

IR FIELD SEMINAR WEEK10

Kosuke Imai 12/1/99

Johnston. *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*.

Chapter 2: "Some Questions of Methodology."

Definition

-The problem associated with many of the existing definitions of culture is their vagueness about "what it is that culture does in a behavioral scene." This important causal link has to be established.

-Following Geertz' definition, Johnston defines strategic culture as "an integrated system of symbols (i.e. argumentation structures, languages, analogies, metaphors, etc.) that acts to establish pervasive and long-lasting grand strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs, and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious."

Components of Culture

-Culture consists of the assumptions about the orderliness of the strategic environment: the role of war in human affairs, the nature of the adversary and the threat it poses, and about the efficacy of the use of force.

-Culture limits behavioral choices: culture appears in the form of "a limited, ranked set of grand strategic preferences over actions that are consistent across the objects of analysis and persistent across time."

Objects of Analysis

-Johnston conducts the content analysis of the Seven Military Classics. The advantages of this choice is as follows: (1) they mix elements from Confucian-Mencian, Legalist and Daoist traditions in Chinese statecraft, and (2) consistent strategic precepts in these texts have been transmitted over time through the military-education systems and education of civilian top officials.

-The potential problems are (1) the majority of those texts originating during the Warring States period, and (2) strategic texts are objects of analysis produced by individuals, and thus not properly cultural products.

-Johnston's responses to these problems are (1) these texts played a significant role in during the imperial era and (2) most of works are compilations of the teachings of a strategist with collective additions by various followers, students, transmitters, and annotators, not solely attributable to an individual.

Methods of Analysis

-unit of analysis is policy argument that "a) defines policy goals and standards and b) recommends the adoption of a particular policy option or criticizes the recommended adoption of another, on the basis of projected event-trends linked to the specific implementation of specific policy options."

-Content analysis: (1) cognitive mapping which is a technique for uncovering policy arguments or linkages between certain causal axioms and their estimated behavioral effects, and (2) symbolic analysis which suggests that "symbols are the vehicles through which cultural forms (i.e. shared rules, axioms, preferences, etc.) become engaged, activated, or manifested empirically, such that culture can be communicated, learned, or contested." (decision makers may be constrained by specific intuitively derived heuristics or mental aids.)

Empirical Analysis

-Johnston takes an approach which conceives strategic culture as a consistent set of ranked preferences that persist across time and across strategic contexts. Decision makers are sensitive to structural or exogenous conditions (i.e. relative capabilities) in a culturally unique way. The interaction between strategic culture and relative capabilities is important in this approach. Finally, Johnston examines the Ming period to test his strategic-culture model against a realpolitik-dynastic cycle model. The former predicts that the levels of coerciveness should decline as the power of the empire increases whereas the latter predicts that the more powerful the empire becomes, the more belligerent it gets.