

***The Political Economy of Regionalism in East Asia.* By Hidetaka Yoshimatsu. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Hardcover: 213pp.**

The study of international relations since World War II has been shaped by three paradigms: realism, liberalism and constructivism. Yoshimatsu has deftly employed all three and applied them to aspects of East Asian inter-governmental and inter-economy relations, otherwise known as regionalism.

Yoshimatsu starts with the realist observation that Asia's states traditionally have pursued security first and foremost, but then acknowledges that new economic forces and incentives have altered the environments in which governments act, and thus the policies they employ. At this point he brings in the role of business associations, broadly conceived, as a new and significant influence on governments' choices. Government leaders' desire to maximise national economic opportunities and minimise costs and risks (or from a more abstract perspective, solve the collective action problem) oblige them to create and support intergovernmental institutions to manage international and regional economic transactions, and also aspects of diplomacy, thus manifesting the liberal paradigm.

Finally, over time and with continued usage, the norms of cooperation for mutual benefit become embedded in the minds of leaders and the discourse of inter-state diplomacy, and these norms in turn shape the subsequent practices of governments. To provide evidence of the functioning in East Asia of all three paradigms — realism, liberalism, and constructivism — simultaneously is the author's objective in this book.

Yoshimatsu is then in a position to generate five hypotheses to guide his analysis of “dynamism and challenges” in East Asia (pp. 18–19):

1. East Asian states maintain the primary objective of securing their national, political and economic interests in promoting economic diplomacy towards regional integration and cooperation.
2. East Asian states undertake strategic inter-governmental talks and strategic balancing policies and measures in order to pursue national, political and economic interests.
3. Economic forces exerted at the global and regional levels necessitate the meaningful incorporation of non-state business

- actors in promoting the consolidation of regional markets and regional economic relations.
4. East Asian states find value in functions performed by formal institutions and arrangements and in pragmatic functional cooperation that will produce immediate and practical outcomes from cooperative actions.
  5. East Asian states utilize a particular set of norms as a means to legitimate their claims and behaviour and increase their influence in the handling of regional affairs and relations.

To explore his hypotheses the author disaggregates “East Asia” into three politico-geographic entities — Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, and then the two collectively as the whole East Asia region — which he considers more or less in turn in subsequent chapters. (South Asia and the wider Asia Pacific lie outside his purview.) This allows Yoshimatsu to traverse such intuitively interesting themes as a comparison of Southeast Asian institutionalization to that of Europe, the interaction of business associations and governments in Northeast Asia, ASEAN’s “balancing and entangling” strategy regarding the region’s major powers, an analysis of China’s aims and diplomatic means and Japan’s “patchwork realism and naïve liberalism”.

This book is valuable for its wealth of information and observations on how economic dynamics have shaped recent inter-governmentalism in East Asia. It is also instructive as an illustration of how one may frame specific policies in terms of the paradigms of realism, liberalism and constructivism.

However as a test of the contemporary importance, relative impact or enduring relevance of the three paradigms, or of the five hypotheses derived from them, the book is less persuasive inasmuch as no rigorous methodology is employed to conduct a test and no counterfactual scenario or null hypothesis is offered. How the hypothesized norms have guided actions is not explicitly and systematically demonstrated, only mentioned in passing. The persuasiveness of the narrative rests on the accumulation of illustrative facts, observations and assertions, bolstered by lengthy substantive footnotes and references to numerous secondary sources.

For area specialists interested mainly in a credible update of the state of security, diplomatic and economic relations among East Asia’s governments, Yoshimatsu’s analysis will prove useful. For libraries, the book will be a worthwhile acquisition as a

repository of information-based generalities. For the more theoretically inclined, the employment of the three paradigms will appear gratuitous and the five hypotheses may be regarded as statements of the obvious.

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