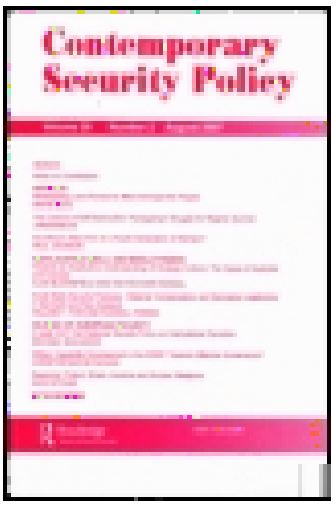

Contemporary Security Policy
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fcsp20

What Can Strategic Culture Contribute to Our Understanding of Security Policies in the Asia-Pacific Region?

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Published online: 26 Jun 2014.

To cite this article: David G. Haglund (2014): What Can Strategic Culture Contribute to Our Understanding of Security Policies in the Asia-Pacific Region?, Contemporary Security Policy, DOI: 10.1080/13523260.2014.927674

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2014.927674

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This article reflects on application of the concept of strategic culture to supply analytical and policy-relevant guidance to those who ponder the future of security relations in the Asia-Pacific. Argued here is that, notwithstanding some obvious problems with the concept, there is utility in the application of strategic culture to the analysis of regional security challenges. To claim that strategic culture may not be equally applicable to all states in the Asia-Pacific region is not the same as saying it has no applicability at all, especially if the states to which it is applicable are important regional actors. This article suggests that both an old approach derivative of national character, and a new one associated with path dependence, might together prove fruitful for policy analysts and policy-makers alike, as they wrestle with what many assume to be the fundamental question of the coming half-century in the Asia-Pacific, namely whether a great power war in the region can be averted. Although there is much variation in the manner with which authors apply the master concept of strategic culture to their specific Asia-Pacific cases, each takes seriously the utility of a cultural approach to national strategic choice. So while the quest for reliable causality and predictive capability on a region-wide basis may remain that of the will-o'-the-wisp, there can be no gainsaying that, on a case-by-case basis, the authors show that the approach can demonstrate valuable insights into the policy dilemmas of cultural provenance and content confronting the Asia-Pacific.

[illegible]: *I O e c Ne e* ?

In paraphrasing the title of Erich Maria Remarque's 1928 anti-war novel, familiar in English as *A Q r Fr* ,[1] I mean to signal my intent to confront the somewhat daunting challenge presented by Jeffrey Lantis to contextualize the poten-

As outlined in the introductory article in this collection, the Asia-Pacific has scarcely been bereft of assessments linking culture with grand strategy, even under the bounded definition many of our contributors employ that strategic culture primarily denotes a distinct set of beliefs and values appertaining to the use of force in a state's regional and global engagements. As noted in Andrew Scobell's article on China, this approach can be linked back to the works of Sun Zi, as well as forward to Alastair Iain Johnston's modern, path-breaking study of Chinese strategic culture, which continues, in so many ways, to serve as [illegible] for scholarly inquiry.[3] Nor is that all, for if one accepts that former Soviet space was, and remains, in no negligible manner contained within the Asia-Pacific geographical ambit, then it is not difficult to establish other, even earlier sources testifying to the region's role in the conceptualization of strategic culture. This comes through especially in the writings of what is sometimes referred to as the 'first wave' of strategic culturalists, during the Cold War, where Soviet and American 'space' also included the Asia-Pacific.[4]

So what does the above have to do with Remarque's book? More than might be thought, given that one of my chief purposes in this article is to ask just how much really can be said to be new on that 'eastern front' of the Asia-Pacific region. My answer will be mixed, starting with the claim that to appreciate how and why strategic culture might be of some help in coming to terms with the nexus between strategic culture(s) and regional security policies, we can do much worse than go back in

'narrative causality' and 'path dependence'. My objective in this section is to argue the applicability to the Asia-Pacific of a case whose geographical origins inhered in a different part of the world and at a different time – the transformation of security relations between the United States and the United Kingdom during the course of

‘produce different characters. Within a nation there are many different influences. Consequently there are many different characters’.[15]

