were premised on the notion that doing so would enhance Soviet power. In the 1960s and 1970s the Soviet position looked relatively robust as the United States coped with its own economic and political crises. Yet this was not due to the efficacy of the Soviet system and the correlation of forces outlook. Instead, the massive oil windfall profits masked the system's underlying shortcomings (Gustafson, 1989: 20, 40; Kotkin, 2001: 15–17; English, 2000: 146; Chernyaev, 2000: 91, 108–10). As one insider noted, 'billions of oil dollars poured into the decaying Soviet industries as a result of the energy crisis of 1973 were used as a drug providing for temporary relief and creating the illusion of a magic solution' (Kortunov, 1997: 357). The newfound wealth relieved pressures to reform standard ways of thinking. Critics had little room to challenge the orthodoxy and rally support for change. When oil prices flattened then plummeted in the 1980s, the enormous fissure in the USSR's economic possibilities and geostrategic reasoning came into full view (Wohlforth, 1993: 210, 271).

Of course, as seen in Tokugawa Japan, the collapse of the old ideas is not enough for change; there must also be a prominent replacement around which actors can rally to bring change. In the 1980s, again in contrast to the 1960s, there was. While Gorbachev came to power with the expectation that he would make changes, but no clear idea of what he would do in foreign policy, others around him did (Gorbachev, 1996: 236, 239; Chernyaev, 2000: 21, 29). Social support favoring 'new thinking' integration ideas had already taken shape by the time Gorbachev had reached power — what Robert English (2000: 2, 10, 20ff., 198–9) has chronicled 'the coalescing... [of] an alternative world view' (Evangelista, 1995: 116; Arbatov, 1992: 87; Kaiser, 1991: 87; Thomas, 2001: 223–4, 282). The origins of this outlook

are found in the Post-Stalin thaw and especially with Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the 20th Party Congress in 1956. Memoirs of new thinkers consistently reference the thaw as the beginning of recognition of the need to engage the world and that capitalism need not be inherently hostile (English, 2000: 20ff.).

By 1985, and in contrast to the early 1960s, this 'Thaw Generation' began to take over the controlling positions of power. In the earlier period there was no established, politically powerful, constituency. By the 1980s, the Soviet Union also contained a much larger and better-educated citizenry than had ever existed before.<sup>16</sup> These social and intellectual trends made the disinterested center in Russia more open to Western ideas and new thinking in foreign policy. An active intellectual community — one that was well placed in leadership and policy positions — increasingly saw Russia's future as one of integration with the liberal West. That cohort gave new thinking a prominence that set it apart from other potential alternatives (discussed below) and a clear focal point for change.

### *International Demands*

Much academic and policy wisdom asserts that ideas were simply the product of other factors in this case. Most important, scholars have argued that the international distribution of power — specifically relative Soviet decline — was the wellspring of the shift (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2000; Oye, 1995). If that were true, ideas would seem to be product, not producer, of the new thinking revolution. This power argument sheds light on important and central elements of what occurred. Consider the counterfactuals: what if the Soviet Union in the 1980s had been better off than the United States economically and had been leading the microelectronic revolution? What if oil prices had soared instead of plunging? Regardless of transnational ties or the intellectual appeal of 'common security', there would have been drastically reduced pressure for Soviet adaptation. Brooks and Wohlforth (2000), in particular, have made a strong case that Soviet economic decline predisposed the Soviet Union towards 'retrenchment'.

What their approach is less persuasive on is the timing of change and especially the new orthodoxy chosen. A strict focus on decline in this case cannot account for why some results and situations were seen as so perilous while others were not. Soviet decline, after all, had been apparent since the beginning of the 1960s. To be sure it was worse in the 1980s, but that tells us little about what threshold of decline is likely to trigger change.

In effect, how countries assess material conditions depends on the pre-existing ideas and the horizon of expectations they generate: some combinations of expectations and results are more likely to induce change than others. From this view, ideas and material conditions conjointly cause outcomes.<sup>17</sup> It

was not just that results were dramatically different in the 1980s than they were in the 1960s; it was also that expectations were much more sharply defined in the later period so that the contradiction between the two augured well for some sort of major shift.

