The absence of non-western IR theory in Asia reconsidered

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Abstract

This paper critically examines an ongoing debate in International Relations (IR) as to why there is apparently no non-Western IR theory in Asia and what should be done to 'mitigate' that situation. Its central contention is that simply calling for greater incorporation of ideas from the non-West and contributions by non-Western scholars from local 'vantage points' does *not* make IR more global or democratic, for that would do little to transform the discipline's Eurocentric epistemological foundations. Re-envisioning IR in Asia is not about discovering or producing as many 'indigenous' national schools of IR as possible, but about reorienting IR itself towards a *post*-Western era that does not reinforce the hegemony of the West within (and without) the discipline. Otherwise, even if local scholars could succeed in crafting a 'Chinese (or Indian, Japanese, Korean, etc.) School', it would be no more than constructing a 'derivative discourse' of Western modernist social science.

1 Introduction

Against the backdrop that International Relations (IR) continues to be dominated by a singular worldview ('warre of all against all') with an exclusivist logic ('conversion or discipline') for all actors and activities in world politics (Chen *et al.*, 2009), calls for the reorientation of the discipline towards a more 'international', less American- or, indeed, Western-dominated direction have been registered with an increasing frequency since the last decade (Wæver, 1998; Crawford and Jarvis, 2001; Smith, 2002).[1] The problem, it is argued, has to do with IR theorizing, for the current IR theories (IRTs) have mostly been based on Western ideas, methods, experiences, and practices which rarely recognize the need to broaden their analytical (and political) horizons. As a result, even those who are victimized under the existing power relations also continue to reproduce that dominance system, simply because of the lack of feasible alternatives in the field to thinking about and doing world politics.

Some significant moves have been underway. For example, Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan's recent efforts to ascertain the possibility of a non-Western IRT in Asia are particularly relevant to our purpose here.[2] According to Acharya and Buzan, their cross-national project seeks to add to the existing criticisms that IRT is Western-centric, oblivious to most of world history on the one hand, and to consider why there is ostensibly no distinctive non-Western theory and what resources might be available to redress that 'imbalance' on the other hand. The ultimate purpose of the project is to 'stimulate non-Western voices to bring their historical and cultural, as well as their intellectual, resources into the theoretical debates about IR' (Acharya and Buzan, 2007a, p. 286). Accordingly, non-Western IRT is expected to somehow change the 'balance of power' within the discipline, and in so doing change the 'priorities, perspective, and interests' that those debates embody (Acharya and Buzan, 2007b, p. 437). 'Mainstream IRT may have been for the West and for its interests', say Acharya and Buzan, and 'this skewing needs to be rectified by the inclusion of a wider range of voices' (Acharya and Buzan, 2007b, p. 437).

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1 Such reflections can be traced back to Hoffman (1977). For a useful collection of essays on non-Western approaches to international relations, see Chan and Moore (2009).

2 See their special issue in *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 7:3 (2007), which was later published as Acharya and Buzan (2010). See also the forum on 'IR Theory Outside the West' in *International Studies Review*, 10:4 (2008) and Chan *et al.* (2001).

Similarly, while Arlene Tickner and Ole Wæver's edited volume goes even further to speak about the field by investigating what is actually done around the world by scholars of IR and why, with a focus on how the political and socioeconomic environments of various geocultural sites shape scholarly activities in IR, it concurs with the Acharya–Buzan project on the dissatisfaction with the hegemony of American IR and the need to 'rebalance this "Western bias"' (Tickner and Wæver, 2009, front flap). Acknowledging the voices and contributions of the periphery and promoting the rise of non-Western schools of thought or paradigms for world politics are of crucial importance, the argument goes, if we are to make the study (and practice) of world politics more democratic.

Critical IR scholarship may find the aforementioned West/non-West framing of IRT rather problematic. As Pinar Bilgin (2008) has pointed out, rather than try to look beyond the confines of the 'West' in search of essentially 'different' ways of thinking about the 'international' from the 'non-West', it is more helpful to appreciate how elements of 'non-Western' experiences and ideas have been built into those ostensibly 'Western' approaches to the study of world politics (and vice versa).[3] In this perspective, one may argue that the real problem is not the apparent absence of 'non-Western' IRT in Asia as Acharya and Buzan sought to make sense of, but the rather limited awareness in 'Western' IR of 'non-Western' ways of thinking about and doing world politics. This pitfall notwithstanding, the aim here is *not* to deny what we think of as 'non-Western' experiences and discourses that have been underrepresented and marginalized in the discipline's efforts to theorize world politics. On the contrary, it is also the present author's belief that 'if IRT is to fulfill its founding mission of clarifying the causes of war and peace, it needs to be for all of us and for our common interest in a progress that is peaceful and prosperous all round' (Acharya and Buzan, 2007b, p. 437). Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether the Acharya–Buzan project and other endeavors motivated by the same concern in thinking past 'Western' IR in search of insights understood as 'differences' are conducive to the purpose of democratizing IR.[4]

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3   See also Hobson (2004).

