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Why is there No Non-Western International Relations Theory? Ten Years On

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Introduction

A decade ago in 2007 we published a forum in *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific (IRAP)* on ‘Why there is no non-Western IR theory?’. We focused that question on Asia, and assembled a group of authors to set out the state of IR in various countries and sub-regions across Asia. We posed it as a challenge to Asian IR scholars to get their voices and their histories into the global debates on how to think about IR, both for their sakes, and as a necessity for the balanced development of the discipline. This challenge attracted sufficient interest for us to follow it on with an expanded book version (Acharya and Buzan, 2010), bringing in more case chapters, including one looking at the Islamic world.

In our framing chapters we took a wide and pluralist view of what counts as IR theory, and stressed the need to bring IR and Area Studies together. We looked at the reasons behind the global dominance of Western IR theory and Western ‘world’ history, and at the possible resources for IR theory in the non-West. Our main arguments were:

- The need for IR and IR theory to have a world historical framing rather than a Western historical one, and the need for the Non-West to both challenge the Western bias and get its own histories into play within IR.
- The need to keep aware of the Coxian injunction that theory is always for someone and for some purpose, and to apply this to all IR theory.
- The importance of history and political theory in IR theory, the massive Western bias in both, and the opportunities for the non-West to mobilise their own historical and philosophical resources.
- That for several reasons, especially first mover advantage, the extensive training of non-Western IR scholars in the US, and Gramscian hegemony, Western IR theory was dominant in Asia. Although there were resources for theory in parts of Asia, there was not much indigenous IR theory there despite a quite widespread feeling that much of Western IRT did not fit well with either Asian history or contemporary Asian IR practices.
- That the likely main movement in Asia was towards national schools of IR and that this offered both dangers and opportunities. Asian IR was not just playing catch-up with the West, but it was not regionally integrated either, and stood in some danger of fragmenting the discipline, both in Asia and globally.

There is no doubt that this work had an impact. According to the journal metrics of *IRAP*, as of June 2016, articles from the 2007 forum occupy five of the top ten places in the journal's list of most-cited articles, including first and second. As of July 2016 Google Scholar recorded over 200 citations for the editors' Introduction, and over 150 for the book. On this basis it seems justified to revisit this project ten-years on, and assess the current state of play. Much of what we said then about IR theory, the nature and reasons for Western dominance, and the resources available in Asia still stands. What we do in this article is first, to survey and assess the relevant literature that has come out since then; second, to set out four ways in which our own understanding of this issue has evolved since 2007; third to reflect on some ways in which Asian IR might contribute to the emergence of what we call 'Global IR'; and fourth to look specifically at hierarchy as an issue on which particularly Northeast Asian history and political theory might offer a comparative advantage. Our aim is to renew, and perhaps refocus, the challenge to Asian IR scholars, and our hope is that this will contribute to the building of Global IR.

Whither IR Theory?

Before turning our attention to developments in IR theory in Asia, we set the context by briefly taking stock of the state of IR theory in general. Looking back at how IR theory has developed in the past decade, several trends stand out. First, the field's mainstream, centered on the West, especially the US, appears to have moved past the "great debates" between paradigms (between realism and idealism, between classical and behaviouralist approaches, and between positivists and post-positivists), and "isms" (especially featuring Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism) (Jackson and Nexon, 2013: 545-48). The most recent debate, between rationalism (Realism and Liberalism) on the one hand and Constructivism on the other, has given way to attempts at paradigm bridging, theoretical pluralism and analytical eclecticism. (Dunne, Hansen and Wight, 2013).

Second, the fading interest in the "big" or meta-theoretical debates has been accompanied by the growing popularity of "middle-range theories". Such work identifies research questions or "issue-oriented puzzles" (Walt, 2005:33) in international affairs and explains them with the help of IR literature's "widely accepted causal mechanisms" (Jackson and Nexon, 2013: 548), that specify the relationship between variables. The vast majority of work in major IR journals in the US fall into this category (Jackson and Nexon 2013: 548), though that is much less true of European IR journals, most of which maintain a broad spectrum of epistemological approaches. The rising IR journals in Asia (*The Chinese Journal of International Politics* has joined *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*) also contain a broad spectrum of theoretical approaches. The

narrow positivist approach has been criticised for being constrained by prevailing “epistemological and ontological assumptions” (Dunne, Hansen and Wight, 2013), for producing mostly conditional or contingent generalizations (Walt, 2005:33), and focusing too much on “practically-relevant knowledge” (Reus-Smit, 2013), at the expense of theoretical innovation. Hence, the talk of “the end of international theory” (Dunne, Hansen and Wight, 2013).

The rise of middle-range theory has mixed implications for those seeking to open IR theory up to the non-Western world. On the one hand. They have expanded the use of IR theory in general. They have stoked the curiosity of Western scholars in the wider world of regions and helped to engage the interest of non-Western scholars in IR theory. On the other hand, this type of work is also primarily, if not always, deductive. It is more concerned with testing the empirical validity of existing concepts than developing entirely new concepts and theories on the basis of new or previously neglected empirical data. The concepts and causal mechanisms it employs for its deductive reasoning are derived mainly from the Western history and experience. This entrenches the tradition of Western dominance in IR theory.

