

# Dialogue and Discovery: In Search of International Relations Theories Beyond the West<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Scholars of International Relations (IR) increasingly realise that their discipline, including its theories and methods, often neglects voices and experiences outside of the West. But how do we address this problem and move the discipline forward? While some question whether ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ (or ‘post-Western’) are useful labels, there are also other perspectives, including those who believe in the adequacy of existing theories and approaches, those who argue for particular national ‘schools’ of IR, and those who dismiss recent efforts to broaden IR theory as ‘mimicry’ in terms of their epistemological underpinnings. After reviewing these debates, this article identifies some avenues for further research with a view to bringing out the global heritage of IR. These include, among other things, paying greater attention to the genealogy of international systems, the diversity of regionalisms and regional worlds, the integration of area studies with IR, people-centric approaches to IR, security and development, and the agency role of non-Western ideas and actors in building global order. I also argue for broadening the epistemology of IR theory with the help of non-Western philosophies such as Buddhism. While the study of IR remains dominated by Western perspectives and contributions, it is possible to build different and alternative theories which originate from non-Western contexts and experiences.

## Keywords

area studies and International Relations, Buddhist philosophy and International Relations, Global South, history of international systems, non-Western International Relations theory, philosophy of science and International Relations, regionalism, Third World

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1. This article is based on the author’s ‘opening dialogue’ at the *Millennium* Annual Conference at the London School of Economics, 16–17 October 2010. This revised draft incorporates my response to the comments made by Kimberly Hutchings at the opening dialogue, which are also published in this issue of *Millennium*.

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That the study of International Relations – its main theories, its dominant centres of teaching and research, its leading publications – neglects or marginalises the world beyond the West is no longer a novel argument that requires proof or elaboration.<sup>2</sup> What is more challenging is to find some agreement on how to redress this problem and move forward. Some of the ideas and avenues suggested towards achieving a genuinely international field of IR have themselves been criticised and provoked controversy. Questions about what to study, how to study and even where to study IR are involved. Resolving all these controversies and finding common ground may not be possible, or even desirable. But having a dialogue over them seems timely and essential to the original cause that everyone agrees on: that the current parochialism and ethnocentrism of ‘International Relations’ as a field of study, especially its dominant theoretical approaches, are unacceptable and perhaps untenable.

My main goals in this article are twofold. The first is to discuss some of the issues of contention that have arisen in the vaguely articulated and highly diversified project of making the study of IR more inclusive of non-Western worlds. The second is to identify areas where further reflection and research could significantly advance the project. The two goals are necessarily related: how we develop IR into a more genuinely universal discipline depends very much on what we think is missing from it now. My main argument is 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 about the functioning of international relations that have their origin in the South’.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, one should acknowledge and encourage dialogue within as well as between cultures and locations, East, West, North, South, to make the project of discovery worthwhile and productive. This article is a modest contribution to this end.

At the outset, let me clarify my use of ‘non-Western IR theory’. This in itself has been a point of disagreement among those who would otherwise agree that IR remains a narrowly Western social science that needs to be broadened. It is easy to see that neither West nor non-West is a homogeneous concept. Contestations over IR theory occurs within as much as between them.<sup>4</sup> Not only do non-Western scholars draw from their

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2. Amitav Acharya, ‘Ethnocentrism and Emancipatory IR Theory’, in *Displacing Security*, eds Samantha Arnold and J. Marshall Bier (Toronto: Centre for International and Security Studies, York University, 2000); Arlene Tickner, ‘Seeing IR Differently: Notes from the Third World’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 32, no. 2 (2003): 295–324; Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, eds, ‘Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? Reflections on and from Asia’, Special Issue of *International Relations of Asia Pacific* 7 (2007); Arlene Tickner and Ole Wæver, eds, *International Relations Scholarship around the World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, eds, *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).
  3. Karen Smith, ‘Can It Be Home-Grown? Challenges to Developing IR Theory in the Global South’, Paper presented to the 47th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, San Diego, 22–5 March 2006, 2.
  4. Many Western scholars are uncomfortable with the earlier parochialisms of their field. Thus, Buzan and Little challenge and seek to ‘reformulate’ the ideas in Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds, *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