4   By 'democratization of IR' we mean that all voices are heard and treated with equal respect, which, for our purpose here, does not *assume* the cultural superiority of the West, consciously or otherwise.

This paper argues that simply calling for greater incorporation of ideas from the non-West and contributions by non-Western scholars from local 'vantage points' does not amount to the democratization of IR as most participants involved in the above grand projects may believe. While realism, liberalism, and (the pluralist wing of) the English School may indeed speak for the West and in the interest of sustaining its power, prosperity, and influence, the 'solution' is not that Asian states should also have an interest in 'indigenous' IRT that speaks for them and their interests, which would only reproduce the very hegemonic logic of dominance which Robert Cox himself has warned against.[5]

The remaining part of the paper will first look at how the Acharya–Buzan project's promotion of non-Western IRT in Asia re-inscribes the hegemonic logic of Western IRT. Not unlike mainstream political science that promotes domestic modernization embodied in economic development and political liberalism, its proponents generally encourage external modernization in terms of exploiting potential Asian sources for IRT, such as generalizations of Asian experiences to develop concepts that can add to the universality of the discipline.

On this basis, the section that follows will argue that (emerging) non-Western IRT in Asia can be understood as a 'derivative discourse' of the modern West (Chatterjee, 1986), reproducing the logic of colonial modernity rather than disrupting it (hence, the observation that China is going to have its own school of IR, that Japan already has several, and that postcolonial India should avoid creating one). The problem is that, with a competitive mood to become another English School or a superior alternative to Western IRT, Asian aspirations for their national schools of IR still treat East and West as oppositional entities, hence unable to escape from the 'Hegelian trap' which had led to the downfall of the Japanese Empire as well as its failure to overcome modernity (Tosa, 2009). The current attempts to foster non-Western IRT in Asia thus remind us of a familiar fallacy found in Japan's post-war China Studies circles in which prominent scholars such as Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910–77) continued to use 'non-Europeanness' to define China's (and Asia's) modernity, even though Takeuchi had repeatedly pointed out the failure of the West's oppositional, master-versus-slave logic.

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5   For his rationale of distinguishing between 'problem-solving theory' and 'critical theory' (will be discussed later), see Cox (1986, pp. 207–10).

In the last section the paper will conclude that discovering or producing as many 'distinctive' schools of IR outside the West as possible is not the same as democratizing IR. This is not to suggest that traditional sources of knowledge in the non-Western sites have no positive agency in IR but to call for reorienting the discipline toward a *post*-Western era whose epistemological foundation is not hegemonic in nature. Democratization of IR requires its decolonization (meaning permanent resistance to structural dominance in power relations of all kinds), which must take place not only in the periphery but also in the core.

2 Non-Western IR theory: the more, the better?

Prompted by the question as to why there is apparently no non-Western IRT in Asia, Acharya and Buzan initiated a research project—including case studies on China (Qin, 2007), India (Behera, 2007), Japan (Inoguchi, 2007), and Southeast Asia (Chong, 2007)—which sought to understand how and why thinking about IR has developed in the way it has (Acharya and Buzan, 2007c).[6] For them, it is puzzling that non-Western voices have not had a 'higher profile in debates about IR, not just as disciples of Western schools of thought, but as inventors of their own approaches', considering that 'the world has moved well beyond the period of Western colonialism, and clearly into a durable period in which non-Western cultures have regained their political autonomy' (Acharya and Buzan, 2007a, p. 286). While in their view there is little that can be called an Asian IRT, they maintain that there have been rich (albeit 'pre-theoretical') intellectual and historical resources that can serve as the basis for developing a non-Western IRT (which takes into account the positions, needs, and cultures of Asian countries) and can be exported to other parts of Asia and beyond.

