

Building an eclectic and inclusive global IR: Challenges and opportunities in the 21st century

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Scholars have long been writing about the need for global International Relations (IR) in a fast-changing world, recognizing the distinct contributions that Non-Western nation-states, regions, civilizations and cultures have made to international affairs and regional orders.¹ While these efforts are laudable, a number of institutional, epistemological, and ontological challenges exist for IR to become a truly global discipline.

Why do we need global IR?

Formally, International Relations is a hundred-year-old discipline - as the focal point of this special issue attests. It must be mentioned that the subject matter has been with us in different forms from ancient times, especially statecraft (e.g. balance of power) and diplomacy as well as international law for several centuries. Emerging from the crucible of World War I, much of the focus among its European pioneers of IR was on how to prevent another war and to obtain peaceful change in world politics.² The natural focus of the European scholars was the relations and behavior among the great powers, who controlled much of world through their colonial empires. The rise of Hitler and the bloodbath of World War II once again brought back the need to study great power politics with more vigor. The Cold War conflict generated much attention among Western scholars on the need for nuclear stability and crisis management among the super powers, many of whom were concerned with preventing another cataclysmic global war.

What was generally ignored in Western IR during much of the Cold War era was the emergence of new states in the international system, as a result of the largely peaceful decolonization process. India's Jawaharlal Nehru and other leaders such as Indonesia's Sukarno, Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Yugoslavia's Marshall Tito took initiative in forming the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, but the Western

countries viewed them with disparagement. Western IR scholars in general took cues from the key economic and security concerns of their states, even while claiming scholarly independence. The Soviet model or the Chinese approaches to IR were often viewed more as propaganda than anything else. It was indeed the end of the Cold War and the intensified globalization of ideas and the material growth of new centers of power that gave birth to a partial recognition of the need to globalize International Relations. The rise of China, and to a limited extent India, Brazil, and a few pivotal states (as represented in the G-20), has generated interest in global IR, though much of the key scholarship is still produced in the West. Increasingly, Chinese and Indian scholars have been writing about IR, the latter with an emphasis on regional issues and India's foreign policy. Civilizational focus has become even more interesting as the new states claim and acknowledge their long histories as civilizations and their contributions to human progress as well as international relations. Yet, progress in developing a truly global IR remains tardy.

The constraints in developing a genuine global IR are many. The discipline remains dominated by American (and to a certain extent European) scholars, as scholars of the global south face many constraints in making their voices heard – some of which are self-imposed. The lack of theory development, differing perceptions on what constitutes theory itself, and in some cases, the absence of strict adherence to rigorous standards of scholarship often affect the publication opportunities of scholars from the global south regions. The temptation to do more descriptive/narrative regional scholarship is partly due to the lack of adequate training in theory or methods. There have been some efforts by the publishers of key journals and books to pay attention to scholarly training, especially from the global south. Yet, gatekeeping by Western scholars - who often act as reviewers - is a challenge even for those editors who want to publish scholarship from different parts of the world. What is needed is intensified regional and national efforts to create their own training as well as theory development, which need not mirror Western-centered theories but should be able to speak to them if they want to obtain international traction. Good journals and book publishing venues could be developed in the global south itself and they should seek manuscripts from all over the world.

To begin with, let us focus on the institutional challenges and constraints faced by global south scholars that stymie efforts to create a genuinely global IR.

Institutional structures in the IR discipline

One of the practical challenges to building a truly global IR has been the institutional structures of the study of IR. Although IR is only just over 100 years old as a discipline, it has grown as an American and to a certain extent, Anglo-Saxon endeavor.³ The key mainstream perspectives - Realism, Liberalism, and

