

## East Asian International Relations

Through the outline of a coherent theoretical foundation for understanding East Asian international relations, this textbook offers a fresh, analytical approach, including applications of evolutionary theory that differ from and contextualize the prevailing theories currently offered for studies of East Asia. It provides an extensive coverage of ancient world order and European imperialism preceding contemporary themes of security, economic development, money and finance, regionalism, the U.S.-China rivalry, and democracy versus autocracy. Demonstrating systemically how facts and theories are constructed, and how these are bound by evolutionary constraints, students gain a realistic view of knowledge production and the mindset and tools to participate actively in determining which facts and theories are more acceptable than alternatives. Feature boxes, discussion questions, exercises, and recommended readings are incorporated into each chapter to encourage active learning. A vital new resource for advanced undergraduate and graduate students in political science, international relations, and Asian studies.

**Ming Wan** is Professor and Associate Dean at George Mason University's Schar School of Policy and Government, USA. He has authored several books, including *The Political Economy of East Asia* (2020) and *The China Model and Global Political Economy* (2017).

# East Asian International Relations

## Evolution and Social Construction

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**Ming Wan**  
George Mason University, Virginia





Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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To Anne with Love

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## Preface

My teaching experience over the past three decades has convinced me of the importance of a coherent theoretical framework to help ground studies of any particular topic. This book demonstrates systemically how facts and theories are constructed, which will give students a realistic view of knowledge production and the mindset and tools to participate actively in determining which facts and theories are more acceptable than alternatives. Jonathan Osborne and Daniel Pimentel (2022: 247), from Stanford University’s Graduate School of Education, argue that to be “competent outsiders” who can evaluate scientific claims, they have to understand “the social practices that the scientific community uses to produce reliable knowledge,” “the criteria of scientific expertise,” and “the basics of digital media literacy.” In this book, I aim at the first two competencies. At the same time, social construction of facts and theories is bound by evolutionary constraints. I therefore offer an overall evolutionary perspective to contextualize the prevailing theories for the study of East Asian international relations.

East Asia is important as a major center of economic prosperity and political power in the world, complex in multiple dimensions, and changing rapidly. Thus, an up-to-date textbook is always needed. But there is a dearth of good choices for students of East Asian international relations. As an instructor, I have increasingly used journal articles that students can access through libraries aiming at a broad IR framework and up-to-date scholarship. However, journal articles are not always suitable either and can be very challenging for students because they are written for fellow scholars. At some point, the urge to write something suitable overcomes the fear of engaging a monumental task that does not always reward authors in the academic community.

Students these days learn differently from previous generations. It is their second nature to check their phones for any particular question about a country or an event, which are often narratives. Some choose narratives that fit their belief systems, and social media platforms feed readers what their algorithms have determined to be the information that would resonate. Both instructors and students now live in an era where basic facts are being challenged everywhere, which makes the classroom ever more challenging. Addressing this particular challenge is one important reason for writing this textbook. I want to contribute a strong foundational book for students.

## Pedagogy

- There is a consistent focus on the construction of facts and theories in every chapter, rather than limiting this to the introductory chapter.

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- Figures, tables, and maps help students visualize important and surprising aspects of East Asian international relations.
- Boxed examples provide focused attention on certain events, theories, personalities, and organizations.
- Key terms are highlighted in bold to easily stand out from the rest of the text, helping students identify the fundamental concepts discussed in each chapter.
- End-of-chapter discussion questions, exercises as well as a list of recommended readings support students in their learning journey.

Online resources ([www.cambridge.org/wan](http://www.cambridge.org/wan)) include lecture slides and essay questions.

## Organization

This book has 10 chapters, divided into three parts. Chapter 1 in Part I, “Introduction and Theory,” introduces the book and theory of evolution. The next chapter examines the prevailing IR theories, with a focus on how facts and theories are constructed. Part II, “Historical Background,” consists of Chapters 3 and 4 and covers the ancient and modern history of East Asian international relations respectively. Part III, “East Asia since 1945,” follows Part II chronologically. It includes six topical chapters, Chapter 5 through to Chapter 10. The first post-1945 chapter examines American hegemony and Asian security, followed by chapters discussing East Asian economic growth, East Asian money, East Asian regionalism, the U.S.-China rivalry, and democracy versus autocracy.