A third development in IR theory during the past decade has been the further rise of Constructivism. In the 2014 Teaching, Research, and Policy (TRIP) Survey (2014), Constructivism came out the top choice of an IR paradigm 22.5%, followed by Realism and Liberalism. (It should be noted, however, that the numbers of those who opted for “I do not use paradigm” exceeded Constructivism, attesting to the aforementioned point about the declining interest in paradigm debates).¹ Alexander Wendt displaced Robert Keohane as “the scholar whose work has had the greatest influence on the field of IR in the past 20 years”.²

The rise of Constructivism has some positive implications for those committed to the project of a more universal discipline of IR or Global IR. Constructivism’s emphasis on ideational forces compared to the material “powerlessness” of the developing countries (Puchala 2000:151) offers greater scope for capturing their normative role in world politics, such as in contesting and localizing Western norms and creating new ones to reform and strengthen world order.³ Second, Constructivism has made inroads into the study of regional dynamics by both Western and non-Western scholars (See for example, Barnett, 1995, 1998 on the Middle East; Kacowitz, 2005, and Sikkink, 2014 on Latin America; Johnston, 1998, and Hemmer and Katzenstein, 2002 on East Asia; and Acharya 2001, 2004, 2009, 2011 on Southeast Asia and Asian regionalism in general). The influential Constructivist book, *Security Communities* (Adler and Barnett 1998), largely focused on regions, both Europe and outside. All this literature has been invaluable in stimulating theory-guided

debates and analysis and communication among both Western and non-Western scholars.

Third, with its emphasis on culture and identity, Constructivism has offered a valuable bridge between the area studies tradition that is popular in the IR literature in the non-Western world and the centres of IR in the West. As a Malaysian IR scholar (Karim 2007) writes, “Thinking in the constructivist vein has been about the best gift made available to scholars and leaders in the region.”

Yet, Constructivism remains largely a Western-centric enterprise. While constructivism has moved beyond its initial privileging of Western norms and norm protagonists, it continues to neglect issues of race and pre-Westphalian civilizations in Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere that might bring new insights into IR theory from outside the core sourcing areas of the West. And a recent study analyzing an extensive journal-based data set (Bertucci, Hayes and James 2016), finds that “despite constructivism’s place as the leading theoretical alternative to rationalist approaches to the study of international relations, in terms of its substantive and empirical scope constructivism does not look much different than rationalist alternatives like realism and liberalism. In all cases, scholarship primarily focuses on security processes and outcomes taking place in the North Atlantic region and Europe”. They note that about 45 percent of their sampled Constructivist research relates to the North Atlantic region, followed by 13.1 percent on Asia, whereas “regions such as Latin America, Africa and, most notably, the Middle East, have received only scant attention.” From the other side, the relationalist work in Northeast Asia (Qin, 2011, 2016; Shih and Yin, 2013) seems to make only tenuous connections with work going on under the same label in the US.

These above-mentioned trends in IR theory are not necessarily irreversible. Constructivism appears to be losing its shine in the post-theoretical turn in IR. Scholars are already looking for clues to a possible new great debate (Jackson and Nexon 2013: 554). But what cannot be overstressed is that not only the so-called great debates, but what comes after them, including the literature inspired by mid-range theories and Constructivism, have been a remarkably parochial affair. They have made little effort to engage IR scholarship from the Global South, and almost no attempt to recognize, not to mention explain or bemoan, the almost total marginalization of the Global South from the mainstream IR theories. It is as if the Global South scholarship on IR, and the developments in IR during and after the great debates, exist in parallel universes.

This leads to a fourth trend in the IR theory in the past decade; the persistence of American and Western dominance. Here we see a serious disconnect

between Western scholars and those from the Global South. The increasing recognition of American and Western dominance in the West is one thing, it is quite another for that recognition to actually reshape the intellectual agenda of Western scholars (with the notable exception of the new English School). This is underscored by the inclusion of a lonesome article (Tickner, 2013), one out of 12 essays in a 2013 special issue of the *European Journal of International Relations*, (Wight, Hansen and Dunne, 2013) devoted to discussing of “pluralism” in IR theory. Surely any discussion of a “pluralist turn” in IR theory in a journal known for avoiding the dominance of American scholarship in IR - which is often cited as the chief source of IR’s exclusionary stance towards Global South voices and agency - could have been more concerned with the question whether theory continues to be parochial and ethnocentric or universal and inclusive of the majority of people living on this planet. By contrast, Dunne and Reus-Smit, 2017, adopt a broader approach, taking into account the conversations on Global IR taking place during and after the 2014 International Studies Association (ISA) Annual Convention.

In marked contrast to the West, scholars from the Global South, and their collaborators and likeminded scholars from the West, have become increasingly vocal in highlighting the persisting parochialism of the mainstream IR scholarship (Some examples, far from exhaustive, would include: Acharya, 2011, 2014; Acharya and Buzan, 2007, 2010 Agathangelou and Ling, 2009; Behera 2010; Bilgin, 2008, 2013; Chowdhry and Nair, 2004; Ling, 2002, 2010; Neuman, 1998; Shilliam 2010; Smith, 2006; Tickner, 2003; Tickner and Waever, 2009; Tickner and Blaney, 2012; Thomas and Wilkin, 2004). The election of Amitav Acharya in 2014 as the first non-Western President of the ISA hopefully made some breakthrough for their cause. His Presidential theme, “Global International Relations and Regional Worlds”, which was the basis of ISA’s 2015 Convention, served as a focal point for highlighting the American and Western dominance of IR. Acharya’s use of “Global IR” rather than Non-Western IR theory, was intended to address some of the concerns raised against the latter including from scholars working on Global South issues. Almost a quarter of the total number of panels and roundtables at the New Orleans Convention, were devoted to the Convention theme. Tellingly, just before the Convention, the 2014 TRIP Survey found that a clear majority of its respondents believe that IR is both American *dominated* and Western *dominated*. When asked if IR is an American-dominated discipline, 49% agree and 11% strongly agreed, for a total of 60%. When asked if IR is a Western-dominated discipline, the result was that 53% agreed, and 22% strongly agreed. Thus an overwhelming 75% of the total number of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that IR is a Western-dominated discipline (For details, see Wemheuer-Vogelaar, et. Al. 2016).⁴ And for the first time, at the same New Orleans Convention, a scholar from outside the West (China), Shipping Tang,

won the ISA's best book prize (on a shared basis), for his theoretical work, *The Social Evolution of International Politics* (Tang, 2013).