Constructivism - have grown out of Western philosophical and epistemological traditions. Critical perspectives, such as dependency theory as well as post-colonial approaches, have come from different parts of the world, but none has been able to break the stronghold of dominant Western paradigms. The largest association of International Studies Association (ISA) remains American-dominated in terms of membership, leadership, and priorities. More members are now coming from other developed countries with a handful from the developing world as well. I was happy to play a major role in changing that focus to some extent as president of ISA (2016-2017). With the help of some key scholars, largely from the global south, we made two significant achievements during that period. One was developing regional sections at ISA and as a result, the South Asia section was approved and today it is one of the most active sections of ISA, facilitating interactions among South Asian scholars around the world. This shows that successful regional sections can be developed within ISA. Second, and more importantly, a global south presidential task force was appointed during my term in office which has produced a report and some key recommendations.⁴ In 2018 The ISA governing council approved some of these recommendations and now it has a committee⁵ working to promote global south initiatives within the organization and to organize regional conferences. Two such conferences were held in Accra and Quito in 2019 which were co-sponsored by regional groupings or universities. In 2020 such a conference was supposed to be held in Ifrane, Morocco, only to be cancelled due to the corona virus crisis. Many of us hope that once the crisis is over, more conferences in global south venues will be possible. Some initiatives have been undertaken by ISA journals to become more inclusive and help scholars from the global south to publish in them. Although these initiatives have helped to broaden the opportunities for global south scholars and themes, the number of beneficiaries remains small, largely due to financial, travel, and visa constraints. Some countries, including India, place unnecessary restrictions on their scholars traveling abroad to attend these conferences or even allowing international conferences on their soil. Universities have to offer funding to scholars to attend these conferences as their counterparts in the advanced countries do.

The changes in ISA have not been paralleled by changes in other associations such as the European ISA or British ISA which remain largely for scholars from these regions. Similar attempts to create a South Asian or Indian association have not come to fruition. This generates some questions. How is it possible to develop a truly global IR without parallel efforts to create active regional venues for scholars from both the South and the North to exchange ideas? There is much hesitancy in countries like India to develop associations and institutional structures that will help develop research agendas as well as promote scholarship, especially by younger scholars in the discipline. Is this because IR and foreign policy are the preservers of foreign

policy elite in Delhi, especially the bureaucratic elite who do not wish for much free discussion of their policies and priorities? Proper scholarship requires freedom of expression and tolerance of diverse opinions and viewpoints, which the governments of rising powers seem reluctant to adopt.

Beyond institutional constraints, themes of scholarship need to be carefully thought out for regional scholars to have a global impact, as everything important in a narrow regional context may not be valuable for others. What subject matter should we study or include in such a perspective? What should IR departments do to promote them?

Some possible themes

In my perspective, Global IR should aim to connect existing and evolving IR perspectives. It should not be narrowly nationalistic in orientation. This means scholars from the West, East, South, North all should engage each other rather than attempt to create atomized scholarship. It should attempt to bridge the gaps between different paradigms and perspectives while generating knowledge on substantive issues. Healthy debate among perspectives is often needed. Positioning research on the singular dimension of a particular paradigm has generated considerable difficulties in explaining variations in outcomes different regions and may well have come to a dead-end. IR scholars should be interested in crafting future research trajectories using the insights of IR theory, both mainstream and critical varieties, and develop policy-relevant ideas so that some of the conflict-ridden regions of the world, such as the Middle East and South Asia, could benefit from scholarly works regardless of their national origins.

An example is the European integration project and the security community that developed in this region. The key question is why the good ideas developed in the European project are not spreading rapidly, unlike European yester-year conceptions of nation-state (including authoritarian state models) and sovereignty. The contemporary European model emerged out of a material condition of the colonial/imperial era and the Cold War rivalry and alliance system, yet institutions, democracy, and interdependence helped shape the model. Certain ideas of cooperation and integration were developed prior to and during the progression of the European project. A fundamental challenge to the EU model is the curvilinear progression that it has been making. Why hasn't it achieved greater global salience in the five decades of its existence and what explains this outcome? Is the absence of certain critical variables identified in realist, liberal, or constructivist perspectives in other regions, causing this outcome? Perhaps the inclusion of civilizational approaches may help understand this phenomenon more effectively.

The larger region of Asia offers a testing ground for understanding different pathways of regional order. The sub-regions of Asia are characterized by many patterns, partial realist, partial liberal, partial constructivists, partial post-colonial, and more importantly, distinct yet interconnected civilizational worlds. The sub-regions of Asia exhibit many differences with Europe. East Asia is highly interdependent economically, yet security competition, based on borders, spheres of influence and ethnic affinities exist, some of which are magnified by the political manipulations of national leaders. China, in particular, is striking many such conflicts with unfounded historical claims in oceans and border territories. Yet, China is also taking steps to create a pan-regional Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is potentially a game changer for conflict and cooperation. Asia-Pacific has failed to transform the way liberal predictions would suggest. It seems states are following different approaches to order building and contributions to peaceful change.