After examining several possible explanations of the absence of non-Western IRT, Acharya and Buzan hold that local scholars do not think that Western IRT has found all the answers to the major problems of world politics to the extent that it precludes the need for other voices. Nor do they consider non-Western theories as essentially 'hidden from the public eye' due to language or other cultural barriers. Rather, they

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6   Their case studies on South Korea and Islamic IR were not included in that *IRAP* special issue.

point to the lack of institutional resources to support theory production, the time lag between the West and Asia in developing theoretical writings, and, more importantly, the Gramscian hegemonic status of Western IRT that discourages theoretical formulations by others. As far as the prospects of non-Western IRT in Asia are concerned, the Acharya–Buzan project recognizes the difficulties that latecomers must face in their construction of IRT because 'Western IRT has not only built the stage and written the play, but also defined and institutionalized the audience for IR and IRT' (2007b, p. 436). Drawing a parallel between industrialization and IRT development, new entrants are said to have a range of options, such as joining into the existing game seeking to 'add local color and cases to [the] existing theory', developing a *sui generis* exceptionalism (i.e. 'Asian values'), or organizing local thinking into rebellions against prevalent orthodoxies in the manner of the *dependencia* theory (2007b, p. 436). Acharya and Buzan find no need (and probably no way) to replace Western IRT, but argue that it can and should be enriched with the addition of 'more voices and a wider rooting' not just in world history but also in 'informed representations of both core and periphery perspectives' within the global political, economic and social order (Acharya and Buzan, 2007b, p. 437).

While the aforementioned attempts at thinking past Western IR are laudable in that they do not deny 'Asia', the 'Orient', or the 'Third World' having historical agency, what they have suggested is not unlike Samuel Huntington's (in)famous assertion at the onset of the so-called post-Cold War era: 'In the politics of civilizations, the people and governments of non-Western civilizations no longer remain the objects of history as targets of Western colonialism but join the West as movers and shapers of history' (Huntington, 1993, p. 23). However, given his conflictual, West-versus-rest worldview, only the West is in effect conceived as the truly 'rational' and 'civilized' civilization. The only agency Huntington grants non-Western civilizations is the destabilizing agency of cultural difference, but this point is often left out by his critics – some even view being cast as a threat to the West something positive, in the sense that their civilization is finally recognized as equal to its Western counterpart (Zheng, 1999, pp. 76–85; Kim and Hodges, 2005).[7]

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7 For a useful corrective, see Salter (2002, ch. 7) and Inayatullah and Blaney (2004).

With the 'Huntingtonian fallacy' in mind, the central contention of this paper is that the current efforts to foster national schools of IR in Asia (and beyond) do not actually empower non-Western voices and experiences in the discipline's theorizing of world politics, so to speak, and it would be remiss if one too readily treats emerging non-Western IRTs in Asia as signs of an increasingly global, truly democratic IR. A useful analogy between former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's 'Wind of Change' speech and today's booming non-Western IRT projects can be drawn here. During his visit to South Africa in 1960, Macmillan tried in the speech to persuade his host that white minority rule could no longer be sustained in light of the widespread political changes taking place across Africa. But just as the establishment of sovereign states in Africa is far from the end of European colonialism there, so is the emergence of national schools of IR in Asia and the democratization of the field. Although Acharya and Buzan (2007c, p. 290) rightly notice that IRT is neither value-free nor neutral (as they put it, 'Liberalism, especially economic liberalism, can be seen as speaking for capital, whereas Realism and the English School pluralists speak for the status quo great powers and the maintenance of their dominant role in the international system/society'), ironically, their advice (which can be summarized as follows: 'Western powers have Western IRT that speaks for them and their interests, so we should have our own!') to those hoping to develop non-Western IRT goes against Cox's exhortation. What the latter means by 'theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose' is to expose any theory's ideological element, to 'lay bare' – not to reproduce – its 'concealed perspective' (Cox, 1986, p. 207).[8] As Cox wrote in his renowned essay 'Social Forces, States and World Orders', IR needs a perspective for understanding global power relations that 'look[s] at the problem of world order in the whole, but beware of reifying a world system' (1986, p. 206).