Whether this is a turning point or a passing phase remains to be seen. At the very least, there seems to be a growing awareness cutting across the West-Rest divide that IR theory needs to be more reflective of the Global South and take the direction of Global IR (Eun, 2016; Dunne and Reus-Smit, 2017). Yet there is always a traditionalist resistance to change. Objections range from the adequacy of the existing IR theories to explain developments in the non-Western world, such as Asia, because, despite its distinctive features, the latter has been progressively integrated into the modern Europe-derived international system and adopted its behavioral norms and attributes (Ikenberry and Mastanduno, 2003: 412-23); to the more dismissive claim that there is nothing wrong with the American dominance of the field because it is "benign" (Mearsheimer 2016).

In sum, there have been a few useful developments towards a more global IR over the past decade. Awareness worldwide of the discipline's West-centrism is more widespread than before. World class IR journals are getting established in Northeast Asia. Some green shoots of original IR theorising are appearing, especially in China. But the basic picture of a parochial US still dominating IR theory remains in place. Perhaps the best that can be said is that whether it is recognised in the US or not, the global challenge to the epistemologically narrow and self-referential American way in IR is getting stronger. As in the real world, the legitimacy of American hegemony is in sharp decline even while its material power remains dominant. Interestingly, Asia's rising IR theory is like Europe's in often standing outside the American mainstream, and keeping open a wider range of theoretical approaches.

Building a Global International Relations

The two of us are inescapably part of the process we describe. In the decade since we first conceptualised the *IRAP* forum, we have not only received a lot of feedback from it, but also become increasingly dissatisfied with the ongoing West-centrism of IR just described. During that time, our work and thinking have moved in mainly separate, but nonetheless strikingly parallel tracks. Both of us have been committed to developing global and world historical perspectives on IR, and both have acquired a deepened awareness and understanding of the problem of West-centrism in IR (Acharya, 2014a; Buzan, 2011; Buzan and Lawson, 2014a & b, 2015). In that latter context, both of us have come to appreciate some of the insights of postcolonialism, though not necessarily accepting all of its political baggage. It may help readers to understand what has stimulated and motivated our growing interest in

promoting a more global IR, if they know how our thinking got to where it is now, and therefore why we thought it useful to revisit the theme of the 2007 IRAP forum. In this section we therefore highlight four developments in our own thinking that have shaped how we now understand the issues around developing ‘non-Western’ IR theory. These are: uneven and combined development, the relationship between theory and history, the English School’s understanding of international society, and the need for ‘global IR’.

Applying uneven and combined development to IR as a discipline

Acharya (2004, 2009) has long been interested in how norms spread internationally, and has argued that local cultural dispositions shape not only what outside norms are locally acceptable or not, but also how outside norms get shaped and adapted to local ideas and practices. More recently, Buzan’s thinking has been influenced by the work of Justin Rosenberg (2010, 2013, 2016) on uneven and combined development (UCD) as a way of theorizing ‘the international’, which reinforces Acharya’s line.

Rosenberg (2016) argues that there is always a multiplicity of societies interacting with each other. He understands unevenness to be a basic fact of historical development driven by three variables: first, the diversity of geographical endowments; second, the physical separation of political units; and third, the differential impact of ‘combination’. ‘Combination’ means the ways in which social orders trade, coerce, emulate, borrow and steal from each other, and is intrinsic to any international order. Before the 19th century, degrees of combination varied mainly with geography, which facilitated deep connections in some environments (most notably where there were available sea and river routes), but obstructed it in others (particularly in the case of land barriers). By contrast, degrees of combination since the 19th century have been heavily determined by industrial technologies. Under the impact of steamships, railways, highways, aircraft, spacecraft and electronic means of communication from the telegraph to the internet, the importance of geography falls away, and combination intensifies rapidly, and probably permanently (Buzan and Lawson, 2015). Combination therefore increases directly with development. Combination is both a homogenizing and a differentiating force.

UCD stands as an alternative to Waltz’s (1979: 76) formulation of homogenization into ‘like units’ through ‘socialization and competition’. Both Waltz and Rosenberg see socialization and competition as consequences of combination. But they disagree about their effects, with Waltz favouring homogenization into ‘like units’, and Rosenberg stressing that the particular timing and circumstances of socialization and competition produce varied outcomes. The extreme conditions created by macro-historical transformations

such as the one that took place during the long 19th century expose the logic of the latter with great clarity (Buzan and Lawson, 2015). Major transformations of this kind have a distinct point or points of origin in which a particular configuration emerges and is sustained. This configuration is produced and reproduced through inter-societal interactions. Further changes spread outwards from this leading-edge (or edges). The pace of spread varied according to the mediating effects of social and physical environments. Agriculture, for example, was slow to spread to less productive soils and climates, and some modes of social order were more receptive to it than others. If unevenness was – and is – a basic fact of historical development, then different peoples and places encounter macro-transformative pressures at different times and under different circumstances, and with different outcomes.

