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Beyond ‘the West/non-West Divide’ in IR: How to Ensure Dialogue as Mutual Learning

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Abstract

Since the publication a decade ago of Acharya and Buzan’s seminal forum, ‘Why is there no non-Western IR theory?’, voluminous studies have attempted to ameliorate the Western parochialism of international relations (IR) studies. This trend includes a strong and increasing commitment among non-Western (in particular, Chinese) IR scholars to the development of ‘national schools’. However, Acharya and Buzan point out that non-Western IR theory-building enterprise ‘cannot be a conversation among the likeminded’. They add: the project ‘is more likely to fail if it does not draw in the broadest group of scholars, including those in the Western mainstream’. In a related vein, Peter Katzenstein writes that the diversity and heterogeneity of world politics cannot be captured by binary distinctions between Western and non-Western IR theory. Rather, our focus, he notes, should be on interactions between different types of knowledge. In short, we need a two-way ‘dialogue’ across ‘the West/non-West divide’ to transform the current Western-centric IR into a global discipline. A critical question, then, is *how* we can ensure such a dialogue without descending into a narcissistic turf war. This article tackles the how-question head-on in its discussions of the diverse kinds and properties of dialogue.

Calls for Dialogue

Since the 2007 publication of Acharya and Buzan’s seminal forum, ‘Why is there no non-Western IR theory?’,¹ voluminous studies that aim to ameliorate the Western parochialism of international relations (IR) and to embrace a wider

1 Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, ‘Why is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction’, *International Relations of Asia Pacific*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2007), pp. 285–86.

range of histories, experiences, knowledge claims, and theoretical perspectives, particularly those *outside* the West, have appeared. This trend includes a strong and increasing commitment among non-Western (in particular, Chinese) IR scholars to the development of ‘national schools’. Of course, contemporary phenomena, not least the rise of China, have added momentum to these attempts to build alternative or indigenous theories about IR. A case in point are the scholarly practices of building an IR theory ‘with Chinese characteristics’. Although consensus is yet to be reached on what ‘Chinese characteristics’ actually are, and there are different views on the use of the term ‘Chinese School’,² many Chinese scholars are in favour of either developing a distinctive ‘Chinese IR’ theory³ or ‘enriching’ extant IR theories ‘with traditional Chinese thought’.⁴

While interest in a ‘Chinese IR’ theory and (by extension) ‘non-Western’ IR has been increasing, concerns about ‘the West-non-West divide’ have also arisen.⁵

- 2 See, for example, Tingyang Zhao, ‘A Political World Philosophy in terms of All-under-Heaven (Tian-xia)’, *Diogenes*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (2009), pp. 5–18; Yaqing Qin, ‘Why is There No Chinese International Relations Theory?’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2007), pp. 313–40; Yaqing Qin, ‘A Relational Theory of World Politics’, *International Studies Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2016), pp. 33–47; Yuan-kang Wang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Feng Zhang, “‘The Tsinghua Approach’ and the Inception of Chinese Theories of International Relations”, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2012), pp. 73–102; Yong-Soo Eun, *Pluralism and Engagement in the Discipline of International Relations* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 25; Feng Zhang, ‘Debating the “Chinese Theory of International Relations”’ in Fred Dallmayr and Zhao Tingyang, eds., *Contemporary Chinese Political Thought: Debates and Perspectives* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), pp. 74–76.
- 3 Qin Yaqing, for example, notes that the development of a ‘Chinese IR’ theory is ‘inevitable’ and ‘desirable’. See Yaqing Qin, ‘Development of International Relations Theory in China: Progress through Debates’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2011), pp. 231–57.
- 4 Unlike Qin, Yan Xuetong refrains from the use of such terms as a ‘Chinese IR theory’, being very cautious about the establishment of a ‘Chinese School’ of IR. Nevertheless, he encourages Chinese scholars to have ‘an interest in rediscovering traditional Chinese IR concepts’ with the aim of ‘enrich[ing] IR theories with traditional Chinese thought’. See Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 255–59.
- 5 Kimberly Hutchings, ‘Dialogue between Whom? The Role of the West/Non-West Distinction in Promoting Global Dialogue in IR’, *Millennium*, Vol. 39, No. 3, (2011), pp. 639–47; Amitav Acharya, ‘Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies’, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (2014), pp. 647–59; Amitav Acharya, ‘Advancing Global IR: Challenges, Contentions, and Contributions’, *International Studies Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2016), pp. 4–15; Pinar Bilgin, ‘Critical Investigations into the International’, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 6 (2014), pp. 1098–114; Pinar Bilgin, “‘Contrapuntal Reading’ as a Method, an Ethos, and a Metaphor for Global

