Social science research is fragmented by the widely differing and seemingly contradictory approaches used by the different disciplines of the social sciences to explain human action. Attempts at integrating different social science approaches to explain action have often been frustrated by the difficulty of incorporating cultural assumptions into rational choice theories without robbing them of their generality or making them too vague for predictions. Another problem has been the major disagreements among cultural theorists regarding the ways in which culture affects preferences and beliefs.

Sun-Ki Chai provides a general model of preference and belief formation, addressing the largest unresolved issue in rational choice theories of action. With Choosing an Identity, Chai plays a bridging role between these approaches by augmenting and modifying the main ideas of the rational choice model to make it more compatible with empirical findings in other fields. The resulting model is used to analyze three major unresolved issues in the developing world: the sources of a government's economic ideology, the origins of ethnic group boundaries, and the relationship between modernization and violence.

"Choosing an Identity is an ambitious and rewarding book. Expanding on rational choice accounts, which take preferences as given, Sun-Ki Chai offers a fresh model of belief and preference formation, a model that draws on psychological approaches to dissonance and economic approaches to regret. He then applies this approach to the origins of economic ideologies in postcolonial states, the origins of ethnic boundaries, and the conditions that generate political violence. Choosing an Identity displays a remarkable breadth of scholarship, and speaks directly and effectively to the big core issues in contemporary social science."

—ROBERT W. JACKMAN, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

"Sun-Ki Chai has written a very original and stunningly researched book that is clearly written and, considering the technical nature of the argument, generally accessible. It is an important and highly innovative contribution that promises to stimulate important discussion and improvement in the rational choice approach. In short, this is the kind of book that can genuinely lead to progress in our understanding of politics."

—BRUCE BUENO DE MESQUITA, STANFORD UNIVERSITY

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