Each social order that encounters the new configuration has its own way of adapting to it. The encounter may be coercive or imitative. Some social orders resist the new configuration, either because of internal resistance to the changes it requires (e.g. Qing China), or because of attempts by leading-edge polities to maintain inequalities between them by denying access to elements of the transformation (e.g. much of the colonial world). Others succeed in developing indigenous versions of the new configuration (most strikingly Meiji Japan). ‘Late’ developers, for example, are not carbon copies of the original adopters, but develop their own distinctive characteristics: thus the growing literature on ‘varieties of capitalism’ (Buzan and Lawson, 2014a). In this sense, the interactions between different social orders produce not convergence, but (often unstable) amalgams of new and old. Through the analytic of UCD, it becomes clear that development is both global and local, multilinear rather than linear, proceeds in fits and starts rather than through smooth gradations, and contains many variations in terms of outcomes.

The synergy between Acharya’s thinking and UCD should now be obvious. Just as with development, so the spread of IR thinking will also be uneven and combined, and the expectation should not be Waltzian uniformity, but Rosenbergian diversity. Western dominance is the external pressure, but as Acharya argues, local circumstances shape whether and how these ideas are taken into local usage. We should expect a globalising IR to be both combined and diverse, and welcome that as a creative process that gives real agency to the ‘late developers’ of IR theory.

Rethinking the relationship between theory and history

In our Introduction to the book (2010: 4, but not to the 2007 Forum) we drew a rather stark distinction between history and social theory, seeing them as ‘opposites’: ‘Where historians seek to explain each set of events in its own

terms, social theorists look for more general explanations/understandings applicable to many cases distributed across space and time'. A differentiation between theory and history along these lines remains quite common (e.g. Elman and Elman eds., 2001). For most social sciences, including IR, theory (as intellectual systems) and history (as events, experiences and practices) appear as distinct domains. These domains are differentiated by an elemental division of labor between theory-building social scientists and (putatively) chronicling historians (Lawson, 2012). Although we acknowledged that this was an oversimplification, it now seems not only wrong, but unhelpful to the enterprise of Global IR that we wish to encourage. Our argument is that the development of a properly global IR requires bringing its theory and world history together in a more systematic and open way.

Our view now is that:

the relationship between history and theory is better conceived as co-constitutive. Understanding theory, and understanding history, requires inquiry attuned to the entwinement of theory and history. Theory is not something 'out there,' removed from history, even retrospectively. Rather, theories are assessed and reassessed, made and remade through ongoing encounters with history.... theories arise historically, formed amid the encounters between theorists and the events they experience and, sometimes, take part in: Marx the revolutionary, Clausewitz the soldier, Freud the analyst. In this understanding, theory is a living archive of events and experiences. We say 'living' because theories are not only derived in and from history understood as 'the past', they are also recrafted as they encounter new histories. In other words, theories are assessed and reassessed, made and remade through ongoing encounters with history. Theory is made in history, and it simultaneously helps to make history.⁵

That theory and history are inextricably entangled has long been evident in the roots of realist and liberal theory in European/Western history. The issue is not to deny this link, but to acknowledge it and then move on to build a global IR theory on the foundations of world and not just Western history.

Rethinking the English School's understanding of international society

There has for a long time been a strand of dissatisfaction with the classical English School's Eurocentric account of how the present global international society (GIS) came about top-down as a result of the expansion of what was originally a European regional international society (Buzan and Little, 2014). While by no means wholly wrong, that account significantly understated both the coercive element, and the interplay between Europe and the rest of the

world, in the making of GIS. It denied agency to ‘the rest’, treated the non-West as something of a blank slate, and contributed to the misleading embedding of Western history as being world history.⁶

Both within and alongside the English School, there is now a growing body of recent work aimed at correcting this imbalance by locating the story of GIS more firmly in world history. Among others, Kacowicz (2005), Schulz (2014), Suzuki et al. (2014), Phillips and Sharman (2015), and Pella (2014, 2015) have made substantial contributions towards filling in the stories of the pre-existing international societies into which the Europeans expanded. They show that from the 16th to the 18th centuries, while the Europeans had a significant military superiority in sea power, in much of Asia they were militarily weak on land, and had few trading advantages other than access to American silver. Not until the 19th century did the small modernizing core of Western states have a generalised military, economic and political superiority over what rapidly became the global periphery. Before that, the Europeans encountered others on equal or even inferior terms, and these encounters fed into the processes of the making of global modernity. In one sense Europe did impose its form of politics (the sovereign, territorial, nation-state) and international relations (Westphalian international society) onto the rest of the world. But as it was doing so, its own processes of development were being shaped by encounters with the rest. The contemporary GIS should not be viewed only as a formation of Waltzian ‘like units’ sharing a thin veneer of primary and secondary institutions. It needs also to be seen as differentiated along several cross-cutting lines: by type of state, by geography (regions), by hierarchy (core-periphery, great powers, race, gender, etc.) and up to a point functionally (economic, legal, political etc.) (Buzan and Schouenborg, forthcoming).

By rebalancing the story of how the global international society was made, and taking a more differentiated view of how contemporary GIS is structured in the light of that historical legacy, the English School has strengthened its position of as part of the necessary foundations for developing a more global IR theory.