In this sense, scholars who advocate broadening the theoretical horizons of IR beyond the disciplinary dominance of Western/American IR scholarship—particularly in the name of ‘Global IR’—often suggest that the field should pursue more active dialogue and engagement across growing theoretical and spatial divides. Andrew Hurrell, for example, notes that Global IR should aim to have, ‘a far broader conversation’ regarding differently situated accounts and concepts about IR.⁶ What these scholars call for is not to discard or disavow Western-centric IR but rather to render it more inclusive and broader, so to reflect voices and experiences outside the West more fully. Acharya clarifies this point by saying that, ‘while one cannot and should not seek to displace existing (or future) theories of IR that may substantially originate from Western ideas and experiences, it is possible, through dialogue and discovery, to build alternative theories . . . that have their origin in the South’.⁷ Elsewhere, he has added that, ‘encouraging debate and dialogue across perspectives . . . is a *core* purpose of the Global IR project’.⁸

In a related vein, Peter J. Katzenstein also writes that binaries ‘pervading our analytical and political universe’ under such labels as ‘Western vs. Non-Western, West vs. Rest, Occident vs. Orient’ act as a serious bar to a valid understanding of the reality of world politics, marked by heterogeneity, uncertainty, and diversity.⁹ As an alternative, he suggests ‘the grey world of ‘both/and’, which focuses on ‘interaction’ between different types of knowledge (i.e. tacit, implicit knowledge and representational, common knowledge) and ‘coevolution’ of multiple modernities—irrespective of their geographical locations or origins, be they the non-West or the West’.¹⁰

What the earlier discussion suggests is clear: non-Western IR theory-building enterprises cannot and should not ‘be a conversation among the likeminded’.¹¹ In Acharya and Buzan’s words, such a project is, ‘more likely to fail if it does not draw in the broadest group of scholars, including those in the Western

IR’, *International Studies Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2016), pp. 134–46; Andrew Hurrell, ‘Beyond Critique: How to Study Global IR?’, *International Studies Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2016), pp. 149–51; Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, ‘Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? Ten Years on’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2017), pp. 341–70; Yong-Soo Eun, *What Is at Stake in Building “Non-Western” IR Theory?* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 70–88.

6 Hurrell, ‘Beyond Critique’, p. 150.

7 Acharya, ‘Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds’, p. 620.

8 Acharya, ‘Advancing Global IR’, p. 14, emphasis added.

9 Peter J. Katzenstein, ‘The Second Coming? Reflections on a Global Theory of International Relations’, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2018).

10 *Ibid.* See also Peter J. Katzenstein, ‘Many Wests and Polymorphic Globalism’ in Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *Anglo America and Its Discontents: Civilizational Identities beyond West and East* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 207–43.

11 Amitav Acharya, ‘Theorising the International Relations of Asia: Necessity or Indulgence? Some Reflections’, *Pacific Review*, Vol. 30, No. 6 (2017), p. 822.

mainstream'.¹² In brief, we need a two-way 'dialogue' across the West/non-West distinction in order to transform the current Western-centric IR into a global discipline without subjugating marginalised perspectives or engaging in a narcissistic turf war.

A critical question, then, is *how* we can ensure such dialogue. This timely and significant question remains unanswered or at best under-explored in the literature, however. To be sure, there are a few good exceptions,¹³ but in general our call for dialogue is not well matched by a corresponding elaboration of how it can be realised. As a result, 'dialogue, a persistent dream in IR, remains elusive, recurrent cycles of small openings followed by closure'.¹⁴ In the ensuing pages, I discuss specific ways to promote a two-way dialogue between Western and non-Western IR scholarship—a key to the success of 'Global IR'.¹⁵

'How to' Promote Dialogue in IR

Diverse Kinds and Properties of Dialogue

In order to promote dialogue in international studies, it is first of all necessary to clarify what kind of thing dialogue is and should be. In general, dialogue is simply defined as 'a discussion or conversation between two or more people or groups'.¹⁶ Yet, in social-scientific disciplines, dialogue can have several different connotations; furthermore, there is ambiguity in how dialogue is understood and practised in social and international studies.

As Kimberly Hutchings aptly notes, dialogue can be 'staged and scripted'¹⁷ by the powerful/mainstream, which inevitably involves subsumption or synthesis in their favour. Socratic 'dialogue', as depicted by Plato, provides a case in point. In Socratic dialogues, dialogue is a scripted version of a conversation in which the truth is *already* known by Socrates. Let us take an example from *Euthyphro*. Upon starting a dialogue with Euthyphro, Socrates expresses hope to 'learn' from him the meaning of 'piety';¹⁸ yet, every time Euthyphro defines piety, Socrates

12 Acharya and Buzan, 'Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? Ten Years on', p. 354.

13 Hutchings, 'Dialogue between Whom?', pp. 639–47; Bilgin, 'Contrapuntal Reading', pp. 134–46.

14 Mustapha Kamal Pasha, 'Western Nihilism and Dialogue: Prelude to an Uncanny Encounter in International Relations', *Millennium*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (2011), p. 684.

