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# Reinventing Regional Security Institutions in Asia and Africa

Power shifts, ideas, and  
institutional change

Kei Koga



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Regional security institutions play a significant role in shaping the behavior of existing and rising regional powers by nurturing security norms and rules, monitoring state activities, and sometimes imposing sanctions, thereby formulating the configuration of regional security dynamics. Yet their security roles and influence do not remain constant. Their *raison d'être*, objectives, and functions experience sporadic changes, and some institutions upgrade military functions for peacekeeping operations, while others limit their functions to political and security dialogues. The question is: why and how do these variances in institutional change emerge?

This book explores the mechanisms of institutional change, focusing on regional security institutions led by non-great powers. It constructs a theoretical model for institutional change that provides a new understanding of their changing roles in regional security, which has yet to be fully explored in the International Relations field. In so doing, the book illuminates why, when, and how each organization restructures its role, function, and influence. Using case studies of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Organization of African Unity (OAU)/African Union (AU), it also sheds light on similarities and differences in institutional change between regional security institutions.

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**Kei Koga**



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**To Nozomi and Shota**



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# 1 Introduction

Regional security institutions are intriguingly complex. Scholars have long debated their security utility and many emphasize their limitations in shaping international politics, yet a number of states and policymakers have invested and are willing to invest their diplomatic and economic resources in these “ineffective” institutions. Despite the conventional notion that power politics rules institutions, major powers also engage with these regional institutions and often adhere to their norms and rules. The ability of these institutions to wield such influence hinges not only on their general utility in providing information or reducing transaction costs among members, but also on their political legitimacy as an aggregation of states within the international arena and their role in providing regional norms and rules that determine legitimate conduct for member states. With this power, the institutions can constrain and empower states by shaping states’ choices, behavior, and preferences, and by influencing those of existing and rising regional powers.

The issue of their influence, however, is only half the story. Because the strategic environment rarely remains constant, the regional institutions simultaneously evolve, and do not necessarily emphasize the same objectives, norms, or rules over time. Their institutional *raison d’être* is subject to change, as is their constraining and empowering ability to shape regional security. For example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) at its inception in 1967 never considered having a security mechanism, but it later created security forums in Southeast Asia and beyond, including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) (1994) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (2010). The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (1975) primarily aimed to create an economic community in West Africa, but it institutionalized a peacekeeping mechanism in the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) (1999). The Organization of African Unity (OAU) (1963) strictly adhered to the principle of noninterference, and it was inconceivable to have a conditional noninterference principle—which its successor, the African Union (AU), currently holds. Articulating the security effect of these regional security institutions (RSIs) and the dynamics of regional security, therefore, requires an in-depth understanding of institutional change.

## 2 *Introduction*

However, little of the literature in International Relations (IR) focuses on the questions of why and how institutional changes occur (Acharya 2009; Cottrell 2016).<sup>1</sup> Instead, mainstream IR theories have long focused on the general utility of institutions in the international system, a utility that is characterized by cooperation among states under anarchy. Neorealists argue that the utility of institutions is extremely limited in the international system because it is ultimately the responsibility of the state as a sovereign entity to ensure its own security in the anarchic world. Given the nature of states, which are constantly concerned with relative power vis-à-vis other states and could defect from fulfilling institutional responsibilities, realists claim that institutions do not necessarily guarantee a state's survival or security.

Other theories, including institutionalism and social constructivism, note that institutions—including security institutions—are not always utility-maximizing tools for states to ensure their own security by the aggregation of military capability. For institutionalists, institutions are useful for states to induce long-term cooperation, even within the security field. Despite their general acceptance of the realist notion that states value relative power, states can effectively cooperate with one another and are satisfied with attaining absolute gains under the conditions that institutions create. These conditions are established by institutions' monitoring and sanctioning function to prevent states from "cheating," offering a "shadow of future" effect (Axelrod and Keohane 1985, 232; Oye 1986).