Another problem for the strategic adaptation explanation in this case is why the Soviet Union turned to new thinking as the solution. Even more so than Meiji Japan, the USSR had flexibility in responding to pressures because outside powers could not force a change. Some alteration was likely given the conditions faced (material and ideational) in the 1980s, but this did not mean that the Soviet Union would consolidate around 'new thinking' and reengagement with international society as an alternative. There were several possible options for the Soviet Union other than the new thinking, but for different reasons these simply did not generate broad social support.<sup>18</sup> New thinking had a preexisting social momentum that made it a distinct rallying theme for change. The presence of a prominent replacement idea made change much easier in the Soviet Union of the 1990s than was true in Tokugawa Japan, which lacked a developed alternative.

### *Synthesis*

The synthetic account needed to explain the shift in Soviet identity is fairly straightforward. A shortfall in geopolitical possibilities — not just military but also economic and social — contradicted ideas that undergirded Soviet identity, helping to set up possibilities for change. But a geopolitical shortfall is not sufficient for change as seen in the lack of transformation in the 1960s. The key linkage was the interaction between expectations and results — specific expectations about the correlation of forces were plainly disappointed, thus opening the way for critics and alternative views. Domestic politics was implicated in the formulation of this alternative. The slow building of social and intellectual momentum for joining the West meant that it was the most prominent replacement idea when the opportunity for change arose. Thus, power and ideas interacted — in specific ways — to shape both the rigidity and malleability of Soviet Russia's international profile.

While parts of the new thinking have fallen by the wayside in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Russian rejection of Gorbachev's more utopian vision, the policy idea of basic integration has endured. Russia has taken on a 'trustee' role but it is a tenuous one with a fragile legitimacy. Russia after Gorbachev, especially under Putin, has also shown signs of a rebel, and Putin has done so with significant domestic support. The malleability of the new identity in this case can be attributed to the disappointing results of the new image in the 1990s. Russia suffered varying setbacks in status and material conditions that challenged the integration mindset.

Some wondered whether the old Soviet days really were so bad. This contrasts with the clearer shift in the Japanese case where early desirable results in the Meiji shift fostered a clearer institutionalization of a trustee self-image. Russia will not return to the Soviet formula, but given the disappointing record of integration in the 1990s it is no surprise that Russia with its new-found oil wealth has challenged some emerging norms of order (e.g. Western notions of democracy) with relatively little domestic criticism.

### *Conclusion*

This article offers an argument that is both generalizable and has distinct causal propositions about identity change and continuity. The brief analyses of Tokugawa Japan and the Soviet Union in no way prove that argument, but hopefully do suggest its relative plausibility across time and space. In both cases not only did change in foreign policy ideas occur, but also a fundamental reorientation in how they saw themselves in the international order. The failure of ‘closed-country’ and the ‘correlation-of-forces’ ideas to fulfill the expectations they generated did much to undermine the preexisting regimes — both through links to the economy and symbols of authority. But what was at risk was not only the regime but traditional national identity itself — at least as involved international order. Likewise the policy ideas that replaced the old and seemed to correlate with desirable outcomes served as the basis for a new national self-image vis-a-vis international order. That is, policy ideas of appropriate behavior, once established and with desirable results, over time defined how states perceived themselves and their place in the international arena. Answers to ‘how can we achieve our goals?’ debates led to ‘what is our tradition of action?’ responses which then came to define the central identity issue: ‘who are we?’

These changes did not vary directly with international pressures. Indeed what we often see is ideas shaping the very understanding of threat and power that critics claim give rise to ideas. The point is not that collective ideas and identity determine everything. International pressures were central too. Hence scholars’ attention to the connection between power and ideas is well deserved. The key, however, is to move beyond discussions of broad ontology and explicate the synergy between the two in terms of specific mechanisms that produce different outcomes. Here I have tried to show how identity continuity versus change is the product of interaction between social expectations about appropriate behavior, results, and the distribution of, and feedback to, alternative ideas. Notably, results and feedback are often mediated by the international distribution of power, but power does not determine expectations. Both are necessary components for understanding.