15 Acharya and Buzan, 'Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? Ten Years on', pp. 341–70; Acharya, 'Advancing Global IR', pp. 4–15; see also Amitav Acharya, 'Global IR and Emerging Chinese Contributions to International Relations Theory: Some Preliminary Reflections', a paper presented at the international seminar on 'Global IR and Non-Western IR Theory' organised by the Chinese Foreign Affairs University on 25 April, 2018.

16 Oxford English Dictionary, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/dialogue>.

17 Hutchings, 'Dialogue between Whom', p. 645.

18 Charles H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 63–98.

rejects his definitions, pointing out flaws in them. Euthyphro's definitions are flawed because they do not constitute what Socrates believes to be piety and/or good reasoning. At the dialogue's conclusion, Euthyphro is compelled to correct his logic. That is, although Socrates tells him that he wishes to learn through 'dialogue' with Euthyphro, what Socrates does is effectively 'monologue', in the sense that the direction and outcome are pre-determined. Likewise, in *The Phaedo*, Simmias is asked to tell what immortality is; yet, Socrates refutes his answers, and he, too, is expected to revise his ways of knowing on the basis of Socrates' own understanding of good reasoning. In short, Euthyphro (a merchant) and Simmias (a disciple) engage in dialogue with Socrates (a philosopher and teacher) passively, without generating new perspectives or facts. They are expected to recognise the truth according to Socrates, the powerful in terms of social status in those days. Such dialogue is little more than 'rhetorical bullying'.¹⁹ Obviously, this is not the kind of dialogue that scholars advocating the broadening of IR call for.

Dialogue can also be understood in a Habermasian manner as 'communicative action' and the intersubjective practice of deliberation. Jürgen Habermas argues that reason-based communicative action is the foundation of knowledge and the path to discovering truth. Individuals in modern societies are believed to be capable of deliberating on a particular subject or problem collectively and rationally.²⁰ Dialogue, understood as a deliberative practice based on communicative rationality, especially in an autonomous public sphere, is essential to adjudicating different truth claims and achieving deliberative democracy.²¹ Although Habermasian dialogue does not entail 'rhetorical bullying', it still operates within a particular epistemological framework, namely rationalism, and thereby excludes other forms of knowledge production and approaches to dialogue, such as those based on intuition or emotion. In other words, this is dialogue that favours a particular way of knowing and creates (implicit) entry barriers to engaging in dialogue. Ultimately, this kind of dialogue would lead to conversations among 'like-minded' agents who are subject to 'Western modernity'.²² Again, this is not the kind of dialogue that scholars working on broadening IR, especially those engaged in the 'Global IR' project, call for.

Dialogue in social and international studies can also be referred to as a reconciliation of diverse perspectives. Patrick Jackson's notion of 'engaged pluralism' is a representative case in point. He argues for 'a pluralist science of IR' in which 'a

19 Hutchings, 'Dialogue between Whom', p. 646.

20 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

21 Jürgen Habermas, 'Three Normative Models of Democracy', in Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 27–30; see also Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), pp. 48–95.

22 Iris Marion Young, 'Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy', in Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 131.

variety of philosophical ontologies' is accepted;²³ following from this metatheoretical commitment, methodologically diverse approaches can accordingly be brought into 'dialogue with one another' with 'equal' scientific validity. This is a Weberian understanding of dialogue in the sense that dialogue is regarded as a part of a collective reasoning (or in Weberian terms, a 'collective concept') associated with social-scientific knowledge production in which 'science' and 'politics' is distinguished clearly.²⁴ On close reading, what this implies is that dialogue does not stand independently of a priori conceptualisations about 'scientific' knowledge. Dialogue in social-scientific disciplines has an ontologically meaningful status only when several preconditions are satisfied. For instance, in order to have a meaningful dialogue, namely a reconciliation of diverse perspectives in IR, a broad definition of what counts as scientific methodology for international studies must first be achieved. In other words, dialogue cannot begin unless equal scientific validity is granted to diverse approaches to the study of IR. Moreover, since dialogue in this understanding entails 'value' judgment of what we mean by 'equally scientific',²⁵ dialogue is by nature political action. Dialogue as political action goes beyond an ideal-typical *treatment* of 'science as a vocation'²⁶ towards a socio-political *constitution* of science. Viewed in this sense, dialogue here inevitably involves the political issue of the power/knowledge nexus.²⁷ Dialogue in which the value judgement of 'equal' scientific validity and a socio-political 'constitution' of science take place *should* be, according to Weber's clear distinction between science and politics, restricted to a space where egalitarian mutual encounter and argumentation is possible. Yet, considering the enduring institutional, racial, discursive, and gender hierarchy, as well as parochialism, embedded in the structure of contemporary IR, this type of dialogue is likely to remain 'ideal' without much-needed actual 'practice'.