Shifting from a focus on the ‘Non-West’ to Global IR

Thinking about GIS in this more integrated and balanced way, brings us back to the idea of Global IR. If contemporary GIS is indeed a product of world historical dynamics, and not just Western ones, then IR also needs to become more global in both its historical and theoretical sources. The label “non-Western IR theory which we coined in 2007 generated interest beyond our expectations. It served a crucial purpose in generating debate that drew a good deal of attention to the parochialism of IR. One of the criticisms, which we had taken into consideration in the 2007 *IRAP* special issue, but has since become

even more salient, is that globalization and income convergence make the categories West and non-West, and the distinction between core and periphery, less and less meaningful, especially in an era of rising powers such as China and India. These distinctions still have some utility. The term West remains politically useful to both the rising powers in defining their identity and the Western nations (in dealing not only with non-Europeans, but also, as seen in the Ukraine crisis, with Russia and Eastern European societies). What IR now needs is a single global conversation about the state of IR theory and of the discipline.

This thinking undergirded the idea of Global IR, (Acharya 2014a). The idea of Global IR is an extension of our notion of non-Western IR, but goes beyond it for both normative and instrumental reasons. The project of making IR inclusive cannot be a conversation among the likeminded. And it is more likely to fail if it does not draw in the broadest group of scholars, including those in the Western mainstream. In this context, the idea of a “post-Western IR”, with a “more radical agenda to disavow and displace” the existing knowledge of Western IR, is highly problematic. The problem is how to both invent a global IR and still engage with those schooled in the existing IR traditions in a meaningful two-way dialogue? (Acharya 2011). Labels matter. Global IR does not reject the terms “non-Western” or “post-Western”, but views them “as part of a broader challenge of reimagining IR as a global discipline” (Acharya 2014a).

... the main elements of the Global IR approach are: a commitment to pluralistic universalism (one that does not impose any particular idea or approach on others, but respects diversity while seeking common ground), grounding in world history, theoretical pluralism, a close nexus with the study of regions, regionalisms and area studies, avoidance of cultural exceptionalism, and recognition of multiple forms of agency, including the agency of non-Western actors (Acharya 2016).

Global IR is not a theory, but a way of understanding and reshaping the discipline of IR. It does not seek to displace existing Western-dominated IR knowledge. Unlike some critical theories and postcolonial scholarship, Global IR does not reject the mainstream theories, such as Realism, Liberalism, the English School and Constructivism, but challenges their parochialism and urges them to accept the ideas, experiences and insights from the non-Western world. All paradigms and *isms* have their place in Global IR. But this is not pluralism as understood in recent writings on IR theory (for a survey of the literature on pluralism, see: Dunne, Hansen and Wight, 2013, Eun, 2016). Pluralism in Global IR does not mean relativism, or accepting a variety of theories to co-exist or seeking unity or synthesis among theories or pursuing “analytic eclecticism”. Nor is it what Dunne, Hansen and Wight (2013: 416) call

“integrative pluralism” that “accepts and preserves the validity of a wide range of theoretical perspectives and embraces theoretical diversity as a means of providing more comprehensive and multi-dimensional accounts of complex phenomena”. Pluralism in Global IR does not accept and preserve existing theories *as is*, but expects them to give due recognition to the places, roles, and contributions of non-Western peoples and societies. In this sense, Global IR is really more about pluralization within theories, rather than just between them. IR is still largely rooted in Western history and political theory. Although it has pretensions to be about all times and all places, in fact it is a rather parochial expression of the short period in world history when the West was dominant. The discipline would look very different if it had been invented in China, India or the Islamic world. As the period of Western dominance begins to ebb, Global IR needs now to break away from this parochial bias by incorporating perspectives not only from other histories and political theories, but also from world history. It is time for IR to live up to its name.

How Asia Fits into Global IR

What are the implications of Global IR for the study of IR in Asia? It is useful here to examine some recent developments in theoretical work on Asian IR. But in doing so, we urge that what and who is Asian should be defined broadly. One should take into consideration not only writings by Asian scholars based in Asia, but also the contribution of anyone writing theoretically on the international relations of Asia. We also take a broader view of IR theory (Acharya and Buzan, 2007, 2010; Alagappa, 2011) and what constitutes theoretical advances than Johnston (2012) who is skeptical of the value of theoretical work on Asia. His standard for judging this is whether it can “resolve major controversies, lead to breakthroughs, and drive theory development”. To some extent, this is an unfair question because the controversies and debates that Asia is expected to resolve in order to meet Johnston’s standard originated in Western contexts with limited relevance for Asia. Applying Western IR concepts and theories is only a first, very small, step towards breaking the Western parochialism of IR as a discipline. More important is to expand the histories and cultural resources on which IR theory generally is based. This might lead to both local theories (like those about the EU) or to reconfigurations of existing mainstream ones (like the developments in the English School described above). Our interest in non-Western IR theory emerged over a growing dissatisfaction with the applicability of mainstream IR theories to Asia. But its real contribution was to encourage explorations into alternative sources of IR theory, such as indigenous histories, classical philosophy and religious traditions, the ideas of national leaders, the writings of contemporary scholars, and the foreign policy practices of modern states and

the norms and process dynamics of regional interactions (such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations).

With this in mind, we can make a number of ‘ten-years on’ observations about the development of theoretical work on Asian IR. First, overall interest in theory seems to be growing among the academic community studying Asian IR. This is encouraging news for Global IR, which is contingent on the greater engagement of scholars outside the West in IR theory - not only theoretical approaches to the study of world politics at large but also to the study of the international relations of their respective nations and regions. There is no systematic survey to confirm this. We can only say this from anecdotal evidence, including our attendance at conferences held in Asia and outside, the participation by Asian scholars in international conferences such as those organized by the International Studies Association (ISA), and the World International Studies Conference (WISC), and the growing number of conferences organized by such associations in Asia (In 2015, for example, ISA held its first ever regional Convention in Southeast Asia).