For a more detailed discussion, see Section “1.3 Design of the Book” in the first chapter.

## Intended Audience

This book is intended as a core text for East Asian international relations courses and as a supplement to general IR and Asian studies courses at the upper undergraduate and graduate levels. Students taking this class will have normally already taken introduction to international relations or/and comparative politics and introduction to Asian studies. However, this textbook is also designed for students with little prior knowledge of the subject but nevertheless want to learn a bit about this big topic occupying much of the news cycle. Intellectual training acquired from this course should help students in other courses and, indeed, in the real world.

While this is a textbook, it could also be useful for those scholars searching for out-of-the-box explanations. We are at an inflection point in East Asian and world history and our theoretical understanding is likely to be drastically different a decade from now.

## Using this Book in Teaching

While the book has a coherent structure, the chapters can stand on their own as modules for instructors to follow, select, or rearrange depending on their course design. Some instructors might start with Chapter 9 on the U.S.-China rivalry and organize a class that way. My own preference is to avoid a U.S.-China centric bias where possible. The United States and China are obviously important, but there are other countries in the region and issues that do not have to always be viewed through a U.S.-China prism. The U.S.-China relationship will come up no matter the topic at hand, but instructors can use that as an opportunity to contextualize a crucial bilateral relationship in a particular section devoted to broader or different topics.

For graduate courses on East Asian international relations, I have recently chosen to discuss IR theory toward the end of the class rather than at the beginning, essentially assigning Chapter 2 on IR theory to the last week of instruction. Most students are already somewhat familiar with IR theory. It is often a better idea to get to Asia first and then summarize what we have learned in terms of applicability of IR theory. Each chapter from Chapter 3 through Chapter 10 includes IR theory in the context of East Asia in any case.

This book largely follows a chronological order, from the past to the present. For a course on a topic at least half of the students will only have limited background knowledge, therefore an instructor will need to build some foundation from the beginning. At the same time, my experience has taught me that in following a chronological order there is a danger in that we may end up burning all the energy and time in discussing the past before we ever get to the present.

This book follows two models of learning, either from cause to effect, or the reverse. The standard model is that of stimulus-reaction, seeking to understand how everything relates to each other and then predicting likely outcomes with constant adjustments for errors. The other model reverses the causal arrow and posits that people actually trace back in memory the likely factors causing an observed outcome in facts and theories. For example, why is there a U.S.-China rivalry? In practice, people often do both. If we have little memory to draw from, how do we explain the U.S.-China rivalry, for example? We then have to “borrow” others’ memory, forming one reason for groupthink.

To illustrate both models, Chapters 7–10 largely reverse the chronological order and start with the current state of affairs, building on knowledge gained from the previous chapters. In practice, instructors may choose to go either way for any topical chapter in the book. In fact, when teaching in class, it is better in some cases for instructors to start with issues that students have already heard something about and are interested in. Since students will have completed the reading assignments, including the relevant chapters from this book, instructors will be released from chasing headlines news.

Following advice from experienced Cambridge University Press editors, the organizing scheme is similar in all chapters. However, instructors should not feel obliged to follow the sequence in any particular chapter.



Another important consideration for designing class lectures and discussion is the level of analysis. My purpose for this book is to make East Asian studies more theoretical and more IR, which by definition is more general and abstract, and less about foreign policy analysis, which is typically rich in description of individual events. That said, I have been teaching East Asia for a long time and know that we cannot be theoretical without background knowledge about the region, and that some students care more about foreign policy analysis than seemingly remote theoretical discussion. It is often a hard balance to strike. I lean to the theoretical side, while having enough real-world cases, and there is some foreign policy analysis in the text, for instance of the Asian Financial Crisis and the Ukraine War. Instructors will decide which level to pitch and at what time, depending on the level of the course, the students, and the topics under discussion.