What Kind of Thing Should Dialogue Be?

What kind of thing, then, should dialogue be? I argue that dialogue needs to be understood and practised as a reciprocal exchange of perspectives for mutual learning. By definition, this understanding of dialogue does not prioritise one side or the other. Nor does it have metatheoretical or methodological preconditions. Most of all, it sets out to safeguard against a tug of war between perspectives and

23 Patrick Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 32–40, 193.

24 Weber Max, 'Science as a vocation', in Gerth, H. H. and Mills, C. Wright, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1988[1919]), pp. 129–58; Max Weber, "'Objectivity'" in *Social Science and Social Policy*, in Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch, eds., *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York: The Free Press, 1969[1904]), pp. 50–112.

25 Patrick, *The Conduct of Inquiry*, p. 21.

26 Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', pp. 1–7.

27 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon Book, 1980).

a subsumption of one in favour of the other. Because dialogue is understood as mutual learning, it must involve the improvement of the existing knowledge that *both* sides in the dialogue have produced. One clear element of dialogue as mutual learning is thus *complementary reciprocity*. Between Western and non-Western perspectives, this complementary reciprocity can take place at and across theoretical, empirical, and metatheoretical levels. There are no necessary or pre-determined pairings. For mutual learning, for example, dialogue between Western international theory and non-Western local experiences and between non-Western philosophy and Western methodology can and should occur. Moreover, the type of dialogue advocated here extends beyond the customary concern about the geographical (or ethnical) origins of knowledge claims (i.e. the question of where they are from) to the question of where research interests or claims overlap and, thus, can complement each other. In any case, the bottom line is that it is through continuous and reciprocal feedback from different levels, perspectives, and experiences that both sides in the dialogue learn, their understandings are complemented, and our knowledge improves.

Of course, the earlier definition of dialogue for itself does not generate dialogue. We also need to address the question of how to translate this definition into *praxis*. It is here, I think, that we need to return to the admonition of Acharya and Buzan, which I briefly mentioned earlier. They note that the project of addressing, ‘the current West-centrism of IR’²⁸ and making the field more diverse and inclusive is, ‘likely to fail if it does not draw in the broadest group of scholars, including those in the Western mainstream’.²⁹ A conversation ‘among the likeminded’—for example, among those interested in non-Western IR theory building—not only ‘carries a greater risk of the fragmentation of the discipline’³⁰ but also fails to achieve mutual learning.

The problem is that those in the ‘Western mainstream’ rarely initiate dialogue with non-Western IR scholars, especially those committed to unsettling the present status of the discipline. As J. Ann Tickner puts it, they (the ‘winners’) have, ‘rarely been willing to engage losers’ in a series of debates in the history of IR. Even if the ‘losers’ show great interest in dialogue, it is, ‘not reciprocated by the mainstream’.³¹ Given this reality, non-Western IR scholars need to *initiate* dialogue; and as a first step, we should attempt to find and expand points of contact with our Western counterparts. One way to do so is to take existing Western IR theories as a starting point *for contact*. This is an ‘instrumentalist’ approach to having dialogue in the present Western-centric state of IR. To be sure, this is not to say that alternative or

28 Barry Buzan, ‘Could IR Be Different?’, *International Studies Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2016), p. 156.

29 Acharya and Buzan, ‘Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? Ten Years on’, p. 354.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 361.

31 J. Ann Tickner, ‘Dealing with Difference: Problems and Possibilities for Dialogue in International Relations’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (2011), pp. 609, 611.

indigenous international studies are unnecessary. There ought to be persistent attempts to develop theoretical insights and historical narratives on IR from non-Western perspectives. However, our theoretical inputs or historical stories are likely to remain disparate or neglected if we do not succeed in sparking considerable interest and attention among ‘Western’ IR scholars. Given their social and geopolitical incentives and motivations, the major concerns of Western IR scholars, particularly those skeptical of the non-Western IR project, are primarily with existing Western IR theories and histories. As such, in order to initiate dialogue, our efforts to advance non-Western perspectives on IR need to be *interlocked with existing* IR knowledge claims, no matter how Western-centric their underlying epistemic or normative foundations are. This ‘instrumentalist’ approach to existing IR theories, in which these theories are used critically or complementarily from non-Western perspectives, can motivate Western IR scholars to listen more carefully to the non-Western voice; this, in turn, can open up possibilities for dialogue between Western and non-Western IR scholars.