Some of the reasons for a rising interest in theory may have to do with changes in the conditions that we had identified as impediments to the development of IR theory in Asia (Acharya and Buzan, 2007). These included the paucity of resources, shortage of publishing outlets, language barriers, official frowning on theoretical work, and relatedly, the pull of policy relevant work that offers greater prestige and financial rewards to IR scholars in many parts of Asia. Some of these barriers remain, especially the entrapment of IR scholars in policy research. But there have been improvements in other areas. Asian universities are increasingly well-endowed. There has been a marked shift in this regard in China. In India, there have emerged a number of private and public universities, such as the multilaterally-sponsored *South Asia University* and the privately endowed O.P. Jindal Global University. These have added to the resource base of the Indian IR community. The theoretical turn in Asian IR is also due to the role of Asian IR focused journals, such as *The Pacific Review* (published from UK and celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2017), *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* (based in Japan and launched in 2000), and the newer *Chinese Journal of International Politics* (Based at Tsinghua university and launched in 2006). The oldest IR journal in Asia, *International Studies*, published since 1959 by the oldest IR School in Asia, has also shown a growing interest in IR theory.⁷

Our second observation about theoretical work on Asia is that its most important contribution has been to challenge existing IR theories, especially their applicability to Asia. Two examples from the literature on regional security in Asia make this point, although one can also find examples of such

challenges in the study of the political economy of the region (especially those concerning the challenge posed by Asia's state-led capitalism to neoclassical theories of international development). One of the two challenges is to realist/neorealist predictions that the end of the Cold War would produce a breakdown of order in Asia due to multipolarity, the rise of new powers, and the relative absence of mitigating factors such as strong regional institutions or economic interdependence (Kang, 2003, Acharya 2004). This may yet turn out to be a false optimism, especially in view of recent growth of maritime tensions in Asia, but the nearly three decades that have elapsed since predictions about Asia's multipolar instability were first voiced is a long enough a period to justify skepticism about theoretical suppositions derived from Europe's past that multipolar orders are inherently unstable. A better explanation might be the drift towards 'hypermasculine' regimes and foreign policy behaviours in Northeast Asia (Sjoberg, 2012).

Another area in which theoretical writings on Asian IR have challenged the Western theoretical mainstream concerns West European-derived theories of regional institutions, especially the rationalistic, interest-driven, formal, legalistic and bureaucratic approach epitomized by the European Union. Writings on Asian regionalism have highlighted the relevance of more informal, consensual and process-centric approaches to regional cooperation. Thanks to theoretical work on Asian regionalism, there has been a growing acceptance in the wider IR community, well before Brexit happened, that the EU should not be considered to be to be a universal model for judging the performance of regional institutions elsewhere.

Aside from these two examples, on which much evidence already exists, Asia is also shaping to be a crucial area for challenging the Liberal view that the emerging powers of the world can be coopted into the American-made and -led world order, and by implication the system of global governance it has promoted and defended since World War II. According to this view, the emerging powers have benefitted so much from the American-led order that they would have little reason to seek its replacement. With China, India and Indonesia, Asia could really be crucial to assessing whether the Liberal claims proves valid. China's initiatives in developing parallel institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and its and India's participation in the BRICS'-organized development and financial organizations, suggest not outright co-option, but a demand for reform and reorientation of the existing international order (Stuenkel, 2016).

Our third observation is that theoretical work on Asia is seldom at the metatheoretical level or taking on the "great debates" frontally. There have been notable exceptions, such as Tang's (2013) "Social Evolution Paradigm" (SEP),

which argues that no single theory is valid across all time, and that IR theories, especially realism and liberalism, “are appropriate to different phases of history” (see the discussion of “theoretical pluralism” by Eun 2016). Most theoretical work on Asian IR has involved middle-range theories, such as those related to balance of power, interdependence, institutions, or norm diffusion, thus reflecting, as mentioned earlier, the general trend in IRT in recent years. Some of the best examples of such work can be found in the Stanford University Press’ series, *Studies in Asian Security*. There has also been a proliferation of specialized book series on Asian IR from other publishing houses, including Routledge (which has several imprints on Asian IR and security), Palgrave Macmillan, Edward Elgar, Sage, Georgetown, Columbia, etc.

It is our general impression that works by Asian scholars using middle-range theory tend to be contextually grounded and leans more towards inductive, rather than deductive approaches (Acharya, 2009). Despite the aforementioned limitations, work employing middle-range theories and empirically grounded in Asia, can lead to the refinement of paradigms and debates within as well as between them. They can produce new theoretical concepts and explanations with broader cross-regional and global applicability, such as Shih’s (1990; Shih and Yin, 2013) and Qin’s (2011, 2016), concept of “relationality”. Qin, a key promoter of the Chinese School, claims that his “relational theory of world politics”, not only resonates within Chinese culture deeply but also has a universal relevance. Western actors also behave relationally, even though this may be hidden from view because of the emphasis on rationality in Western culture. Qin’s relationality argument echoes Constructivism, but this is consistent with a core element of Global IR that it does not displace existing IR theories but seeks to enrich them with the infusion of ideas and practices from the non-Western world. We argued in 2007 that theoretical work on Asia (or any region) should not simply apply Western theories in the local context to assess their validity, but should generalize from the local context on its own terms to offer new concepts and approaches that have analytical value beyond the region. This is an important requirement of Global IR that Asia is beginning to address, although it has a long way to go.