Western counterparts; but many so-called Western International Relations theories (IRTs) may also have roots in the non-Western spheres, although they often go unacknowledged and unheralded.<sup>5</sup> Hence, there are good arguments, including those made by Professor Hutchings in this issue of *Millennium*, against using a dichotomous view of ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’.<sup>6</sup>

I use the term ‘non-Western’ partly as a term of convenience, rather than to reflect any particular ideology.<sup>7</sup> The term is also useful to interrogate the idea of ‘Western’, which has been so dominant, pervasive (and less questioned by critics of ‘non-Western’), in the mainstream IRT, and as a point of reference to engage theorists, such as the founders of the English School, who used these concepts (‘Western’ or ‘European’) to lay out their own beliefs about the foundations and evolution of international relations.<sup>8</sup> This is certainly a far cry from the ‘West versus the Rest’ dichotomy in some recent policy discourses.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, one suspects alternative categories, such as ‘Third World’, ‘Global South’, ‘subaltern’, ‘post-colonial’, ‘post-Western’, will each prove to be equally unsatisfactory.<sup>10</sup>

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5. Helen Louise Turton and Lucas G. Freire, ‘Hybridity under Hegemonic Influence in IR Scholarship: Realism in South America’, Paper presented to the ISA/ABRI Conference on Diversity and Inequality in World Politics, Rio de Janeiro, 22–24 July 2009, 26.
  6. Kimberly Hutchings, ‘Dialogue between Whom? The Role of the West–Non-West Distinction in Promoting Global Dialogue in IR’, *Millennium*, this issue. All subsequent quotations from her are taken from the same article.
  7. My usage is similar to what Chan and Mandaville call ‘bodies of non-Western knowledge’, and Tickner and Waever refer to as ‘non-Western and “Third World” contexts’, and ‘non-Western scholars’. Stephen Chan and Peter Mandaville, ‘Introduction: Within International Relations Itself, a New Culture Rises Up’, in Chan, Mandaville and Roland Bleiker, eds, *The Zen of International Relations: IR Theory from East to West* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 8; A. Tickner and O. Waever, ‘Introduction: Geocultural Epistemologies’, p. 3, and ‘Conclusion: Worlding Where the West Once Was’, p. 332, in Tickner and Waever, eds, *International Relations Scholarship around the World*.
  8. For the usage of these terms in the early English School literature, see Bull and Watson, eds, *The Expansion of International Society*, including the introduction and conclusion by Bull and Watson and Bull’s chapter ‘The Revolt against the West’. See also Martin Wight, ‘Western Values in International Relations’, in *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics*, eds Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (London: Allen and Unwin), 89–131. But, in general, *The Expansion of International Society* employs other terms such as ‘European’ and ‘Third World’.
  9. See, for example, Kishore Mahbubani, *Can Asians Think? Understanding the Divide between East and West*, 3rd edn (Singapore: Times Editions, 2004).
  10. Some prefer the term ‘post-Western’ to ‘non-Western’. To me, post-Western assumes the end of Western dominance as an objective fact or a normative aspiration, neither of which is accurate or helpful for the purpose of making IR theory more inclusive. While Professor Hutchings (in her article and in an obvious nod to the post-colonialist distaste for binaries) objects to ‘non-Western’, she does not comment on the merit of ‘post-Western’. The purpose of my article is not to debate which term is best, but rather how to bring other kinds of knowledge and perspective outside of the West into the picture. As Bilgin notes, the idea of a ‘non-Western’ in IR scholarship does not imply passive submission to IR knowledge generated by the West. What may be regarded as ‘non-Western’ does not necessarily originate within ‘teleological Westernisation’, and those that do not appear to be radically different but seem to be framed within the categories and concepts of Western IRT cannot be dismissed as ‘the robotic “Stepford Wife” to “Western IR”’. Such a stance, Bilgin concludes, ‘denies agency to “non-Western” scholars and represents them as unthinking emulators’. Pinar Bilgin, ‘Thinking Past “Western IR”’, *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2008): 13.