This is not an endorsement of the current Western-centrism of IR or existing IR theories. To reiterate, the goal is mutual learning, which must involve the improvement of the knowledge that *both* sides in the dialogue have produced. To achieve this goal we, non-Western, scholars ought to examine and accumulate our different lived experiences and intuitions about IR precisely because they are the basic resources for achieving the improvement of knowledge and ‘greater diversity’ in IR, the ultimate goal of ‘Global IR’. At the same time, however, it should again be emphasised that our attempts to develop or highlight non-Western IR theory or history should *not* be ‘a conversation among the likeminded’, which would inevitably lead to the ‘fragmentation’ of the discipline,³² a concern shared by many IR scholars³³ and a situation that would make dialogue impossible. It is in this light that I call for an instrumentalist approach to dialogue. For example, beginning with *existing* Western IR theories as a point of contact and moving into interweaving our different lived experiences and intuitions about the international situation with them can be very useful in generating dialogue between Western and non-Western IR communities and, thus, enabling mutual learning.

An Illustration: Constructivist IR theory and East Asian History

Let me explain the earlier discussion in more detail in the context of promoting dialogue across ‘the West/non-West divide’. The focus here is on dialogue as

32 Acharya and Buzan, ‘Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? Ten Years on’, p. 361.

33 See Micheal Brecher and Frank Harvey, eds., *Millennial Reflections on International Studies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002); Brian Schmidt, ‘International Relations Theory: Hegemony or Pluralism?’, *Millennium*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (2008), pp. 105–14; Pasha, ‘Western Nihilism and Dialogue’, pp. 683–99; Ido Oren, ‘A Sociological Analysis of the Decline of American IR Theory’, *International Studies Review*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2016), pp. 571–96.

mutual learning between Western-centric IR theory and local understandings of Asia, more specifically between constructivist IR theory and the indigenous knowledge and experiences of East Asian states.

Most scholars agree that socially constructed attributes, such as national identity or nationalism, matter a great deal in East Asian international politics. IR and area studies have a wealth of literature advocating this view. According to constructivism, for example, social and ideational attributes form our conceptions of who we are and what we value; they in turn define the content of states' 'interests' and, therefore, the way they 'act' in world politics.³⁴ It is 'identity' that constructs, 'a particular set of interests or preferences with respect to choices of action' in international politics.³⁵ Drawing on these constructivist insights, scholars interested in East Asian regional politics observe that, 'nationalism appears to be rising in a renascent Asia, stoking tensions, aspirations, pride, and identity politics'.³⁶ Shin notes that, 'historical memories and national identity' shape Northeast Asian inter-state relations.³⁷ Going a step further, Wang claims that, 'different interpretations of history and differences in identity . . . must be seen as a cause for conflict'³⁸ between China and Japan. In this respect, concerned scholars suggest that East Asia narrows, 'the gaps in the perceptions of identity' through 'historical reconciliation' so as to improve regional cooperation.³⁹ Furthermore, these claims lead to the following analytical injunction: one needs to pay great attention to national identity or historical memory in order to make sense of the present and future of East Asian international politics.⁴⁰

34 Alexander Wendt, 'Collective Identity Formation and the International State', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 2 (1994), pp. 384–96; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

35 Ted Hopf, 'The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory', *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1998), p. 175.

36 Jeff Kingston, *Asian Nationalisms Reconsidered* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 1.

37 Gi-Wook Shin, 'National Identities, Historical Memories, and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia' in Gilbert Rozman, ed., *Asia's Alliance Triangle* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 189.

38 Zheng Wang, 'Perception Gaps, Identity Clashes', in Tatsushi Arai, Shihoko Goto, and Zheng Wang eds., *Clash of National Identities: China, Japan and the China Sea Territorial Dispute* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2013), p. 16.

39 Jun-Hyeok Kwak and Melissa Nobles, eds., *Inherited Responsibility and Historical Reconciliation in East Asia* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 4.

40 David C. Kang, 'Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks', *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2003), pp. 57–85; Gilbert Rozman, ed., *East Asian National Identities: Common Roots and Chinese Exceptionalism* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012); Evelyn Goh, *The Struggle for Order: Hegemony, Hierarchy, and Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Tatsushi Arai, Shihoko Goto, and Zheng Wang, eds., *Clash of National Identities: China, Japan and the China Sea Territorial Dispute* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Centre, 2013); Mi-Kyung Kim, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Memory and Reconciliation in East Asia* (London:

Despite the voluminous literature on the importance of national identity and its implications for East Asian international politics, the questions of *how* and *when* this ideational and social construct matters in the foreign policies of East Asian countries remain unclear. An attempt to answer this question requires both theoretical and empirical knowledge. That is, we need both theoretical knowledge regarding the causal mechanisms and processes of national identity in relation to a state's foreign policy *and* empirical observation of how specific aspects of this identity actually come to exercise a causal effect on certain foreign policies of East Asian countries. Unfortunately, however, it is often acknowledged that area studies on Asia lack the former (i.e. theoretical and methodological commitments to an understanding of causal mechanisms) and that theoretical IR studies do not pay due attention to the latter (i.e. empirical, local experience of individual Asian countries' foreign policy). In effect, the two fields remain disparate even though both acknowledge the importance of national identity. Hence, this is a point where dialogue (i.e. mutual learning and complementary reciprocity) can and should take place.