Our fourth observation is that although still limited, there is also some indication of growing attempts by scholars drawing on classical traditions and civilizations to challenge Western IRT and propose alternative or indigenous concepts and theories (See Chong, Milner, 2016; Yan, 2011, 2013; Shahi and Ascione, 2016). This approach is an important step towards a Global IR. It has been foundational for the aspirations for a Chinese School, and could potentially contribute to the theory development, if not a ‘school’ in India.

Fifth, we note that developments in Asian IR during the past decade vindicate our conclusion in 2007 that an “Asian school of IR” of region-wide scope was highly unlikely.⁸ Obstacles to a regional school include the distinctive local conditions and intellectual predispositions, often shaped by national ideologies and foreign policy frameworks, of scholars in the various parts of the region, especially Japan, China and India (Alagappa 2011). Institutional support mechanisms for the study of IR also vary widely among Asian countries. To be sure, these differences should not be overstated and may be blurring now, with some shared themes emerging across sub-regions such as the role of rising powers in the existing international order, economic interdependence, and regional institutions. But another constraint on the development of an Asian School of IR is the rather limited nature of exchange and interaction among scholars from the different subregions of Asia. One limited exception here is the Asian Political and International Studies Association (APISA), founded in 2003, and the regional conferences organized by the International Studies Association (ISA) in various Asian locations, including Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Sixth, in 2007 we had also argued that “schools” that reflect distinctive national themes, trajectories and foreign policy approaches are more likely to emerge in Asia. Since then, a “Chinese school of IR” has been much mooted, though what in fact has emerged are several different approaches drawing on various aspects of Chinese history, culture and political theory (Wang and Buzan, 2014). There is some talk of Korean, Japanese, and Taiwanese IR schools, but not yet much of substance to back them up. It is perhaps a good bet that as in China, and indeed as for the English School, any national schools that do emerge will simply operate alongside an array of different theoretical approaches. In India, as in China, there is a growing interest among scholars to draw upon classical Indian texts such as the epic *Mahabharata* (Narlikar and Narlikar, 2014; Datta-Ray 2015) and the secular treatise *Arthashastra* (Gautam, 2015) traditions to explain Indian foreign policy and strategic choices. This raises the possibility that Indian scholars might one day develop such a school by focusing on the rise of India, including the distinctive concerns and status that comes with it. But such talk is yet to grow into a self-conscious attempt to develop an Indian School of IR (Acharya, 2013).

While the development of national schools can contribute to the goal of a Global IR, there are also risks and limitations, some of which are especially visible in authoritarian states, where proximity to and identification with the centers of national power and security, including state and regime security, is a significant pressure. Politics aside, our key concern about any national school is whether it can “deprovincialize” (Acharya 2014c), i.e., travel beyond the national or regional context from which it is derived in the first place, as the

English School and the Copenhagen School (“securitization” theory) have done. If “schools” are only useful for explaining developments with regard to a specific country or region, then their proliferation carries a greater risk of the fragmentation of the discipline. This is indeed a major challenge from developing a Global IR from local thinking and sources.

Conclusion: Hierarchical Traditions and Models

The challenge for Asian IR is how to contribute to the building of Global IR. Asian exceptionalism, or generalizing from the unique attributes of Asian history, culture and identity, while valuable, will not suffice. One needs to look at alternative and multiple pathways to bring Asia in and enrich IR theory with ideas, concepts and theories that have meaning and applicability beyond Asia or its individual countries. This idea of “deprovincializing” Asia (Acharya 2014c), and building a pathway towards a “pluralistic universalism” (Acharya, 2014a) in IR theory out of Asia is, in our view, the central intellectual challenge facing Asian scholars of IR. Building IR theories that cover specific times and places is certainly part of what needs to be done. There are many historical gaps in the coverage of IR theory, and it is just as legitimate to theorise about the Chinese tribute system as it is to theorise about the EU. But the larger goal should be to make conceptual and theoretical contributions that reach beyond local times and places.

We conclude by looking more closely at one specific example of the kind of theorizing from Asia that might have wider application: the hierarchical traditions and models of Confucian Northeast Asia. There may well be other hierarchical traditions from Asia that can be used in this way. As Neumann (2011) notes, most of those who entered Western international society came from suzerain systems of one sort or another. But the Confucian case is at this point the best developed and most widely known. When we wrote in 2007 it was still reasonable to see China and Japan as exceptions to the realist rules of statehood (290). China was still attempting to rise peacefully, and Japan was still mainly content with being a trading state with major constraints on its right to use force. Now both look, in realist terms, more ‘normal’. China has spent the last few years increasing its military strength, being increasingly assertive towards its neighbours, and throwing its newly acquired weight around. Japan has turned towards re-acquiring the characteristics of a ‘normal’ state. Both are ruled by nationalist-minded parties, and their relationship has deteriorated over the festering history problems between them. In some ways, this matters to what we said above about national schools of IR and the role of Asia in making global IR. It perhaps matters less to what we have to say about hierarchy and relationalism as possible Asian contributions to IR theory, though it does put

them into sharper relief as factors shaping the contemporary practice of international relations in Asia.

