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The Effect of Identity-Derived Value Competition on Foreign Policy: A Study of India's Act East Policy using the Value-Action Framework

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Universiteit Leiden

**The Effect of Identity-Derived Value Competition on
Foreign Policy**
A Study of India's Act East Policy using the Value-Action
Framework

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Universiteit Leiden

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Abstract

In November 2014, India's newly elected Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the "Act East Policy" (AEP), which aims to increase economic and strategic cooperation with Indo-Pacific countries and deepen cultural relationships. It does so on a regional, multilateral, and bilateral level. Although there is academic literature on this policy, most of the literature looks at the AEP through a realist lens, thereby considering it a mere "balancing" effort against China's increasing influence in the region. This thesis opts to diversify the literature on the AEP by taking a constructivist approach. In doing so it seeks to understand how the ruling Hindu Nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) conceptions of India's state identity have shaped the AEP. Using the value-action framework and process-tracing method, this thesis finds that there are three identities which create values that shape the BJP's preferences for the AEP. Firstly, the "challenged state" identity gives rise to the 'increasing national security' value. The second identity, a "once-thriving civilization", gives rise to two closely connected values: 'creating an economically stronger India' and 'ensuring India gets its rightful place in the comity of nations and international institutions'. Lastly, the "democracy shaped by Hinduism in a changing Asian landscape" identity gives rise to the 'establishing a democratic and rules-based international order' value. However, through assessment of India's wider foreign policy behaviour this thesis finds that these values do not all carry equal weight. It argues that the pursuit of national security, prosperity and indirectly the pursuit of India's "rightful place" on the international stage were the main factors leading to the establishment of the AEP. Thus, concluding that the "challenged" state and "once-thriving civilization" identities have more influence on the AEP under BJP rule than the "democracy shaped by Hinduism in a changing Asian landscape" identity.

Keywords: *constructivism, India, identity, Act East Policy, process-tracing, value-action framework*

List of Abbreviations

AEP = Act East Policy
BCIM = Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor
BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party
BRI = Belt and Road Initiative
FTA = Free Trade Agreement
IR = International Relations
LEP = Look East Policy
MEA = Ministry of External Affairs
PII = post-imperial ideology
RCEP = Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On May 16th, 2014, the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led by Narendra Modi saw a landslide election victory which ended two terms of rule under the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty in India.¹ After his inauguration as prime-minister, Modi shared his vision for India's future:

'Together, we will script a glorious future for India. Let us together dream of a strong, developed and inclusive India that actively engages with the global community to strengthen the cause of world peace and development'²

Later that year in November, Modi started to implement this vision of India as an active state on the world stage when he announced the "Act East Policy" (AEP) during the East Asia Summit in Myanmar.³ This policy is a diplomatic effort that promotes cultural, economic, and cultural relationships with Indo-Pacific states.⁴ The term "Indo-Pacific" in this case, refers to an imagined space that combines the Pacific and Indian oceans and the land masses that border these bodies of water.⁵

The AEP is not a new foreign policy initiative but builds on India's former Look East Policy (LEP), which was introduced by then prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao in 1991.⁶ Whilst the LEP mostly focussed on Southeast Asian countries, the AEP deepened connections with the wider region, including countries like New Zealand, Australia, Japan, and South Korea.⁷ Furthermore, the AEP thematically also takes a broader approach than the LEP. The LEP was primarily concerned with building closer economic ties with ASEAN countries, whilst the AEP also seeks to deepen cultural ties and strategic relations with countries in the Indo-Pacific region.⁸ Examples of strategic cooperation can be found in civilian nuclear cooperation agreements with South Korea, Japan and Australia, sale of defence equipment to Vietnam and Myanmar and joint military maritime exercises with Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Singapore.⁹ Furthermore, an example of deepened cultural

¹ Burke. "Narendra Modi and BJP Sweep to Power in Indian Election."; NRI Tax Service. "Election 2014 - Shri Narendra Modi Led BJP Win - Certain Relevant Facts & News - a Big Congratulation from Nri Tax Service."

² Reuters. "Sworn in as India's Leader, Modi Speaks of a 'Glorious Future.'"

³ Singh. "'Act East Policy' of India: Meaning and Objectives."

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Singh. "Vikrant Kumar Edara Asked: What Does the Term 'Indo-Pacific' Signifies, as Distinct from Asia-Pacific?"

⁶ Singh. "'Act East Policy' of India: Meaning and Objectives."

⁷ Mazumdar. "FROM 'LOOK EAST' TO 'ACT EAST': INDIA'S EVOLVING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION." 363.

⁸ Singh. "'Act East Policy' of India: Meaning and Objectives."

⁹ Mazumdar. "FROM 'LOOK EAST' TO 'ACT EAST': INDIA'S EVOLVING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION."; 363.

cooperation can be found in India's provision of scholarship to ASEAN states to educate about traditional Indian medicines, therapies and yoga. Moreover, another example can be seen in India's involvement in the renovation of historical religious monuments in Bagan, Myanmar.¹⁰ These cultural efforts are regarded to signify Modi's interest in the pursuit of soft power influence in the region.¹¹

In terms of academic work, most scholars working on the AEP seem to build onto the realist perspective that India uses this policy to act against China's rise and expanding influence in the region.¹² To an extent this approach is logical as China and India have a long and complicated relationship that has even led to a recent violent border clash in December 2022.¹³ Nevertheless, more work is needed that goes beyond exploring India's reasoning for the AEP through a realist lens, as this focus creates a monolithic view of the situation. This thesis aims to contribute to a more diverse academic understanding of India's AEP by employing a constructivist perspective that highlights the importance of the social sources of state interests.¹⁴ In doing so, it focusses on the conceptions of state identity, as the importance of identity for India's foreign policy has been highlighted in various constructivist works.¹⁵ Although some of these works have specifically targeted the importance of state identity for India's LEP, there is an absence of recent constructivist work that engages with the AEP. This thesis thus aims to contribute to filling this gap by answering the following research question: "In what ways have conceptions of state identity shaped India's Act East Policy?"

In order to answer this research question, this thesis engages in process-tracing through the application of Kuniko Ashizawa's value-action framework. This framework finds that: 'a concept of state identity perceived by policymakers provides a specific value – defined here as some sort of pro-attitude toward actions of a certain kind– which in turn determines a policymaker's preference for a particular foreign policy'.¹⁶ Through its application of the

¹⁰ India News. "Cultural Diplomacy in ACT East Policy: India's Way Forward within the ASEAN Region."

¹¹ Bajpae. "Dephasing India's Look East/Act East Policy." 359.

¹² Aswani, Sajith, and Bhat. "Realigning India's Vietnam Policy Through Cooperative Sustainable Development: a Geostrategic Counterbalancing to China in Indo-Pacific."; Kumar. "India Balancing China: Exploring Soft Balancing Through Indo-Pacific."; Liu & Jamali. "India's Indo-Pacific Strategy: A Pragmatic Balancing Between the United States and China."; Mazumdar. "FROM 'LOOK EAST' TO 'ACT EAST': INDIA'S EVOLVING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION."; Rajagopalan. "Evasive Balancing: India's Unviable Indo-Pacific Strategy."

¹³ Lalwani, Markey and Singh. "Another Clash on the India-China Border Underscores Risks of Militarization."

¹⁴ Checkel. "The Constructive Turn in International Relations Theory." 324.

¹⁵ Chacko and Davis. "The Natural/neglected Relationship: Liberalism, Identity and India-Australia Relations."; Miller. "Trauma, Colonialism and Post-Imperial Ideology."; Singh. "From a Sub-Continental Power to an Asia-Pacific Player: India's Changing Identity."; Roy. "EVALUATING INDIA'S LOOK-EAST POLICY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES UNDER UPA RULE."

¹⁶ Ashizawa. "When Identity Matters: State Identity, Regional Institution-Building, and Japanese Foreign Policy." 573.

value-action framework this thesis identifies three different conceptions of state-identity relevant to the AEP: a “challenged state”, a “once-thriving civilization” and a “democracy shaped by Hinduism in a changing Asian landscape”.

These identities give rise to four values: the ‘increasing national security’ value, the ‘creating an economically stronger India’ value, the ‘ensuring India gets its rightful place in the comity of nations and international institutions’ value and the ‘establishing a democratic and rules-based international order’ value, which together shape the Indian government’s preferences for increased Indo-Pacific connectivity through the AEP.

This thesis finds that although these values are all equally important in rhetoric, a closer look at India’s wider foreign policy actions suggest that in the end the ‘increasing national security’ value, the ‘creating an economically stronger India’ value and indirectly the ‘ensuring India gets its rightful place in the comity of nations and international institutions’ value are the dominant values dictating India’s foreign policy behaviour under BJP rule. Thereby, suggesting that the “challenged state” and “once-thriving civilization” identities had the most influence on the establishment of the AEP.

Chapter 2 explores the realist, liberalist and constructivist academic literature on India’s foreign policy and the AEP. It argues that although realist and liberalist perspectives offer important insights on India’s foreign policy and the AEP, these perspectives neglect the effects of the social dimension of international relations, like state identity. Thereby, highlighting the necessity for more constructivist work on India’s foreign policy and the AEP specifically.