Having introduced the Gramscian notion of hegemony, it is not possible for Acharya and Buzan to defend their position on the grounds that their project is only interested in what Cox termed as 'problem-solving theory', which seeks to make the prevailing social and power relationships (and the institutions into which they are organized) work as

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8 Cox was quoted favorably in the Acharya–Buzan project to underscore that their attempt to promote non-Western IRT is a meaningful one.

smoothly as possible by dealing with particular sources of trouble. Rather, non-Western IRT cannot but be a Coxian 'critical theory', concerning itself with the origins of these relations and institutions and how and whether they might be in the process of changing (Cox, 1986, pp. 207–210).[9] Indeed, it becomes necessary to ask what is the form of power that underlies the study of world politics and produces the current particular understanding of IRT – or in Gramsci's words, what is the configuration of the historic bloc? So far those who are concerned with the possibilities of non-Western IRT in Asia have noted the marginalizing effect of Western IRT as a Gramscian hegemony, yet little attention has been paid to the question as to how that hegemonic order in academic IR came about.[10] Without interrogating the origins of the dominant structure as well as its counter-structure's possible bases of support, counter-hegemony attempts are unlikely to bear fruit; as have been seen earlier and will be further illustrated, the nascent non-Western IRT projects in effect bear the imprint of the prevailing structural logic, such of accepting the binary opposition of 'us/them' as their own point of departure.

This casts doubt on Acharya and Buzan's speculation that the dominant status of Western IRT in Asia and elsewhere is largely enabled by the 'hard reality of the Western style of international political economy [which] continues to dominate real existing international relations' (Acharya and Buzan, 2007b, p. 437). As Said (1993) demonstrated in *Culture and Imperialism*, however, the other way round could be true. The era of high or classical imperialism may have come to an end with the dismantling of the colonial structures after the Second World War, yet it has in one way or another continued to exert considerable cultural influence in the present (ibid., p. 7). This is so because neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of capital accumulation and territorial/resource acquisition (ibid., p. 9; emphasis in the original):[11]

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9 Cox's distinction between problem-solving theory and critical theory is heuristic. As he wrote, 'Critical theory contains problem-solving theories within itself, but contains them in the form of identifiable ideologies, thereby pointing to their conservative consequences, not to their usefulness as guides to action' (1986, p. 209).

10 Behera (2007) is an exception among the contributions in the Acharya–Buzan volume.

11 Here Said uses 'imperialism' to denote 'the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory'; 'colonialism' is understood as a consequence of imperialism, 'the implanting of settlements on distant territory' (1993, p. 9).

> Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination.

Simply put, the empire needs to define and affirm itself through various relationships of power between its metropolitan center and its colonial periphery. Moreover, the imperial system encompasses the cultural sphere, which not only underpins imperial expansion but also makes alternative cultural imaginaries unimaginable. From this perspective, counter-hegemony understood in a Gramscian sense would be a very difficult task since a hegemonic order (e.g. *pax britannica*, *pax americana*) functions mainly by *consent* in accordance with some principles which even those who are dominated would consider as universalistic (Cox, 1983).

The next section will illustrate such difficulty by showing how non-Western IRT in Asia is being developed (or, in the case of Taiwan, ignored) under the complicity of imperialism and academic IR as a Western social science, followed by a brief examination of the abortive effort to construct a 'non-European' China Studies in Japan after the Second World War.

3 Seeing the world through the eyes of the empire

Current attempts to identify local conditions that are unfavorable to the development of non-Western IRT in Asia alert us to the classic statement of modernization and development theory by Almond and Powell (1978), in which Third World states became like Talcott Parsons' 'adaptive societies' analogous to organisms in evolutionary biology.[12] Parsons measures the degree of movement of a society from traditional to modern by the differentiation of its stratification, whereas Almond and Powell (now followed by Acharya and Buzan) measure the degree of movement from underdevelopment to development of Third World states. Old modernization and development theorists anticipate that, under the 'right' social, political, and economic conditions, Third World states will evolve into more First World-like ones. Similarly, the non-Western IRT project promises that Asian states will eventually 'catch up' with their

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12 Discussions in this and the following paragraphs are developed from Weber (2005, ch. 8).

Western counterparts and become 'part of the game'. This kind of teleology can also be found in mainstream democratization theorists' assertion that political corruption in democratizing countries will be gradually reduced on their way toward 'mature democracy' (Schedler *et al.*, 1999). It is therefore not a coincidence that participants in the non-Western IRT project wonder whether or not democracy is a necessary condition for indigenous IRT development (Acharya and Buzan, 2007c, pp. 297–98). All these have in common is the adoption of a sort of historicist framework that differentiates between several stages of human development, with the Western model as the 'end of history'. The problem with historicism is that it assumes the existence of a singular, universalizing narrative of modernity that denies alternative modes of temporality (Chakrabarty, 2000a),[13] hence reinforcing the existing geopolitical/cultural inequalities (someone is always more 'civilized' than others).

