

Explaining Japan's International Relations: The Quiet Diplomacy of an 'Aikido State'

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- ▶ [Journal issues](#)
- ▶ [Subject index](#)
- ▶ [Author index](#)
- ▶ [Articles](#)
- ▶ [Discussion papers](#)
- ▶ [Book reviews](#)
- ▶ [Film reviews](#)

Conferences and seminars

- ▶ [Conferences](#)
- ▶ [Seminars](#)

Translations

- ▶ [Translations](#)

Links

- ▶ [Links index](#)
- ▶ [Academic institutions](#)
- ▶ [Academic literature](#)
- ▶ [Information sources](#)
- ▶ [Government and politics](#)
- ▶ [Business and economy](#)
- ▶ [Search engines and portals](#)

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- ▶ [Information for authors](#)
- ▶ [Contribute to ejcs](#)
- ▶ [Editorial board](#)
- ▶ [Copyright and disclaimers](#)

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- ▶ [Search](#)

The following facts show Japan's interest in developing and intensifying its relations with the Central Asian states in the energy sphere: —In May 2006, the Japanese Ministry of Economics, Trade, and Industry published a new national energy strategy, in which the need was emphasized for expanding Japan's ties with states rich in energy resources. This project was to be based on the creation of powerful transnational corporations for extracting, processing, and transporting raw materials. In this respect, Tokyo is keeping a close eye on the strengthening of Beijing's international position, as well as the build-up of its military-political and economic potential, viewing this as a threat to its own strategic interests. Kobe University, Kobe, Japan TOSH MINOHARA. JAPAN'S PEACE-BUILDING DIPLOMACY IN ASIA: Seeking a More Active Political Role. By Peng Er Lam. international challenge of being a developed economy condemned to an abnormal pacifist stance in its foreign relations and permanently locked into an American embrace. As the Yoshida doctrine of self defense, one country. History of Japanese foreign relations deals with the international relations in terms of diplomacy, economics and political affairs from about 1850 to 2000. The kingdom was virtually isolated before the 1850s, with limited contacts through Dutch traders. The Meiji Restoration was a political revolution that installed a new leadership that was eager to borrow Western technology and organization. The government in Tokyo carefully monitored and controlled outside interactions. Japanese delegations to The Quiet Diplomacy of an 'Aikido State'? David Envall, University of Melbourne [About | Email]. Volume 3, Issue 1 (Book review 3 in 2003). Japan's International Relations introduces Japan's relations with the US using an historical overview, including a discussion on the development of

Hook, Glenn D., Julie Gilson, Christopher Hughes and Hugo Dobson(2001) *Japan's International Relations: Politics, Economics and Security*, London: Routledge, paperback, ISBN 0-415-24098-0, 576 pages, including glossary, abbreviations, chronology, bibliography, appendices and index.

Written by four scholars from British Universities — of whom Glenn Hook is hitherto the most well-known — this book, *Japan's International Relations: Politics, Economics and Security* is a comprehensive examination of Japanese foreign policy (and, more broadly, Japan's international relations) over the post-war period. The motivation for the book is "to explain in a single volume the complex web of ... [Japan's international] relations especially to advanced undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as practitioners, policy-makers and other readers" (page xxxiv). The book may not have the same appeal to all these groups; however, it is a required read for anyone interested in Japan's foreign relations.

Although not an introductory-style text, the book is nevertheless a textbook, especially in terms of layout, with lots of diagrams, sub-headings and cartoons. While textbooks of this size are certainly not unheard of, as a text for Japanese foreign policy studies, this one stands out — all together, the book has 576 pages. In addition to the main text, it contains a number of tables and figures, as well as 129 pages of chronology, bibliography, appendices and index. It is detailed, well-referenced and well-researched. Yet, the book, despite its size, has a feel of only just having squeezed everything in. Even at 576 pages, space has been at a premium, and the result is a study notable for its breadth rather than its depth.

The book includes 24 chapters and is divided into six parts. The first part and the sixth part resemble an introduction and a conclusion, while the second to fifth parts all discuss separate aspects of Japan's international relations. These middle sections address, in order, Japan-United States relations, Japan-East Asia relations, Japan-Europe relations, and the relations between Japan and global institutions. Parts two to four are further divided into five chapters. These chapters provide an *introduction* and a *conclusion*, and also look at the *political*, *economic*, and *security* aspects of each particular relationship.