Subsequently, Chapter 3 addresses the methodology of this thesis. Firstly, it explores Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper’s concerns regarding the academic usefulness of the term “identity”.¹⁷ In order to get around the issues raised by Brubaker and Cooper; this thesis chooses to apply process-tracing using Kuniko Ashizawa’s value-action framework to explore conceptions of state identity relevant to India’s AEP.¹⁸ In doing so, it focusses on conceptions projected by important BJP members, as this thesis considers them to have significant influence on India’s foreign policy.

Lastly, Chapter 4, explores the identities and values influencing the AEP by exploring empirical evidence. Whilst the first two sections of this chapter seek to explore the causal relations between these identities, values, and the preferences for the establishment of the AEP, the final section takes a more critical approach. It firstly establishes the presence of another

¹⁷ Brubaker and Cooper. “Beyond Identity”.

¹⁸ Ashizawa.

value in India's foreign policy, the "improving relations with China" value, which has had a minimal effect on the AEP. In addition, by assessing the workings of these identity-derived values in other cases, namely India's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its last-minute rejection of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), this section establishes that although all values are visible rhetorically, some values, namely the 'increasing national security' value, the 'creating an economically stronger India' value and the 'ensuring India gets its rightful place in the comity of nations and international institutions' value are currently more influential in shaping India's foreign policy actions, including the AEP. In the end, this section briefly links these findings back to the examined academic literature on India's foreign policy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. A Realist Perspective

Realist perspectives, which emphasize the competitive and conflictual aspects of International Relations are noticeably present in the academic discourse surrounding India's foreign policy.¹⁹ Some realist scholars make more general claims about India's foreign policy. An example of this is Hussein Solomon who argues that ever since its independence in 1947, India's foreign policy has been infused with classical realism.²⁰ However, most of the realist work on India's foreign policy seems to be more context specific.

In fact, the majority of articles looking at India's regional foreign policy do so through the context of the rise of China.²¹ Consequently, they highlight different aspects of India's preference for increased engagement with the region.²² Jitendra and Chanwahn argue that India's Asia-Pacific engagements are aimed at countering China's promotion of "economic interdependence" through the use of US-led "political interdependence".²³ They find that this trend has become more apparent since the Doklam border stand-off between India and China.²⁴ Jain Purnendra also looks at the effects of Sino-Indian border conflicts on India's foreign policy. However, instead of the Doklam stand-off, Purnendra researched how the Ladakh border conflict in 2020 has pushed India to change its approach to foreign policy.²⁵ He finds that it has caused India's strategic interactions to take a more realist turn. India is still combining strategic autonomy with multi-alignment, but it now also eagerly incorporates realpolitik when deepening strategic and defence relationships in the Indo-Pacific.²⁶

When it comes to academic work on the AEP, realism seems to be the most prevalent framework. Here again, most of the work analyses India's AEP as a balancing effort to China's

¹⁹ Camisão and Antunes. "Introducing Realism in International Relations Theory."

²⁰ Solomon. "Critical Reflections of Indian Foreign Policy: Between Kautilya and Ashoka." 65.

²¹ Jain. "Hesitant Realism: China-India Border Tensions and Delhi's Deepening Strategic Ties with Tokyo and Canberra."; Jitendra, and Chanwahn. "Shifting Contours of India's Asian Relations."; Mazumdar. "FROM 'LOOK EAST' TO 'ACT EAST': INDIA'S EVOLVING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION."; Rüländ and Michael. "Overlapping Regionalism and Cooperative Hegemony: How China and India Compete in South and Southeast Asia."

²² Ibid.

²³ Jitendra, and Chanwahn. 2.

²⁴ Ibid. 14 & 16.

²⁵ Jain. 77.

²⁶ Ibid.

increased influence in the Indo-Pacific.²⁷ Realist work on this topic builds onto “the balance of power” concept which argues that imbalances and concentrations in material and military capabilities amongst great powers are restored to ensure the survival of major powers. Whilst great powers use several mechanisms to restore this balance, secondary and tertiary states are more likely to bandwagon or join other states to balance against it.²⁸ They find that whilst India still engages with China on a geo-economics level it also seeks cooperation with other states through its AEP as a way to balance China’s rise.²⁹

In doing so, they all take different focus points. Most look at India’s engagements with the United States and Japan whom it engages with on a strategic level.³⁰ Examples of cooperation with these countries can be found in the India-US-Japan-Australia Quadrilateral Initiative (QUAD), which is used to counter Chinese behaviour.³¹ In this regard, disagreement exists between Kumar and Rajagopalan. Whilst Rajagopalan feels that it would be wise to seek cooperation with the United States, Kumar considers this to be foolish and suggests India to look to the Indo-Pacific for a regional alliance.³² Indeed, R.S. Aswani, Shambnu Sajith and Mohammad Younus Bhat also highlight this as a fruitful option. They find that by realigning the AEP with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, India would be able to use its relations with Vietnam to counter the Belt and Road Initiative and Chinese expansion in the Indo-Pacific.³³

Although it is the most common focus, not all realist work argues that India’s AEP is merely a balancing effort against China. Amit Singh and Amit Sarwal state that India is not actively balancing against China, although Beijing thinks it is. Instead, India uses its AEP to safeguard Indian interests.³⁴ In doing so, they identify nine policy drivers which cut across both hard and soft policy issues: ‘quest for energy’, ‘economic diplomacy’, ‘prospects for connectivity’, ‘defense and maritime issues’, ‘the potential of Indian diaspora’, ‘the growing influence of China in the region’, ‘internal security concerns’, ‘the Modi factor’ and ‘the threat

²⁷ Aswani, Sajith, and Bhat. “Realigning India’s Vietnam Policy Through Cooperative Sustainable Development: a Geostrategic Counterbalancing to China in Indo-Pacific.”; Kumar. “India Balancing China: Exploring Soft Balancing Through Indo-Pacific.”; Liu & Jamali. “India’s Indo-Pacific Strategy: A Pragmatic Balancing Between the United States and China.”; Rajagopalan. “Evasive Balancing: India’s Unviable Indo-Pacific Strategy.”;

²⁸ Lobell. “Balance of Power Theory.”

²⁹ Aswani, Sajith, and Bhat.; Kumar.; Liu & Jamali.; Rajagopalan.

³⁰ Kumar. “India Balancing China: Exploring Soft Balancing Through Indo-Pacific.”; Liu & Jamali.; Rajagopalan.

³¹ Kumar. “India Balancing China: Exploring Soft Balancing Through Indo-Pacific.”351.

³² Ibid. 339.

³³ Aswani, Sajith, and Bhat. 97.

³⁴ Singh and Sarwal. “Paraspara , Encounters, and Confluences: India’s Soft Power Objective in the Indo-Pacific Region.” 751.

of Islamic terrorism'.³⁵ By widening their scope beyond Sino-Indian relations, Singh and Sarwal's article shares many similarities with both liberalist and constructivist work on the topic, which also engage with India's foreign policy through a wider lens. Whilst Singh and Sarwal's work is comprehensive it is still written from a realist point of view as it mainly seems to focus on India's national security objectives.³⁶ Given the heavy focus on security issues, more versatile work is needed that looks at the AEP from other angles.

2.2. A Liberal Perspective

Another perspective regarding India's foreign policy can be found in liberalism. In comparison to realist perspectives on India's foreign policy and the AEP, liberal perspectives tend to be more focused on cooperation, institution building, and economic connections.³⁷ In certain cases scholars focus on India's integration in the liberal international order.³⁸ Johnson Singh Chandam argues that India's motivation to join the liberal order not only derives from national interest, but is also linked to the consistency of their own political principles with that of the international order and the absence of any other viable alternative order.³⁹ Similarly, when reflecting on India's future in the global order, Ummu Salma Bava notes that India will continue to sustain the existing global order, as it benefits from it.⁴⁰

In parallel with realist work on India's foreign policy, there is a clear liberal interest in exploring Sino-Indian relations. In doing so, the liberal perspective is more optimistic as it believes economic interdependence can decrease the likelihood of war.⁴¹ When it comes to Sino-Indian relations, a visible argument made by liberal scholars is that continued economic cooperation between India and China could lead to peaceful and stable Sino-Indian relations in the future.⁴²

Liberal perspectives are also prevalent in works that analyse India's concerns surrounding China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Scholars like Ravi Bhoothalingam and

³⁵ Ibid. 735.

³⁶ Carafano. "Carafano on Katzenstein, 'the Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics.'"

³⁷ Meiser. "Introducing Liberalism in International Relations Theory."

³⁸ Chandam. "India's Interplay with Liberal International Order: Potentials and Constraints." & Bava. "India and the Global Order."

³⁹ Chandam. 329.

⁴⁰ Bava. 22.

⁴¹ Hudda. "Interpreting the Rise of China: Realist and Liberalist Perspectives."

