

Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, eds., *Non-Western International Relations Theory—Perspectives on and beyond Asia*, London and New York: Routledge, 2010.

Seiko Mimaki

1. Introduction

In his seminal article in 1977, “An American Science: International Relations,” Stanley Hoffmann wrote that International Relations Theory, born and raised in America, is “too close to the fire,” and so “needs triple distance.” The discipline, according to Hoffmann, should move away from the contemporary world towards the past, from the perspective of a superpower toward that of the weak and the revolutionary; from the glide into policy science, it should relocate itself to that steep ascent toward the peaks of traditional political philosophy and the questions it raises.¹

Since then we have witnessed Critical IR Theory in full bloom. According to Critical IR theorists, knowledge cannot be value-free. As Robert W. Cox pointed out, theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose. Of course, theory can be sophisticated so as to transcend its own perspective, but the standpoint of the original proponent of a theory is always contained somehow within it. Moreover, positivist theorists in an hegemonic country tend to legitimize the political and social structure of the world in which their country enjoys its dominant status, by using their theoretical knowledge. That is why we need “critical” theory, which is differentiated from traditional “problem-solving” theory. While the latter focuses on understanding the present international order, the former has a normative concern with social changes and human emancipation.²

Critical IR theorists have made much progress in revealing how traditional IR theories, especially Realists’ state-centric analyses, contributed to perpetuating and reinforcing the existing American hegemonic order, and to expanding the scope of IR Theory beyond the level of the nation state to encompass the whole of humanity. Many voices that had long been marginalized within the IR community have gradually come to be heard by their mainstream counterparts. Many IR specialists have become increasingly aware of the America-centric character of IR Theory and have endeavored to reconstruct the field as a non-American enterprise. More attention has been paid to various indigenous intellectual traditions of non-American IR communities.

Critical IR theorists have gained ground in Western IR communities, as is evident in the growth of British IR theory, continental IR theory, and Commonwealth IR theory.³ Although some scholars have referred to non-Western thoughts as a possible source of IR theory,⁴ most of their attention has been on the writings of critical thinkers of European heritage, such as Kant, Hegel, Marx, Gramsci, Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas. As a result, while they have been successful in discovering the possibility of de-Americanizing the IR field, the Critical IR theorists have not been able to reveal the West-centric bias in the field sufficiently.

Overcoming West-centric IR is not just an academic problem. It is becoming necessary for those of us in the non-Western world. In the 21st century, non-Western countries have increased their influence, and the gap between the current West-centric IR Theory and the realities of the world has become a serious problem. We are now in urgent need to properly reflect non-Western voices and perspectives in the IR Theory debate and to construct truly global IR theories for ana-

lyzing and understanding the dynamics of the world in which we live.

Therein lie the novelty and significance of the book reviewed here. Citing Robert Cox's argument, "Theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose," the editors of this collective work assert that the mainstream IR theories, including Critical IR theories, are presented as universal theories but speak for the West, thusly perpetuating its power, prosperity, and influence. The central goal of this book is to challenge the Western domination from outside the West by introducing non-Western IR traditions to the Western IR audience; all the while, it encourages non-Westerners to contribute to the IR Theory debate in proportion to the degree to which they are involved in their practice. Including case studies on Chinese, Japanese, South Korean, Southeast Asian, Indian and Islamic indigenous IR, this book challenges the current West-centered IR field.

In the volume's introductory chapter, "Why is there no non-Western international relations theory?" Acharya and Buzan argue that IR scholars should pay more attention to the non-Western IR tradition and its theoretical possibilities because "Western IRT [IR Theory] is both too narrow in its source and too dominant in its influence to be good for the health of the wider project to understand the social world in which we live" (p. 2). An original aspect of the book is that every contributor tries to identify distinctive Asian patterns, whereas previous theoretical works on Asia have been concerned with just "testing" Western IR theories on Asia. Acharya and Buzan pose five possible reasons for the absence of non-Western IR Theory: (1) Western IR Theory has discovered the right path to understanding IR; (2) Western IR Theory has acquired a hegemonic status in the Gramscian sense; (3) non-Western IR theories do exist, but are hidden; (4) local conditions discriminate against the production of IR theory; and (5) the West has had a big head start, and what we are seeing is a period of catching up. These five hypotheses are then explored in the following case study chapters and mainly in the concluding chapter, which is written by the two editors.