Social constructivists argue that institutions "socialize" actors. Institutions not only create "regulative norms," which constrain members' behavior by setting obligation, prohibition, and permission, but also nurture a "constitutive norm," which establishes a new identity and new interests for member states by collectively creating meanings and symbolizing certain actions (Searle 1995, 29). Member states' shared commitments to social norms then promote increased understanding of appropriate behavior, resulting in a reconstitution of their identity that ultimately shapes their interests, even in the security field (Wendt 1992, 417; Katzenstein 1996, 1–32; Johnston 2001, 487–515).

These studies of general institutional utility are vital to understanding why international institutions are formulated, persist, and occasionally collapse. However, research has suffered from five limitations—both academic and practical—to the broader study of institutions. First, current research treats all institutions monolithically by focusing on their general utility, and therefore has difficulty explaining the variance among institutions and the process of institutional change. Neorealists, institutionalists, and, to a lesser extent, social constructivists explore the common characteristics of a broad range of institutions, and they often fail to distinguish differences among those institutions, particularly RSIs. Second, the research assumes that the functionality of international institutions is a given; it clarifies neither why and how specific objectives, norms, and functions came about, nor what effect they were intended to have. Third, previous studies demonstrate a regional bias toward western states; in their analysis, they fail to focus on regional security institutions created and managed by

non-great powers.<sup>2</sup> Fourth, the omission of RSI's institutional change as a research agenda in IR diminishes the importance of treating regional institutions as active participants in shaping regional security dynamics. Fifth, although many studies seek to test general theories of institutions by examining a regional institution, these studies do not necessarily encourage a systematic and comparative analysis of institutions across regions, except for the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the most developed regional institutions in the world.

To overcome these limitations, this book analyzes institutional changes in RSIs led by non-great powers. Constructing a new theoretical model, the book explains why and how variances in institutional change among RSIs emerge. This theoretical model illustrates a two-step process of institutional change. First, expected or actual changes in the regional distribution of power create the conditions for an RSI's institutional change. The model posits that the changes in the distribution of power are neither sole determinants nor a sufficient condition for an institutional change, but that they are a necessary condition. Second, member states reassess an RSI's security utility in the face of actual or expected changes in the distribution of power, and the outcome of such a reassessment determines the type of institutional change. These member states' reassessments are based on a reference point, "institutional security preference" (ISP)—an institution's preference order consisting of its objectives, rules, and norms for addressing certain regional security issues. In short, when the regional distribution of power changes or is expected to change, member states assess its effects on the RSI's security utility. Through internal evaluation of the future security utility with financial and political cost calculations, member states determine the specific direction of institutional change or lack thereof.

An agent-centered historical institutionalism in comparative politics has been particularly instrumental in constructing this theoretical model. This historical institutionalism emphasizes the role of both structure and agent in explaining institutional change. Its unique contribution rests on two basic concepts that deepen our understanding of how and when agents shape institutions. One such concept is its definition of change. Unlike ahistorical IR theories, historical institutionalism emphasizes a historical reference point to identify change. Institutional history such as sunk costs, institutional legacy, and past decisions create this reference point, which helps actors to evaluate and judge an institution's current utility relative to the past. The other such concept is a "critical juncture" created by an exogenous shock. A critical juncture produces a "window of opportunity" in which actors' choices are most likely to affect an outcome. Unlike conventional historical institutionalism, however, agent-centered historical institutionalism does not consider exogenous shock the sole cause of institutional change; it posits that the actors within the institution also play a pivotal role in determining the direction of institutional change, although they still face a certain degree of constraints from the institution. Thus this model contributes to deepening the understanding of the roles of both structure and agent in institutional change.



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Still, the historical institutionalism model needs refinement. It does not clarify how structure and agent interact and influence one another at a given moment in time in the international realm. A new theoretical model of institutional change synthesizes this approach in the literature on institution in IR to enhance its explanatory power further. The model can specify the degree to which structural and agent factors are integral to institutional change. This book, therefore, introduces a new theoretical synthesis, one that considers both structure and agent imperative to understanding the causes and processes of institutional change.