⁴² Ratha and Mahapatra. "Recasting Sino-Indian Relations: Towards a Closer Development Partnership." 707.; Rusko and Sasikumar. "India and China: From Trade to Peace?" 121

Zorawar Daulet argue that India's mistrust towards the BRI is unjustified, and that engagement with the BRI would lead to significant geo-economic benefits.⁴³

This line of thinking is also visible in Reimeingam Marchang's "BCIM Economic Corridor an Integral Part of BRI for Regional Cooperation: Positioning India's North-East and Act East Policy", which simultaneously seems to be one of the few liberal articles that engages with India's AEP. It argues that India through its AEP has been using its North-Eastern region to develop an economic trade corridor with ASEAN states. The author adds to this that India should not close itself off from the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM) as it could help foster mutual trust, development, and trade through connectivity networks.⁴⁴ Another liberal article that directly addresses India's AEP is Pande Amba Ngaibiakching's "India's Act East Policy and ASEAN: Building a Regional Order Through Partnership in the Indo-Pacific". Although Ngaibiakching also finds the BRI has changed the global security and economic environment, she mostly focusses on the regional partnerships that result from these changes.⁴⁵ In doing so, she argues that the AEP fits into the current scenario where New Delhi searches to promote mutual development in the Indo-Pacific as well as a rules-based order which promotes international law, respect for sovereignty, transparency, international law, stability and a free and fair-trade framework.⁴⁶ She concludes her argument by stating that India and ASEAN together can play a constructive role in creating a new regional order.⁴⁷

Whilst liberalist work on India's foreign policy offers important insights that counters the prominent realist "balancing" narrative, it also overlooks the immaterial dimension of international politics, thereby neglecting the influence of ideas and beliefs on world politics, which is important to constructivists and the author of this thesis.⁴⁸

⁴³ Bhoothalingam. "India and China's Belt and Road Initiative: A Turning Point; Singh. "Rethinking India's Approach to China's Belt and Road Initiative." 12.

⁴⁴ Marchang. "BCIM Economic Corridor an Integral Part of BRI for Regional Cooperation: Positioning India's North-East and Act East Policy." 264.

⁴⁵ Ngaibiakching. "India's Act East Policy and ASEAN: Building a Regional Order Through Partnership in the Indo-Pacific." 67.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Theys. "Introducing Constructivism in International Relations Theory."

2.3. A Constructivist Perspective

Whilst liberal and realist work on India's foreign policy mostly focusses on material aspects of international politics, constructivists like Checkel critique not what these scholars do or say, but rather the dimension they ignore, namely the sources of state interests and the social dimension of international relations.⁴⁹ This narrative is also present in Chris Ogden's book *China and India: Asia's Emergent Great Powers* which critiques the realist perspective and argues that one needs to go beyond the material aspects of power.⁵⁰

There is comprehensive constructivist literature that targets India's foreign policy. Similarly, to liberal academic literature, constructivist literature shifts away from the realist belief that India's AEP is a mere attempt to balance China's rise.⁵¹ However, it differs from both realist and liberal approaches by going beyond material notions of International Relations.

In terms of constructivist work on India's foreign policy one can see a focus on the effects of state identity and colonialism. For example, Manjari Chatterjee Miller introduces the concept of 'post-imperial ideology' or PII, which she claims is rooted in a mentality of victimhood and is an essential part of India's national identity. Thus, it shapes India's international position.⁵² Miller argues that in the case of India, PII strongly influences its foreign policy when India perceives a threat to its sovereignty, when its national prestige is challenged or when its borders are at stake.⁵³ According to Miller, post-imperial ideology can cause two foreign policy goals: 'a drive to maximize territorial sovereignty' and 'the advancement of status'.⁵⁴ Miller is not the only scholar to highlight the importance of India's colonial history for its foreign policy. Through the analysis of case studies on India and Australia's approaches to China, Russia and nuclear non-proliferation, Priya Chacko and Alexander E. Davis establish that although both countries' state identities have been shaped by colonialism and liberalism, their liberal state identities are fundamentally different.⁵⁵ Whilst Australia favours the Western-liberal hegemonic world order, India consistently opposes this order instead opting for a "polycentric order" by forming selective coalitions to weaken established hierarchies and by defying international regimes.⁵⁶ Others like Kadira Pethiyagoda,

⁴⁹ Checkel. 324.

⁵⁰ Ogden. *China and India: Asia's Emergent Powers*. 20.

⁵¹ Singh. "From a Sub-Continental Power to an Asia-Pacific Player: India's Changing Identity."

⁵² Miller. "Trauma, Colonialism and Post-Imperial Ideology." 7.

⁵³ Ibid. 25.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 30.

⁵⁵ Chacko and Davis.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 44.

focus less on colonialism and more on the effect of historic cultural values on India's foreign policy. Through assessing India's history, she is able to establish that "pluralism", "tolerance", "non-violence", and "hierarchy" are not only deeply rooted in India's history but are also highly relevant values for India's foreign policy today.⁵⁷

When it comes to finding constructivist sources on the AEP, there seems to be a clear research gap, as no relevant constructivist work on the AEP could be found for this literature review. Nevertheless, there is some constructivist work that targets the AEP's predecessor the LEP.⁵⁸

Such constructivist perspectives can be found in Sandeep Singh's work which highlights the importance of identity for India's interest in the Asia-Pacific region. He critiques the current domination of material factor-based analysis of India's increasing involvement in the Asia-Pacific region and instead argues that identity is also needed to explain India's engagement with the region.⁵⁹ He finds that a "crisis of identity" not a "crisis of security" at the end of the Cold War has shaped India's Asia-Pacific strategies.⁶⁰ Singh finds that states seek not only security but also recognition within the global system. India is therefore seeking to maximize its recognition by taking on an Asia-Pacific identity.⁶¹ It does this as India's strategic elite believes that being an "Asia-Pacific player" comes with considerable status. He argues that whilst India's engagement with the region comes with physical benefits (material aspects of power), India's goal driving this involvement is its desire for status (discursive aspects of power).⁶²

Similarly, Nalanda Roy also highlights the importance of identity in shaping India's interest towards the East. She argues that the United Progressive Alliance government (UPA), which was in power from 2004 to 2014, was greatly successful in implementing the LEP. She states that the government's belief in a shared destiny has shaped the core of an emerging identity and has been the main element in India's approach towards the Southeast Asian region.⁶³ Unlike Singh whose article was published in 2014 and does not discuss the AEP, Roy does make references to Modi's AEP at the end of her article. Nevertheless, given the fact that it is not the main focus of her article, this engagement is rather descriptive and merely discusses

⁵⁷ Pethiyagoda. "Which Cultural Values?" 69.

⁵⁸ Singh. "From a Sub-Continental Power to an Asia-Pacific Player: India's Changing Identity." & Roy. "EVALUATING INDIA'S LOOK-EAST POLICY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES UNDER UPA RULE."

⁵⁹ Singh. "From a Sub-Continental Power to an Asia-Pacific Player: India's Changing Identity." 206.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 206 & 207.

⁶¹ Ibid. 206.

⁶² Ibid. 187.

⁶³ Roy. 643.

the latest changes.⁶⁴

The constructivist literature on India's foreign policy showcased the importance of the immaterial dimension of international politics for shaping the Indian government's behaviour. However, when it comes to the current AEP, constructivist work seems to be missing. Thereby, indicating a clear research gap. Whilst this gap could simply mean that constructivism might not be relevant to this policy, this would be unlikely as constructivist work on India's LEP has stated that India's interest in the Indo-Pacific is shaped by identity.⁶⁵ This thesis therefore aims to fill this research gap by exploring the ways in which conceptions of Indian state identity projected by BJP members have influenced the AEP.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 652 – 653.

⁶⁵ Roy. ; Singh. "From a Sub-Continental Power to an Asia-Pacific Player: India's Changing Identity."

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Identity as an Analytical Concept

As mentioned previously, this thesis aims to answer the following research question: “In what ways have conceptions of state identity shaped India’s Act East Policy?”. As established in the previous chapter, the impact of identity on the AEP has been neglected in academic research. Although identity has not been adequately explored in relation to the AEP, this is not the case for identity in the field of International Relations (IR) as a whole. Ever since the early 1990s, identity as an analytical concept has started to shape the IR discourse.⁶⁶ This mostly happened due to rise of constructivism.⁶⁷

Whilst there is growing academic literature on identity, this literature is far from monolithic in nature. The concept of identity in IR is imagined in a wide variety of ways. For example, scholars like Ronald Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, Peter Katzenstein and Jutta Weldes have considered identity to be a central concept for theorizing constructivist IR approaches.⁶⁸ Whilst others like Thomas Banchoff, Alison Brysk, Craig Parsons, Wayne Sandholtz and Yong Wook Lee have focused on empirical analyses which highlight causal conclusions targeting identity.⁶⁹ In doing so, they look at the ways in which identity shapes states’ interests.⁷⁰ Still, others look at identity from different perspectives. For instance, William Bloom, William Callahan and Ted Hopf look at the construction of national identity, whilst Abigail Ruane and Ann Tickner look at identity through a feminist lens.⁷¹

This wide variation in the use of identity, also outside of the field of IR, has led some scholars to critique the usefulness of the concept for analysis.⁷² A strong critique towards the utility of identity for academic research comes from Brubaker and Cooper’s article “Beyond Identity” which states that the various uses of identity are not only heterogenous but point in wildly different directions.⁷³ Brubaker and Cooper find that identity tends to either mean too much or too little. They argue that strong conceptions of identity often preserve the “common-sense meaning” of the word, as they emphasize sameness over time and across persons.⁷⁴ These

⁶⁶ Ashizawa. 571 & 572.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 572.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. 573.