We have argued that if IR had developed elsewhere than in the West it would almost certainly not look like it does now. This argument is based on the close linking between IR theory and the anarchic practices and political theories that have dominated Western international history. East Asia provides the clearest historical counterfactual, because its international history has been mainly dominated by hierarchical practices and political theories. There is no shortage of observers of East Asian societies and international relations who think that hierarchy remains a powerful factor in all levels of political relations in these societies (Shih, 1990; Fei, 1992; Harris, 2014: locs. 362-74, 1289; Chen, 2015). Confucianism is widely held to provide the philosophical foundations for hierarchical thinking and practice in East Asia, and to the extent that this observation is correct, East Asia's history and political theory point to hierarchy as one key area in which this region can mobilise its intellectual resources to make a distinctive contribution to IR theory. Mainstream Western IR theory has for long been subject to the critiques of *anarchophilia* and *Eurocentrism*, and is increasingly open to the need to think about hegemony and hierarchy as essential elements of the international system/society (Watson, 1992; Simpson, 2004; Lake, 2009; Clark, 2011; Zarakol, 2011; Bukovansky et al., 2012). Waltz (1979) was not wrong in his argument that hierarchy is a fundamentally different principle of social order from anarchy/sovereign equality. Among other things, hierarchical structures, with their focus on relative status, generate quite different logics of securitization from anarchical ones, with their focus on the absolute status of sovereign equality.

The basic Confucian model of society is rooted in a hierarchical family structure similar to that in many traditional agrarian civilizations (Hwang, 2011: 109-10, 199). For traditional Chinese 'foreign policy' (not a wholly appropriate term) during the Ming dynasty, it was about a benevolent and morally superior emperor expecting loyal subordination from others, and reserving the right to punish them if they disturbed China's peace or good order (Zhang, F, 2015: 202-5). This model can be, and is, extended to the political and international realms, as it was under the principle of *Tianxia* which applied Confucian relational logic to 'all under heaven'. There is support in the literature for the view that this still applies in modern foreign policy terms, with Confucian cultures being more inclined to hierarchy and bandwagoning than to sovereign equality and balance of power (Fairbank, 1968; Kang, 2003-4; Kissinger, 2011: 1-3; Harris, 2014: locs. 362-74. For a critique, see Acharya, 2003-4).

Traditionally in East Asia, Confucianism operated mainly on the basis of a hierarchy rooted in the existence of a central culture. Power considerations were

of course relevant to establishing and maintaining hierarchical relations, but they were not its main foundation (Zhang, Y. 2001; Suzuki, 2009: 34-55; Zhang and Buzan, 2012; Zhang, F, 2009, 2014). After 1911, the Chinese imperial system was abandoned. By then Japan was already strongly in contention for the mantle of ‘Middle Kingdom’, having defeated China in 1895 and Russia in 1905. Japan’s attempt at regional empire lasted until 1945, and since then, the US has had hegemonic status in East Asia (Goh, 2013). China’s rise now puts the question of hierarchy back onto the agenda for NEA. China has no strong claim to either political or cultural centrality or superiority, so any claim for hierarchy will be based mainly on its relative power and wealth. The current neo-Confucian discourse from the Chinese party/state about a harmonious society, both domestically and internationally, and about *Tianxia* as a structuring concept for international relations, suggests that China is reclaiming these traditions to legitimize its foreign policy. As Callahan (2009) notes, this linkage gives a worryingly imperial/hierarchical implication to China’s discourse about harmony. This certainly fits both with China’s keenness to deny equal status to Japan, and its undiplomatic assertions in Southeast Asia about big versus small countries. In Confucian thinking, social harmony necessarily rests on the precondition of stable hierarchy. But almost nothing is said about the hierarchy side of this equation in China’s contemporary foreign policy rhetoric. At least in China, therefore, political sensitivity might constrain the development of IR theory along these lines. But that inconvenience does not disguise the fact that East Asia commands the historical and philosophical resources to address an IR theory issue on which Western theorizing has been relatively thin. The fact that China is promoting hierarchical rhetoric at the same time as it also plays as one of the strongest defenders of sovereign equality and non-intervention, makes this topic not just theoretically important, but also of immediate policy interest within Asia and beyond.

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Notes

¹ Teaching, Research and International Policy (TRIP) Survey (2014), Available at <https://trip.wm.edu/charts/#/questions/38> . Constructivism is of course a broad church, so this figure embraces people taking quite different approaches, but nonetheless agreeing to identify with the general label.

² Teaching, Research and International Policy (TRIP) Survey (2014), Available at <https://trip.wm.edu/charts/#/bargraph/38/5045>).

³ On the normative agency of the Global South, see: *Global Governance* (2014) 20:3 with contributions by Eric Helleiner (international development), Kathryn Sikkink (human rights), Martha Finnemore and Michelle Jurovitch (universal participation), and this author (normative impact of the 1955 Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung on human rights, sovereignty, disarmament, and the UN). See also the essays in Weiss & Roy, eds. 2016. “The UN and the Global South, 1945 and 2015: past as prelude?” Special Issue of *Third World Quarterly*, 37 (7).

⁴ The 2014 TRIP Survey split the sample so that respondents either received the question with American dominance (and later countering this dominance) or Western dominance. The term “Western” triggered significantly more agreement in terms of dominance than the term “American” Further details can be found in the TRIP Article in the Issue.

⁵ For the full argument behind this paragraph, see Buzan and Lawson (forthcoming).

⁶ By GIS we mean the society of states that includes all of the states-members of the international system. This distinguishes from both regional international societies, such as that in Europe or the Middle East, and subglobal ones, such as Western.

⁷ See “International Studies in India”, Special Issue of *International Studies*, 46 (2009) 1 & 2.

⁸ Indeed, given the theoretical diversity in Chinese IR, there will not even be a single ‘Chinese School’ (Wang and Buzan, 2014).