Gilbert Rozman’s *Northeast Asia’s Stunted Regionalism* is a comprehensive study of the limitations of the development of a Northeast Asian regional identity that is greater than the sum of its individual, national parts. In Europe, the growth of regional identity has been associated with institution building and confidence building, and analysts have speculated since the end of the Cold War that similar developments would occur among China, Japan, the Koreas, and Russia to reduce the likelihood of mutual suspicion and conflict. Unlike other commentators, who have cherry-picked evidence from the past fifteen years to highlight the prospects for the creation of a Northeast Asian regional identity at some undefined point in the future, Rozman begins his study of the period between 1989 and 2003 by observing that by any meaningful standard, regionalism has not developed in line with previous predictions. His study focuses on the reasons for this failure, and on applying lessons from recent history to understand the region’s future development.

Rozman argues that economic liberals have been far too optimistic in stressing the primacy of economic factors in forging a regional identity in Northeast Asia, while realists have been far too pessimistic in stressing how security fears drive countries apart. Both theoretical schools receive scant support for their predictions in this examination of the recent history of Northeast Asia. Liberal political economists have held up regionalism as an ideal, but have paid little attention to the significant barriers to regionalism in Northeast Asia in assuming that economic interdependence will erode security fears and national identities. Realist predictions of conflict over territorial disputes and counterbalancing Chinese power have also failed to materialize. Rozman argues that such reductionist analyses of Northeast Asia based on liberal or realist theories have ignored larger factors external to the region, including globalization and decentralization. He further argues that one of the primary...
causes of Northeast Asia’s limitations in developing a regional identity has been national “modernization with insufficient globalization.”

Rozman’s criticism seems targeted at international relations theory itself as it is applied to Northeast Asia. In critiquing the dominant theoretical views, he claims, “Liberal openings and realist suspicions represent the deductive propensities of social scientists disinclined to engage in detailed research on the countries of [Northeast Asia]....So-called theory serves as a crutch for not preparing to do systematic research in order to bring together the extensive facts essential for evaluating what is really happening in a region.” Rozman’s study provides a rich, inductive response to both the realist and liberal schools of thought. Using a wide range of primary sources, including much that is available only in Russian, Chinese, Japanese, or Korean, Rozman’s analysis of the dynamics of Northeast Asian regionalism from 1989 to 2003 represents a rarity in political science: a work within the international relations literature that uses multiple case studies and emphasizes comparative domestic politics. This approach is necessary because understanding the resurgence of national identities despite economic integration requires a complex and detailed examination of the domestic political behavior of individual states.

Despite Rozman’s criticism of the primary schools of international relations theory, his work is difficult to pin down along a particular theoretical line of its own. One clue to Rozman’s own theoretical leanings is his ordering of the determinants of regionalism’s success—national identity, national security, economic interests, and cultural exchange—suggesting an approach based on ideas and identities typically associated with constructivism. Indeed, Rozman bases much of his analysis of the problem of creating trust on the hostile images that many of the major states in the region have of one another. At the same time, he remains focused on the liberal promise of economic integration as a basis for regionalism, as well as the realist emphasis on major states’ security fears. Rozman’s study is thus a theoretical hybrid. It brings the debate primarily found in comparative politics between area studies and more universal rational choice approaches to international relations theory and makes a strong case for an area studies approach in analyzing the regional dynamics of Northeast Asia. It also generally but firmly criticizes the deductive methodology of political scientists in attempting to understand the reality of this complex region.

The study analyzes the dynamics of Northeast Asian regionalism chronologically from 1989 to 2003, using six periods of analysis. Critics will likely draw attention to the fact that the periods are not logically demarcated. Rozman instead attempts to focus on major trends and their development over time.
Within each period, Rozman assesses the role played by exogenous factors such as globalization and U.S. influence, attitudes toward regionalism in each of the major countries, bilateral relations among Japan, China, and Russia, and provides an overview of strategies for promoting regionalism.

In the first period Rozman analyzes, from 1989 to 1990, Cold War dynamics faded as Northeast Asian states began to focus on their own national aspirations. From 1991 to 1993, linkages between localities across national borders intensified, and many observers became optimistic about the growth of regional trade. Very quickly, however, individual nations’ fears of “cross-border duplicity” and troubles in bilateral relations created a sharp reversal in these trends, and central governments reasserted authority over their provinces, to the detriment of regional cooperation. The years 1994-1996 saw earlier optimism about regionalism’s promise founder, as historical distrust between Japan and other Asian powers prevented the consolidation of any broader identity. From 1997 to 1998, rhetoric failed to match reality, as new bilateral “strategic partnerships” masked a continuing deep national mistrust, particularly between China and Japan. In 1999 and 2000, regionalism experienced a resurgence, as South Korea’s “sunshine policy” signaled a new commitment to resolving regional security issues, regional institutions in both the economic and security realms strengthened, and an economic recovery following the Asian financial crisis contributed to growing intraregional trade. Finally, from 2001 to 2003, the United States’ pursuit of cooperation in the global war on terrorism promoted bilateral relationships with the major Asian states at the expense of regional identity. However, during the six-party negotiations over North Korea’s nuclear weapons program, regional identities may have experienced a slight resurgence.

Rozman’s recommendations for building regionalism focus on multiple country-specific strategies, while factoring in domestic political objections and the impact of globalization. Finding central conclusions in Rozman’s work is difficult because he examines the causes of regionalism’s failure and the agenda for pushing regionalism forward within each country individually. However, two broad claims stand out. The first is Rozman’s argument that Northeast Asia must be a region without a leader, because a leadership role for any state will reinforce the historical suspicions of neighboring states, limiting the prospects for forming a regional identity. Second, Rozman claims that there are no status quo powers in Northeast Asia because each state has outstanding historical claims, either based on territory or identity in some form.

Ultimately, Rozman concludes that a measured, gradual approach to regionalism based on realistic objectives can create a foundation for the con-
struction of a regional identity in a relatively short timeframe, probably by 2015. He lays out multiple steps required for this approach, but the critical agenda items include a recognition of the benefits of globalization, a shared determination to solve the North Korean nuclear problem, a security-based agreement between China and Japan, U.S. backing for a Northeast Asian regional identity, and the encouragement of South Korean and Russian involvement in regional organizations. While many of his steps are specific to particular nations, his work contributes to this debate by identifying the critical nations involved in forging a regional identity.

Rozman’s work illustrates the critical contribution that systematic, detailed case studies and analyses of domestic politics can make to debates in international relations. In addition, it demonstrates that the domestic political interpretations of global developments and bilateral relationships are critical factors influencing the possibilities and limitations of Northeast Asian regionalism. At the same time, many realist critics will point to Rozman’s recommendations and predictions as ultimately discordant with the bulk of his analysis. Why should the domestic factors that have served as barriers to regionalism change in the early twenty-first century? How can there be a true accord between China and Japan in a security environment dominated by bilateral ties to the United States? Rozman addresses the broader forces pushing toward increased regionalism, such as a growing backlash against U.S. unilateralism, the rapid pace of regional economic growth and interdependence, and common security interests. However, these factors have not yet been sufficient to resolve conflicts over clashing national identities. Consequently, despite Rozman’s cogent analysis, there appears to be little reason to believe that a more pragmatic approach to regionalism by the major states could ultimately reverse the continued prioritization of national identities over economic and security cooperation.