Beyond a Japan of Contradictions

Japan's International Relations looks at Japan's past international relations and makes predictions about its future. The book introduces and develops themes and arguments clearly, and is a very "reasonable" account of Japanese foreign policy. Indeed, it is so "reasonable" that in one sense it is ten to fifteen years too late: it would have been of greater value had it been published during the period of "Japan bashing" and paranoia about the rising menace of Japanese power (for example, see Friedman and LeBard 1991). In another sense, however, it is a timely reminder that, despite all Japan's current problems in this age of "Japan passing", the country remains an important international political and economic power.

This often overlooked fact — that Japan is a significant player in international relations — is an important idea behind the approach of the book. Even critics of Japan are "forced to accept, either implicitly or explicitly, that Japan matters greatly in the international system" (page 8). Yet, as the book discusses in Chapter 1, Japan's "greatness" is a hotly debated issue. Many see Japanese power as varying across the spectrum of international relations issues — politics, economics and security. The argument that Japan suffers from an unevenness of power is what creates the disparity of opinion about Japan's behaviour on the international stage.

The book devotes some space to discussing why Japan matters (across the spectrum of international issues) and where Japan matters (Japan's regional and global relationships). Although it concedes that Japanese power is not equal across all areas and regions, it asserts that "Japan is not a uni-dimensional actor ... but a full actor in the political and security dimensions of international relations" (page 13). This "tri-dimensional" perspective is not only an argument for Japan's international importance, but also acts as a justification for the structure of the book. By allocating a roughly equal amount of space to each of the areas and to the different regions, the book aims to emphasise this tri-dimensional argument.

Japan is obviously important in terms of its economic role and in terms of its relationships with the United States and East Asia. However, the book's arguments for Japan's political and security importance deserve some scrutiny. The most revealing aspect of the book's political-security arguments is its use of the words *poised* and *potential*. The book argues that, having acquired a stake in the world's major institutions, "Japan could be poised for a more assertive political leadership role" (page 11). It then argues that "Japan possesses considerable military resources which provide it with the potential to be a major actor in the security dimension" (page 13). These statements, however, do not really counter what are elsewhere considered to be the numerous obstacles, both domestic and international, preventing Japan from increasing its international role. The question is whether these obstacles are greater than Japan's foreign policy potential. At the international level, for instance, Sino-Japanese and Korean-Japanese tensions, increasing US unilateralism, strategic competition between the US and China, as well as Japan's relative diplomatic isolation due to unresolved historical issues in the region, all stand in the way of Japan attaining any significant security or political role at present (Manning 1999; Mastanduno 2002).

international structures and on domestic elements in the relationship. The discussion on Japan-US political relations includes sections on how the relationship was managed during bipolarity and since the Cold War. International Situation and Japan's Diplomacy in 2018. 2 Japan's Diplomacy. Amid the various challenges facing the international order based on fundamental values that have underpinned global stability and prosperity, Japan must take on a greater responsibility and role than before, while collaborating with other countries. As a stable force in the international community, Japan will continue to build relationships of trust with countries' leaders, and while promoting its national interests, lead the international community for peace and prosperity of the world. (2) The Six Priority Areas of Japan's Foreign Policy. In order to protect and promote Japan's national interests, Japan intends to continuously strengthen the following six priority areas of its foreign policy: (1) strengthen the Japan-U.S.

Its multi-regional importance also needs to be questioned. Japan is clearly a key player in East Asia and arguments about interdependence can generally overcome scepticism about Japan's *amae* (dependence) on the United States. Yet, the book barely makes a case for Japan having a significant relationship with Europe, let alone any significant influence. Its discussion of the European connection is merely a list of characteristics: occasional opportunities for interaction, some economic concerns about fortress Europe, along with minor cooperation on drug-trafficking (pages 16–17). Consequently, the fact that Europe receives equal billing with Japan's other key relationships is quite odd. It is also unfortunate. The section on Europe is the least engaging part of the book, which sadly detracts from the other superior sections and undermines the book's multi-regional argument.

Japan's International Relations: Explaining the What, Why and How

Japan's International Relations also attempts to explain the workings of Japanese foreign policy, the “What”, “Why” and “How”. The “What” of Japan's international relations — “in terms of Japan's patterns of behaviour and role in the international system” (page 24) — refers to the fact that Japan has “been forced to interact with an international system shaped largely by the other major industrialized powers” (page 39). At times, Japan has withdrawn from the international system; at other times, it has acted unilaterally in managing its international interests. More recently, Japan has attempted to manage its interests by focusing its efforts on international cooperation and global institutions.