⁷³ Brubaker and Cooper. 8.

⁷⁴ Ibid.10.

strong conceptions tend to have problematic assumptions. For instance, strong notions of identity assume that identity is something that all groups (or individuals) can have, even when they are not aware of it. From this angle, identity is something one can “discover” and can be mistaken about.⁷⁵ On the other hand, weak conceptions of identity break with these strong implications of identity, by stating that identity is multiple, in flux, constructed etcetera. These weak conceptions of identity are thus problematic in their own right as they lack meaning and a clear link to identity, which does emphasize some self-sameness over time.⁷⁶ Given the problematic nature of both weak and strong conceptions of identity, Brubaker and Cooper doubt the analytical utility of identity for academic research.⁷⁷

This thesis acknowledges the concerns raised by Brubaker and Cooper and has adapted its methodological approach accordingly. In order to avoid the issues raised by Brubaker and Cooper, this thesis has decided to implement Kuniko Ashizawa’s “value-action framework”. This “value-action framework” refers to ‘a concept of state identity perceived by policymakers provides a specific value – defined here as some sort of pro-attitude toward actions of a certain kind– which in turn determines a policymaker’s preference for a particular foreign policy’.⁷⁸

A figure explaining this causal phenomenon can be found below. In this figure FP action stands for foreign policy action.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 9.

⁷⁸ Ashizawa. 573.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 578.

Figure 1

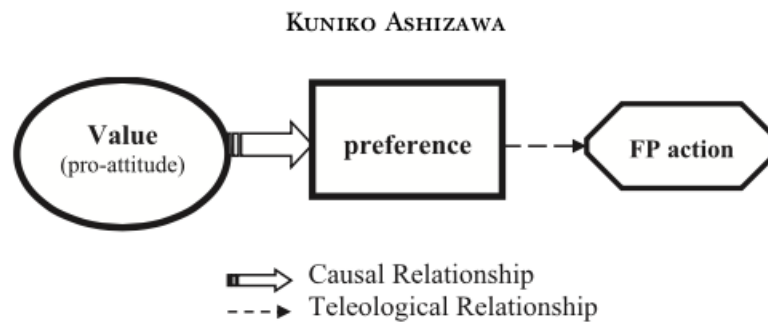


FIG. 1. Value-Action Framework

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The reasoning behind this choice for the value-action framework is that this framework allows one to research how conceptions of state identity influence foreign policy through empirical and inductive observations, without delving into the objective existence of these state identities.⁸¹ By not portraying identity as an objective matter but rather as a subjective matter, the value-action framework allows one to avert some of the issues raised by Brubaker and Cooper.

In their article, Brubaker and Cooper argue in favour of the term “self-understanding” as an analytical alternative to identity. “Self-understanding” in their work is a term that: ‘designates what might be called “situated subjectivity”: one’s sense of who one is, of one’s social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act.’⁸² Whilst both weak and strong conceptions of identity view the objective existence of identity as a given, the term “self-understanding” refrains from doing so. Instead, “self-understanding” is a subjective term, which is merely interested in explaining how one sees themselves.⁸³

This thesis takes this logic behind “self-understanding” and applies it to India’s foreign policy. In doing so, it aims to determine how important foreign policymakers understand India’s state identity and how these conceptions subsequently shape values, preferences, and foreign policy actions. Thereby, staying away from the academic discussion surrounding the objective existence of identity and the problems raised by Brubaker and Cooper.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 579.

⁸¹ Ibid. 573.

⁸² Brubaker and Cooper. 17.

⁸³ Ibid. 17– 19.

3.2. *Application Value-Action Framework for India's Act East Policy*

Although this thesis uses Ashizawa's value action framework, there are some differences in implementation. For her case-study on Japan's foreign policy preferences, Ashizawa not only used relevant official government documents but also had access to information obtained from interviews with over 70 Japanese foreign policymakers.⁸⁴ Furthermore, she mostly based her argument on the conceptions of state identity projected by foreign policymakers from two Japanese ministries.⁸⁵ In this regard, this thesis takes a different approach. Unlike Ashizawa, this thesis does not have access to interviews with Indian foreign policymakers. Therefore, it gets its information from existing primary and secondary sources.

Furthermore, instead of focusing on Indian ministries, the argument made in this thesis is mostly based on conceptions of state identity projected by members of the ruling political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It does so for the following reasons. Firstly, a BJP government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, introduced the AEP a few months after its election victory in 2014.⁸⁶ Therefore, their views are highly relevant to the AEP. Secondly, they are considered to be the most influential government since Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Congress which ruled for over half a century.⁸⁷ In fact, the BJP party was the only party to win with a clear majority since Rajiv Gandhi's 1984 victory.⁸⁸ Thirdly, whilst this analysis does include some information provided by India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), it would have been impossible to solely base the analysis on that information, as the information provided in MEA's *Annual Reports* is often very compact. The information available on BJP officials' ideas on the other hand were more readily available and allowed for deeper analysis.

Similarly, to Ashizawa this thesis used process-tracing, which is a distinct in-depth case-study methodology that traces causal mechanisms. In doing so, it links causes (X) to their outcomes (Y), or effects, focusing on one or a small number of cases.⁸⁹ It is a qualitative analysis methodology, which is traditionally used to provide theoretical explanations of historical incidents.⁹⁰ In this thesis, process tracing is used to understand the causal links between important BJP officials' conceptions of India's state identity and India's foreign policy

⁸⁴ Ashizawa. 574.

⁸⁵ Ashizawa.

⁸⁶ Kesavan. "India's 'Act East' Policy and Regional Cooperation."

⁸⁷ Biswas. "The Secret behind Success of India's Ruling Party BJP."

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Beach. "It's All About Mechanisms - What Process-Tracing Case Studies Should Be Tracing." 463. & Beach, Derek. "Process Tracing Methods in the Social Sciences."

⁹⁰ INTRAC. "Process Tracing."

initiatives. For this analysis, a positivist approach was taken. Positivism is an approach that finds that through careful study and observation of the physical elements such as states, one can gain an understanding of the social world.⁹¹ This approach is reflected in this thesis, as it relies on empirical data on India's foreign policy to observe these causal relations between foreign policymakers' conceptions of India's state identities and foreign policy initiatives like the AEP. The last section partly shifts away from process-tracing and positivism, as it takes a more critical and reflective stance. In doing so, it highlights the findings' link to examined literature and critically discusses some of the subtleties that are not accounted for by the value-action framework. As such, the last part of this section shares resemblances with post-positivism, as it highlights the limitations of positivist approaches, like the value-action framework.⁹²

In order to establish the causal links needed for answering the research question, this thesis used primary sources like the BJP's 2014 Election Manifesto (which was released prior to the establishment of the AEP and the BJP's 2014 election victory) to determine the BJP's reasoning behind the creation of the AEP. However, given the lack of material available it was not possible to only include relevant primary sources released prior to the establishment of the AEP. Given that actors' conceptions of state identity, and thus values, can change over time this was problematic. As a way to solve this issue, both the BJP's 2019 and 2014 Election Manifesto were compared to see whether values had significantly changed. This comparison indicated that the BJP's values had remain stable enough throughout this period to also include primary sources that were released after the establishment of the AEP. Nevertheless, the 2014 Election Manifesto is still considered to be the most important primary source for this analysis. Other significant primary sources, other than the BJP 2019 and 2014 Election Manifestos, are MEA's *2014-2015 Annual Report* and press releases made by the Prime Minister's Office. Furthermore, newspapers provided further insights into influential BJP Ministers' views. Some important figures in this regard are Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, and Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh. This thesis also briefly uses a comment made by former ambassador to Japan, Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa in order to illustrate the argument being made.⁹³

Through the consultation of these sources, this thesis was able to introduce three identities relevant to the AEP: the "challenged state" identity, the "once-thriving civilization"

⁹¹ E- International Relations. "Positivism, Post-Positivism and Interpretivism."

⁹² The Kootneti Team. "What Are Positivism and Postpositivism in International Relations?"

⁹³ Sitara. "Deepa Wadhwa."

identity and the “democracy shaped by Hinduism in a changing Asian landscape” identity.

These identities arguably create four values. The “challenged state” identity gives rise to the ‘*increasing national security*’ value (hereafter referred to as the “security value”). The second identity, a “once-thriving civilization”, gives rise to two closely connected values: ‘*creating an economically stronger India*’ (the “prosperity value”) and ‘*ensuring India gets its rightful place in the comity of nations and international institutions*’ (the “rightful place” value). Lastly, the ‘democracy shaped by Hinduism in a changing Asian landscape’ identity gives rise to the “*establishing a democratic and rules-based international order*” value (the “rules-based” value).

All these values point to preferences for increased Indo-Pacific connectivity in the case of the AEP. The “security value” refers to the notion that in order to develop as a nation, it is critical to address internal and external challenges to its own national security, whilst the “prosperity” value is linked to the BJP’s desire to create a prosperous India. Moreover, the “rightful” place value refers to the BJP’s belief that India’s position as a rich civilization warrants it an important position on the international stage. Lastly, the “rules-based” value is linked to India’s need to establish a rules-based international order which is free from aggression and respects sovereignty. All of these values together shape the BJP government’s preferences for increased connectivity with Indo-Pacific countries, as outside involvement with the region is needed to secure these values.