There was an additional impetus for the decline of scholarly interest in national character, which set in around the midway point of the Cold War. By that time, it seemed that the concept had been getting ensnared in some of the same pitfalls that would trip up those who professed an interest in other popular concepts of the

confines of a personality-in-culture approach near and dear to social psychologists (as well as to some other psychologists and even a few psychiatrists). This was the rather blunt judgement of Bernard Hennessy, who would permit political scientists into this conceptual [illegible] on one condition only, namely when national character could be shown to have an impact upon the making of foreign policy. He argued in an article published a half-century ago in the journal of the International Studies Association, that this he did not expect to discover very often, if ever, since in his view foreign policies 'are made largely by cosmopolitan elite groups who appear to be on the whole little affected by national character or modal personality trends. And these policies are based, for the most part, on "hard" facts of geography, economics, historical traditions, and on more-or-less rationally calculated factors of power and prestige'.[19]

Finally, it is noteworthy that these early waves of scholarly interpretation and debate were underway in the early decades of the Cold War, largely focused on Euro-centric concerns. This meant that many fascinating changes underway in the Asia-Pacific region were largely ignored, including the reconstruction of Japanese strategic culture, the bitter historical experiences on the Korean peninsula, the evolution of security relations between the Philippines and its neighbours during the Vietnam War, the irascibility of American engagement in the region, and the slow emergence of China following the Cultural Revolution, to mention but a few. These changes were scarcely viewed through strategic-cultural lenses during this period, in spite of the fact that they would have profound implications for modern regional security.

[illegible]

Given what I have been arguing so far about the contentious nature of national character, how could I possibly hint that there might yet be some nuggets of precious metal contained within such an otherwise gangue-stuffed body of ore? The first step towards answering this question comes, paradoxically, from the very same Hamilton Fyfe who was so withering in his condemnation of the concept. Recall that Fyfe was not unhappy with the notion of character, but simply the national variant thereof. In his emphasis on the utility – nay, the necessity – of subnational character, he unwittingly provided some clues as to how we might apply strategic-cultural perspectives to the quest for policy-relevant knowledge regarding security in the Asia-Pacific region (or anywhere else) today. What Fyfe was saying could be otherwise expressed by reference to what could be labelled a 'fallacy of composition', namely the practice of reasoning improperly from a characteristic of a single member of a group to the character of the entire group.[20]

This problem became off-putting to the discipline of anthropology, which had done so much to inspire research into national character in the first place, both during and immediately following World War II. One of that discipline's leading scholars of those years, E. Adamson Hoebel, explained that his and his colleagues' loss of interest in a category with which they had been, during the war, so intimately associated stemmed from their collective distaste with attempts to apply 'traditional anthropological techniques to the study of large national societies' rather than to such

smaller, more appropriate units as tribes.[21] In short, anthropologists were dwelling upon the analytical distinction between the general and the specific, and opting for the latter. This has recently been finding support from security policy analysts who are starting to conclude that for strategic culture to mean anything useful, its significance can only be found in the notion of strategic 'subculture(s)'. And it is for this reason that I suggest national character might yet have something to contribute to strategic culturalists, whether they be in the Asia-Pacific region or in some other part of the world. Indeed, we have already glimpsed, in some of the other contributions to this special issue, the usefulness of strategic subcultures (to which I return in concluding, below).

Consider in this regard the claim made by an Australian security specialist with an interest in strategic culture in the Asia-Pacific, Alan Bloomfield. He notes, in a piece published by this journal, that a major drawback to date among strategic culturalists is their compulsion to attain conceptual coherence, understood both in a temporal sense (where priority is accorded more to cultural continuity than to change) and in a spatial (national) one. In respect to both dimensions, Bloomfield argues that when we talk about strategic culture, we are necessarily conjuring up a 'number of "subcultures" [that] compete for influence over strategic decision-making'. In short, the time has

cultural affair than when it is said to be influenced by various ethnic diasporas and their lobbies. This debate is an old one among those who study American foreign policy, and it flares up time and again.[24] This was the case recently and dramatically with the controversy triggered by the claim by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt that American grand strategy towards the Middle East has been negatively and profoundly influenced by what they call the 'Israel lobby'.[25]

Mead finds America's Middle East strategy to be determined by sources mainly independent of ethnic lobbies.[26] Nevertheless, ethnicity plays an indispensable part in his interpretation of America's overall strategic culture, for taking a leaf out of another David Hackett Fischer book,[27] he argues that there have been four strategic

variant (if such a thing it is) of strategic culture holds out the prospect of generating policy-relevant knowledge appertaining to security policies and dilemmas in the Asia-Pacific region? I think it can, and in arguing this position in this section of my article, I will extract meaning from interstate security relations in another part of the world (the transatlantic realm) to illustrate some ways that strategic culture understood as an instance of path-dependent behaviour might be of assistance.