It is helpful to recall that those ideas and theories that traveled from the West to the non-West and the channels through which they traveled (e.g. the Fulbright Scholarship of the United States, the Overseas Research Studentships of the UK, etc.) were hardly independent of Western interests and policy-making. Modernization theory and development studies emerged during the Cold War as the West's economic, political, social, and cultural response to the management of former colonial territories (Weber, 2005, ch. 8). While some Western academics and practitioners of international politics sought to develop theories and then guide policies that would transform newly independent colonies into sovereign nation-states, the only acceptable model of development for them was the Western liberal capitalist 'First World'. Modernization and development theory was consciously conceived as a Western (and predominately US) alternative to Soviet-style socialist strategies of development espoused in the 'Second World'. Another case in point is the creation of 'Pacific Rim' Studies and the emergence of notions such as 'Asia-Pacific' in the US management of the Vietnam War fiasco (Cummings, 1997). The new world map was drawn in such a way as to help shift the global focus away from failed containment and toward a

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13 To paraphrase Chakrabarty (2000a, pp. 22–23), historicism 'tells us that in order to understand the nature of anything in this world we must see it as an historically developing entity, that is, first as an individual and unique whole – as some kind of unity in potential – and, second, as something that develops over time'.

sort of broader picture, within which communist Vietnam was outperformed by so-called newly industrialized countries (NICs) or the 'four dragons' (also known as the 'four tigers') that include Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan.

Unfortunately, only a few efforts have been made to study how such dynamics between imperialism and disciplinary social sciences have affected ways of thinking about and doing world politics in the Third or formerly colonized world.[14] As a consequence, those who were once colonized continue to see themselves and their (former) colonizer through the eyes of the empire. Hence, Imperial Japan's 'Southward Advance' (*Nanshin*) discourse in the 1930s was the only available historical foundation for the formulation of Taiwan's 'Go South' (*Nanxiang*) economic policy towards Southeast Asia in the 1990s (Peattie, 1996; Chen, 2002, ch. 3). The familiar rhetoric used by proponents of 'Asian values' such as Confucianism, anti-Western modernity, anti-individualism, and anti-communism can also be readily identified in the wartime Japanese promotion of the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' (Jansen, 1984; Peattie, 1984). Imperialism lingers where it has always been.

The prospects of non-Western IRT in Asia have likewise been under the shadow of the modernization and development enterprise, with each state at different stages of 'catching up' to Western powers. Lest there be any misunderstanding, the emergence of non-Western voices does not mean that they are all geared toward creating more national schools of IR, but it is clear that non-Western interventions originated in Asia have been following this path more often than not. Indeed, with the rise of China's comprehensive power, Chinese scholars anticipate that reformist China will sooner or later fully exploit its potential for an 'IR theory with Chinese characteristics' to emerge and evolve (Song, 2001; Qin, 2006, 2007; Xiao, 2010).[15] In the same vain, Japanese scholars are eager to demonstrate that there are several unique theories/theorists of IR in Japan already before the Second World War – the leading figures of the Kyoto School of Philosophy and their 'world history standpoint', for

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14 Shih (2007a) argues that the Taiwan independence movement can be in part understood as an unintended consequence of such dynamics.

15 Such confidence is evident in Wang Yiwei's statement that China's geo-strategic rise will prepare the ground for the eventual rise of a Chinese IR theory, which, in turn, will 'restore' once universal Western IRT to 'the status of local theories' (Wang, 2009, p. 116).

instance – or at least Japanese IR studies as a whole has certain distinctive character (Inoguchi, 2007; Ikeda, 2008; Shimizu, 2008),[16] whereas South Korean scholars are preoccupied with the would-be Korean School's ability to 'bridge' theoretical universalism (the West) with contextual exceptionalism (the East) and to address the Korean national question through dealing with multiple civilizational divides between socialism and capitalism, China and Japan, China and America, and so on (Choi, 2008; Kim and Cho, 2009; Shih, 2010). Interestingly, thanks to their background in subaltern studies and postcolonial traditions, some Indian scholars are wary of the consequences of creating an indigenous Indian IR that remains a nationalist, atavistic, or nativist project (Behera, 2007).