Textbooks will always have space limitation and cannot be expected to provide adequate background information for everything. It is therefore not actually necessary to even attempt such comprehensivity. Instructors might want to ask students to do a group or individual presentation on any topic, such as the North Korean nuclear negotiations, the South China Sea dispute, and the Taiwan Strait tensions. Students often do a great job with presentations (don't start me on ChatGPT!). Instructors then can work with students to become "competent outsiders" as mentioned before and learn to think like social scientists. For theoretical training, I have actually found it easier to pick a topic less familiar to the students in my class; students tend to be more opinionated and less willing to entertain alternative theoretical views with a hot-button issue they care about greatly.

It is always useful to demonstrate to students the process of knowledge production, which is never a smooth one. Though I have removed some of the thought and methodological discussion in the manuscript, my own thinking in writing this textbook is to encourage students to think along and "participate" in the production of knowledge. It is therefore important to treat much of what has been said in this textbook, polished though it may appear, as potentially problematic and up for debate.

As a political scientist, I do not have the expertise in some areas covered in an interdisciplinary textbook. Thus, I have relied on secondary sources that use original or primary source information. Similar to other scholars, I typically cite refereed scholarship in academic journals and publishers, particularly those works based heavily on primary sources. From time to time, however, I also cite well received "popular" works aimed at the general public. This book is not intended as a general survey of the literature and debates over East Asian international relations, but while writing I realized that credit should be given where it is due, particularly in so many areas outside my own research agenda. Thus, the book has ended up with more citations than originally intended. I fully recognize that my citations still cannot do justice to the vast catalog of work by a vibrant community of scholars.

I have followed the standard practice of listing Western concepts and theories as benchmarks and then examining how East Asian concepts and experiences fit into that framework. It is equally possible to put East Asian concepts and theories at the

center and introduce Western concepts and experiences into those, as many works on the subject matter written in East Asian languages often do. Some instructors may choose to do so in class. However, as this is an English-language textbook that will be used along with other works following mostly a Western framework, I have chosen the former approach. Moreover, my own preference for the process of integrating knowledge should logically allow for productive entry from any particular angle, including a Western angle, so long as we remain fully aware of the alternatives, and appreciative of those who choose to approach the subject from an East Asian perspective.

## Evolutionary Framework

Having tried several different angles to approach East Asian international relations over the years, focusing on an International Relations rather than Comparative Politics approach, I have ultimately decided that an evolutionary framework works the best for studies of East Asia. Fundamentally, nothing in East Asian international relations makes sense except in the light of evolution, to paraphrase Theodosius Dobzhansky.<sup>1</sup> East Asian values and institutions have been evolving, particularly over generations with different defining experiences, and theories applied to East Asia have also been evolving. There is an evolutionary logic to the production of knowledge and it is important to seek to understand the origins and changes of a particular theory. We can immediately see, for instance, how a particular IR theory applies to East Asia or to any region is contingent. As will be explained in Chapter 1 (Subsection 1.1.2), evolution offers the best approach to manage complexity. To address directly the level of analysis challenge discussed above, rich description facilitates evolutionary analysis because explanation is partly embedded in description (see Subsection 1.2.1). However, evolutionary explanation, not short-hand version, takes time and space to do properly. Instructors who are interested in an evolutionary framework may only be able to demonstrate a full evolutionary explanation only a few times in a course.

Based on my teaching experience, introducing or mixing in a new framework requires care in classroom instruction. I did intend to go further than a casual usage of evolutionary terms, but this textbook is not meant to be a mega test of evolutionary theory, which is already a proven science. Evolution as a philosophy of science does not compete directly with any particular IR theory deriving from different philosophies of science such as rationalism.

One common criticism of evolutionary theory is that if it explains everything it explains nothing. It is thus not necessary. But we might say the same thing about existing IR theories: If power explains everything, it explains nothing. One way to deal with that is to treat power as an umbrella term and to use specific power-related terms such as sanctions, coercion, foreign aid, and threat of force to analyze a

<sup>1</sup> Dobzhansky (1973) said, “nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution.”