But first let us ask whether this variant, borrowed from such disciplines as economics and sociology, should even be regarded as fitting within the conceptual and theoretical confines of strategic culture. It certainly is not typically considered to be resident therein, or we would already have had agreement that a fourth wave of strategic culture had been cresting over the past several years, and is now breaking upon our shores. Such agreement is not easily encountered. Still, there is a basis for culturalizing path dependence; indeed, this is suggested in the introductory article when in a review of authors Lantis considers to be third generation strategic culturalists (embodying the post-Cold War constructivist turn) he mentions a student of German strategic culture, Thomas Banchoff. This work, he suggests, gives us reason to imagine that strategic culture can be commodious enough even to embrace path dependence.[30] Indeed, the undoubtedly constructivist account of Germany's 'transformed' strategic culture Banchoff provides does make reference to the role played therein by path dependence. Noting that the typical field of application of path-dependent studies has been the arena of domestic politics, Banchoff insists that the German case 'convincingly demonstrates that the logic of path dependence can be applied to international politics'.[31] And so it can. But path dependence

debate in the social sciences,[35] let me simply observe that if we really are expected to aspire to generating policy-relevant knowledge – that is, knowledge that presupposes predictability to be within the realm of the possible, explanation must also be within that realm – and if context is ruled out-of-bounds due to its presum-

For Pierson and many others, including and especially historical sociologists, 'placing politics in time' can best, perhaps only, be done by adhering to the logic of path dependence. This is hardly a straightforward or uncontested logic.[37] But it should have an appeal to strategic-culturalists who are discontented with structural explanations of foreign policy behaviour, for instance of the sort that ascribe policy outputs to variables such as relative capability ('power'), or cumulative wealth – testifying, in short, to a conviction that 'large' causes should result in commensurately large outcomes.[38] In contrast, path dependence implies that the process itself through which history unfolds takes on causal importance, in what some scholars refer to as 'narrative positivism'.[39]

It is, of course, one thing to invoke path dependence, or narrative causation, as the mechanisms by which history can be said to continue to matter in the fashioning of strategic culture, for instance in the unobjectionable observation that choices made in the past can go on limiting policy options in the future.[40] Yet it is quite another thing actually to explicate the point. Thus we can predict that strategic-culturalists of what in these pages I have been calling the 'fourth wave' might expect to find themselves, as they draw ever closer to historical sociology, grappling with the two most important aspects of path dependency: 'temporal sequencing' and 'contingency'. For path dependence to mean anything, it cannot simply connote sensitive dependence upon initial conditions; rather, it must suggest a break point after which the ability of those initial conditions to shape the future can be shown to have altered substantially.[41]

Some will label that break point contingency, others will term it a critical juncture, by which they will mean those moments when choices get made that prove to have lasting impact, because they foreclose alternative future possibilities, through the generation of 'self-reinforcing path-dependent processes',[42] referred to varyingly as 'positive feedback', 'lock-in', or 'increasing returns' (this third formulation often being favoured by economists). Although there is no necessary reason for the logic of positive feedback to yield positive outcomes for interstate cooperation, usually the tendency of those who are enamoured of path-dependent approaches is to dwell upon efficient cooperation as that which is being locked in, and hence to forget that sometimes path dependency can consist in reactive sequences capable of generative negative outcomes for cooperation.[43]

To illustrate this, let us turn to a historical transformation in interstate cooperation that speaks to a radical transformation in the culture of strategic relations, as those are viewed through the lens of context. In other words, strategic culture, taken seriously as context, does not only apply to the individual units of analysis (that is, the respective national identities or even subcultures), but also to the relationship itself, such that one can speak legitimately of the culture of bilateral ties, as for instance in connection