The last section of this paper looks into the concept of “value complexity”, which is a key part of Ashizawa’s value-action framework. The existence of multiple values can cause problems as they can be incompatible with each other as they might point to opposing foreign policy preferences. In the case of incompatibility, dominant value(s) can arise which subordinate other values.⁹⁴ In the case of the AEP, some “value complexity” was visible. The “improving relations with China” value was largely absent as this value does not align with India’s “security” and “rules-based” value. Nevertheless, one can see reflections of this value in India’s AEP, as it refrains from naming and shaming China. Thereby, still allowing for cooperation in areas such as climate change.⁹⁵

However, understanding the power dynamics amongst the most important values for the AEP is difficult as they all seem to create a preference for increased Indo-Pacific connectivity. In addition, the rhetoric surrounding these values do not give clear indications

⁹⁴ Ashizawa. 580.

⁹⁵ Weijia, “Climate Change Offers New Realm for China-India Cooperation.”

regarding the importance of each of these values. In order to understand the underlying competition and hierarchy amongst these values, this section thus looks to other foreign policy actions namely India's last-minute withdrawal out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and India's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which do see excessive value competition. The fact that that these examples do see value competition help one to understand the hierarchy and power dynamics amongst these values. More importantly, they help one understand which identities currently have the most influence on India's foreign policy and the AEP.

In exploring value competition, this thesis briefly finds some discrepancies between rhetoric and foreign policy action, as well as intricate relations between different values that Ashizawa's value-action framework is currently unable to explain.

It is important to note that this research has several weaknesses, mostly caused by the lack of primary data.

Firstly, given the limited data, this thesis cannot argue that the discussed state identities and values are the only relevant identities and values influencing India's actions in the Indo-Pacific. Nevertheless, the state identity conceptions discussed in this thesis are the ones that are the most apparent in the examined primary sources. This does not mean, however, that if one were to organize interviews with Indian foreign policymakers, one would not find other conceptions of state identity or different values amongst foreign policymakers or BJP officials. Especially given the fact that other values like "hierarchy" also came up in constructivist literature on India's foreign policy.⁹⁶

Furthermore, in this thesis the BJP is mostly portrayed as a unitary actor, given the fact that there was no visible value competition between different BJP members in the examined sources. The only value competition addressed in this analysis, is the clash between different values' preferences in certain situations. Nevertheless, it could very well be that in reality there is more variation in values held by different BJP officials. In fact, this is likely the case as the BJP is not monolithic. For example, it has isolationists, libertarians, and internationalists as members.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, given this analysis' focus on the most powerful BJP members, namely those setting the Party's agenda and those holding important positions in the Modi government, this thesis is still able to provide useful insights on dominant values derived from conceptions of state identity.

⁹⁶ Pethiyagoda.

⁹⁷ Vaishnav. "What Is the Secret to the Success of India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)?"

Chapter 4: Analysis

4.1. Explaining India's Act East Policy: Conceptions of State Identity

As discussed in the methodology, actors' conceptions of state identity can shape values.⁹⁸ Upon examination of primary sources, three different conceptions of state identity were identified that are considered relevant to the AEP.

The first value, the "security" value emerges from BJP officials' understanding of India as a "challenged state". This identity is built on both internal and external challenges faced by the Indian state. In terms of external challenges to security, very few countries worldwide have as many hostile, or difficult neighbours as India. In particular, India has a turbulent relationship with its neighbours China and Pakistan, both of which it has a history of post-independence conflict with. The strategic cooperation between Pakistan and China in terms of nuclear and military cooperation has further complicated India's external security environment.⁹⁹ India's internal security is also challenged. In 2014, over 200 districts, which is more than 40 percent of the country's territory, were affected by terrorism and/or insurgencies in some shape or form. Many of these internal insurgencies also have an external dimension, as Pakistan funds some of these insurgent/terrorist groups. Moreover, insurgent groups at times take shelter in neighbouring countries, as is the case for insurgents in North-East India which use Myanmar territory as their safe haven.¹⁰⁰

Conceptions of India as a "challenged state" are embedded in statements made by important government officials. Both India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh as well as India's Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar have stated that India is facing the challenge of state-sponsored violence.¹⁰¹ Rajnath Singh added to this by stating that "our hostile neighbourhood" wants to destabilize India.¹⁰² Jaishankar further emphasized India's vulnerability by mentioning that: 'Indian society is extremely sensitive to challenges of security, perhaps more than many of its contemporaries.'¹⁰³ In explaining this vulnerability to security issues, Jaishankar highlighted that: 'Law and order issues and even internal security

⁹⁸ Press Information Bureau Government of India Prime Minister's Office. "Text of Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue."

⁹⁹ Singh, RSN. "Threat Perception of India."

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Outlook Web Bureau. "'Hostile Neighbourhood' Wants to Destabilise India, State-Sponsored Terrorism a Big Challenge: Rajnath Singh." & Press Trust of India. "India Faces Conventional, Non-Conventional Threats: S Jaishankar."

¹⁰² Outlook Web Bureau.

¹⁰³ Press Trust of India.

are obviously more complex in a large, pluralistic and diverse polity.’¹⁰⁴

These comments made by the ministers reflect their understanding of India being a “challenged state”. This conception of India’s state identity has most likely been shaped over the years through negative interactions with neighbouring states and perceptions of the complex internal security situation in the country. This conception of the state ultimately gave rise to the “security” value, as it was felt that India needed a way to address these external and internal challenges to their authority. In doing so, a regional approach was arguably preferred given the complex regional nature of many of the issues.

The second and third value, the “prosperity” value and the “rightful place” value can be attributed to another perceived identity, namely that of a “once-thriving civilization”. It is important to note here that “thriving” not only refers to material prosperity and influence but also highlights the BJP’s perception of India as a moral and harmonious entity.

This identity of a “once-thriving state” is derived from India’s pre-colonial past. In ancient times, India was an important religious and cultural leader in the region.¹⁰⁵ This can be seen in India’s regional spread of Buddhism.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, during the age of the Mughal Empire, India saw increased economic power. During this age, India functioned as a “bridge” between East Asia and the Middle East through which both ideas and products could pass. This strategic location allowed for India to become an economic power for centuries, as it was able to function as both a foreign trade and agriculture hub.¹⁰⁷ References to the importance of India’s rich pre-colonial history are made all throughout the BJP’s 2014 Election Manifesto. Yet, these references are rather selective. The previously discussed Muslim Mughal Empire, has been erased from history textbooks as it does not fit into the Hindu-centric narrative.¹⁰⁸ In fact, the manifesto’s references to India’s identity as an ancient civilization are more generic. Its first page starts with the following quote: ‘India is the most ancient civilization and has always been looked upon by the world as a land of wealth and wisdom.’¹⁰⁹ India’s pre-colonial superiority is further emphasized when it is mentioned that:

‘According to Sunderland, India was also one of the greatest shipbuilding nations and consequently has access to international markets. Indian prosperity held the world in thrall. It was this wealth which attracted the foreigners – from Alexander to the Britishers. Historical records establish the level of progress and prosperity attained by

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Quinn. “How History Shapes India’s Foreign Policy Goals.”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Jaswal. “Mughals, RSS, evolution: Outrage as India edits school textbooks.”

¹⁰⁹ Bharatiya Janata Party. “Election Manifesto 2014.” 1.

India before the advent of the Europeans. Indian advancement in mathematics, astronomy, physics and chemistry along with the biological sciences has been well recognized. India was a land of abundance, prosperity, affluence, a land of sharing and caring living in perfect harmony and peace with the nature.’¹¹⁰

The BJP’s conceived identity of India as a “once-thriving civilization” is also reflected in their section on foreign policy, which emphasizes the magnetic effect their wisdom and heritage had on other states:

‘India has always played a major role in the world affairs, offering a lot to the World. This has been its tradition since time immemorial. The magnetic power of India has always been in its ancient wisdom and heritage, elucidating principles like harmony and equity.’¹¹¹

This conception of India as a “once-thriving state”, led to the BJP’s values of creating an economically stronger India and re-gaining India’s rightful place in the international arena. In achieving these values, they highlighted the necessity of reconnecting Indian policy to its civilizational consciousness. This becomes clear in the following statement from their 2014 Election Manifesto: ‘Pick up the thread from the point where the continuum of our civilizational consciousness was lost and reorient the polity in consonance with those strong points of Indian psyche which will be the engine for our future glory.’¹¹² These “strong points of Indian psyche” are not explicitly named in the document but most likely refer to India’s ancient wisdom and heritage, which create moral principles of equity and harmony.¹¹³ This importance of incorporating Indian civilizational consciousness is clearly reflected in the establishment of the AEP, which has a newfound cultural element.

Lastly, the fourth value, or the “rules-based value” is arguably derived from the BJP’s conception of India’s identity as “a democracy shaped by Hinduism in a changing Asian landscape”. This identity is derived of two components. The first being a “democracy shaped by Hinduism”. During the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, Modi explained how India’s identity shaped its value of a democratic rules-based order. In the following statement he highlights how both Vedanta philosophy, which is a Hindu philosophy, and democracy have shaped their engagement with the world:

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 40.

¹¹² Ibid. 2 & 3.