Why should we care about the mechanism of institutional change? Explaining this phenomenon contributes to both policy development and academic knowledge. From a policy perspective, this study offers policymakers a better understanding of the utility of each RSI and the dynamics of its institutional change. With this knowledge, policymakers can anticipate when institutional change is likely to occur and what type of institutional change an RSI would likely experience. Moreover, policymakers can anticipate when their ideas and proposals will most influence the outcome of institutional change. Doing so allows them to allocate effectively diplomatic and political resources toward such institutions and to formulate their security policies concerning the utilization of RSIs to achieve their policy objectives. In short, the analysis provides an understanding of “when” and “how” policy initiatives can have the most effect on RSIs’ institutional design.

From an academic perspective, this research offers three main contributions. First, it fills a gap in the existing literature on international institutions because little within IR theory focuses on institutional change. This contribution will help scholars avoid treating security institutions monolithically and to identify and understand each institution’s functions, effects, and qualitative change. Second, it addresses both continuity and change, whereas mainstream IR theories predominantly tend to focus on continuity. Although constructivism attempts to explore the evolution of international norms, it faces difficulty explaining the process of interaction between agent and structure due to different prioritization of structure and agent within its own paradigm (Checkel 1998; Copeland 2000). Unlike these mainstream theories, this theoretical model—based on agent-centered historical institutionalism—enhances the explanatory power of the characteristics of RSIs by emphasizing discontinuity and continuity. Third, this study deepens the understanding of the utility of RSIs led by small- and medium-sized powers. To date, there has been no systematic research on their institutional change; however, their role is gaining currency in regional security, particularly considering how small- and medium-powers can manage and counter-influence great power politics and how they address the emergence of transnational security threats, including international terrorism. In this sense, this systematic examination contributes to further understanding the utility of RSIs.

Based on this theoretical model of institutional change in RSIs, the book conducts its analysis by employing the method of structured, focused

comparison to illustrate clearly the two-step process of institutional change. This method helps to uncover causal paths of institutional change: how changes in the regional distribution of power generally induce institutional change (George and Bennett 2005, 75). Additionally, the method illuminates a clear comparison of each case by focusing on the particular aspects of the historical cases and makes “systematic comparison and [accumulation] of the findings of the cases” possible (George and Bennett 2005, 67). It verifies the degree of applicability of the model of institutional change. Furthermore, examining each case through process-tracing helps to investigate a detailed causal chain concerning how member states’ expectations or perceptions influence institutional change and how actors within an RSI influence a specific direction of institutional change. With these theoretical and methodological frameworks, this book examines three RSIs led by non-great powers: ASEAN, ECOWAS, and OAU/AU. I selected these RSIs because they are led by small and medium powers, do not have great powers as members, and evolved to have security objectives, norms, or functions despite this role being beyond the scope of their original objectives. Thus I examine periods for each RSI when changes in its security norms, rules, functions, objectives, or actions were observed.

To operationalize the model of institutional change, I analyzed the evolution of agendas, discussions, decisions, and actions within each RSI by employing process-tracing through archival research, interviews, government reports, and secondary sources such as journal articles and newspapers. Specifically, archival research on these three institutions included over 1,000 documents, some of which—gained through my field research in Ethiopia, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Singapore—have yet to be explored in IR. This detailed process-tracing through primary and secondary materials has helped to identify key actors and processes in the construction of the RSI’s ISP.

This book is organized into seven chapters. Following a brief review of existing approaches to and theoretical models of institutional change, Chapter 2 presents a new theoretical model of a two-step process of institutional change based on agent-based historical institutionalism. It discusses detailed definitions and different types of RSIs and institutional change.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 offer case studies for ASEAN, ECOWAS, and the OAU/AU respectively. Each chapter assesses the strategic landscape of the region, member states’ expectations of the utility of each institution, and member states’ discussions concerning the potential transformation within the institution. At the end of each chapter, I present a within-case analysis to generate patterns of institutional change in the same RSI. More specifically, for ASEAN, the periods of 1968–1976 and 1988–1997 are examined. From 1968 to 1976, ASEAN issued the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), and Bali Concord I. This period is also divided into two phases. The first is from 1968 to 1971, when ASEAN adopted the declaration of ZOPFAN in the context of US and British political and military retrenchment from Southeast Asia. The second is from 1972 to 1976, when ASEAN issued TAC and Bali

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Concord I, while the Sino-Soviet rivalry intensified behind the Sino-US rapprochement. From 1988 to 1997, ASEAN created the ASEAN Regional Forum and ASEAN+3, two ASEAN-led multilateral institutions whose membership includes states outside of Southeast Asia. Another strategic change, US and Soviet disengagement from the region after the end of the Cold War, was witnessed during this period. Whereas ASEAN maintains a central position in both institutions, these newly established institutions formally focus on security issues.