Students of what nearly everyone accepts was an unusual reversal in a long-standing pattern of tense and at moments even bellicose relations between the United States and its most bitter strategic rival during the first full century of its existence as an independent republic, Great Britain, have for some time pondered why and how the two countries were able to overcome this adversarial pattern, to replace it with perhaps the best example of institutionalized positive cooperation in the entire international system – so positive that the bilateral ties are routinely heralded as the 'special relationship'.[46]

Most scholars who search for contingency in this earlier period focus their temporal sequencing either upon 1895 or 1898. The first of these dates speaks to the importance attached to the short-lived war scare at year's end over an obscure boundary dispute between Britain and Venezuela, which improbably threatened to embroil the United States in a war with the United Kingdom. In so doing, the crisis served as a reality check for policy elites on both sides of the Atlantic, suddenly confronting the absurdity of a fratricidal war between the two Anglo-Saxon countries, and reminding everyone of the urgency of working out a saner relationship between them.[51] Those who find contingency residing in the second date recognize how important for bilateral harmony was the hinge year of 1898, when Britain alone among the European powers supported America – and did so enthusiastically – in its war against Spain.[52]

By contrast, others note that the downturn in Anglo-American relations during the interwar period signified that perhaps those who looked to the end of the 19th century for evidence of the critical juncture erred by 40 years. Instead, they date the moment of institutional lock-in in the Anglo-American relationship as the late summer of 1940, and the historic American decision to begin backstopping the British war effort, initially through that season's 'destroyers-for-bases' swap, and subsequently in 1941 through Lend-Lease and convoying – all steps taken while the United States was still ostensibly neutral in World War II.[53] According to this way of

World War II. Admittedly, it will be among the more open and penetrable political systems of the Asia-Pacific region that are most likely to be encountered debates yielding insights into diverse strategic subcultures, and in this respect the United States and Australia may be the most rewarding venues for this kind of strategic-cultural analysis. Still, to claim that this manner of construing strategic culture may not be equally applicable to all states in the Asia-Pacific region is not the same as saying it has no applicability at all in the regional context, especially if the states to which it is applicable are important regional actors, as both Australia and, r r, the United States are.

If we can agree that context as culture need not be antithetical to the quest for explanation (and therefore prediction), we can bring ourselves to realize that one important way in which history matters for strategic choice is in the temporal sequencing of those events that constitute the historical record. To be sure, it is far from simple to plumb this fourth wave for policy inspiration, but that does not mean the effort should not be made. After all, there exists ample theoretical reason from a structural perspective to assume a pessimistic reading of security outcomes within the region. This suggests that at least insofar as concerns the region's great powers (China and the United States), we can expect nothing of strategic interactions other than the 'same damned thing, over and over again'.[54] Against this structural pessimism is a strategic-cultural perspective that, if not guaranteeing a happier ending to the regional security story than that provided in the structuralists' coda, at least holds out a greater prospect of one than do those accounts emanating from power-transition theory. In this alternative story, all depends upon the region's two most

(unlike, it is said, other regional powers). The result, he argues, is to blind Chinese elites (and publics) to the dangers inherent in their 'Great Wall of the imagination', first and foremost of which is the exacerbation of an Asia-Pacific regional security dilemma that looks to become more worrisome.

Andrew Oros broaches the always intriguing, if vexing, question of strategic-cultural change, in his investigation into whether one might expect Japan to depart from a decades-long posture of pacifism in favour of a return to one marked more by militarism. Important to his analysis, and not at all inconsistent with some of the other contributors' emphasis upon strategic subcultures, is the notion that strategic culture needs always to be contemplated within the context of a related notion, 'security identity', and that this latter is the outcome of a vigorously contested and negotiated political process by and among elites. For the past several decades, there have been three cardinal elements of this identity: Japan should have no tra-

in such approaches as 'network-centric warfare' (NCW) and 'effects-based operations' (EBO). This reliance on technology, Harris argues, is problematic in its potential impact on American security relations with the Asia-Pacific. He describes how the American experience with the frontier, occasioning as it did greater reliance upon technology, and accompanied by a national preoccupation with cultivating applied science, frames a modern technology-dependent approach to China and regional relations. Significantly, Harris stresses how much the contemporary pivot of the Obama administration expresses cultural continuity, instead of, as it is sometimes said, a break with continuity. In this sense, his approach to strategic culture might, , be nested within the national character paradigm.