## Issues of Contention

In this section, I address three main questions that have attracted some debate (aside from the issue of 'Western' and 'non-Western') in the efforts to advance IR studies:

1. Whether existing IR theories are already adequate to account for non-Western experiences and voices, and whether those which have not been are expanding their analytic scope and reach to issues and concerns of the world as a whole.
2. Whether attempts to develop indigenous concepts and theories end up simply mimicking Western theories.
3. Whether one should engage in developing IRT through national or regional 'schools'.

A recent study of the subject under discussion asked: have existing IR theories found the right answers to all the main questions of interest to IR scholars?<sup>11</sup> Its finding was that they had not. Mainstream theorists of IR may feel otherwise. For example, Ikenberry and Mastanduno argue that the distinctive features of Asia's inter-state relations are being gradually eroded by its progressive integration into the modern international system. Hence the core concepts of IRT, such as hegemony, the distribution of power, international regimes and political identity, are as relevant in the Asian context as anywhere else.<sup>12</sup> Snyder concedes China's claim to a distinctive strategic culture, but rejects the need for a 'distinctive theory' to analyse it. He argues instead for using Chinese distinctiveness to test and broaden existing IR theories. The key distinction between theories such as realism and liberalism, on the one hand, and Confucianism (as the main philosophical basis for a Chinese school), on the other, argues Snyder, is that 'realism and liberalism present themselves as universally applicable paradigms, whereas Confucianism is formulated a [sic] specific to Chinese or East Asian civilization'.<sup>13</sup> Yet one might ask: are realism and liberalism genuinely universal, even though they present themselves as such? One hardly needs to be reminded of the Western historical and philosophical roots of both.

But there is a larger point here. To say that IRT should be inclusive of non-Western voices and realities is not to say that Western-derived theories are irrelevant, especially when they apply to relationships within the West and between Western and non-Western actors. Dismissing Western theories simply because they are Western can be a slippery slope to the relativist trap. But IR theory shows major gaps when it comes to explaining the political, economic and security relationships in the non-Western world.<sup>14</sup>

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11. Acharya and Buzan, eds, 'Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory?'

12. G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno, 'The United States and Stability in East Asia', in *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*, eds G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 421–2.

13. Jack Snyder, 'Some Good and Bad Reasons for a Distinctively Chinese Approach to International Relations Theory', Paper presented at the annual meeting of the APSA, Hynes Convention Center, Boston, Massachusetts, 28 August 2008, 9, 10.

14. Stephanie G. Neuman, *International Relations Theory and the Third World* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998).

Theories of international relations are neither monolithic nor unchanging. To some, IR theory has been made more relevant to the non-Western world with the help of extensions and ‘advances’.<sup>15</sup> The constructivist turn in theory, despite its distinctly Western origin, has helped to foster a growing body of theoretical work on Africa, Asia and Latin America and Islam,<sup>16</sup> thanks to its sensitivity to questions of culture and identity, identified by Arlene Tickner as one of the major potential sources of non-Western theorising.<sup>17</sup> Post-colonialism, feminism and strands of critical IR theory – all of which have significant Western pedigree – have helped considerably in broadening the relevance and appeal of IR theory around the world. Ayoob has adapted realism to explain the distinctive security predicament of the Third World.<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, the call for bridging the North–South gap in IRT by simply testing, extending and revising existing theories like realism, liberalism and constructivism would not address the need and demand for change.<sup>19</sup> What is needed, indeed, are ‘proposals for alternative theories about the functioning of international relations that have their origin in the South’.<sup>20</sup> This leads to the question as to whether some of the non-Western formulations on IRTs are simple mimicry of the Western or are ‘genuinely’ post-Western – a subject I shall address now.