2. Case Study Chapters

The book then presents seven case-study chapters. The second chapter (the first case study) is "Why is there no Chinese international relations theory?" written by Yaqin Qin. According to Qin, the main reason why Chinese IR Theory is absent is the traditional worldview in China, which lacks an awareness of "international-ness." The traditional Chinese worldview, called *Tianxia* (All-under-Heaven), was firmly based on the Confucian concept about the universe. In this worldview, there was no defined entity with a finite boundary, nor were there related concepts such as sovereignty and territorial integrity. This worldview was practiced in the tributary system, which endured from 221BC to the early 1880s. This system was an unequal and quasi-international system, wherein China was the sole, dominant actor maintaining stability and providing an international system for interaction among states. In this system, there was no legal equality among the constituent units and therefore there were no "like units" as neo-realists would assume. The situation changed after the Opium War (1841), and the traditional tributary system was defeated and replaced by the Westphalian system. Chinese intellectuals began to gain an awareness of Western modernity and regarded the West as the only teacher from whom to learn. They did not have much interest in creating a distinct Chinese IR school. However, Qin seems confident about creating a distinctive Chinese school of IR Theory in the future by using potentially rich sources, such as the traditional *Tianxia* worldview, the revolutionary thinking which has been a main driving force of Chinese modernization since 1898 and the reformist thinking beginning in the late 1970s that has brought about great economic development and social transformation in China.

"Why are there no non-Western theories of international relations? The case of Japan" by

Takashi Inoguchi reflects on the development of IR study in Japan and looks for elements that would be useful for the future development of Japanese IR Theory. First, Inoguchi asks, “[A]re there any theories of international relations in Japan?” His answer is a “qualified yes.” As an example, the author observes that “flying geese pattern” regional integration theory can be seen as a positivist middle-range theory. In the normative domain, Inoguchi mentions that Japan has developed a kind of “proto-constructivist” theory of identity formation. Yet, his overall assessment of Japan’s past theoretical advance is negative. According to Inoguchi, the international environment surrounding Japan did not leave much room for Japan to develop its own way of conceptualizing the world. In the interwar period, Japan was a failed challenger to American hegemony and in the post-war period, Japan has been embedded in the global governance system dominated by the United States. Moreover, the relatively weak academic tradition of positivistic hypothesis testing in social sciences and a relatively strong tradition of descriptive work in the country has also discouraged the development of distinctive Japanese IR Theory. According to Inoguchi, current Japanese IR studies are characterized by four major intellectual currents: *staatslehre*, historicism, Marxism and positivism. Even today these four traditions coexist quite amicably without significant efforts toward integration. Due to the situation described by Inoguchi as “diversity without disciplinary integration,” the Japanese IR community has been in an isolated position from the world IR communities, even from the IR communities in the neighboring countries, Korea, Taiwan and China. Inoguchi introduces the proto-theoretical arguments of the three distinguished thinkers in wartime Japan—Nishida Kitaro, an innate constructivist; Tabata Shigejiro, a popular sovereignty theorist of international law; and Hirano Yoshitaro, a Marxist theorist of regional integration—suggesting that they would have a universal audience if translated into English. Inoguchi concludes that if IR theories are understood as narrowly American-style positivistic theories, there are no Japanese IR theories, but if IR theories also include constructivists, normative theories, and legal theories, then there are Japanese IR theories.