The book's basic premise is that, in examining the “What” and trying to answer the “Why”, the traditional approaches of international relations (IR) and international political economy (IPE) are insufficient. In terms of the “How” — the methods used by Japan — the country has defied these traditional explanations (pages 7–8). As the book notes, “Japan's pattern of behaviour, exact role and agenda, and policies and strategies in the international system remain puzzling to many when compared to the other major industrialized powers” (page 24). For instance, the realists of IR (Waltz 1993) have so far been disappointed by Japan's failure to take up a military role commensurate with its economic might. Instead, the book (pages 37–38) argues that:

[T]he tight paradigmatic frameworks of IR and IPE at least must be jettisoned. In their stead, an eclectic approach is called for which draws upon the collective insights and strengths of four traditions in the study of international relations, whilst at the same time striving to overcome their individual shortcomings and weaknesses: namely, a blending of realism and liberalism ... constructivist approaches and policy-making studies.

This mix-and-match method is ultimately founded on three key terms — *structure*, *agency* and *norms*. These terms encapsulate key thinking from the realist, liberal and constructivist schools described above, and so the book's approach is indeed “eclectic”. *Structure* refers to “the external environment in which a state and its people are enmeshed and interact” (page 39). *Agency* refers to the domestic sources of a state's foreign policies. The book argues that “states should not be seen as hermetically-sealed units which are pushed around helplessly by the vagaries of the international system” (page 40). *Norms* are those ambiguous, intangible things that “shape the behaviour” of policy-makers (page 65).

Chapter 2 examines in more detail the questions of “what”, “why” and “how” as well as the three key terms of structure, agency and norms. It provides an historical overview (1000 years of history in about five pages), with some emphasis on the contemporary period and contemporary catchphrases such as regionalisation and globalisation. It then moves on to the determinants of Japan's international relations (the three key terms), explaining quickly international structures and listing all the domestic agents and norms that shape Japan's foreign policies.

The book's breadth over depth approach is clearly apparent in this chapter and, in particular, in the part on norms. The book lists all the major norms that any good constructivist might use to characterise Japan's post-war foreign policies: bilateralism, Asianism, trilateralism, internationalism, anti-militarism, developmentalism and economism. It also examines ideas of reactivity and immobilism, as well as formal and informal proxy channels. In arguing that Japan practices “*aikidō*”, or quiet diplomacy (page 71), the book looks at the idea of cultural determinism and a range of Japanese concepts like *omote* (above the surface) and *ura* (below the surface), *nemawashi* (groundwork consultations), *ringisho* (circulated draft plan) and *kegemusha* (behind-the-scenes leader). Unfortunately, the list of factors, while comprehensive, does not lead onto more substantive discussions on the interactions between structures, norms and agents. Rather, each factor is piled on top of the others and the resulting analysis, though highly detailed, is somewhat unfocused. This flaw is particularly apparent when the book is compared with another recent textbook, written by Joseph S. Nye (2000), which deals with similar issues in international relations.

Key Subjects: the US, East Asia, Europe and Global Institutions

Japan's International Relations introduces Japan's relations with the US using an historical overview, including a discussion on the development of international structures and on domestic elements in the relationship. The discussion on Japan-US political relations includes sections on how the relationship was managed during bipolarity and since the Cold War. Some mention is made of the “Americanization” of the Japanese academic community (page 101). The economic section looks at a range of issues between the two countries, including trade conflicts, financial relations and free trade cooperation. When discussing security issues, the book examines the Cold War period in terms of the balance between “internal and external pressures” (page 127), focusing on how Japanese administrations have dealt with various alliance issues. The security treaty is discussed, as are the revised defence guidelines.

In the section on Japan's relations with East Asia, the book follows the same general pattern, first detailing the development of the modern regional structure after the end of colonialism. Japan's split with, and isolation from, East Asia is an important theme. In terms of politics, the book looks at Japan's relations with China, the two Koreas and the countries of Southeast Asia. For example, it outlines the stalled diplomacy and regular “incidents” which have characterised Japan-North Korea relations since the Cold War. The chapter on Japan's East Asian economic relations focuses on Japan's re-entry into the East Asian economy and its role as a developmental model for the countries of the region, in particular, its role as the “lead goose” in Asia (page 199). Space is given to Japan's actions before and during the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Japan's

security relations in the region are divided into Cold War and post-Cold War periods. The book makes note of Japan's conception of security in terms of "comprehensive security" and its cultivation of multilateral security forums.

