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Introducing heterarchy: a relational-contextual framework within the study of International Relations.

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Abstract

This thesis posits that for too long International Relations (IR) has been overly rigid and insular, discouraging cross-disciplinary cooperation within the social sciences and becoming increasingly irrelevant to policy-makers. IR academia tend to stick rigidly to their theoretical paradigms in interpreting the real world, straight-jacketing their thinking into theories that limit analysis. However, humans think relationally and contextually so why not apply this form of thinking to IR? Heterarchy, the theoretical framework presented here, seeks to overcome this silo effect, to expand IR's relevance, and encompass previously barred academic areas to the sub-discipline.

This thesis presents a new relational-contextual framework within which empirical variables can be situated to provide a different understanding of actors' actions and speech acts within the IR field.¹ Heterarchy sits in part within both foundationalist and anti-foundationalist ontologies, challenging both positivist and post-positive schools by relating the world through relationalcontextual rationales. Heterarchy suggests that IR (referring to the practice of international affairs) can best be understood from a sub-systemic viewpoint where the behavior of actors can only be observed by knowing the differing contexts between 'self' and 'other', and where relations continuously form and shape each actor; hence its relational-contextual nature. These relational-contexts are initiated through certain identifiable catalysts which stimulate similarly identifiable variables to expose actor relationships to the observer. While this does have constructivist and relativist underpinnings, heterarchy differentiates itself from both in terms of its approach and methodology. Having laid out this conceptual framework, the thesis then investigates how heterarchy might work empirically by exploring the Japanese-South Korean relationship which defies conventional understandings.

¹ This capital letter acronym will refer to the academic discipline throughout the thesis.

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Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Dr James Ogilvy who introduced me to the idea of heterarchy through his articles at Stratfor. I hope that the conception that I present here is in keeping with his ideas, even if approaching them from a different angle, to produce 'the legs to carry heterarchy forward' as a new framework within IR.

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