“Why is there no non-Western international theory? Reflections on and from Korea,” written by Chaesung Chun, analyzes the reason for the relative underdevelopment of IR theorizing in Korea. Korea had long been deprived of opportunities to develop its own IR Theory. Traditionally, Korean scholars, mostly Confucian philosophers, lived in the Sino-centric tributary system. Then, Korea suffered under Western imperialist powers, followed by Japanese colonial rule. Soon after the foundation of the South Korean government in 1948, the Cold War environment placed the Korean IR community under the strong influence of American academia, which was dominated by political realism. After “importing final products” in the 1950s and 1960s, however, Korean scholars gradually turned to the task of adapting the Western theories to explaining South Korea’s international realities. With the end of Cold War, the American influence faded, and the call for Korean IR Theory became louder. Chun, while admitting that Western IR theories, especially realism and security studies, have been helpful in explaining the international relations surrounding South Korea, still stresses that many assumptions underlying Western theories cannot be uniformly applied to the international relations of Northeast Asia, which is characterized by multiple organizing principles of international relations and overlapping political identities. Chun concludes that the central challenge for a postmodern IR project is to comprehend different stages and logics in different regions within coherent theoretical frameworks, and this is the main task for non-Western academia.

The fifth chapter, “Re-imagining IR in India,” is written by Navnita Chadha Behera. Interestingly, this chapter begins by criticizing Indian scholars’ attempts at creating an indigenous, Indian IR school to catch up with Western IR communities. She warns that even if they were to succeed in creating an Indian school of IR, it would at best earn a small, compartmentalized space *within* the master narrative of the Western-dominated IR field. She suggests that, instead, Indian scholars should “re-image” IR itself toward a post-Western IR Theory. As the first step toward

this goal, she proposes a reconsideration of the three sets of *givens* in which Indian IR scholars have been embedded: infallibility of the Indian state modeled after the Westphalian nation state, thorough internalization of the philosophy of political realism, and positive faith in the wisdom of modernity. She cites Gayatri Spivak's famous sentence, "what is important in a work is what it does not say... This is not the same as a careless notation [but] what it refuses to say," and calls the reader's attention to the "silence" of traditional Indian IR communities. Traditional IR theorists in India have seldom paid attention to India's own heritages as a source of knowledge creation for new IR Theory. In the Indian IR communities, the attempts to conceptualize nationalism by India's leading figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Rabindranath Tagore were all but forgotten because they were regarded as irrelevant to the rational, scientific and modern world of IR. Even Kautilya's realist political philosophy, which predated Hobbes' "state of nature" and Machiavelli's *Prince*, has never been a serious concern for Indian IR scholars. Behera emphasizes that the Indian IR communities cannot produce a non-Western IR Theory as long as they continue to fight the intellectual battle with the West on a "turf chosen by the West, with tools designed and provided by the West and rules-of-game set by the West."

"Southeast Asia: Theory between modernization and tradition," by Alan Chong examines the absence of non-Western IR Theory in Southeast Asia. He points out that modernization, as the culmination of the region-wide processes of colonialism and nationalism, has been one of the biggest impediments to non-Western IR theorizing in Southeast Asia. Due to the strong belief in modernization, both Western scholarship on Southeast Asia and post-1945 indigenous scholarship have dismissed many indigenous sources as invalid for the modern scientific age. Mainstream Western observers of the region have explained Southeast Asian states as prone to conflict because they are insufficiently modernized along Westphalian lines, and staunch realists have presented pessimistic views of Southeast Asian regionalism. Such discourse of modernization-realism has long penetrated Southeast Asian IR scholarship. Chong warns that if Southeast Asian IR scholarship continues to delude itself within the discourse of modernization-realism, it will never be able to offer innovative Asian ideas. He concludes the chapter by introducing various attempts at transitional and hybrid theorizing as a new enterprise to develop non-Western theoretical perspectives.