This is a rough synthesis, but as seen in the very different circumstances of Meiji Japan and the Soviet Union, it suggests the potential of transcending the intellectual confines of either/or 'ideas vs power' paradigmatic tests. It also offers a way to begin to anticipate reactions to a dilemma that many, perhaps all, contemporary states are caught in: pressures from the outside to alter traditional symbols and pressure from significant domestic political forces to resist such adaptation. Such tensions are evident today in places as diverse as the United States, Saudi Arabia, China, and France, and the fate of these struggles over identity will mold 21<sup>st</sup>-century world politics.

### *Notes*

For helpful comments and discussion, the author is grateful to Joshua Busby, Christina Davis, Ted Hopf, John Ikenberry, Jason Lyall, Allen Lynch, Andrew Moravcsik, John Owen, Leonard Schoppa, Arthur Stein, Marc Trachtenberg and participants in the Princeton International Relations Faculty Colloquium and the UCLA International Relations Workshop.

- 1 For examples in international relations see Campbell (1998); Katzenstein (1996b); Bukovansky (2002); Barnett (1998); Hopf (2002).
- 2 Abdelal et al. (2006) label this a 'relational comparison' identity type.
- 3 Carr (1964: 145), of course, mostly discusses liberal ideals or norms, but he blurs the differences between these terms and dominant ideas or ideology. His focus is also more on international order than national change.
- 4 Nau (2002) combines power and identity in exploring conflict and cooperation in international relations.
- 5 See Wendt (1999) on identity versus culture versus ideas. See Katzenstein (1996a: 18–22, 29–32) on the relationship between identity and norms.
- 6 Goldstein and Keohane (1993) offer a more individualist notion of ideas.
- 7 For more on the method of doing so, see Abdellal et al. (2006) and Legro (2005: 41–3, 51–5, 89–90, Appendix 2).
- 8 For example, Barnett (1998: 52) 'focuses on dialogues as a source of norm creation and inductively traces how state–society relations contributed to the state's policy at that moment'.
- 9 On this distinction see Checkel (1998) and Hopf (2002).
- 10 This is suggested in different ways by Sahlins (1991: 43–4) and Scott (1976: 6, 10).
- 11 Gourevitch (1978) reviews some of these arguments.
- 12 Watanabe Kazan as quoted in Harootunian (1989: 237–8).
- 13 See Tannenwald and Wohlforth (2005: 3–12) and other articles in this special issue of *Journal of Cold War Studies*.
- 14 See also Kull (1992) on the Third World in general.
- 15 On economic problems see Easterly and Fischer (1995). On the 'window of opportunity' analogy developed in the Soviet case, see Checkel (1997). For earlier opportunities for ideational change in the Soviet case see Checkel (1997:43–5) and Wohlforth (1993: 228–9).

- 16 In 1959 some 36 percent of the adult population had received secondary education, in 1986 that figure was over 70 percent (Dunlop, 1993: 68).
- 17 Trying to assess which mattered most probabilistically is misguided. On this issue see English (2002) and Brooks and Wohlforth (2000).
- 18 For example, the country could have embraced a strategic withdrawal without ending the Cold War. Larson and Shevchenko (2003: 82–4) detail some of the alternatives.