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particular topic. So how should we view evolution? A key difference between the “mainstream” approaches and evolutionary theory in IR is that those approaches prevail partly because they use “workhorse” theories that are accepted by a critical mass of scholars to explain specific phenomena. Evolutionary theory should but does not yet have any recognized workhorse theory in the IR field. Evolution does have testable theories in natural science disciplines, but it is underdeveloped in the disciplines of political science and international relations. Specific evolutionary theories will hopefully emerge to explain a specific range of empirical evidence. From an evolutionary perspective, we can ask different questions as I do in this book, but we do not have to wear evolution on our sleeves all the time. This textbook is designed to allow instructors to teach with only casual reference to evolution if they choose to do so.

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# Abbreviations

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| ABF    | the Asian Bond Fund   |
| ABMI   | the Asian Bond Markets Initiative                                 |
| ADB    | the Asian Development Bank  |
| AFTA   | the ASEAN Free Trade Area   |
| AHA    | the American Historical Association                               |
| AICHR  | the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights            |
| AIIB   | the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank                          |
| AMF    | the Asian Monetary Fund   |
| AMRO   | the ASEAN Plus Three Macroeconomic Research Office                |
| APEC   | the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum                       |
| APF    | the Asia Pacific Form of National Human Rights Institutions       |
| APSA   | the American Political Science Association                        |
| APT    | the ASEAN Plus Three  |
| ARF    | the ASEAN Regional Forum  |
| ASEAN  | the Association of Southeast Asian Nations                        |
| BIS    | the Bank of International Settlements                             |
| BRI    | the Belt and Road Initiative                                      |
| CBDC   | a central bank digital currency                                   |
| CINC   | Composite Index of National Capability                            |
| CMI    | the Chiang Mai Initiative   |
| CMIM   | the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization                     |
| COMMIT | the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking |
| CPTPP  | the Comprehensive and Progressive Transpacific Partnership        |
| DPRK   | the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea                         |
| e-CNY  | e-Chinese yuan (China’s digital currency)                         |
| EAEC   | the East Asian Economic Caucus                                    |
| EAEG   | the East Asian Economic Group                                     |
| ECSC   | the European Coal and Steel Community                             |
| EFEQ   | the École Française d’Extrême-Orient                              |
| EMS    | the European Monetary System                                      |
| FONOPs | the Freedom of Navigation Operations                              |
| FTA    | a free trade agreement  |
| FTAAP  | the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific                           |
| GATT   | the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade                        |
| GDP    | Gross Domestic Product  |
| HDI    | the Human Development Index                                       |
| HDR    | <i>Human Development Report</i>                                   |

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| HPAEs  | high-performing Asian economies                                      |
| IBRD   | the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development            |
| IMF    | the International Monetary Fund                                      |
| IPE    | International Political Economy                                      |
| IPEF   | the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity                   |
| IR     | International Relations  |
| ISS    | International security studies                                       |
| ITO    | the International Trade Organization                                 |
| LDP    | the Liberal Democratic Party   |
| MFN    | most-favored-nation status   |
| MNEs   | multinational enterprises  |
| NAFTA  | the North American Free Trade Agreement                              |
| NATO   | the North Atlantic Treaty Organization                               |
| NBC    | the National Bank of Cambodia  |
| OECD   | the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development             |
| PPP    | purchasing power parity  |
| PRC    | the People’s Republic of China                                       |
| RCEP   | the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership                      |
| RMB    | Renminbi (PRC currency)  |
| ROC    | the Republic of China  |
| ROK    | the Republic of Korea  |
| RTA    | a regional trade agreement   |
| SEATO  | the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization                               |
| SIPRI  | the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute                 |
| TFP    | total factor productivity  |
| TPP    | the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement                              |
| TTIP   | the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership                   |
| UNESCO | the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| WTO    | the World Trade Organization   |