Two periods for ECOWAS are also examined. One is from 1976 to 1981, during which time ECOWAS issued two security protocols: the Protocol on Nonaggression (PNA) (1978) and the Protocol relating to Mutual Assistance on Defence (PMAD) (1981). Although ECOWAS functionally began as a socioeconomic institution, as stipulated in its 1975 treaty, these security protocols allowed ECOWAS to assume security functions, including collective self-defense and collective security, at least on paper. I examine these two protocols and analyze the regional interstate and domestic conflicts that resulted from the Portuguese retrenchment from West Africa in the African continent in 1975. The second period is from 1989 to 1999. During this period, ECOWAS reformed its security functions through two sets of important security decisions or documents. One set is from 1989 to 1993, when ECOWAS created its Standing Mediation Committee, the Declaration of Political Principles, and the Revised Treaty. The other is from 1994 to 1999, during which time ECOWAS created the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (MCPMRPS). Through these declarations and documents ECOWAS officially established a comprehensive security mechanism, which included a peacekeeping function. In this section I analyze the strategic trend of the non-involvement of the great powers and the United Nations and how it influenced ECOWAS discussions. I also address how changes in the regional balance of power influenced ECOWAS to change.

Concerning the OAU/AU, I examine two periods: 1979–1982 and 1989–2002. In the former period, the OAU decided for the first time to establish a peacekeeping mission in Chad. I analyze the effect of the 1979 Chad Civil War on the OAU's internal discussions and the process of the formation of OAU peacekeeping forces. In fact, although the OAU convened a defense committee from the mission's inception, the institution itself lacked a military function; however, it managed to form a peacekeeping force. This case study is particularly interesting because the OAU did not institutionalize peacekeeping, or any other security mechanisms, within the organization as a whole following the mission in Chad. In the latter period, after the end of the Cold War, the OAU undertook a clearly observable change, transforming itself into the AU, an institution that maintained the right to intervene in intrastate conflicts under certain conditions. This period included sequential changes in the OAU and is divided into two phases. The first is from 1989 to 1993, when the OAU decided to establish the Central Organ of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, through the 1993 Cairo Declaration.

The second is from 1994 to 2002, when the OAU decided to replace itself with the AU through its adaptation of the Constitutive Act. Analyzing the development of the African regional strategic landscape during the 1990s, the OAU's institutional transformation to AU is analyzed.

Following these case studies, Chapter 6 contains cross-comparison analyses of ASEAN, ECOWAS, and the OAU/AU based on each case study conducted. Finally, Chapter 7 presents conclusions that yield academic contributions and policy implications derived from this study.

## 2 Theory of institutional change in regional security institutions (RSIs)

Why and how do variances in changes in regional security institutions (RSIs) occur? In International Relations (IR), the theory of institutional change in RSIs has been neither rigorously discussed nor constructed. Although many IR scholars have addressed international institutions, their theoretical frameworks have not focused on institutional change. Theories relevant to institutional evolution do exist; however, one can draw more detailed theories of institutional change from other disciplines (e.g., North 1990; Campbell 2004; Scott 2013), particularly the agent-centered historical institutionalism in comparative politics. Obviously, this theory does not aspire to explain the change in international institutions specifically, because its subject matter focuses on domestic institutions; thus it is imperative to modify the theoretical framework and make it applicable internationally.

This chapter deconstructs the existing theoretical frameworks relevant to institutional change into elements of approaches and concepts, and reconstructs a new theory by synthesizing them. First, the chapter reviews the approaches existing in the IR field—the ontological dimension of relevant theory based on the agent-structure framework. It illustrates how the agent-centered historical institutionalism approach best explains variances of institutional change. Second, it discusses the concept and definitions of institutional change in RSIs. With the agent-centered historical institutionalism approach in mind, this chapter constructs a new theoretical model, illuminating a two-step process of institutional change for RSIs.