### References

- Abdelal, Rawi, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston and Rose McDermott (2006) 'Identity as a Variable', *Perspectives on Politics* 4(4): 695–711.
- Arbatov, G.A. (1992) *The System: An Insider's Life in Soviet Politics*. New York: Times Books.
- Barnett, Michael (1998) *Dialogues in Arab Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Beasley, William G. (1955) *Select Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy, 1853–1868*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Beasley, William G. (1972) *The Meiji Restoration*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Beasley, William G. (1989) 'The Foreign Threat and the Opening of the Ports', in Marius B. Jansen (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 5, The Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Boulding, Kenneth F. (1968) 'The Learning and Reality-Testing Process in the International System', in John C. Farrell and Asa P. Smith (eds) *Image and Reality in World Politics*, pp. 1–15. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Breslauer, George W. (2002) *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Brubaker, Rogers and Frederick Cooper (2000) 'Beyond Identity', *Theory and Society* 29: 1–47.
- Brooks, Stephen G. and William C. Wohlforth (2000) 'Power, Globalization, and the End of the Cold War: Reevaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas', *International Security* 25(3): 16–18.
- Brown, Archie (1997) *The Gorbachev Factor*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bukovansky, Mlada (2002) *Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bull, Hedley (1977) *The Anarchic Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bull, Hedley and Adam Watson (eds) (1984) *The Expansion of International Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Buzan, Barry and Richard Little (2000) *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Campbell, David (1998) *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Carr, Edward Hallett (1964) *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Chandra, Kanchan and David Laitin (2002) 'A Framework for Thinking about Identity Change', mimeo, Stanford University, CA.
- Checkel, Jeffrey T. (1997) *Ideas and International Political Change: Soviet/Russian Behavior and the End of the Cold War*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Checkel, Jeffrey T. (1998) 'The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory', *World Politics* 50(2): 324–48.
- Chernyaev, A.S. (2000) *My Six Years with Gorbachev*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Cullen, L.M. (2003) *A History of Japan 1582–1941: Internal and External Worlds*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Dessler, David and John Owen (2005) 'Constructivism and the Problem of Explanation', *Perspectives on Politics* 3(3): 597–610.
- Dunlop, John B. (1993) *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Easterly, William and Stanley Fischer (1995) 'The Soviet Economic Decline', *The World Bank Economic Review* 9(3): 341–71.
- Elster, Jon (1986) 'Introduction', in Jon Elster (ed.) *Rational Choice*, pp. 1–33. New York: New York University Press.
- English, Robert D. (2002) 'Power, Ideas, and New Evidence on the Cold War's End', *International Security* 26(4): 70–92.
- English, Robert D. (2000) *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Evangelista, Matthew (1995) *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Frieden, Jeffrey (2006) *Global Capitalism*. New York: Norton.
- Garthoff, Raymond (1994) *The Great Transition: American–Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Giddens, Anthony (1979) *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. Berkeley, CA: University of California.
- Gilbert, Margaret (1987) 'Modeling Collective Beliefs', *Synthese* 73: 185–204.
- Goldstein, Judith and Robert Keohane (eds) (1993) *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Goldstone, Jack A. (1991) *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Gong, Gerrit W. (1984) *The Standard of 'Civilization' in International Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gorbachev, Mikhail S. (1966) *Memoirs*. New York: Doubleday.
- Gourevitch, Peter (1978) 'The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics', *International Organization* 32(4): 881–912.
- Gustafson, Thane (1989) *Crisis amid Plenty: The Politics of Soviet Energy under Brezhnev and Gorbachev*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Hall, Peter (1993) 'Policy Paradigms, Social Learning and the State: The Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain', *Comparative Politics* 25(3): 275–97.
- Harootunian, H.D. (1989) 'Late Tokugawa Culture and Thought', in Marius B. Jansen (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 5, The Nineteenth Century*, pp. 168–258. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hopf, Ted (2002) *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow 1955 and 1999*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Howe, Christopher (1996) *The Origins of Japan's Trade Supremacy: Development and Technology in Asia from 1540 to the Pacific War*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Jackson, Patrick, Daniel Nexon, Jennifer Sterling-Folker, Janice Bially Mattern, Richard Ned Lebow and J. Samuel Barkin (2004) 'Bridging the Gap: Toward a Realist–Constructivist Dialogue', *International Studies Review* 6(2): 346–8.
- Jansen, Marius B. (1989a) 'Japan in the Nineteenth Century', in Marius B. Jansen (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 5, The Nineteenth Century*, pp. 50–115. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jansen, Marius B. (1989b) 'The Meiji Restoration', in Marius B. Jansen (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 5, The Nineteenth Century*, pp. 308–66. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jansen, Marius B. (2000) *The Making of Modern Japan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Johnston, Alastair Iain (1995) *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kahneman, Daniel and Amos Tversky (1979) 'Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision Under Risk', *Econometrica* 47(2): 263–92.
- Kaiser, Robert G. (1991) *Why Gorbachev Happened: His Triumphs and His Failure*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Kates, Robert W. and William C. Clark (1996) 'Environmental Surprise: Expecting the Unexpected', *Environment* 38(2): 28–34.
- Katzenstein, Peter (1996a) *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Postwar Japan*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Katzenstein, Peter (ed.) (1996b) *The Culture of National Security*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Keene, Donald (1969) *Japanese Discovery of Europe 1720–1830*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Keene, Donald (2002) *Emperor of Japan: Meiji and His World, 1852–1912*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kitahara, Michio (1986) 'The Rise of Four Mottoes in Japan', *Journal of Asian History* 20: 54–64.
- Kortunov, Andrei (1997) 'The Soviet Disintegration: Did the West Play a Role?', in Anne De Tinguy (ed.) *The Fall of the Soviet Empire*, pp. 348–62. Boulder, CO: East European Monographs.
- Koschmann, J. Victor (1987) *The Mito Ideology: Discourse, Reform, and Insurrection in Late Tokugawa Japan, 1790–1864*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