For example, constructivist IR theory makes it possible to grasp the essence of East Asian international politics, namely the politics of identity, and understand the patterns of East Asian states' external behaviour associated with nationalism. Let us take a concrete example from South Korean foreign policy behaviour vis-à-vis Japan and North Korea. South Korea often reacts more firmly and even aggressively to Japan's history textbooks than it does to North Korea's nuclear weapons.⁴¹ This seems puzzling. South Korea directly faces North Korea's nuclear threats; in order to curtail the latter's nuclear ambitions, South Korea needs to cooperate and coordinate with regional states, including Japan. Moreover, the USA has asked or pressured Seoul to consider the trilateral security cooperation system of the United States–Japan–South Korea. In addition, South Korea and Japan are both democracies with thick economic ties; several economic institutions have been established to promote bilateral cooperation between the two countries. As such, one would expect South Korea to pursue comprehensive cooperation with Japan. Nevertheless, empirical reality shows the opposite. Why does South Korea behave as it does in relation to Japan?

Existing (Western) IR knowledge claims, more specifically constructivist IR theory, can provide and define a range of explanatory possibilities; taking cues from it, we can have plausible answers to this puzzle by shifting our analytical focus from power politics or material interests to identity politics. However, constructivism—as a general theoretical perspective derived mainly from Western history and Western philosophy of knowledge—falls far short of answering *how* and *when* national identity actually matters to South Korea's foreign policy

Routledge, 2015); Brad Glosserman and Scott A. Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2015).

41 East Asia Institute, *The 2nd Joint Korea-Japan Public Opinion Poll: Analysis Report on Comparative Data* (Seoul: East Asia Institute, 2014).

actions. This is where indigenous knowledge in turn feeds back into an enrichment of constructivist IR theory and our overall understanding. For example, several in-depth historical enquiries on South Korea demonstrate that South Koreans have long formed a clear set perception of Japan as the immutable ‘other’.⁴² Since the colonial occupation of the early 20th century, the idea of the Japanese ‘other’, a foil to Korean ethnicity, has built bonds of national solidarity and social coherence among South Koreans. In postcolonial Korean society, Japan is still a powerful differentiator that reminds Koreans who they are and who they are not. South Korean sentiment and, to an extent, even its history curricula support the idea that the Korean nation is not only distinct from Japan but ethnically superior as well.⁴³

In contrast, ethnicity remains today a reminder in both South and North Korea of ‘who they are’ despite the border between them. Neither territorial partition nor political separation has completely erased the belief in a Korean identity based on a shared past, common ancestry, and ethnic homogeneity. The view that all Koreans are ‘members of an extended family’ is a resilient one.⁴⁴ Of course, during the Korean War of 1950–1953, the South and North adopted political identities that were not only distinct from but also in stark opposition to each other; owing to this change, the more or less unitary system of ethnic national identity in South Korea gave way to an identity shaped by multiple variables. Nonetheless, ethnic identity remains the most fundamental and rigid of these variables. In South Korea, the powerful idea of a mythic, historical Korean nation persists.⁴⁵ For instance, while ethnicity (a cultural construct based on common ancestry, language, and history) is typically distinct from race (an immutable phenotypic and genotypic group), Koreans view the two as inseparable. In Korean discourse about identity, the terms ‘race’, ‘ethnicity’, and ‘nation’ are used interchangeably.⁴⁶ The governments of both South and North Korea, in this

42 Chizuko Allen, ‘Northeast Asia Centred around Korea: Choi Namsun’s View of History’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (1990), pp. 787–806; Roland Bleiker, ‘Identity and Security in Korea’, *Pacific Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2001), pp. 121–48.

43 Byung Chul Koh, ‘A Comparison of Unification Policies’, in Whan Kihl Young, ed., *Korea and the World: Beyond the Cold War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Hyun Choe, ‘National Identity and Citizenship in the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Korea’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2006), pp. 84–118; Nae Young Lee and Han Wool Jeong, *The Impact of North Korea’s Artillery Strike on Public Opinion in South Korea* (Seoul: East Asia Institute, 2010); Sung Bae Kim, *Identity Prevails in the End: North Korea’s Nuclear Threat and South Korea’s Response in 2006* (Seoul: East Asia Institute, 2011).

44 Gi-Wook Shin, James Fred, and Gihong Yi, ‘The Politics of Ethnic Nationalism in Divided Korea’, *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (1999), pp. 465–84; Bleiker, ‘Identity and Security in Korea’, p. 121.