The virtual absence of non-Western IRT in Taiwan, which was not examined in the Acharya–Buzan project probably due to the island's perceived lack of historical and intellectual sources for IRT (compare Shih, 2008), is also worthy of note. The point here is not that some potentially valuable sources are overlooked, but rather why they are overlooked by the local scholarship (unwittingly or otherwise) in postcolonial Taiwan. As Shih Chih-yu (2007b, p. 218) indicates,

> Taiwanese scholars do not want to be different from their Western counterparts so as not to be reduced (in the eyes of the Western academic) to being a pre-modern, non-universal, non-rational actor. To speak the same language is not unlike becoming an equal colleague in the English-speaking academic community.[17]

The total acceptance of American/Western IRT in Taiwan, then, reflects a self-empowering identity strategy through which Taiwanese associate themselves with the United States/West, which in turn allows them (and, indeed, the emerging Taiwanese state) to look at China from a presumably universalist, superior position.

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16 Inoguchi (2009) maintains that the study of IR in Japan bears more differences than similarities with its counterparts in Korea and Taiwan in part because it is much less 'penetrated' by American IR (hence more distinctive).

17 Bau *et al.* (1999) is indicative of the tendency that Taiwanese scholars are more concerned with demonstrating their familiarity with Western concepts and theories than with exploring potential local sources for the subject matter. The conference on 'Contending Approaches to Cross-Strait Relations Revisited' at the National Taiwan University, on 24– 25 April 2009, shows that this observation still holds.

Having examined how imperialism has been played into the world-views of Asian academics and policy-makers alike through Western IR, it is important to remember its profound impact on the general cultural sphere as well as on specific political, economic, and social practices in Asia and other parts of the Third World. This does not imply that IR scholars should only concern themselves with Western hegemony and the Westphalian system within which it operates. As William Callahan notes, alternative non-Western visions of world order, such as China's traditional concept of *Tianxia* ('All-under-Heaven') which is increasingly popular among its government-affiliated scholars and public intellectuals, may not necessarily lead us toward a posthegemonic world (Callahan, 2008).[18] Nevertheless, rather than rush to the conclusion that the *Tianxia* system (or at least the understanding of it popularized by Zhao Tingyang) encourages a violent conversion of difference and thus 'presents a new hegemony that reproduces China's hierarchical empire for the twenty-first century' (Callahan, 2008, p. 750), it would be more prudent for us to recognize what appears to be Chinese atavism as more a consequence of Western dominance in social sciences than an update of imperial China's hierarchical governance. Zhao argues that to be a 'true world power' China needs to excel not just in economic production, but in 'knowledge production' as well; and to be a knowledge power, China needs to stop simply importing ideas from the West and instead exploit its own indigenous 'resources of traditional thought' (Zhao, 2005, p. 1). To be sure, using such resources for creating new insights in IR does not inevitably follow the paradigm of cultural imperialism (Shani, 2008). Yet, Zhao's logic, which is exactly the same as that of Acharya and Buzan's embedded in the modernization and development problematique, cannot produce a genuine alternative because he continues to take the West as his reference point. In this sense, Zhao's *Tianxia* can be conceived as a Chinese 'mimicry' of the Western imperial system (Bhaba, 1994). Similarly, Japanese colonialism in Taiwan, Korea, and Manchukuo served as a demonstration that Japan could behave like – and even fare better than – Western imperialists (Suzuki, 2009); moreover, these acquisitions allowed Japan to savor Westphalian colonial desire while enjoying the Confucian demand for tribute (Ling, 2002). As a product of postcolonial learning that synthesizes Confucian China's

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18 The bulk of his analysis of the *Tianxia* concept focuses on Zhao (2005).

parental care and leadership with Westphalia's emphasis on the self-interested state, then, Zhao's *Tianxia* system is not unlike a contemporary version of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

All in all, the pitfalls of the aforementioned efforts to build up more non-Western IRTs in Asia reconfirm Spivak's (1988) observation that creating a collective category of 'the subaltern' defined in relation to the core would leave the entire relational structure intact, hence replicating the logic of colonial modernity outlined by Chatterjee (1986). The difficulty involved in unlearning such colonial/imperial power relations cannot be overemphasized, considering Japan's failed attempts to counter Western hegemony in the first half of the twentieth century.[19] Confronted with the Hegelian challenge that relegates Asia to the land of Oriental despotism that symbolizes the beginning of history, with Europe/the West at the end of history waiting to absorb the non-West into itself, Japanese intellectuals and national leaders alike came up with the notion of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere/Pan-Asianism, which purportedly possessed a greater universality than the West.[20] This non-Western alternative to modernity inevitably failed, for the simple reversal of East and West only ensured the continuation of the unwanted master-slave relationship, in which the slave triumphs over the master by oppressing his oppressor and thereby himself becoming the new master/oppressor (Tosa, 2009).