- Kotkin, Stephen (2001) *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970–2000*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kratochwil, Friedrich V. (1989) *Rules, Norms, Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kull, Steven (1992) *Burying Lenin: The Revolution in Soviet Ideology and Foreign Policy*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Kuran, Timur (1995) *Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Larson, Deborah and Alexei Shevchenko (2003) ‘Shortcut to Greatness: New Thinking and the Revolution in Soviet Foreign Policy’, *International Organization* 57(1): 77–109.
- Legro, Jeffrey W. (1995) *Cooperation under Fire*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Legro, Jeffrey W. (2005) *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Levy, Jack S. (1994) ‘Learning and Foreign Policy: Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield’, *International Organization* 48(2): 279–312.
- Light, Margot (1988) *The Soviet Theory of International Relations*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.
- Lynch, Allen (1989) *The Soviet Study of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McGwire, Michael (1991) *Perestroika and Soviet National Security*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- March, James and Johan Olsen (1989) *Rediscovering Institutions*. New York: Free Press.
- Mearsheimer, John J. (2001) *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: Norton.
- Mendelson, Sarah E. (1998) *Changing Course: Ideas, Politics, and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Nation, R. Craig (1992) *Black Earth, Red Star: A History of Soviet Security Policy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Nau, Henry (2002) *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Onuf, Nicholas Greenwood (1989) *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Oye, Kenneth A. (1995) ‘Explaining the End of the Cold War: Morphological and Behavioral Adaptations to the Nuclear Peace?’, in Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen (eds) *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War*, pp. 57–84. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Parrott, Bruce (1983) *Politics and Technology in the Soviet Union*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Perrin, Noel (1988) *Giving Up the Gun: Japan’s Reversion to the Sword, 1543–1879*. Boston, MA: David R. Godine Publisher.
- Ploss, Sidney I. (1986) *Moscow and the Polish Crisis: An Interpretation*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

- Risse, Thomas (2000) 'Let's Argue!: Communicative Action in World Politics', *International Organization* 54(1): 1–39.
- Sahlins, Marshall (1991) 'The Return of the Event, Again', in Aletta Biersack (ed.) *Clio in Oceana: Toward a Historical Anthropology*, pp. 37–99. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Scott, James (1976) *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Selznick, Phillip (1957) *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Selznick, Phillip (1966) *TVA and the Grass Roots: A Study of Politics and Organization*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Smith, Anthony (1991) *National Identity*. London: Penguin.
- Sukehiro, Hirakawa (1989) 'Japan's Turn to the West', in Marius B. Jansen (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 5, The Nineteenth Century*, pp. 432–98. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tannenwald, Nina and William Wohlforth (2005) 'Introduction: The Role of Ideas and the End of the Cold War', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7(2): 3–12.
- Thomas, Daniel C. (2001) *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Toby, Ronald (1984) *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Totman, Conrad (1980) 'From Sakoku to Kaikoku: The Transformation of Foreign Policy Attitudes, 1853–1868', *Monumenta Nipponica* 35(1): 1–19.
- Vlastos, Stephen (1995) 'Opposition Movements in Early Meiji, 1868–1885', in Marius Jansen (ed.) *The Emergence of Meiji Japan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wakabayashi, Bob Tadashi (1986) *Anti-Forcignism and Western Learning in Early Modern Japan*. Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies.
- Weir, Margaret and Theda Skocpol (1985) 'State Structures and the Possibilities for Keynesian Responses to the Great Depression in Sweden, Britain, and the United States', in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (eds) *Bringing the State Back In*, pp. 107–68. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wendt, Alexander (1999) *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, George M. (1992) *Patriots and Redeemers in Japan: Motives in the Meiji Restoration*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilson, James Q. (1989) *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*. New York: Basic Books.
- Wohlforth, William (1993) *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.