45 Choe, ‘National Identity and Citizenship’, pp. 85–115; Kim, ‘Identity Prevails in the End’, pp. 3–32.

46 Gi-Wook Shin and Paul Yunsik Chang, ‘The Politics of Nationalism in U.S-Korean Relations’, *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2004), p. 121.

respect, continue to regard the reunification of Korea as the key to the ‘completion’ of the nation-state. Both consider the division of Korea after WWII as a ‘temporary’ circumstance.⁴⁷ The leitmotif of ethnically based national identity is a critical component of policy discourses on the reunification of Korea. For example, in their policy discourses on North Korea, the South Korean governments, whether liberal or conservative, often evoked the Korean term ‘*danil minjok*’ or ‘*han minjok*’, which literally means ‘a nation of one clan’.⁴⁸

Viewed in this light, South Korea’s behaviour towards Japan becomes understandable. When we consider the country’s long-standing ethnic identity, according to which Japan is regarded as an inferior and/or antagonistic *Other*, the negative image of Japan that South Korea has and South Koreans’ emotional and hostile reactions (not to the North Korean nuclear tests, but) to Japanese history textbooks appear logical, even natural. What does all of this evidence imply? Knowledge about local historical experiences makes constructivism a more effective approach to understanding the dynamics and extent of national identity’s causal effect on foreign policy. Such knowledge is indeed necessary to determine which aspects of national identity are more rigid and, thus, exercise a more powerful causal influence on foreign policy and why. In the case of South Korea’s national identity, although multiple aspects constitute it—including political ideology and geographical location—it is ethnicity that exercises the primary and dominant influence as regards engendering social coherence and solidarity within the nation and highlighting the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This indigenous knowledge helps to increase the analytical purchase of national identity, a key variable of constructivism. In short, historicised research and local knowledge can add depth and sophistication to existing (Western-centric) IR theory by specifying its boundary and scope conditions. Taken as a whole, both sides learn, and our knowledge, thus, improves.

What Is to Be Done?

The discussion thus far has significant implications for the ongoing Global IR project and our calls for dialogue in it. First of all, the earlier discussion does not suggest that constructivism alone can generate dialogue as mutual learning across ‘the West/non-West divide’. Constructivism has been specifically selected as an example of how an ‘instrumentalist’ approach to dialogue as advocated here

47 *Ibid.*, p. 476; see also Edward Olsen, ‘Korean Nationalism in a Divided Nation: Challenges to US Policy’, *Pacific Focus*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2008), pp. 4–21.

48 Moo Hyun Roh, ‘Speeches on March First Independence Movement Day Address’, 1 March, 2006, Seoul, The Office of President; Moo Hyun Roh, ‘Letters on South Korea–Japan relations, President Roh Moo Hyun Speeches’, Seoul, The Office of President, 2006; Myung Bak Lee, ‘President Lee’s Address for the 60th Anniversary of the Korean War’, 25 June, 2010, Seoul, The Office of President; Myung Bak Lee, ‘Speech on 65th Anniversary of National Liberation’, 15 August, 2010, Seoul, The Office of President; Myung Bak Lee, ‘President Lee Myung Bak Speeches’, 16 April, 2012, Seoul, The Office of President.

works in practice.⁴⁹ This instrumentalist approach is applicable to other existing Western-centric IR theories as well. To re-emphasise the point, their use is not for theory or hypothesis ‘testing’ in non-Western contexts, but for contact (i.e. as a dialogue-initiating move). More importantly, the centerpiece of this instrumentalist approach is the move towards interweaving indigenous experiences or perspectives with *existing* IR theories. To this end, indigenous findings need to be converted into theoretical concepts or couched in terms of theoretical variables that engender theories or concepts that are reflective of local contexts and which can also ‘travel’ beyond the specific contexts. From this vantage point, additional discussion and more sophisticated thinking is then necessary with respect to the above case of an instrumentalist dialogue between constructivist IR theory and the indigenous historical experiences of South Korea.

As the existing constructivist literature indicates, national identity matters in international politics. South Korea’s foreign policy behaviour is no exception. But, it is the historicised knowledge and ethnographically attuned approach that actually tells us *how* it mattered and *when* it mattered most. Such knowledge has shown that the impact of national identity depends on the types of national identity involved and on their degree of rigidity, which rigidity is dependent on collective memories and emotions regarding a state’s historical experiences. More specifically, among the multiple national identities that can be preserved in a state over time, one is more rigid or fundamental than the others; its causal power (i.e. its constraining and enabling influence) over a state’s foreign policy overwhelms other types of national identity. Put simply, national identity operates within a ‘hierarchical’ setting. Hence, in order to increase the explanatory purchase of national identity (and by extension constructivist theory), analysts need to understand not just any national identity of a given state but the rigid one topmost of the hierarchical layers, which can be termed a ‘superior’ identity. And this ‘superior’ identity resonates well with the collective emotions of a given nation: it is manifested or embodied in and through the nation’s collective emotions, and thus (re)produces and reinforces the superior identity. In the case of South Korea, for example, ethnicity—or, more to the point, a socio-historically constructed belief in ethnic homogeneity—serves as the bedrock on which the nation’s ‘superior’ national identity and collective emotions are based.