### I Paucity of theoretical framework for institutional change in IR

The question of which factor alters institutions—structure or agent—has been one of the long-standing debates of social science and an indispensable ontological question that theory construction seeks to answer (Wendt 1987; Wight 2006). In general, depending on their ontological standpoint, theories of institutional change will fall into one of three approaches: structure-focused, agent-focused, or the combined approach. The structure-focused approach attributes causes of institutional change to external environment outside institutions,

whereas the agent-focused approach assumes that conscious actors produce changes. The combined approach, conversely, is an eclectic approach that emphasizes interdependence between structure and agent, which shape one another's characteristics.

The mainstream IR theories, namely neorealism and institutionalism, assume the structure-focused approach. Given that these theories do not deal with institutional change *per se*, it is important to focus on how they explain these changes. In these mainstream theories, "structure" refers to an anarchic international system in which there is no world government to enforce international rules and norms; thus states compete with each other to ensure their own security, generating an equilibrium, or "balance of power." The approach assumes that changes are caused by shifts in the power balance among states. Once the balance of power is disrupted, reconfiguration of power relationships among states begins, eventually resulting in a new and relatively stable power balance. The degree of such a change depends on the depth of strategic impacts, which is determined by the timing and the magnitude of the shifts in power. Slow and small power shifts, such as an arms buildup of Southeast Asian states, induce only small changes in the balance of power, whereas fast and large power shifts, such as the rapid increase in China's military capabilities, produce radical ones.

With these basic assumptions, the neorealist argues that states constantly fear other states' domination or intrusion, but that states, unable to defend themselves unaided due to limited resources and capabilities, cooperate through the establishment of institutions such as coalitions and alliances (Waltz 1979, 126; Gilpin 1981, 193). This cooperation is more likely when states perceive common threats, because such cooperation directly serves their security interests. However, such cooperation is essentially ephemeral; when common threats or interests disappear, the coalitions, alliances, or institutions also disappear (Waltz 1979, 166–167; Mearsheimer 1994/1995, 9; 2001, 51–52). As such, for the neorealist, international institutions are "a reflection of the distribution of power in the world," and fail to have an independent effect on international politics (Mearsheimer 1995, 82). Nevertheless, the main problem with the neorealist explanation is that, in reality, institutions continue to operate after the original common threats disappear. NATO's survival in the post-Cold War era is an evident case. Moreover, the disappearance of communist threats and an increase in relative regional stability in Southeast Asia did not lead to the dissolution of ASEAN. In short, the neorealist's dichotomous definition of change—institutional survival or collapse—cannot explain the flexibility and resilience of institutions.

Institutionalist theory employs the same structure-based approach but brings other concepts that better explain changes in security institutions than does neorealist theory. Most notably, Wallander and Keohane argue that when the security environment—the balance of power—changes, institutions adapt by altering their original objectives, thereby securing their survival (Wallander and Keohane 1999, 23). To identify such changes within security institutions, the

authors create a clear conceptual demarcation between threats and risks, and argue that security institutions transform from threat-oriented coalitions to risk-oriented coalitions. Yet this does not mean that all institutions can transform. The institutions whose principles are “contradictory to those of a new era” would likely collapse, whereas a change is more likely to occur in a “highly institutionalized” institution, which possesses high adjustability to the outside environment (Wallander and Keohane 1999, 25 and 33–34).<sup>3</sup>