In an earlier survey of the field of IR, Olson and Onuf hoped to see ‘the ideal of a cosmopolitan discipline in which adepts from many cultures enrich the discourse of International Relations with all the world’s ways of seeing and knowing’. But they also warned that the globalisation of IR may well indicate ‘the successful diffusion of the Anglo-American cognitive style and professional stance rather than the absorption of alien modes of thought’.<sup>21</sup> To some, this is precisely what is happening to a good many of the recent efforts to explore the possibility of non-Western IR theories. Are these efforts then mere ‘mimicry’ or ‘local variations’ of Western theories and debates?<sup>22</sup>

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15. William Brown, ‘Africa and International Relations: A Comment on IR Theory, Anarchy and Statehood’, *Review of International Studies* 32 (2006): 119–43.
  16. ‘Constructivism’s theoretical reach extends past the West and into the Third World.’ Michael Barnett, ‘Radical Chic? Subaltern Realism: A Rejoinder’, *International Studies Review* 4 (2002): 52. Tadjbakhsh attests to the usefulness of constructivism in analysing Islamic sources of IRT. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, ‘International Relations Theory and the Islamic Worldview’, in *Non-Western International Relations Theory*, eds Acharya and Buzan.
  17. Tickner, ‘Seeing IR Differently’.
  18. Mohammed Ayoob, ‘Inequality and Theorizing in International Relations: The Case for Subaltern Realism’, *International Studies Review* 4, no. 3. (2002): 27–48.
  19. Caroline Thomas and Peter Wilkin, ‘Still Waiting after All These Years: “The Third World” on the Periphery of International Relations’, *British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 6, no. 2 (May 2004): 241–58.
  20. Smith, ‘Can It Be Home-Grown?’, 2.
  21. William Olson and Nicholas Onuf, ‘The Growth of a Discipline Reviewed’, in *International Relations: British and American Perspectives*, ed. Steve Smith (New York: Blackwell, 1985), 18.
  22. Giorgio Shani, ‘Toward a Post-Western IR: The *Umma*, *Khalsa Panth*, and Critical International Relations Theory’, *International Studies Review* 10 (2008): 723. See also Ching-Chang Chen, ‘The Absence of Non-Western IR Theory in Asia Reconsidered’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 11, no. 1 (2011): 1–23. ‘Mimicry’ is a term attributed to post-colonial scholar Homi Bhaba (see Bilgin, ‘Thinking Past “Western IR”’, 14). But here mimicry is used in the literal sense of emulation, or imitation, which has a constructivist pedigree.

I do not think those who decry mimicry are asking that we summarily reject IR theories just because they are Western. What yardsticks might one use to judge what is genuinely non-Western or post-Western? An obvious candidate might be the critical theories of IR, but these, as noted, are not divorced from Western influence either. Should we start from an indigenous base and then link up with available Western theories if and where it helps a better understanding of the problem at hand? This would require less reliance on deductive theorising, aimed at ‘testing’ theories, and more on ‘induction’ – generalising from local experiences on their own terms, or ‘abduction’ – ‘using a dialectical combination of theory and empirical findings, moving back and forth between the two to produce an appropriate account’.<sup>23</sup> These questions require much more careful debate and dialogue, without which we run the risk of trivialising the whole idea of developing a genuinely universal discipline of IR.

Finally, if one is to question the integrity of the idea of a non-Western IRT as an overarching and homogeneous project, should the natural next step not be to open it to national and regional voices? Is organising IRT into national or regional schools necessary or desirable? There are several obvious advantages to such a move, such as mobilising interest and resources, and attracting attention and even prestige. One need look no further than the establishment of an English School section in the International Studies Association to get a sense of this.