Japan's relationship with Europe receives much more attention than it deserves. This is unfortunate because the extra space that would result from a spared down Europe section would have been better used for extending the other three sections. The introduction is more an overview of Europe than of Euro-Japanese relations. Like other books about Japan's encounters with European powers (Nish and Kibata 2000), the most interesting sections deal with pre-World War II relations, while the contemporary section can only talk about what is not happening or what may happen in the future. Political relations turn on the low politics of the new trilateralism, while economics involve trade, markets, and government-to-government economic relations. The section on security discusses shared interests and examples of interaction; apparently, NATO provided Japan with detailed information of their bombing of Kosovo (page 284). In a rare departure from filler, the book notes that, "For many Japanese people, 'Europe' remains only an interesting holiday destination" (page 232).

By contrast, the section on Japan and global institutions is much more engaging. Based on its ideas of internationalism and anti-militarism, Japan has pursued an institutional- and multilateral-oriented foreign policy. Japan's successes and failures in working at such institutions, therefore, have been a major determinant of whether Japan's post-war foreign policy can also be viewed as successful. This section looks at Japan's activities and roles at the UN, in the G7/8 summits and at the major economic institutions of the world, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

The book (page 365) argues that this approach raises a number of important points, including the role of Asianism in Japan's foreign policy and the tendency towards quiet diplomacy. "Japan has begun, with the end of the Cold War and the end to the structure of bipolarity, to pursue more clearly multilateral approaches to international relations" (page 365). Less noted, but also important, the section highlights (unintentionally perhaps) the mediocrity of Japan's internationalist and institutional achievements. Its failure to gain a UNSC permanent seat, its lack of a "loud voice" at the major economic institutions (despite providing generous funding), and its timidity at G7 summits reflect the influence of normative constraints on Japanese foreign policy. That is, they reflect Japan's reluctance to use all of its diplomatic tools. But they also reflect the obstacles that face Japan at the structural level of international politics (even after the end of bipolarity).

The *Aikidō* State?

The book's final section considers the future of Japan's international relations. It examines this question in terms of each of Japan's relationships (the US, Asia and Europe) and in terms of Japan's approach to global institutions. The second chapter of the section also looks at how Japan will cope with the rise of globalization.

The final section of the book also brings to the fore the somewhat plain concept of Japan's "quiet diplomacy", which appears at various stages in the book, and moulds it into a shapelier, not to mention more "germane", metaphor of Japan as the "*aikidō* state". What does the term *aikidō* imply about Japanese foreign policy? Because of its *aikidō* approach, Japan does not attempt to initiate attacks, but seeks "to control and neutralize an attack, not through sheer physical strength, but rather through connected movements that blend with the energy of an attack and redirect that energy back against the attacker" (page 376). Practitioners of *aikidō* have a different sense of time (page 377), which explains Japan's tardy responses to crises; they also have a longer-term approach to issues, which explains Japan's persistence with the AMF failure (page 378; cf. Green 2001).

Aikidō and quiet diplomacy constitute the main focus of the book's final twenty-odd pages. The book notes (page 377) that "Japan's quiet diplomacy is characterised by the norm of economism and restricted by the anti-militarist norm and has accordingly imputed economic activity above military activity with positive meaning." The conclusion drawn from these observations is that Japan is a new kind of international actor especially in tune with the new world of globalization. The book's assessment of Japan's international role, therefore, is a positive one. Made together with the *aikidō* argument, the assessment (page 391) suggests that:

it has become possible to understand Japan not simply as a reactive state, but as an alternative form of international actor, a quiet diplomat or *aikidō* state, which holds the tools to deal effectively with the changing systemic conditions of this new millennium.

Yet, this assertion — that Japan is a new, effective international actor — overextends the *aikidō* argument. This is confirmed firstly by a re-examination of the argument's key norms, economism and anti-militarism.

The main norm of Japan's quiet diplomacy, economism, was the post-war attempt to focus on economic development as a more realistic alternative to a strong military role. As the book notes (page 68), it was a creative way of combining the two norms of anti-militarism and developmentalism. Essentially, through economism, Japan's leaders recognised the constraints and opportunities of the Cold War period and pursued a pragmatic policy for rebuilding Japan. A key factor in such thinking was the prevalence of anti-militaristic norms. Anti-militarism was the product of a popular reaction to the horrors of World War II; it was also the most affordable defence policy, a kind of "100Yen" security policy for a poor nation. Lastly, it was the product of political immobilism: socialist opposition to the military, vested bureaucratic interests and so forth.