¹¹³ Ibid. 40.

‘India’s own engagement in the Indo-Pacific Region -from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas- will be inclusive. We are inheritors of Vedanta philosophy that believes in essential oneness of all, and celebrates unity in diversity Ekam Satyam, Viprah Bahudavadanti (Truth is one, the learned speak of it in many ways). That is the foundation of our civilizational ethos – of pluralism, co-existence, open-ness and dialogue. The ideals of democracy that define us as a nation also shape the way we engage with the world’¹¹⁴

The second component of this identity, namely the “in a changing landscape” component can also be derived from Modi’s key-note speech. Modi made several references to the changing nature of the Indo-Pacific landscape by stating that there is a shift in the “global order”.¹¹⁵ To this he added that the Indo-Pacific region has been seeing assertions of power that do not align with international norms.¹¹⁶ Although he did not specifically mention any state, Modi was most likely referring to China’s assertive rise in the region. This is a likely assumption, as former ambassador to Japan, Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa had also previously highlighted that India’s involvement in the Indo-Pacific is partially derived from China’s assertiveness and its lack of willingness to abide by international law or rules-based order.¹¹⁷

Overall, this section has shown how the three distinct identities can be seen in the BJP’s narrative. Namely the BJP’s conception of India as a “challenged state”, a “once-thriving civilization” and a “democracy shaped by Hinduism in a changing Asian landscape”. Whilst these identities provide important insights, it is important to further explore the values and preferences which arise from them.

4.2. Explaining India’s Act East Policy: Values and Indo-Pacific Connectivity Preferences

Through a close examination of MEA’s 2014-2015 *Annual Report* and the 2014 and the 2019 Election Manifestos published by the BJP, this thesis was able to perceive four values that together shaped the BJP’s preferences for the Act East Policy. Namely, the “security” value, the “prosperity” value, the “rightful place” value and the “rules-based” value.

References to these values in some shape or form can be found in official documents published by MEA and the BJP. The first value, the “security” value, is arguably the vaguest value when examining the sources, as although visible it does not provide specific examples of

¹¹⁴ Press Information Bureau Government of India Prime Minister’s Office. “Text of Prime Minister’s Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue.”

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ DD India. *Indian Diplomacy: India’s Act East Policy*. & Sitara. “Deepa Wadhwa.”

these internal and external challenges, other than terrorism.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, according to the India foundation, a think tank whose governing council is closely linked to the BJP, India's external challenges are shaped by India's conflicts with Pakistan and China, which leave India's land borders vulnerable to external threats. They further highlight the need to protect India's Ocean Region (IOR) in order to safeguard sea lanes of communication.¹¹⁹ When it comes to explaining internal challenges, they mainly highlight the issues of separatism and sub-national extremism in North-East India, Kashmir and Jammu and Left-Wing Extremism.¹²⁰

On multiple occasions, the security value is highlighted. In 2014, the BJP explained that external and internal threats to security demanded urgent solutions.¹²¹ It further added that if India is to survive as a nation and is to ensure its voice is heard, it ought to address these challenges.¹²² An almost identical rhetoric focusing on national security is visible in their 2019 Manifesto, where the following was stated:

'In order to achieve our long-term goals, we must first secure our country against internal and external aggression. These threats need to be dealt with at their roots and decisive leadership that will equip our security apparatus with all the necessary tools. As we have already demonstrated, we intend to use our foreign policy, where necessary, in order to tackle the problem of global terrorism. Thus, we intend to increase the strength of our diplomatic and allied cadres.'¹²³

This use of foreign policy as a way to increase national security, is also discussed in MEA's 2014-2015 *Annual Report* where it is stated that India's foreign policy pursues 'an active interaction with the international community to meet our key goals' thereby 'ensuring national security, sovereignty and territorial integrity'.¹²⁴

References to the second value, the "prosperity" value, can also be found in the BJP's 2014 Election Manifesto where it is mentioned that a reboot of foreign policy goals, content and process is needed to create an economically prosperous India.¹²⁵ Similarly, MEA highlighted the importance of the Indo-Pacific for India's "prosperity" value by emphasizing that economic interaction with this region has become more important, given these countries'

¹¹⁸ Bharatiya Janata Party. "Election Manifesto 2014." 2.

¹¹⁹ India Foundation. "Governing Council." & Katoch and Chaturvedi. "Addressing Internal and External Threats."

¹²⁰ Katoch and Chaturvedi.

¹²¹ Bharatiya Janata Party. "Election Manifesto 2014." 2.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Bharatiya Janata Party. "BJP Manifesto 2019." 9.

¹²⁴ Ministry of External Affairs. "Annual Report 2014-2015." i.

¹²⁵ Bharatiya Janata Party. "Election Manifesto 2014." 39.

emergence as major trade and investment partners. Thereby, aiding India in its development goals.¹²⁶

In addition, references to the third value, the “rightful place” value are plentiful in BJP Manifestos. A clear example of this value can be found in their 2014 Manifesto where they state that: ‘BJP believes a resurgent India must get its rightful place in the comity of nations and international institutions.’¹²⁷ In explaining their proposed approach to obtain this value, they already hint at their preference for deepened connectivity in the following statement: ‘We will create a web of allies to mutually further our interests. We will leverage all our resources and people to play a greater role on the international high table.’¹²⁸

Although the explained values were mostly observed in the BJP’s 2014 Election Manifesto, which was released prior to the establishment of the AEP, there is still a clear link to the AEP. The document namely shows that the BJP already knew it was going to fundamentally change India’s foreign policy if elected. This becomes clear in the following statement:

‘The vision is to fundamentally reboot and reorient the foreign policy goals, content and process, in a manner that locates India’s global strategic engagement in a new paradigm and on a wider canvass, that is not just limited to political diplomacy, but also includes our economic, scientific, cultural, political and security interests, both regional and global, on the principles of equality and mutuality, so that it leads to an economically stronger India, and its voice is heard in the international fora. BJP believes that political stability, progress and peace in the region are essential for South Asia’s growth and development.’¹²⁹

This statement not only highlights the previously discussed values but also the preferences through which it aims to achieve the content of these values. This statement shows that prior to its election victory in 2014 and the establishment of the AEP, the BJP already had a preference to reboot foreign policy on a “wider canvass”, through the inclusion of matters such as security and cultural interests in order to create an economically stronger and more influential India. Thereby, hinting at their preference for increased connectivity with the region. Given the fact that the creation of AEP has indeed widened the scope through the inclusion and deepening of cultural and security elements, it can be assumed that this rhetoric and thus the values discussed above are all applicable to the AEP. Moreover, this statement shows the close

¹²⁶ Ministry of External Affairs. “Annual Report 2014-2015.” Vii.

¹²⁷ Bharatiya Janata Party. “Election Manifesto 2014.” 39.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 40.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 39.

connection between the “security”, “prosperity” and “rightful place” value, by showing that in order to ensure India’s international influence, one needs to create a secure and prosperous India.

The fourth and last value is that of “establishing a rules-based international order”, hereafter referred to as the “rule-based” value. In the 2014 Election Manifesto, the BJP already highlighted its ambitions of creating a peaceful and egalitarian world.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, the BJP’s “rule-based” value becomes more concrete when examining Prime Minister Modi’s Keynote Address during the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, which is Asia premier defence summit.¹³¹ During this conference, Modi highlighted that India: ‘Will promote a democratic and rules-based international order, in which all nations, small and large, thrive as equal and sovereign’.¹³² When explaining what India’s vision for the Indo-Pacific entails Modi states that:

“We believe that our common prosperity and security require us to evolve, through dialogue, a common rules-based order for the region. And, it must equally apply to all individually as well as to the global commons. Such an order must believe in sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as equality of all nations, irrespective of size and strength. These rules and norms should be based on the consent of all, not on the power of the few. This must be based on faith in dialogue, and not dependence on force. It also means that when nations make international commitments, they must uphold them. This is the foundation of India's faith in multilateralism and regionalism; and, of our principled commitment to rule of law.”¹³³

He further highlights his preference for using connectivity to create a rule-based order, as he finds that connectivity not only furthers trade and prosperity but also unites a region.¹³⁴ Moreover, this statement makes implicit references to specific foreign policy preferences. For example, it promotes a rules-based approach for managing global commons. One could also relate this to India’s response to China’s territorial claims regarding the South China Sea. In this case, India has been pushing for a rules-based order that upholds the United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea, in order to ensure the freedom of navigation and the safety of trade routes.¹³⁵

The preceding discussion has discussed part of the value-action framework by focusing

¹³⁰ Ibid. 2.

¹³¹ IISS Shangri-La Dialogue. “IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2023 - Asia’s Premier Defence Summit.”

¹³² Press Information Bureau Government of India Prime Minister’s Office. “Text of Prime Minister’s Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue.”

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Pant. “The Strategic Signal of an Indian Presence in the South China Sea.”

on visible values and preferences that are most relevant to the AEP. In doing so, this section has identified four different dominant values: the “security” value, the “prosperity” value, “rightful place” and the “rules-based” value. These values together all arguably highlight the BJP’s preference for deepened connectivity with Indo-Pacific states.