In my view, such approaches are welcome if they stay clear of some well-known traps. The first is excessive nationalism and parochialism. It is of course not always the case that such schools are internally homogeneous or externally exclusive. To cite again the example of the English School (which also goes by the name of the ‘international society’ perspective), it had Hedley Bull, an Australian, Robert Jackson, a Canadian, and more contentiously Charles Manning, a South African, and the Chinese-born but UK-trained Yongjin Zhang (now at Bristol). And within the School itself, there have been divisions over leadership and naming.<sup>24</sup> But national or regional schools can become intellectual and methodological (if not ideological) straitjackets, creating barriers to pluralisation and cross-national/regional discourse. And they can take an exceptionalist turn, becoming self-serving and even repressive. The Singapore School of the 1990s, more a policy discourse than an academic project, was widely seen as an intellectual justification for Lee Kuan Yew’s brand of soft authoritarianism. National schools can also seem, fairly or unfairly, to be rationalisations of a country’s (or rather power’s) shifting fortunes, decline or rise. Reading a fascinating history of the emergence of the English School through the deliberations of the British Committee on the Theory of International Relations,<sup>25</sup> it is hard to escape the feeling that it reflected a particular national context and experience.

23. Hiroyuki Hoshiro, Book Review, *Whose Ideas Matter: Agency and Power in Asian Regionalism, Pacific Affairs* 83, no. 3 (September 2010): 547–8.

24. Tim Dunne, ‘A British School of International Relations’, in *The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century*, eds Jack Hayward, Brian Barry and Archie Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 398, fn. 10; Andrew Linklater and Hidemi Suganami, *The English School of International Relations: A Contemporary Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

25. Brunello Vigezzi, *The British Committee on the Theory of International Politics (1954–1985): The Rediscovery of History* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 2005).

Might one, then, be forgiven for viewing the early English School as a way of rationalising, and perhaps taking comfort in, the decline of Europe, if not of Britain alone?

Another question that one confronts here is whether the development of distinctive schools of IR theories is the exclusive preserve of great powers, for example, China, Japan, India and so on. This of course would be hardly unusual given the historically close nexus between power (Britain, Europe and the USA) and the production of IR knowledge. One probably would not hear much about a Chinese School of IR if China was not a 'rising' power.

The idea of a 'Chinese School' of IRT is indeed of special interest. Although claims to distinctiveness in IR are not a Chinese invention or monopoly,<sup>26</sup> nowhere today is such an enterprise more pronounced than in China. When the reform era began, there were debates within China over 'whether an IR theory (or a set of theories) with Chinese characteristics should and could be established'.<sup>27</sup> The early advocates of such theories were relying on themes such as the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence', 'anti-hegemonism' and China's 'independent foreign policy'. But this invited scepticism from others within China's IR community who saw it as a way of legitimising the Chinese official interpretation of world affairs. In the end, few successful attempts could be made in drawing from the classical Chinese tradition of thought and diplomacy.<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, attempts to construct a Chinese School of IRT entailed providing a theoretical basis for China's 'peaceful rise' (although shades of the earlier focus on foreign policy concerns such as anti-hegemonism, five principles, etc. remain). Moreover, such efforts have been accompanied by a revival of selected historical ideas and institutions, including but not limited to Confucianism. Qin argues that all social theory must have a 'theoretical hard core' centred on a 'big idea' or a 'big problematic'. For China, it is the idea of *Datong*, or 'Universal Great Harmony', key elements of which are the tributary system and the 'all under heaven' world-view (*Tianxia*); he does not include Confucianism, although others do.<sup>29</sup>

Jack Snyder has warned that 'a monolithic Chinese School could produce a stultifying uniformity, intellectual cheerleading for government policies, and an ideological justification for a blinkered Chinese nationalism that hinders rather than expands understanding'.<sup>30</sup> It is revealing that the key proponents of a Chinese School lean heavily on Confucianism and the pre-Confucian but hierarchy-oriented concept of *Tianxia*, rather than the more pan-Asian strands of thinking, especially Buddhism (to be discussed later).

26. On the other side of the power shift, Africa's uniqueness, albeit as a marginalised place, is discussed in Kevin Dunn, 'Tales from the Dark Side: Africa's Challenge to International Relations Theory', *Journal of Third World Studies* 17, no. 1 (2000): 61–90.

