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BOOK REVIEWS

Non-Western International Relations Theory

Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (eds.)
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This is an important book, which is long overdue. As the centre of gravity in world politics moves, slowly but inexorably, from West to East, we will all need to know how world affairs are understood and interpreted in both the new power centers and, just as importantly, in countries that have no pretensions to great power status themselves, but must coexist in the neighborhood of the new giants. At least we all need to know about it on the plausible assumption that in the future, as in the recent past, the process of global integration will continue. If, in the face of some future catastrophe, we retreat into our separate civilizational and cultural comfort zones, it may not matter so much. This is not an impossible future, but given the power, reach, and rapid development of modern communications and information technology, it seems a highly improbable one.

Yet, judging from the mainstream literature on International Relations (IR), it sometimes seems that this is precisely where we are heading. The professional study of IR may not be as dominated by American scholarship as it was when Stanley Hoffman famously described it as an American social science in the pages of *Orbis,* but it is still heavily

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dominated by western approaches and attitudes. Even when the authors are themselves from Africa, Asia, or the Middle East, they tend to have been trained in the West, and, as several of those represented in this collection would readily admit, themselves employ a western rather than a home-grown analytical method.

The editors are to be congratulated, therefore, on convening this group of largely Asian scholars, to interrogate why so little non-western international theory exists, whether this matters, and how long it is likely to persist. Anyone from within the IR profession who wants to examine non-western viewpoints and traditions of statecraft will now have a point of departure, The eight authors who address the question from the points of view of China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, and South East Asia have also rendered their colleagues an invaluable service.

Whether their message will be heard in the wider world is debatable. Just as war is too important a matter to be left to the generals, diplomacy at the highest level is, I fear, too important to be left to IR theorists. As the world is thrown ever closer together by modern communications and the all encompassing but fickle embrace of the world market, it is a matter of genuine urgency to discover if the practical men who command our fate are reading from the same score or, as Keynes famously suggested was more likely, are the unwitting slaves of some defunct (and in the case of IR, Western) philosopher. Most of the authors quote approvingly Robert Cox's aphorism that 'theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose', and the editors build on it to suggest that, on this view, 'neorealism and neoliberalism are for the US, and about keeping it number one; the English School is for the UK and is about using institutions to enable a declining power to punch above its weight; and a Chinese school would be for China and how to facilitate its peaceful rise' (p. 228). It is a witty formulation, which in turn leads them to speculate that the nationalist impulse – itself of course imported from the west – may drive two non-western challenges to the Westphalian system. The first would be to recover their civilizational histories before the encounter with the West as a source of an alternative to the Eurocentric model; the second to construct history to serve the purposes of current policy.

On the evidence presented, the second of these developments seems more likely than the first. But I doubt whether IR theorists will have much to do with it, particularly as the editors also note that realism

remains the default position for non-western as for western governments and that none of them take much notice of what goes on in the academy. Indeed, one might sometimes be forgiven for concluding that IR Theory (IRT) is for the theorists themselves, its purpose to allow them to move around the world, cushioned against its more troubling aspects by the familiarities of their common discourse. In the fourteenth century, Ibn Battuta was able to travel throughout the Muslim world because, for all the varieties of human life he observed, he was able to navigate around them using the familiar signposts of Islamic culture. IRT, or even social science more broadly considered, is a poor substitute, but seems to me to perform much the same function.

The really important question is not whether our understanding of contemporary IR has been distorted by a Eurocentric bias. Of course it has. What we need to know is whether, as the balance of forces is reconfigured, cultural patterns of relations across borders, or more often perhaps between different peoples, will reassert themselves in ways that will make the resolution of global problems easier or more difficult. The raw materials, with which one can begin to probe this question, can be unearthed from this volume even if one sometimes has to hack through some fairly dense academic undergrowth to reach them.

Thus to take the example of China and India, the two countries most likely to challenge western hegemony in the foreseeable future, the chapters by Yaqing Qin and Navnita Chadha Behera offer alternative intellectual foundations for the reorganization of the world order to the Westphalian system and European Enlightenment.