The next, seventh chapter is entitled "Perceiving Indonesian approaches to international relations theory," and is written by Leonard C. Sebastian and Irman G. Lanti. Their central contention is that Indonesia may provide a useful exploratory study into non-Western theories that could be both innovative and emancipatory. The authors admit that because of weak institutional structures in Indonesian IR departments and a lack of physical resources and proper funding, there is no significant effort to develop an Indonesian IR Theory. Yet the authors are confident there is a wealth of indigenous sources that IR scholars can use for theorizing. The authors pay special attention to the politico-cultural traits of the various indigenous ethnic groups such as the Javanese, the largest ethnic group, and the Seberang communities, which have a more individualistic political culture than the Javanese. When the Javanese try to influence people, they prefer the power of "personal charisma" to the Western "power through the barrel of a gun." The Javanese would likely approach a difference of opinion by efforts to find a middle ground while the Seberang would likely approach the same situation by recognizing the differences. Especially, the Javanese political culture deeply affects Indonesian leaders' political behavior and their foreign policy. For example, in Suharto's support of the so-called "ASEAN way," we can see the influence of the Javanese conception of attaching great importance to harmony and solving differences through closed-door discussions away from the public eye. The authors conclude that the Western IR approach focusing on solely rationalist explanations or solely constructivist explanations may not capture the essence of Indonesian IR thinking, which is greatly influenced by the country's indigenous traditions.

“International relations theory and the Islamic worldview” is written by Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh. Her central contention is that Islam, which she defines not as a region but as a culture-religion-identity-worldview, recognizes and theorizes about the world sharply different from the West. Tadjbakhsh asserts that the nature of Islamic IR Theory is “decidedly normative,” which is based not on empirical observations of behaviors or predictions of what behaviors would be, but on how institutions reflect the essence of an idea, a norm, and a morality. For Islam, the state is not an end in itself, but is, rather, a means towards securing an Islamic “good life” and spreading Islamic values. While power/capability is the driving force in realism and neorealism, Islamic theory relies on social cohesion and a social unity for progress towards a moral good. The most typical contrast between Islamic IR Theory and Western IR Theory revolves around the idea of peace. In Islamic tradition, justice is the ultimate ethical impetus and peace should be based on justice. This concept of peace is clearly at odds with the realists’ dictum that order should precede justice. Though Western IR theories have internalized the Enlightenment norms of secularization and rationality and seriously neglected the ideational factors such as religion, culture and identity, these ideational factors are critically important to understand Islamic international relations. Contrary to the Westphalian model, in the Middle East strong sub-state and powerful super-state identities always compete with the state for loyalty. Islamic states are always in dilemma between the aim of the state to survive in the international arena and the aim of Islam to maintain domestic legitimacy. Tadjbakhsh concludes that Islamic IR Theory does exist, but it is not always put into practice because of the ultimate tension between the “raison of state” and the “raison of Islam.”

3. Theoretical Chapters

In the ninth chapter, “World history and the development of non-Western international relations theory,” Buzan and Richard Little stress the importance of bringing more historical world perspectives into IR Theory. IR theorists and world historians are still alienated from each other despite the importance of developing synergistic relationships between their two fields. Why? The authors point to the IR theorists’ deep-rooted Eurocentrism. World historians are rapidly moving away from a Eurocentric perspective. There is increasing interest in comparative method, or in Pomeranz’s words, the principle of “reciprocal comparison,” which entails “viewing both sides of the comparison as deviation when seen through the expectation of the other, rather than leaving one as always the norm.” In the field of world history, there is also growing attention to “connected history,” which questions the established boundaries and the established notion of periodization. By contrast, most IR theorists are still locked into a Eurocentric framework. They do not have much interest in theorizing about the emergence and expansion of a global international system/society. Neorealists and neoliberals take the existence of such a system/society as given. Constructivists have begun investigating the evolution of the European international system/society, but they have yet to develop a global take on this issue. Even the English School, which has a clear awareness of comparative and world historical perspectives on the study of international relations, has not found a way out of Eurocentrism. For example, Hedley Bull and Adam Watson’s *The Expansion of International Society* (1984), which deals with the question of global connections, presupposes that the basic features of the contemporary international political structure have been inherited from Europe. They even insist that “it was in fact Europe and not America, Asia or Africa that first dominated and, in so doing, unified the world; it is not our perspective but the historical record itself that can be called Eurocentric.” Problematically, many IR theorists would accept this argument. The authors insist that in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of a global international society, IR theorists should bring more world historical

perspectives into IR Theory, and move away from the assumption that the history of modern Europe has encompassed quintessential elements of international relations. They conclude the chapter by stressing that non-Western IR theorists should have a crucial role to play in this challenge.