27. Wang Jisi, 'International Relations Studies in China Today: Achievements, Trends and Conditions', in *International Relations Studies in China: A Review of Ford Foundation Past Grantmaking and Future Choices* (Beijing: Ford Foundation China Representative Office, 2003), 114.

28. *Ibid.*, 115.

29. Qin, 'Why Is There No Chinese International Relations Theory?', in *Non-Western International Relations Theory*, eds Acharya and Buzan. On *Tianxia*, see William A. Callahan, 'Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-hegemonic or a New Hegemony?', *International Studies Review* 10, no. 4 (2008): 749–61.

30. Snyder, 'Some Good and Bad Reasons', 2.

There is much less interest in India – the other emerging power from Asia – in developing a school of IR of its own,<sup>31</sup> even though the modern discipline of IR has a longer history there than in China, and Indian scholars bemoan the advances in IR teaching and research in China while India, once Asia’s leader in this, has been left further behind.<sup>32</sup> But a recent report on the state of IR in India argues that a key goal of international studies (IS) in India should be to ‘ensure that Indian IS scholarship contributes to increasing the knowledge base on India’s role as a responsible power fostering peace, security, good governance, economic development, and resolution of a wide range of problems in its immediate region and the world’.<sup>33</sup> This is not a call for developing an ‘Indian school of IRT’, but it underscores the potential for self-centrism in any such enterprise, a danger that was recognised by Bajpai before anyone took note of India’s rise, when he warned that efforts to develop an IRT out of India might carry the danger of ‘lapsing into uncritical nativism or seeking some essentialist “Indian” vision’.<sup>34</sup>

Does progress in IR require fighting American and European ethnocentrism with Chinese and Indian ethnocentrism? It is interesting to note that there are fewer demands for an African school. Peter Vale, while bemoaning that there is ‘almost nothing in the IR canon on Africa’, categorically rejects the case for a ‘fully African IR’, demanding instead ‘a greater sensitivity to African ways of knowing the international’.<sup>35</sup> Freedom of expression is another issue to keep in mind when advocating national schools of IR. In Iran, for example, while Islam has emerged as a major basis for thinking about international relations, ‘younger scholars have been cautious not to transcend what is traditionally regarded theologically acceptable by major religious authorities’.<sup>36</sup>

## Looking Ahead: What to Study?

Debates and dialogues over the numerous ways in which IRT as it stands today dominates and excludes non-Western actors and experiences are important. But we also need to move on to *discovery*, by identifying complementary and alternative sources of theorising that are inclusive of non-Western voices and experiences. Below I discuss a few of these (not unrelated) sources: (1) the genealogy of international systems, (2) the question of ‘agency of the South’, (3) bringing the ‘human’ dimension to IR, (4) the role of area studies, and (5) the study of regions and regionalism. A sixth source, perhaps the most important one, concerns the epistemology of IR knowledge, which is addressed in a

31. Navnita Chaddha Behera, ‘Reimagining IR in India’, in *Non-Western International Relations Theory*, eds Acharya and Buzan, 92–116.

32. For recent discussions on the state of IRT in India, see the special issue of *International Studies* 46, nos 1–2 (2009).

33. ‘Report of the Workshop on International Studies in India’ (Singapore: Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, 2009), 12.

34. Kanti Bajpai, ‘International Relations in India: Bringing Theory (back) Home’, in *International Relations in India: Bringing Theory back Home*, eds Kanti Bajpai and Siddharth Mallavarapu (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2001), 31.

35. Peter Vale, ‘IR and the Global South: Final Confessions of a Schizophrenic Teacher’, 30 October 2009, available at: <http://www.e-ir.info/?p=2644> (accessed 15 January 2011).

36. Homeira Moshirzadeh, ‘A “Hegemonic Discipline” in an “Anti-Hegemonic” Country’, *International Political Sociology* 3, no. 3 (2009): 345.



separate section later in the article. Although the list is far from exhaustive, it does point to some important ways of thinking about how to bring non-Western perspectives and experiences into IR theory.

