**Reconstructing Japan’s Security: The Role of Military Crises**

By Bhubhindar Singh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, 240 pp, ISBN: 9781474446228 (hardback)

Over the last decade or so, Japan’s security policy has been subjected to extensive academic scrutiny, with numerous books and articles devoted to either analysing a particular set of bilateral relations or exploring certain broader transformations. Singh’s monograph which seeks to examine the means through which Japan’s security policymaking elite achieved security policy expansion in the post- Cold War era belongs to the latter body of scholarship.

As can be surmised from the title, *Reconstructing Japan’s Security* belongs to the constructivist school of International Relations. As Scott Watson ([2012](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0305829811425889)) has argued, the constructivist works in the field of security studies generally rely on one of the two approaches- securitization and framing. While Singh’s premise-that threats emanating from certain crises are presented by policymaking elites as requiring security policy expansion (pp.30-32)-closely resembles the definition of securitization, the analytical framework deployed here, as well as its application belong to the framing approach. Singh argues that in the post-Cold War era, security policymaking elites driven by the ‘normal nationalist’ agenda relied on external military crises to achieve expansion in Japan’s security policy. Following the framing approach, the role of the crises is construed here not as an objective reality that induces certain policy response, but as a policy window that enables policymaking elites to forge a narrative depicting the crisis in question and related threats in ways that justify security policy expansion. The empirical chapters of the book are devoted to exploring the ways such threats were framed by the policymaking elites with the purpose of overcoming domestic opposition and the subsequent policy outcomes.

There are four empirical chapters in the book, each devoted to one or a set of external military crises, the framing of the threats by the policymaking elites, and the subsequent policy changes. The military crises and policy changes that are the focus of this book are as follows: the 1990-91 Persian Gulf Crisis and the 1992 legislation that enabled Japan to participate in international peacekeeping activities (Chapter 3); the 1994 North Korean Nuclear Crisis, the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, the 1998 Taepodong Crisis and the inclusion of regional role for Japan’s Self Defence Forces (SDF) within the US-Japan Alliance framework (Chapter 4); the global war on terror that followed the 9/11 attacks and the further expansion of Japan’s responsibilities within the US-Japan defence cooperation framework (Chapter 5), and finally, the series of China related maritime incidents in 2010-2013 that led to the 2014 re-interpretation of Article Nine of Japan’s Constitution and subsequent legislation to enable SDF’s participation in collective self-defence missions (Chapter 6).

Few of those familiar with Japan’s security policy would find the argument that in the post-Cold War era, the ‘normal nationalist’ position which advocates for an expanded security role for Japan, gained dominance within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party as particularly new or surprising. Same goes for the argument that the ‘normal nationalists’ utilized various security crises in Asia-Pacific and beyond to achieve such expansion on the policy level.

However, the main strength of this book is not the causal linkage it establishes between external crises and changes in Japan’s security policy but its focus on the process of framing of the threat related to the crisis in question (defined by the author as threat construction) into a narrative that justified certain policy, and the detailed depiction of the measures adopted as part of the policy expansion. Indeed, the author should be commended for the meticulous analysis of the narratives forged by the policymaking elites and the subsequent policy outcomes.

*Reconstructing Japan’s Security* therefore makes an important contribution to the burgeoning literature on Japan’s security policy by exposing the linguistic techniques deployed by the policymaking elites and its unravelling of the actors and the processes involved in both the framing of the threats and policy transformations. The book is not without its shortcomings. Mass media features in the book solely as a tribune for policymaking elites. This could probably be attributed to the author’s exclusive reliance on English language sources, but this does not justify the exclusion of mass media’s agency both as an amplifier of the policymaking elites’ narrative and its critic. A detailed analysis of the counter-narratives presented by the opposition and the left-leaning intellectuals would have enriched the process tracing of threat framing. Nevertheless, Bhubhindar Singh’s timely monograph is an important piece of scholarship and a welcome addition to the constructivist literature devoted to Japan’s foreign policy.

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