After Japan's defeat in 1945, the success of the Chinese revolution became a new source of inspiration for Japanese thinkers. Unlike their pre-war predecessors who pointed to China's backwardness through European lenses, many of them began calling for the construction of a 'non-European' style of China Studies in Japan. Takeuchi, for instance, considered China's lack of 'Europeanness' or European-style modernity as its strength, which enabled it to replace feudal/imperial political institutions with republican ones and to topple Confucian orthodoxy – neither of which Japan was able to achieve. In his famous speech '*Hôhô to shite no Ajia*' ('Asia as Method'), he went further to assert that only the East, the proper subject of history, can save those universal values

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19 For the project of 'overcoming modernity' backed by some of the most prominent intellectuals during wartime Japan, see Calichman (2008).

20 See Aydin (2007) for an excellent comparative study on Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian thought prior to World War Two.

(freedom, equality, etc.) that originated from the West (Takeuchi, 2005, p. 165):

> [T]he Orient must re-embrace the West; it must change the West itself in order to realize the latter's outstanding cultural values on a greater scale. Such a rollback of culture or values would create universality. The Orient must change the West in order to further elevate those universal values that the West itself produced. This is the main problem facing East–West relations today, and it is at once a political and cultural issue.

Although Takeuchi must be given credit for creatively employing love ('re-embracing the West') to soothe the violent East-versus-West binary opposition, he did not entirely avoid repeating the fallacy of Pan-Asianism prior to 1945. As Mizoguchi Yuzo (1989, pp. 26–30) indicates, such substitution of West/Europe for East/Asia has done little to challenge the modern-backward presumption. Indeed, China or Asia in this regard cannot but continue to be defined in light of Europe. Post-war Japanese China scholars' misstep is by no means exceptional, though, as we have seen in today's various projects on the promotion of non-Western IR. In fact, even Chakrabarty (2000a, p. 22) also accepts 'the indispensability of European political thought to representations of non-European political modernity'. As the first step, then, Asian IRT projects should stop taking Western IRT as their sole reference point.[21] Mizoguchi's approach thus offers a valuable insight in that he proposes China as a method by which Japan learns how to understand a different nation based on the latter's own historical subjectivity, without taking any specific standpoint. In so doing, Japan could belong to a truly universal world, which is outside of *any* national or civilizational conditions.[22] In short, the Japanese experience before, during, and after the Pacific War is just yet another reason why IR scholars who live and work in the periphery – Asia in this case – should be wary of the current

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21 Only if this almost exclusive orientation toward the IR studies in North America and Europe ceases to exist can IR communities across Asia and beyond take each other's works seriously and in their own right. On the other hand, as an anonymous reviewer indicates, there is an alternative way of understanding the construction of Asian IRT, which is about how Asians have learned and re-appropriated Western IRT for purposes unfamiliar to Western IR theorizing.

22 My reading of *Hôhô to shite no Chûgoku* here follows that of Shih (2010).

drive in the field for more *non*-Western approaches to world politics. But the critique of Eurocentrism in Asian IR should not stop here. Scholars who practice Western IR must also recognize and resist the pitfalls of equating the mere increase of non-Western voices with the genuine democratization of the field, if they are to live up to their responsibility to jointly construct a non-hegemonic discipline.[23]

4 Conclusion: decolonized IR theory for democratic ontology

Contrary to its proclaimed mission, the discipline of IR is a fundamental source of the world's problems, not its solutions. Dominated by Western modernity that is premised upon a self-other binary in which the other's identity must be negated and agency be denied, IR privileges the claims of state sovereignty over all other kinds of political community and places overwhelming emphasis on the 'universalization' of state-building processes, where the liberal, capitalist First World becomes the role model for all. Moreover, the Gramscian hegemonic status of Western IRT precludes one from questioning the West's assumed right to determine which ways of producing knowledge are legitimate (or not) and to use the standards of a particular kind of knowledge-making enterprise (i.e. positivism) for judging the legitimacy of all other different ways of creating knowledge. This makes the construction of alternative sites of knowledge production in world politics all the more important and pressing.