### *Genealogy of International Systems*

A good starting point is our prevailing ‘Westphalic’<sup>37</sup> view of international systems. As Buzan and Little put it: ‘Westphalia-based IR theory is not only incapable of understanding premodern international systems, but also ... its lack of historical perspective makes it unable to answer, in many instances address, the most important questions about the modern international system.’<sup>38</sup>

Early English School theorists such as Bull and Watson took the view that the contemporary international system resulted from a worldwide acceptance by non-Western societies of the rules and norms of European international society, leading to what might be called Westphalia writ large. The process of expansion of the European international society resulted from the failure of non-Western rulers to conduct themselves on the basis of equality and reciprocity. (Whether the failure might have been the result of the use of coercion or force by Western powers is sidestepped.<sup>39</sup>) Yet, C.H. Alexandrowicz’s analysis of the original treaties between European East India companies (as representatives of European sovereigns in whose name they were contracted) and Asian rulers questions the view that the Europeans always regarded the non-Western societies as unequal and dealt with them on the basis of the ‘standards of civilisation’ thesis to dismiss their claim to sovereignty and exclude them from the society of states. Instead, the encounter between the ‘two worlds took place on a footing of equality and the ensuing commercial and political transactions, far from being in a legal vacuum, were governed by the law of nations as adjusted to local inter-state custom’.<sup>40</sup>

But such work and our explorations into pre-Westphalian international systems remain severely limited. The literature on pre-Westphalian international systems focuses heavily on military–security interactions, and the types of relationships that approximate to either anarchy, that is, the Greek city-states or the Warring states of

37. Bajpai, ‘International Relations in India’, 32.

38. Buzan and Little, *International Systems in World History*, 3.

39. While conceding that the ‘standards of civilisation’ thesis is countered by the more global conception of natural law theorists such as St Thomas Aquinas, Bull nonetheless argued: ‘it could hardly have been expected that European states could have extended the full benefits of membership of the society of states to political entities that were in no position to enter into relationships on a basis of reciprocity’. Hedley Bull, ‘The Emergence of a Universal International Society’, in *The Expansion of International Society*, eds Bull and Watson, 122.

40. C.H. Alexandrowicz, *An Introduction to the History of the Law of Nations in the East Indies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 225. Alexandrowicz, on the basis of far more detailed empirical research than Bull could ever undertake, notes (p. 224): ‘Though the Europeans had sailed to the East Indies since the end of the fifteenth century equipped with legal titles of a unilateral character and though they had at first intended to discover and to occupy lands, and, where necessary, to establish their territorial possessions by conquest, they had in practice to fall back on negotiation and treaty making in preference to resorting to war. In fact they found themselves in the middle of a network of States and inter-State relations based on traditions which were more ancient than their own and in no way inferior to notions of European civilization.’

China, or empires and hegemonic systems (Rome, Maurya India, etc.). Interactions anchored on trade, ideas (including political ideas) and culture, where empire, hegemony or explicit and continuous power balancing is absent, have been ignored.<sup>41</sup> International systems could develop out of ideational interactions as much as material ones such as war and conquest.<sup>42</sup> For example, South-east Asia and the Indian Ocean, with a long history of commerce and flow of ideas, but without unity by conquest, are seldom studied as international systems, while the Mediterranean under *pax Romana* has been an archetypical case.

The dominant Western source of thinking about IR concepts and theories is not just Westphalia, but also the classical Mediterranean. A good many of the ideas that we use in IR theory today come directly or indirectly from the world that Greece and Rome made (but not the Phoenicians, Egyptians or Persians). This refers not only to established theories, but also to more recent variations and formulations. Realists have long traced their lineage to Thucydides, but Reus-Smit has written a fascinating work on the constitutive principles of international society from the Graeco-Roman world, Deudney has challenged both realism and liberalism with a republican security theory originating from the Roman Republic, and Ned Lebow has derived a cultural theory of international relations from the Greek concept of honour.<sup>43</sup> We are yet to see such grand theorising from the Sumerian,<sup>44</sup> Egyptian, Chinese or Indian pasts, stuck as we are with the idea of Kautilya being an Indian Machiavelli, rather than Machiavelli being a Euro-Mediterranean Kautilya.