The common characteristics of these norms suggest that Japan's quiet diplomacy has been less than a comprehensive doctrine for foreign policy. First, the norms have both been compromises, to domestic political differences, economic necessity or the realities of the international system. Second, the norms, while generally successful, have also produced regular tensions, especially in terms of Japan's relationship with the United States, but also in terms of Japan's own domestic politics. In fact, the characteristics suggest that Japan has employed a quieter diplomacy because this has been the most satisfactory, if imperfect, option available to a middle power in less than ideal circumstances. Such a scenario differs considerably from the description "seeks to control and neutralize"; instead, it brings to mind a policy that aims to cope with challenges and, if possible, occasionally seize opportunities.

The quiet diplomacy thesis is also problematic if examined from an international perspective. Here, the concern is the book's emphasis on globalization and its relationship with Japan's foreign policy behaviour. An *aikidō* foreign policy works well in

an environment characterised by multilateral security forums, non-traditional security concerns such as environmental security, the prevalence of economics over security and cooperation over competition, as well as the rise of non-state actors. In other words, contrary to the book's claims to have used an eclectic approach to international affairs, the *aikidō* argument depends on a distinctly liberal-constructivist viewpoint of the emerging global political economy.

Is this a realistic interpretation of Japan's international environment or instead wishful thinking? An alternative position suggests that Japan finds itself in an unstable region, dependent on a hegemonic power, challenged by a rising power, and threatened by a rogue state. The structure of the regional system is less favourable than depicted by the globalization debaters. Furthermore, the processes of this regional system are in a state of flux. That is, the rules in Asian international relations are incomplete and ambiguous; they lie somewhere between those of an international community and those of an anarchic self-help system (Ikenberry and Tsuchiyama 2002). Japan does not enjoy the same relatively calm regional environment like that enjoyed by western European states. Again, this interpretation depicts Japan's quiet diplomacy not as a doctrine but as an expedient approach to unfavourable international circumstances. Moreover, it suggests that the *aikidō* policy is liable to obtain only partial success in protecting and advancing Japan's national interests.

Conclusion

Overall, *Japan's International Relations* is an excellent read and an excellent reference. The research and the material that is provided in the book are first rate. Some flaws do exist, however; the most important of which is the failure to balance breadth and depth in the material. The problem is unfortunately compounded by the attempt to include considerable theoretical and methodological material along with the basic historical information and main arguments. At times, the theoretical arguments are not substantially developed. Nevertheless, the book raises an enormous number of issues relating to Japanese foreign policy, both past and present. For anyone interested in Japan's international relations, therefore, it should be considered required reading.

A Selected List of the Appendices

I have not included the full list of documents contained in the appendices, but only a small selection. The book allocates 59 pages for the appendices and includes a diverse range of important and interesting documents. In addition to the extensive bibliography and the 20 pages of tables, this is a very valuable resource. Many of these documents can be found at the book's [website](#).

Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan 1960

Japan-US Joint Declaration on Security 1996

Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People's Republic of China 1978

Japan-Republic of Korea Joint Declaration 1998

Joint Declaration on Relations between the EC and Japan 1991

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Dobson, Hugo (1999), "The Failure of the Tripartite Pact: Familiarity Breeding Contempt between Japan and Germany, 1940–45", *Japan Forum*, vol.11, no.2, pp.179–90.

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Hughes, Christopher (1999), *Japan's Economic Power and Security: Japan and North Korea*, London: Routledge.

Some Useful Websites

Again, I have not included the full list of internet sites listed by the book. This simply gives an indication of its comprehensive nature.

The Website for the Book

[Japan's International Relations](#)

Links

[Asahi Shinbun](#)

[Kyōdō News](#)

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About the Author

David Envall completed his Bachelor of Arts (Honours) with majors in Japanese and Political Science at the [University of Melbourne](#), Australia, in 1998 and is now a doctoral candidate in the [Department of Political Science](#) at the same university. David was an exchange student at [Sophia University](#) in 1997 and is undertaking an MA (International Relations) course in the Graduate School of Law at [Hitotsubashi University](#), Japan. The title of his PhD research is *Leadership, Leaders and Environments: A Study of Japanese Prime Ministers at the G7 Summits*. As part of his MA course, he is comparing Japanese and Australian approaches to their alliances with the United States. From September 2003, he will be teaching a course on Japan's post-war international relations as part of the [Japan Studies Program](#) at [Tokyo International University](#).

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[Back to top](#)



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