4.3. Explaining India’s Act East Policy: Discussing the Larger Picture

The previous section has demonstrated how BJP officials’ understandings of state identity provides them with certain values which subsequently shape their preferences for certain foreign policy actions. In the case of India’s AEP, the “security”, “prosperity”, “rightful place”, and “rules-based” values arguably shape its preferences for increased Indo-Pacific connectivity through the AEP. Yet, as explained by Ashizawa, when multiple values exist simultaneously there exists a situation known as “value complexity” which can at times lead to values pointing to opposing preferences that are incompatible.¹³⁶ In these cases, the “value-processing” mechanism acts as a solution and can follow three different patterns:

“(1) an innovative conceptual solution to transform a conflict among different preferences into compatible ones being introduced, (2) some values simply being omitted, leaving one value (or a set of ones) as a dominant one and (3) a dominant value subordinating other values. Through one of (or a set of) these mechanisms, the dominant, or principle, value emerges which leads to the commanding preference, and the actual foreign policy actions follow in order to fulfil it.”¹³⁷

Whilst in the case of the AEP there are multiple visible identity-derived values, the previously discussed values all point to the preference of increased connectivity with Indo-Pacific. This makes it difficult to establish which values held more power in the establishment of the AEP. However, through an analysis of India’s wider foreign policy behaviour it becomes clear that these same values do not always point to similar preferences and therefore cannot always coexist.

In these cases, the “value-processing” mechanisms acts as a filter which puts forward the dominant value(s). An assessment of the ways in which these values function in other

¹³⁶ Ashizawa. 580.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

foreign policy instances, where there is problematic value competition, can help create a deeper understanding of the underlying power dynamics between the previously discussed values. Thereby, simultaneously creating a deeper understanding of the AEP. This is exactly what this section aims to do by discussing India's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its last-minute decision to not join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

However, before delving into this topic, this section will first explore a value that was seemingly absent from the AEP, namely Modi's intent of "improving relations with China".¹³⁸ The reason that this value is eliminated through the value-processing mechanism arguably stems from the "security" and "rules-based" value. As established previously, this thesis argues that India engages in the AEP to increase their own national security and to establish a democratic rules-based order in the region. Although BJP officials seem to mostly refrain from explicitly naming China when discussing these values, there is evidence to suggest that Chinese actions influence their values and preferences. Firstly, as mentioned before India and China have been involved in a long-term continuous border dispute.¹³⁹ Furthermore, India is disturbed by China's closeness to its arch-rival Pakistan, which further complicates India's national security.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, Modi claims India values a democratic rules-based international order which adheres to the needs of all and not the power of a few.¹⁴¹ As previously highlighted by former ambassador Wadhwa, the AEP thus aims to partially address China's lack of adherence to a rules-based order.¹⁴² Given the friction between India and China regarding the rules-based order and national security issues, it makes sense why this value of "improving relations with China" seems to be missing in the implementation of the AEP. Simultaneously, the existence of this value could also explain why the BJP often refrains from naming China in their public documents. Instead making general references to an Indo-Pacific region which sees assertions of power and to "internal and external challenges to security".¹⁴³ By refraining from naming specific states, the Indian government can simultaneously pursue diverging interests. It allows India to address these challenges to their values whilst still engaging with China on other fronts, like climate change.¹⁴⁴ In a way, this links back to the first pattern in the value-processing mechanism, where an innovative conceptual solution is created to transform a conflict amongst

¹³⁸ Tiezzi. "Why China Embraces Narendra Modi."

¹³⁹ Toper. "Explained: What, Where and How of India-China Border Dispute."

¹⁴⁰ Khan. "Limited Hard Balancing: Explaining India's Counter Response to Chinese Encirclement."

¹⁴¹ Press Information Bureau Government of India Prime Minister's Office."

¹⁴² DD India.

¹⁴³ Bharatiya Janata Party. "Election Manifesto 2014." 2. & Press Information Bureau Government of India Prime Minister's Office.

¹⁴⁴ Weijia,

preferences.¹⁴⁵

As established previously, the main values discussed in this analysis are mostly seen to be compatible as they all seem to point to the same preferences for increased Indo-Pacific connectivity. However, whilst these values might be compatible in case of the AEP, they are not always compatible in India's foreign policy.

A clear example of value competition can be seen in RCEP, a free trade agreement (FTA) which was signed on November 15th, 2019, between fifteen Indo-Pacific states – including Australia, Japan, New Zealand, China and the ten ASEAN members.¹⁴⁶ Whilst India was supposed to sign RCEP, it withdrew at the last minute.¹⁴⁷ When explaining his decision to leave negotiations Modi stated that: “Neither the Talisman of Gandhiji nor my own conscience permits me to join RCEP”.¹⁴⁸ The reference to the Talisman of Gandhiji means that one, when in doubt, should ask themselves whether one's action will benefit the weak and the poor.¹⁴⁹ Thus, Modi's disapproval towards RCEP is arguably based on the belief that it will not benefit India's economically weakest population. In this regard, one needs to consider the domestic political dimension of the situation. According to the Indian National Congress their party's position as a forceful opposition made sure that Modi's government did not neglect the interests of India's dairy producers, fishermen, farmers, and small and medium business owners.¹⁵⁰ This is also reflected in data on BJP's electoral dominance, which state that the party sees high levels of support amongst economically weaker sections of India's population.¹⁵¹

There were arguably a couple of reasons behind India's choice to not join RCEP. In India's case, it has prevailing trade deficits with the majority of RCEP countries. With half of India's total trade deficit being with China. Furthermore, FTAs have in the past worsened India's trade balance, which makes many policymakers more wary of RCEP, as it could further increase India's trade deficit.¹⁵² In order to solve the risk of a growing trade deficit, India had a couple of proposals for other RCEP countries, one being a key clause that would allow for an auto-trigger and snapback measures. This meant that in case imports were to cross a threshold limit, this mechanism would automatically be triggered towards the partner country. Thereby limiting damage to the Indian economy.¹⁵³ Ultimately, the Indian government was

¹⁴⁵ Ashizawa. 580.

¹⁴⁶ Bhutani. “India's Reluctance in Joining the RCEP - a Boon or a Bane in the Long-Run?”

¹⁴⁷ Panda. “Is the RCEP China's Gain and India's Loss?”

¹⁴⁸ Dutta. “5 Reasons Why PM Modi Pulled out of RCEP in Bangkok.”

¹⁴⁹ M.K. Gandhi. “Gandhi's Talisman.”

¹⁵⁰ Sharma. “India Has Good Reason to Reject the RCEP.”

¹⁵¹ Kumar. “Where Did the BJP Get Its Votes from in 2019?”

¹⁵² Bhutani.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

unable to include their proposals in RCEP, which made them decide that it was better to not join RCEP.¹⁵⁴ RCEP would have allowed India to further engage in connectivity efforts in the Indo-Pacific, thereby further immersing itself in the international system and securing itself a place at the international table. In this case it initially seemed that the “rightful place”, “rules-based”, “prosperity”, “security” and “China” values could coexist through the implementation of certain protective measures in RCEP. Yet, when the Indian government was unable to implement these measures, it became clear that these values could not coexist as they now pointed to diverging preferences.

The “prosperity”, “security” and the “rightful place” value now created a preference for not joining RCEP. In the case of the “rightful place” value, this preference seems counterintuitive as joining RCEP would allow India an important seat at the international table. However, as established in the previous section on values, the “prosperity” and “security” values function as prerequisites for the “rightful place” value. Therefore, the “rightful place” would arguably also steer away from RCEP as this would arguably harm India’s economy, thus their chances of increasing India’s foreign influence. On the other hand, the “rules-based” and “China” values seem to create a preference for signing RCEP as it would help to deepen Sino-Indian relations and further promote multilateralism in the region. However, in the end the “prosperity”, “security” and indirectly the “rightful place” value were deemed to be of highest importance, thereby omitting the “China” and “rules-based” values.

The domestic political influence on the importance of these three values should not be underestimated. Protectionist lobbies like Swadeshi Jagran Manch, which promote local products and indigenous producers, actively promoted nationwide apprehension against the deal. This organization is affiliated with the influential Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which were partly responsible for Modi’s electoral success in 2014 and 2019.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, according to the Indian National Congress their party’s position as a forceful opposition in 2019 made sure that Modi’s government did not neglect the interests of India’s dairy producers, fishermen, farmers, and small and medium business owners.¹⁵⁶ The importance of these groups for the BJP is also reflected in data on the BJP’s electoral dominance, which state that the party sees high levels of support amongst economically poorer sections of India’s population.¹⁵⁷ In these regards, concerns regarding RCEP were also visible amongst important stakeholders like

¹⁵⁴ Panda. “Is the RCEP China’s Gain and India’s Loss?”

¹⁵⁵ Palit. “Domestic Politics Force India’s Withdrawal from RCEP and Broader Trade Disengagement.”

¹⁵⁶ Sharma.

¹⁵⁷ Kumar. “Where Did the BJP Get Its Votes from in 2019?”

India's dairy industry who felt that New Zealand and Australian products would flood the Indian market, thereby harming Indian small-scale producers.¹⁵⁸

This domestic pushback against RCEP amongst BJP important supporters arguably created a situation in which the “prosperity”, “security” and “rightful place” values were considered to be the most important values.