From Qin we learn of the absence in the Chinese intellectual mind of a concept of 'international-ness' (and therefore presumably also of an international system or society). Since the world revolved around the Chinese Emperor, a hierarchical tributary system evolved to handle the awkward fact that the reach of even the Emperor's armies was limited. Tributary systems in general – and not merely in the Chinese civilizational orbit – seem better at dealing with ambiguity than the territorial model based on sovereignty. One wonders whether it is because China is the legatee of a tributary system that Hong Kong has been able to retain its essential character under the one nation two systems formula, and a *modus vivendi* has been reached with Taiwan under which, providing the issue of sovereignty is not raised, mutually advantageous relations can be developed across the straits.

From Behera we learn of the very high value placed by Kautilya, not only on realist policies, but on their ethical justification, the misery that comes from dependence on others and the happiness that flows from self rule. He also traces the nonterritorial roots of the anticolonial nationalist writings of Tagore and other Indian critics of western imperialism. Is it too fanciful to see the combination of two Indian traditions, the one that seeks a spiritual unity between 'self community and nature' (p. 105) and the other that flows from Kautilya's Mandala theory, as the seed bed of Nehru's foreign policy? This combined a conception of nonalignment, viewed not as a modern form of traditional neutrality, but as a new principle of international engagement better designed for the postimperial world than western power politics, with an unquestioning assumption of India's regional hegemony.

Whether, despite such apparent continuities, these Chinese and Indian intellectual traditions will be strong enough to ground a new international order, either at the global or regional levels, remains to be seen. There is a sociological problem here, which the editors hint at, but which none of the authors address head on. The recovery of these non-western intellectual traditions will have to deal with the fact that they were reflections of essentially agricultural civilizations. The same could be said of course of the Westphalian world of agro-states, to use the late Ernest Gellner's terminology. It may have been, therefore, a purely contingent matter that the modern global economy developed within this world. But this does not mean the modern system can necessarily dispense with the territorial sovereignty that underpinned it. Perhaps, it can, but it is not self evident.

The chapter by Takashi Inoguchi on Japan provides some indirect support for this line of enquiry. It is not that western IRT does not pose problems for the Japanese – as he suggests the unquestioning acceptance of US positivism by some of Japan's neighbors inhibits intellectual exchanges between them. Nor is it the case that Japan's approach to IRT is immune from the hierarchical mindset that seems more characteristic of eastern than western theory, as in the flying geese metaphor for regional integration. But both pre-modern and modern Japanese governments have always taken territorial control very seriously and the Japanese themselves chose quite deliberately to break out of their isolation and to accommodate themselves to the western dominated order on their own terms. The fact that the policies they followed eventually

led them into national defeat and humiliation does not alter the fact that they needed to craft their own intellectual strategy – *staatslehre tradition* – well described by Inoguchi – to marry traditional Japanese culture to the requirements of industrial civilization.

I draw two conclusions from this fascinating collection of essays. The first is that to remain relevant western IRT will gradually have to accommodate itself to a more culturally diverse set of intellectual approaches. The second and more important conclusion is that governments will need to invest more resources in their diplomatic services and in learning how each other think than they have done since the end of the Second World War.

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Nuclear Logics: Contrasting Paths in East Asia & the Middle East

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For those who live in the American International Relations community, Etel Solingen's *Nuclear Logics: Contrasting Paths in East Asia & the Middle East* undoubtedly represents a stunning success of the study of nuclear proliferation. In 1994, Solingen published an influential article in this field of research, 'The Political Economy of Nuclear Restraint', in *International Security*, and argued that countries with ruling coalitions pursuing economic liberalization have stronger incentives to refrain from developing nuclear weapons than those with 'inward-looking, nationalist, and radical-confessional coalitions'. Based on the review of cases in South Asia, on the Korean Peninsula, in the Middle East, and in Latin America, she concluded that the former are internationalist in nature