Similarly, institutionalism in Asia-Pacific also is taking a different track than the European model. After making some major strides in peaceful change and regional order, why is Asia-Pacific suddenly in the throes of new forms of conflict? This is also a challenge to Global IR from Asia - how to build peace and not to fall into the European historical mode of warfare and the Thucydides Trap? For instance, the role of ASEAN as a norm-maker is currently under challenge as China flouts many of its negotiated codes of conduct. Yet, there is interstate peace in the sub-region even when internal peace may be lacking in some states. Despite high levels of economic interdependence, the East Asia sub-region, has not been successful in creating a security community, even similar to the ASEAN region, as unresolved territorial issues often come to the forefront. Despite these variations, Asia-Pacific is not the anarchic world some fear. There is a certain level of order and a reluctance on the part of states to use active force to advance their goals as they previously did. Is it purely the function of balance of power or deterrence, or is it due to some other additional unnoticed factor? Civilizational and cultural factors seem to increasingly matter in these regional behavioral patterns. Certain peculiar norms of inter-state behavior maybe evolving among states in the sub-regions of Asia.

Civilizational IR: It is argued that what is missing in IR may be the role of civilizations and their impact on interstate relations. Here there is room for the meeting of Westphalian norms, realist and liberal and Western constructivist ideas with ancient civilizations of Asia-Pacific. The effort by elites to create illiberal or authoritarian Westphalian states while ignoring civilizational bonds among communities and ethnic groups is a puzzle that needs exploration. The building of nation-states based on dominant ethnic identities ignores the civilizational co-existence of different communities in the sub-regions of Asia for centuries. For example, in South Asia the absence of deep regional peace cannot be explained without examining civilizational variables that bind different communities.

In terms of civilizational ideas, South Asian countries have been reluctant to follow the principles of tolerance inherent in the dominant religions in the region: Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. Some of these values were drawn and practiced by leaders such as Mohandas Gandhi and late Pashtun leader Ghan Abdul Gaffar Khan. Eclectic Islamic ideas inherent in Sufism are undervalued in the region, especially in Pakistan and Afghanistan today. Extreme violence marks the internal and external relations of these countries. Buddhism's powerful ideas of nonviolence (ahimsa) and compassion are blatantly neglected in Sri Lanka's violent suppression of minority rights, despite being a majority Buddhist country. India has almost forgotten Gandhi's non-violent ideas and the current BJP-led government seems keen to pursue a policy of promoting "Hindutwa" (Hinduness), upsetting minority rights and communal harmony of the multi-ethnic country. The National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019, which discriminate minorities, especially Muslims, are blatant examples of this trend.

The non-acceptance of peaceful civilizational norms - developed in the South Asia sub-region over centuries - by contemporary states is critical for understanding the dilemma they are in. While this region has historically been a theater of syncretic civilizational ideas derived from Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism in particular that promoted peace among different communities, violence has occurred in the context of the politicization of religions. And religion and cast affiliations have been used by various groups for their own narrow advantages. The four historical heroes of India, for instance, are known for their espousal of peace- Buddha, Ashoka, Akbar and Gandhi.⁶ But you hear little about their teachings today in mainstream political discourses.

Civilizational IR has little hope if Asian civilizations, such as India and China, abandon tolerance and inclusiveness. The increasing focus on nation-state and border security, derived from yesteryear European models of ethnic and communal dominance, undermines efforts at building a global IR, let alone a peaceful world order. The exclusivist agendas offer little to creating a peaceful world or to the social harmony of the countries themselves.

Chinese scholars have focused on the value of resurrecting the Tianxia (the tributary model). The peaceful rise strategy of Deng Xio-Ping and his successors have benefited the country much and allowed it to grow as a global power during the past three decades without war. Yet, the policies of Xi Jinping seem to advance the rise by using salami-tactics and territorial expansion, which some argue may produce an unnecessary war with the US and China's neighboring states.