Moreover, another recent example that again highlights the importance of the “prosperity”, “security” and “rightful place” values over the “rules-based” value can be found in India's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In the year since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, most Western democracies have shamed Moscow, have limited their use of Russian oil and gas, have imposed sanctions, and have aided Ukraine with ammunition and arms.¹⁵⁹ Yet, India, the world's biggest democracy, has not done any of these things.¹⁶⁰

Rhetorically, the “rules-based” value is still present. On March 2nd, 2022, the United Nations General Assembly voted, 141 to 5, on a resolution which condemned Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.¹⁶¹ India noticeably abstained from voting. When explaining its decision to abstain, India's permanent representative to the United Nations at the time, T.S. Tirumurti, stated that: ‘Keeping in view the totality of the evolving situation, India has decided to abstain’.¹⁶² He further stated that: ‘India urges that all member states demonstrate their commitment to the principles of the UN Charter, to international law and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states’.¹⁶³

Nevertheless, whilst this rhetoric would suggest that India still considers the “rules-based” value to be important, this is not reflected in their actions, as it does not condemn Russia for harming Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Instead, one sees a practical focus on the “security” and “prosperity” values.

The “prosperity” value is most clearly reflected in India's actions and rhetoric surrounding its import of Russian oil, which it has recently greatly increased. In fact, India now gets 28 percent of its oil from Russia, whilst it only imported 0,2 percent before Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.¹⁶⁴ When justifying this increase, Indian officials stated it was their duty

¹⁵⁸ Sharma.

¹⁵⁹ Frayer. “A Year into the Ukraine War, the World's Biggest Democracy Still Won't Condemn Russia.”

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Kirby. “Why India Isn't Denouncing Russia's Ukraine War.”

¹⁶² The Wire Staff. “At UN General Assembly, India Abstains from Resolution Criticising Russian Actions in Ukraine.”

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Frayer.

to find “bargains” for their population.¹⁶⁵ India’s minister of External Affairs Jaishankar further stated it was hypocritical for wealthy Westerners to ask them to not do so, as ‘Europe has managed to reduce its imports [of Russian gas] while doing it in a manner that is comfortable’.¹⁶⁶ He further added that: ‘At 60,000 euros or whatever is your per capita income, you’re so caring about your population. I have a population at 2,000 dollars [per capita annual income]. I also need energy, and I am not in a position to pay high prices for oil’.¹⁶⁷

The “security” value is seemingly also present in India’s decision to maintain relations with Russia. Dr. Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan from the Observer Research Foundation, an Indian think tank, states that as the West is distancing itself from Russia, India fears Russia will start to get closer to China¹⁶⁸. She finds that the world is already seeing a close Russia-China relationship. India thus wants to make sure that Russia is not fully emerged in China’s camp, as it still sees China as its most significant national security threat.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, India is heavily depended on Russia for its weapons. Although its import of Russian weapons has recently fallen since the Ukraine War, it still gets 45 percent of its arms import from Russia.¹⁷⁰

These two examples create important insights regarding value complexity in India’s foreign policy, which are relevant for creating a deeper understanding of the AEP. When it comes to the AEP, the “rules-based”, “rightful place”, “security” and “prosperity” values can peacefully coexist, as they all create a preference for increased Indo-Pacific connectivity. Yet, when it comes to India’s foreign policy actions regarding RCEP and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, these values cannot coexist as they create opposing preferences. In both cases, the “security”, “prosperity” and indirectly the “rightful place” values are chosen as the dominant values directing India’s foreign policy behaviour. Yet, there are subtle differences between both cases.

In the case of RCEP, the situation mostly follows Ashizawa’s conception of the value-processing mechanism. Namely, there is a situation of value complexity, which refers to a situation in which values create opposing preferences.¹⁷¹ In this case, Ashizawa finds that some values can simply be omitted thereby ‘leaving one value (or a set of ones) as a dominant one’.¹⁷² This is what can be seen when it comes to RCEP, where the “rules-based” value is simply

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Frayer; Observer Research Foundation. “Observer Research Foundation, ORF.”; Observer Research Foundation. “Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan: Nuclear & Space Initiatives: NSG: Non Proliferation.”

¹⁶⁹ Frayer.

¹⁷⁰ Pandit. “India Remains World’s Largest Arms Importer, with Russia, France & US as the Biggest Suppliers.”

¹⁷¹ Ashizawa. 580.

¹⁷² Ibid.

omitted, leaving the “security”, “prosperity” and “rightful place” values as the dominant values.

However, in the case of India’s response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, a situation emerges that is not fully accounted for by Ashizawa’s framework. At a first glance, the situation seems very similar to RCEP, as the “prosperity”, “security” and indirectly the closely related “rightful place” values emerge as the dominant values thereby omitting the practical influence of the “rules-based” value. Yet, the “rules-based” value is not omitted rhetorically. In fact, the Indian government still considers it to be important to highlight the importance of international law, sovereignty and territorial integrity in its statements regarding the Ukraine War.¹⁷³ This rhetorical use of the “rules-based” value could be linked to India’s pursuit of the “rightful place” value, as it was previously established that the BJP ought to use “strong points” of Indian psyche, like “equity” and “harmony” to ensure future glory.¹⁷⁴ Following this logic, it would make sense for India to highlight the importance of international law and sovereignty in their discourse, especially given the fact that it has actively been pursuing a permanent seat in the United Nations’ Security Council.¹⁷⁵ However, Ashizawa’s value-action framework does not account for such intricate relations between different values nor does it discuss the discrepancies between rhetoric and foreign policy actions. Thereby highlighting the need for further evaluation of this framework.

Although this example raises new questions regarding the intricate relations between values and the discrepancies between India’s rhetoric and foreign policy actions, which are not accounted for by the value-action framework, these examples together still offer important insights which help to further grasp the dominant values and identities shaping India’s AEP. By assessing these examples, it becomes clear that in practice the “prosperity”, the “security” and indirectly the “rightful” place values trump the “rules-based” value in case of opposing preferences. This would suggest that these values also had a bigger say in the establishment of the AEP. Thereby simultaneously, highlighting the notion that under BJP rule the “once-thriving civilization” and the “challenged state” identities carry more weight in foreign policy than the “a democracy shaped by Hinduism in a changing Asian landscape” identity.

These findings share resemblances to a variety of realist, liberalist, constructivist works on the AEP. Similarly, to Singh and Sarwal, this thesis also finds that India is trying to safeguard its national interests, in terms of internal security concerns, economic diplomacy and

¹⁷³ The Wire Staff. “At UN General Assembly, India Abstains from Resolution Criticising Russian Actions in Ukraine.”

¹⁷⁴ Bharatiya Janata Party. “Election Manifesto 2014.” 40.

¹⁷⁵ PTI. “PM Modi Strongly Calls for Reform of UN.”

the influence of China in the region.¹⁷⁶ Its findings also share resemblances with Ngaibakching, who highlights India's promotion of the rules-based order and Miller who delves into India's pursuit of status.¹⁷⁷ This is not to say that it sees connections with all of the literature on India's foreign policy. For instance, Pethiyagoda's value of "hierarchy" was not reflected in the examined sources.¹⁷⁸ This thesis' main contribution to academic literature on the AEP is not the content of the values it has examined. Instead, its value lies in the links it has made between these values and conceptions of state identity and its examination of the underlying competition between these different values through the use of the value-processing mechanism.

¹⁷⁶ Singh and Sarwal. 751 & 753.

¹⁷⁷ Ngaibakching.. 67.; Miller. 30..

¹⁷⁸ Pethiyagoda. 69.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to explore how the conceptions of state identity have shaped the AEP. In doing so it has established that the BJP's views of India as a "once-thriving state", a "challenged state" and a "democracy shaped by Hinduism in a changing Asian landscape" gave rise to the "security", "prosperity", "rightful place" and "rules-based" values which together created a preference for increased Indo-Pacific connectivity. These preferences for increased Indo-Pacific connectivity subsequently led to foreign policy actions like the AEP. However, an examination of India's wider foreign policy showed that not all values carry equal weight under BJP rule, as "the rules-based" value is quickly discarded in foreign policy in favour of the "security". The "prosperity", and indirectly the "rightful place" value in case of opposing preferences. Thereby, suggesting that the "challenged state" and "once-thriving state" conceptions of identity had the most influence in shaping the AEP.

In some ways India's dominant pursuit of the "security" and "prosperity" values through the AEP could be linked to dominant realist academic literature which also highlights how the pursuit of national interests and security has shaped the AEP. In doing so, they are not wrong. However, they overlook the social dimension that shapes these values. Namely the importance of the BJP's conceptions of India as a "once-thriving state" and a "challenged state" for shaping these pursuits.

However, more constructivist work on the AEP is desperately needed given the fact that no recent work on the influence of identity on the AEP could be found for the literature review. This work could build on the weaknesses of this research, by including more primary data in the shape of interviews with Indian foreign policymakers. Furthermore, as established in the methodology chapter this essay considers the BJP to be a unitary actor, which given the different political orientations of members is most likely not reflective of real life. Through the use of new data and methods, it would be worth exploring how value-competition amongst BJP members influences the AEP. From a theoretical standpoint, there is value in researching how the value-action framework can be revised to account for more intricate relations amongst values and discrepancies between foreign policy action and rhetoric.

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