What the earlier discussion suggests is clear and straightforward: IR theories, specifically constructivist theorists, should focus on local contexts and ethnographical knowledge precisely because the latter is what helps, in both our examination of the various aspects of a state’s identity and our evaluation of the *hierarchy* of these aspects, to correctly understand their effect. In other words, it is through indigenous knowledge and experiences that constructivist IR theory is to be able to understand *when* a national identity matters *most*. In addition, as

49 Furthermore, as discussed earlier, constructivism and area studies on Asia remain disparate even though both acknowledge the importance of national identity. Hence, I believe this is a point where dialogue (i.e. mutual learning and complementary reciprocity) should take place.

the South Korean case demonstrates, the substantive elements of the 'superior' national identity are derived from the nation's historical experiences, especially its traumatic experiences—such as colonialism and war—wherein the cognitive and emotional distinction between *Self* and *Other* (or *Us* and *Them*) is clear and consistent and, thus, underlies and ensures the nation's social coherence and emotional solidarity. This, once again, reminds us that IR theory should be capable of being interlinked with a thick understanding of local histories or experiences that, in turn, must be converted into interlinking/interweaving theoretical concepts or variables. As a result, we can have or remould a theory (e.g. constructivism) that reflects local contexts and tacit knowledge (e.g. a superior identity) and which can also 'travel'. I would prefer to call the outcome of this complementary reciprocity 'emotionalised constructivism'.

As many scholars have recently argued, looking at the world from a perspective that privileges Western veins of thought leaves much open to misinterpretation. But, the opposite is also true. The recent calls for a more inclusive and broader IR that properly reflect histories, knowledge, and theoretical perspectives from outside the West do 'not seek to displace existing (or future) theories of IR that ... originate from Western ideas and experiences'.⁵⁰ Instead, the ultimate objective of this project to broaden IR is to recognise multiple foundations of thought and encourage dialogue across the West/non-West divide in the study of global politics. If so, debates over Western versus non-Western IR, or the superiority of one way of knowing over another, should not be a major issue of concern for today's IR. Instead, the question to be debated is when and where each way of thinking offers greater insights. Most importantly, we should focus on developing productive interaction between differently situated or derived perspectives.

Viewed in this light, it is unfortunate that the ongoing IR broadening project, be it non-Western or Global IR, approaches the problem of 'West-centrism' too narrowly as regards the *geographical* origins of concepts, theories, or theorists. For example, a study by Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al., based on the 2014 Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) survey data, shows that non-Western IR scholars tend to 'have geographically bounded perceptions of IR communities', and that 'geography plays a central role in the Global IR debate'.⁵¹ Of course, it is true that non-Western worlds and their voices sit on the margins of the discipline; we must grapple with this marginalisation or underrepresentation. The point is not that these geographically based concerns are misplaced but that the non-Western or Global IR project needs to widen the discussion by considering the issue of marginalisation beyond geographical parameters.

50 Acharya, 'Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds', p. 620; see also Acharya 'Global IR and Emerging Chinese Contributions to International Relations Theory', p. 3.

51 Wiebke Wemheuer-Vogelaar, Nicholas J. Bell, Mariana Navarrete Morales, and Michael J. Tierney, 'The IR of the Beholder: Examining Global IR Using the 2014 TRIP Survey', *International Studies Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2016), pp. 18, 24.

To paraphrase and reflexively extend a claim made by Acharya,⁵² a ‘challenge’ that we ought to take up is to ‘demonstrate’ how marginalised concepts, experiences, or perspectives derived from non-Western contexts can be interweaved with Western-centric IR theory. As the earlier discussion on three different approaches to dialogue and the illustration of national identity have shown, I believe that by spelling out the theoretical meanings of local Asian experiences *in relation to* existing Western IR theory’s causal mechanisms or boundary conditions, we can establish and expand useful ‘points of contact’ across the fragmented understandings stemming from both the Western parochialism of IR and monological attempts to develop non-Western IR. Following on from this undertaking, dialogue as mutual learning in international studies can take place. This is also a necessary move away from the West/non-West binary and a critical attempt to build indigenous concepts or theories that can ‘travel’ beyond the national or regional contexts from which they are derived. Rather than unquestioningly applying Western-centric IR theories or developing non-Western indigenous knowledge to replace those theories, we need to focus on promoting dialogue between them, with the aim of creating complementary understandings of our complex world. After all, the issue is not who is right or where we are from, but *whether we can talk to each other*. In this sense, although dialogue can be valued as an end in its own right, what is more crucial and needs to be teased out further is ‘types’ or ‘properties’ of dialogue. Thus, critical research on the ‘instrumentalist’ approach to dialogue put forth here is essential, and will be most welcome.

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