China's Rise: China's strategic orientations have increasingly become hegemonic. It seems Xi Jinping has changed the peaceful rise strategy of his immediate predecessors by aggressively pursuing territorial push in the South China

Sea, Taiwan, and the Indian border, while removing some of the freedoms Hong Kong has been experiencing. Muzzling scholarly independence is also a part of this strategy. Yet, China deserves our attention beyond the Western theoretical lenses. Why China has adopted a peaceful rise strategy, why it has remained authoritarian yet accommodated liberal ideas of economic interdependence and institutions, why it is pursuing the Belt and Road Initiative without overtly militarizing it - unlike the East India Companies of European colonial powers - all call for a reassessment of a rising power's strategic orientations as distinct from Western imperial powers. Yet, the transition under Xi to a more aggressive posture shows that China is not free of the pathologies of power politics.

Donald Trump has abandoned many international institutions and has made American policy more revisionist than anyone in the past. As a result, Asia-Pacific is steadily witnessing the rise of a new cold war and the decline of many institutions that maintained partial peace. The rise of an illiberal international order and the role of the US in dismantling the very institutional structures that it helped to create deserve our examination.

India's Rise: Similarly, India's limited but significant rise as a major power largely through institutional accommodation demands our attention. Is it simply the result of new balance of power considerations or the result of leadership that India has shown in global governance institutions? There has been focus on the democratic and secular values of India that gave it a favorable global position despite the many weaknesses in economic and developmental areas. If India becomes a more intolerant nation and abandons its core democratic and secular values, simultaneously not able to economically progress rapidly and create an egalitarian society, how will India be accepted as a rising power in the 21st century? What kind of a model it can offer to other states?

Can global IR offer ideas for making the impending power transitions more peaceful and accommodative?

Peaceful change is an area where Global IR could provide ideas and strategies for states as well as societies to consider. The sovereign state is only one form of political organization that the world has witnessed. The challenge is how civilizational ideas of co-existence enter the picture of sovereign states and their relationships.

Bridging Theoretical Paradigms: One way to develop a global approach to IR is to pursue puzzle-driven, as opposed to a paradigm-driven, research agendas. Many puzzles in IR cannot be fruitfully explained using a single paradigm as it forces scholars to pigeonhole the explanation into one or the other perspective, however inaccurate it may be. Often, a single paradigm approach cannot offer analytical richness. Many International Relations phenomena are more complex than we

understand and often the historical contexts and situations of states need to be explored in order to obtain a convincing understanding of the issues that we try to grapple with.⁷ Paradigms can give rise to dogmatic allegiance and ideological preferences, creating islands of theories. By being open, one should be willing to disprove one's paradigm after conducting the empirical research if the puzzle cannot be explained by a given paradigm that the scholar has adhered to. By not doing so, many IR theorists tend to lose a key philosophy of science requirement.

Open-mindedness and a willingness to work through the causal mechanisms and pathways, rather than simply narrating variables, are essential to pursue the eclectic approaches rooted in a Global IR framework fruitfully. We need to know how these different variables (often drawn from different paradigms and approaches) are connected and how they affect or cause the outcome - singularly or in unison - that we are trying to explain. Explanation should be the most important objective of the scholarly enterprise, not simple description of a phenomenon. Eclectic approaches, if not carefully pursued, can end up as thick descriptions of a mish-mash variety, a danger that scholars should avoid. Global IR research thus could focus on new methodologies and concretization of different philosophical and theoretical traditions as syncretic cultures have done in the civilizational contexts, especially in the Asia-Pacific, for thousands of years.

Notes & References

1. For a detailed articulation, see Acharya, Amitav and Barry Buzan (2019), *The Making of Global International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. For instance, see Carr, E.H.(1939): *The Twenty Year's Crisis, 1919-1939*, New York, NY: Harpertorch Books.
3. Hoffmann, Stanley (1977): "An American Social Science: International Relations," *Daedalus*, Vol. 106, No. 3, I (Summer): 41-60.
4. See, https://www.isanet.org/Portals/o/Documents/GlobalSouth/2018_GlobalSouth_Task_Force.pdf
5. On this committee, see <https://www.isanet.org/ISA/Governance/Committees/Status-of-Global-South>
6. On this, see Sen, Amartya (2005): *The Argumentative Indian*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
7. I have made such an attempt in my recent book *Restraining Great Powers: Soft Balancing from Empires to the Global Era*, New Haven: Yale university Press 2019, to explain the relative absence of hard balancing among key states.