However, as this paper has shown, most intellectual endeavors to construct non-Western IRT in Asia run the risk of inviting nativism – the mirror image of universalism – which do not involve a critical self-reflection and questioning of the *a priori* assumptions, procedures and values embedded in the modernization and development enterprise. Following the historicist trajectory laid down by the West, attempts to 'catch up' with Western IR make the discipline turn neither post-Western nor democratic. Indeed, they can never catch up and will remain stuck 'in the transition narrative that will always remain grievously incomplete' (Chakrabarty, 2000b, p. 1510; cited in Behera, 2007, p. 359). How, then,

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23 This, of course, does not imply that all IR scholars in the West are unaware of the problems of Eurocentrism and Orientalism in the Third World (Smith, 2002), or that there have been no attempts to transcend ethnocentric divides (Booth, 1979). Despite the existence of such work, the discipline's overall epistemological foundations continue to be Eurocentric.

can we reorient IR toward a more democratic, less hegemonic direction (in terms of disrupting the structural hierarchies between Western and non-Western perspectives)? To borrow from Shih (2007b, p. 212),

> Political scientists need an epistemology of democracy that does not assume a fixed ontology or a fixed teleology. This democracy should enable people to resist fixation by any ideology, regime, tradition, or self-consistency. Its form and meaning cannot be determined in advance because the nature of suppression is never fixed.

A step forward may involve analyzing actual practices of such fluid resistance or subversion in various, often inconsistent, tracks of theorizing. How the subaltern intellectuals actually engage in activities pertaining to IR theorizing thus deserves more comprehensive treatment.[24]

Shih's remark on democratic theorizing brings us back to Said's observation that cultural discourses/ideologies are complicit in the formation of empire and that the metropolitan center's subjectivity is constituted through its power relations with the colonial periphery. From this perspective, empire will never collapse without its core's cultural decolonization (Chen, 2006). In the same vein, the IR discipline will remain undemocratic if decolonization only takes place in non-Western IR. Western IR needs to acknowledge its direct involvement in the lives of those whom it studies and to jointly create non-hegemonic spaces where different perspectives of IR can co-exist and learn from each other.[25] Without such efforts (albeit difficult and even painful), it will be impossible for the discipline to cultivate a political re-imagination that recognizes, understands and encourages differences, and fosters alternative ontological possibilities of social and political spaces for interactions within and between political communities at all levels.

Although linking the democratization of IR to its decolonization is not an entirely novel claim (Ling, 2002; Jones, 2006) and some important correctives of the booming non-Western IRT projects have been proffered (Shani, 2008; Shimizu, 2010),[26] this paper has sought to show

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24 The author thanks an anonymous reviewer for offering this direction for further research.

25 This point has been made in Behera (2007).

26 Unlike sociology, anthropology, and other social sciences, however, the calls for decolonized knowledge and alternative, locally relevant concepts did not gain much currency in Asian IR until fairly recently. See Alatas (2006).

why critical IR scholarship cannot afford to lay down its guard, considering the immense difficulty in counter-hegemony as seen in Japan's past failure to escape from the Hegelian trap. Such caution should not lead one to conclude that the 'oriental subject' simply does not have any indigenous voice (Shani, 2008, p. 727), for that would deny 'Orientals' agency in entering into a productive dialogue between civilizations, including the West, which is in itself a Huntingtonian fallacy. Nevertheless, because the way non-Western IR is promoted in the discipline has largely worked to cast the 'burden of proof' onto those IR scholars who live and work in the non-Western periphery rather than propel those who do Western IR to reflect upon the epistemological/political implications of their approach and to communicate with the former,[27] our concern is both warranted and immediate. After all, if IR scholarship outside the West were effectively turned into the 'local informants' for the Western center, that would mean the installation of a bridgehead in the center of the periphery (Galtung, 1971), hence reinforcing the dominance relationship.[28] Whether the emergence of Asian national schools of IR will end up traversing this road remains to be seen.

Acknowledgements

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27   See, *inter alia*, Snyder (2008).

28   This author is not optimistic about IR scholars' ability (and willingness) to reflect on the extent to which their knowledge production may have been complicit in that relationship, however. Given his recent work's (Chen, 2009) very detailed engagement with some mainstream IR concepts (hence revealing his postcolonial desire to 'speak the same language', as Shih puts it), it seems fair to conclude that the author too is not immune from his own criticism presented here.

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