My research examines how issues related to national identity – what I term a “grand vision” of the state – affect the politics behind foreign policy making. The cases I examine in detail all derive from postwar Japan, with a particular focus on Japanese security policy. My dissertation examines two types of grand visions, those derived from both “functional” and “regional” identity projects. Based on detailed process-tracing of several cases, I argue that the images leaders use to justify foreign policy is grounded in and displays a grand vision of the state’s perception of itself in the international system. This grand vision serves both to justify leaders’ current decisions and to influence future policy options through its institutionalization into the foreign policy-making process. In brief, I argue that it is important to consider through a detailed analysis of specific cases the mechanisms by which such grand visions constrain policymakers, and how both these mechanisms and the grand vision itself may change over time. By focusing on a limited number of specific cases, I am able to examine the effect of the grand vision on foreign policy outcomes vis-a-vis major domestic and international actors as well as changes in the international system resulting from the end of the Cold War. The resultant analysis therefore contributes both to the empirically-focused literature on Japanese security and economic policies as well as to the broader political science literature on the impact and mechanisms of identity-based factors on public policymaking.

The bulk of my empirical research focuses on the now common reference to Japan’s postwar grand vision of itself as an “antimilitarist” state. Rather than surveying a variety of policies over the fifty plus years of postwar Japanese security policy, I examine how this “functional” grand vision of Japan’s role in the international system affected the debate, adoption, and subsequent evolution of the Japanese government’s bans on the export of arms and on the military use of space. I discuss each of these two “bans” at length in individual chapters which begin with an overview of the initial debates over the policies and continue chronologically into the post-Cold War period. In a third empirical chapter, I examine the impact of these two separate foreign policies on the post-Cold War security issue of Japan’s joint Theater Missile Defense (TMD) development with the United States in order to demonstrate how Japan’s functional grand vision continues to affect the policy-making process under the new security environment of the post-Cold War era.

Identity projects are not limited to security issues but also play an important role in the emerging post-Cold War economic architecture in the Asia-Pacific. In consideration of this important phenomenon, and in order to offer greater case variation in my theory-building project, my dissertation also will examine the debate over Japan’s “regional” grand vision and its effect on the arena of international political economy. In this area, I will examine the effect of a changing regional grand vision on Japan’s policies towards Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC) in the late 1980s and early 1990s.