This institutionalist theory provides nuanced explanations for the process of institutional change; however, it is still insufficient, in part because part of their argument is contradictory. The most notable example is the Warsaw Pact Organization, which was built on the principle that the Soviet bloc—a highly institutionalized entity throughout the Cold War—would counterbalance the United States and its allies politically and militarily. If this institutionalist theory were correct, it would predict that the organization would transform into a risk-oriented coalition adapted to the new security environment, but institutionalists argue that it collapsed at the end of the Cold War because its principles are contradictory to a new era. In other words, the institutionalist remains silent about which variable is more important in influencing institutional change, high institutionalization or contradictory principle. Furthermore, the development of security institutions is not necessarily linear from threat-oriented to risk-oriented. For example, both the 1981 ECOWAS Protocol on Mutual Assistance of Defence and the 1990 establishment of the Economic Community of West African States Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (now the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group: ECOMOG) were created to manage the risk of internal conflicts among member states. ECOWAS has never functioned as a threat-oriented institution designed to counter external threats from nonmember states. In this sense, its theoretical applicability is quite limited to a few particular institutions, namely NATO.

Overall, the strength of the structure-focused approach lies in explaining the conditions of institutional change. The approach clearly notes that a change in the balance of power is the cause of institutional change. Nevertheless, its weakness lies in its inability to specify why and how institutional change in each security institution differs significantly. Institutionalism attempts to answer this question, but its theoretical framework cannot be applied broadly due to its very limited scope. It is too deterministic to attribute every institutional change to a structural cause, because such an approach remains silent on why some institutions survive and others collapse, and on what direction of change and why such specific change is generated.

An alternative to the structure-focused approach is the agent-focused approach. The functionalism/neofunctionalism argument is a seminal form of the agent-focused approach because it focuses on policymakers’ decisions to explain regional integration process (Mitrany 1943; Haas 1958; Nye 1971). The agent-focused approach regards agent factors, including ideational and normative elements, to be the causes of institutional stability or change. Rather than emphasizing structural constraints, it underscores the role of agents, who

construct and reconstruct their worldviews by internalizing ideas, and behave accordingly—the so-called “logic of appropriateness.” According to this logic, human behavior is primarily “driven by rules of appropriate or exemplary behavior, organized into institutions” (March and Olsen 2004, 3). This subjectivity/ intersubjectivity creates normative orders that become embodied as actors’ “identity” and “culture.” Consequently, the creation and diffusion of ideas or norms produces a new cognitive template through which agents see reality, leading to institutional change.

Social constructivism is largely associated with this approach and emphasizes the role of ideational factors in international relations. These factors include the formulation of identities and interests through interaction among actors, or “socialization” (Wendt 1999, 81–82). As both ideas and practices interactively shape social norms, ideas are widely shared in society and affect actors’ behavior. Thus for social constructivists, social norms—created by agents—shape structure, and they view institutions as either processes or outcomes of norm diffusion created by agents through socialization (e.g., Johnston 2001; Checkel 2005; Acharya 2009).

The problem, however, is that social constructivists cannot agree on a definition of institutions (Haas and Haas 2002, 582). The difference stems from which procedural point is emphasized in norms and identity consolidation: whether agents have already taken for granted norms and identity, or are still shaping and nurturing them. Without clarifying constructivists’ focus on this issue, it is quite difficult to analyze when and how interactions between agent and structure occur and which factor comes first (Checkel 1998, 342; Copeland 2000, 197). Due to the broad range of schools of thought existing within social constructivism, although constructivists’ emphasis on the role of norm diffusion helps understand how actors formulate preferences and analyze how institutions change, there is no consistent framework to explain institutional change.

The agent-focused approach helps explain the divergence of characteristics and functionality among institutions. Nonetheless, given this approach’s emphasis on the role of ideational factors, the approach does not explain where and how these ideas have emerged and are selected in a given period. Moreover, just as in the structure-focused approach, the approach tends to emphasize continuity, or equilibrium, rather than change (Thelen 1999, 387; Hay 2008, 57–60). The difference is that it emphasizes normative perspectives of equilibrium rather than material perspectives.

The combined approach of structure-based and agent-based approaches employs a dialectical analysis of institutional change. In this category, the most well-known approach is the structuration approach. It emphasizes simultaneous interactions between structure and agent without presuming the primacy of either (Giddens 1984, 25). In explaining institutional change, theories that adopt this approach recognize the important role played by both exogenous and endogenous factors—such as a shift in the balance of power, norm diffusion, or an accumulation of incremental changes through iterative institutional practice—and assume that institutions constantly change, whether incrementally