The concluding chapter, “On the possibility of a non-Western international relations theory,” is written by Acharya and Buzan. Here the authors answer the five main questions posed in their introductory chapter, and offer their assessment of the prospect for building non-Western IR Theory in the future. About the first possible reason of the absence of non-Western IR Theory—that Western IR Theory has discovered the right path to understanding IR—the authors assert that Western IR Theory is not always the “right path” to understanding non-Western international relations, and as such, it is challengeable. On the second hypothesis—that Western IR Theory has acquired a hegemonic status in the Gramscian sense—they admit that the hegemonic standing of Western IR theory is one of the core reasons for the absence of non-Western IR theory in Asia. They also confirm the third and fourth hypotheses that non-Western IR theories do exist but are hidden, and that local conditions discriminate against the production of IR theory. They emphasize that in order to fully explore the “hidden” non-Western IR theories, it would be necessary to improve the unsatisfactory academic situations surrounding non-Western IR scholars. They then admit the validity of the fifth hypothesis, that the West has had a big head start, and what we are seeing is a period of catching up, though they also emphasize that Asia is not in a mere copying mode and there is plenty of room for divergent development.

After verifying the five hypotheses, the editors confirm that the current Western-centric IR Theory does not capture the needs and conditions in Asia adequately, and therefore, it will definitely be necessary to develop non-Western IR Theory. Overall, the editors are optimistic about the future development of non-Western IR theories. Certainly it would be an exaggeration to say that a fully-fledged Asian or non-Western IR Theory will emerge soon, but there are plenty of pre-theoretical resources in the non-Western world, including classical traditions, thinking and foreign policies of leaders, and works of scholars. Moreover, there are various paths to developing non-Western IR Theory. The editors emphasize that the development of non-Western IR Theory need not be a matter of projecting pure indigenous ideas, nor should it be a matter of wholesale adoption/borrowing of foreign ones. It can also proceed through mutual adaptation or contextualization of Western ideas, in a process that Acharya calls “constitutive localization.” The reader sees the IR Theory debate broadened in a constructive direction toward a truly global IR Theory.

4. Conclusion

Since the 1980s, a significant number of critical IR works have posed serious questions about the America-centric nature of mainstream IR Theory. However, this book is novel in its attention to the more deep-rooted problem, that is, the West-centric nature of IR Theory, which even distinguished critical IR works could not properly reveal. However, considering the fact that this book is virtually the first major attempt to discover and construct non-Western IR Theory, we may suggest some points for further development.

First, although all of the contributors agree that it is necessary to discover and construct non-Western IR Theory, they do not agree on *what kind* of non-Western theory should be built. Some contributors focus on the possibilities of non-Western “problem-solving” theory, which could address and explain various problems in Asia more properly than Western IR theories, while others seek a non-Western “critical” theory for the purpose of bringing emancipation to non-Western peoples whose voices have been denied by Western discursive power. In this reviewer’s view, the proposition about the various possibilities for non-Western “problem-solving” theory is more de-

veloped than that about the call for non-Western “critical” theory.

Second, we should ask whether efforts to create an indigenous IR school, such as a Chinese IR school, a Japanese IR school or an Islamic IR school make sense as a critique of Western-hegemonic IR Theory.⁵ The search for an indigenous IR Theory does not necessarily include a counter-hegemonic project. Rather, in some cases, it may serve as a justification of hegemony. For example, the recent calls for a distinctively Chinese IR school coincide with the rise of Chinese power in the 21st century. In some cases China’s traditional concepts, such as *Tianxia* (All-under-Heaven), have been used to justify China’s hierarchical empire rather than to achieve a post-hegemonic order.⁶ Among all the contributors, with thanks, perhaps, to the strong academic tradition of subaltern studies and post-colonial studies in India, Behera is most clearly aware of this danger. She warns that creating an Indian IR school is not a real solution to the Western-dominated IR Theory, saying that such an attempt would at best earn some space for Indian scholars *within* the existing IR framework but never contribute to building a *new* non-hegemonic site of knowledge where different traditions of the IR field all over the world can engage in a healthy dialogue and co-exist. Acharya and Buzan stress that “the likely role of non-Western IRT is to change the balance of power within the debates, and in so doing change the priorities, perspective and interests that those debates embody” (p. 236). However, in the reviewer’s opinion, the greatest possibilities for non-Western IR Theory may not lie in bringing about changes *within* the existing IR, but in creating a *new* post-Western, anti-hegemonic IR Theory.