Although there is much variation in the manner with which the above authors apply our master concept of strategic culture to their specific Asia-Pacific case studies, there is one element of commonality that deserves underscoring here: each takes seriously the utility of a cultural approach to national strategic choice. So while the quest for reliable causality and predictive capability on a region-wide basis may indeed remain what some say it has always been, namely a will-o'-the-wisp, there can be no gainsaying that, on a case-by-case basis, the authors have contributed valuable insights into the policy dilemmas of cultural provenance and content confronting the core states of the Asia-Pacific.

NOTES

1. In German,
2. See David G. Haglund, '"Let's Call the Whole Thing Off"? Security Culture as Strategic Culture', , Vol. 32 (December 2011), pp. 495–517. Also on this difficulty, see Christoph O. Meyer, 'Convergence towards a European Strategic Culture? A Constructivist Framework for Explaining Changing Norms', , Vol. 11, No. 4 (2005), pp. 523–49, citing from pp. 523–5.
3. Alastair Iain Johnston, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995). Also see Huiyun Feng, 'A Dragon on Defense: Explaining China's Strategic Culture', in Jeannnie L. Johnson, Kerry M. Kartchner, and Jeffrey A. Larsen (eds), (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 171–87.
4. Most prominently, Jack Snyder, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1977); and Colin S. Gray, 'Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back', , Vol. 25, No. 1 (1999), pp. 49–69.
5. Which is not to claim that national character was a new concept even at that time; to the contrary, scholars had been evincing interest in it for more than a century. Some argue that Tocqueville pioneered this line of social inquiry, while others trace its lineage back to David Hume, nearly a century before Tocqueville. See Reino Virtanen, 'French National Character in the Twentieth Century', , Vol. 3701, No. 3 (1967), pp. 82–92; and Srdjan Vucetic, 'The Search for Liberal Anglo-America: From Racial Supremacy to Multicultural Politics', in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.),

N : P S A r H r (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 354–55. On the concept itself, much has been written of late, with the following figuring among the best sources: S. Neil MacFarlane and Yuen Foong Khong, *H S r N* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006); Roland Paris, 'Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?', *I r S r*

49. Charles A. Kupchan, *How Enemies Become Friends: The Sources of Stable Peace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 2.
50. On the history of the bilateral relationship, see Kathleen Burk, *Old World, New World: Great Britain and America from the Beginning* (New York: Grove Press, 2009); Kenneth Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815–1908* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967); Harry Cranbrook Allen, *Anglo-American Relations since 1783* (London: Black, 1959); Charles S. Campbell, Jr., *From Revolution to Rapprochement: The United States and Great Britain, 1783–1900* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974); Robert Balmain Mowat, *The Diplomatic Relations of Great Britain and the United States* (London: E. Arnold, 1925).
51. See, on this crisis, Jennie A. Sloan, 'Anglo-American Relations and the Venezuelan Boundary Dispute', *History of American Relations*, Vol. 4 (November 1938), pp. 486–506.
52. Christopher Hitchens, *Blood, Class and Empire: The Enduring Anglo-American Relationship* (New York: Nation Books, 2004), quote at p. 30. Geoffrey Seed, 'British Reactions to American Imperialism Reflected in Journals of Opinion, 1898–1900', *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 73 (June 1958), pp. 254–72; and Sylvia L. Hilton and Steve J. S. Ickringill (eds), *Empire Perspectives on the Anglo-American Relationship in the 1898* (New York: Lang, 1999).
53. On the destroyers-bases exchange, see James R. Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy: Anglo-American Naval Collaboration, 1937–1941* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), pp. 72–93, 114–27; and Philip Goodhart, *Fifty Ships That Saved the World: The Foundation of the Anglo-American Alliance* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965).
54. This is the clear implication of John J. Mearsheimer, 'The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3 (2010), pp. 381–96.