Finally, if non-Western IR scholars are to seek a post-Western IR Theory, one of their most important tasks will be the theorization of the colonialist and racist hierarchy that endured as the dominant factor of international relations in past centuries. The so-called “Westphalian strait-jacket,” which treats international relations as a closed system of “like units,” has made us blind to the simple historical fact that the society of nations was not a society of equals, but a society of unequals until African independence in the mid-1960s. Even after the international order is formally decolonized, *de facto* colonialism and racism are never things of the past. Yet, Western IR theorists have largely been silent on the problem of Western imperialism and racism despite their huge impact on non-Western peoples.⁷ Even Critical IR theorists, whose main goal is human emancipation, have not adequately addressed the anti-colonial struggles and anti-racist struggles that took place all over the world in the 20th century.⁸ Today, Western IR theorists are increasingly aware that the development of the IR field has become entwined with Western imperialism in the real world,⁹ but non-Western IR scholars can definitely play a role in extending the emancipatory project to the deprived peoples in the non-Western world and in opening up the possibilities for post-colonial and post-racist Critical IR Theory.

Notes

- ¹ Stanley Hoffman, “An American Social Science – International Relations,” *Daedalus*, Vol. 106, No. 3 (Summer 1977), pp. 41-60.
- ² Robert Cox, “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,” *Millennium*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (June 1981), pp. 126-155. For an overview of the core arguments of Critical IR Theory, see Nicholas Rengger and Ben Thirkell-White, “Still Critical after All These Years? The Past, Present and Future of Critical Theory in International Relations,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 33 (July 2007), *Special Issue—Critical International Relations Theory after 25 Years*, pp. 3-24.
- ³ See, for example, Steve Smith, ed., *International Relations: British and American Perspectives*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1985; Robert Crawford and Darryl S. L. Jarvis, *International Relations—Still an American Social Science: Toward Diversity in International Thought*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001; Knud Erik Jørgensen, “Continental IR Theory: The Best Kept Secret,” *European Jour-*

nal of International Relations, Vol. 6, No. 1 (March 2000), pp. 9-42; Knud Erik Jørgensen and Tonny Brems Knudsen, eds., *International Relations in Europe: Traditions, Schools, Destinations*, London: Routledge, 2006; and Timothy Shaw and Lucian M. Ashworth, "Commonwealth Perspectives on International Relations," *International Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 5 (September 2010), pp. 1149-1165.

- ⁴ For example, Robert W. Cox, "Towards a Posthegemonic Conceptualization of World Order: Reflections on the Relevancy of Ibn Khaldun," in Robert W. Cox and Timothy J. Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- ⁵ This point is also developed by Ching-Chang Chen's excellent review of this book: Chen, "The Absence of Non-Western IR Theory in Asia Reconsidered," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (January 2011), pp. 1-23.
- ⁶ William A. Callahan, "Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-hegemonic or a New Hegemony?" *International Studies Review*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (December, 2008), pp. 749-761.
- ⁷ Robert Vitalis, "The Grateful and Genours Liberal Gesture: Making Racism Invisible in American International Relations," *Millenium*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (June 2000), pp. 331-356; Branwen Gruffydd Jones, *Decolonizing International Relations*, London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006.
- ⁸ John M. Hobson, "Is Critical Theory Always for the White West and for Western Imperialism? Beyond Westphalian towards a Post-Racist Critical IR," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 33, Special Issues (July 2007), pp. 91-116.
- ⁹ David Long and Brian C. Schmidt, *Imperialism and Internationalism in the Discipline of International Relations*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005.