## Agency

The issue of genealogy is closely linked to the question of agency. When the positivist notion of standards of civilisation replaced natural law, which had recognised the status of all nations under international law, it denied the agency of non-Western polities and

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41. Wallerstein's World Systems theory focuses on economic interactions but goes to the other extreme. It has been criticised for regarding political–security interactions as epiphenomenal, for focusing only on the post-1500 period and for leaving out many parts of the world.
  42. One example might be what Sheldon Pollock calls 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis' in Asia (especially South-east Asia). This refers to 'largely hierarchised societies, administered by a corps of functionaries, scribes, tax collectors, living in grand agrarian cities geometrically planned in orientation to the cardinal points and set within imaginary geographies that ... recapitulated the geography of India'. Yet, the Sanskrit Cosmopolis was not the result of any Indian military conquest in Asia. As Pollack writes: 'Constituted by no imperial power or church but in large part by a communicative system', the 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis' was 'characterised by a trans-regionally shared set of assumptions about the basics of power'. Sheldon Pollock, 'The Sanskrit Cosmopolis, 300–1300: Transculturation, Vernacularization, and the Question of Ideology', in *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit*, ed. Jan E.M. Houben (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 14–15.
  43. Christian Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Daniel Deudney, *Bounding Power: Republican Security Theory from the Polis to the Global Village* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
  44. An important effort is Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook, *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

societies in international affairs. The latter could not play the positive game of sovereignty,<sup>45</sup> including the all important game of power balancing. Yet, if we define agency in both material and ideational dimensions, then non-Western societies have much to claim, even in the modern era of Western dominance. A case in point, discussed by Alexandrowicz, is Grotius concept of *Mare Liberum*. Widely credited as the founder of the doctrine, Grotius is now believed to have been deeply informed and influenced by the ‘outstanding precedent for maritime freedom offered by the regime in the Indian Ocean in contrast to maritime practice in Europe [*mare clausum*]’.<sup>46</sup>

The role of non-Western countries in the international system has been conceptualised as one of dissent and rebellion, so memorably described by Bull as a ‘revolt against the West’. But as Ayoob notes, the Third World during the Cold War also played a conformist and supportive role.<sup>47</sup> One could extend the argument further and say that the so-called Third World has been a maker of international rules and norms. These include significant modifications to, and adaptations of, European norms of sovereignty on the basis of pre-existing local beliefs and practices, as well as the creation of new rules in the local context and exporting them to the wider regional and global levels to influence and shape relations within the Third World and between the Third World and the West.<sup>48</sup> The Latin American and African norms of inviolability of post-colonial boundaries, Latin America’s strengthening and institutionalisation of non-intervention, norms of Arabism from the Middle East, and the Asian construction and modification of the non-intervention norm to delegitimise great power alliances and power balancing are some examples of such normative agency. Although some of these norms are of Western origin, their creative adaptation and repatriation are important examples of agency that cannot be denied a place in IR theory.

### *Humanising IRT*

One of the key issues in recent debates about IRT, especially the post-positivist challenge to the neorealist–neoliberal synthesis, is the centrality of the state in mainstream IRT (whether realism, liberalism or Wendtian constructivism). Hence, a concept that puts the individual at the centre of IRT is richly appealing in thinking about alternative IRTs. The emergence and growing prominence of approaches to various sub-fields of IR with the human prefix, such as human development, human security, humanitarian intervention and humane globalisation, along with the earlier and ongoing study of human rights, are therefore developments of fundamental importance.

These concepts and understandings capture many of the key challenges that have been excluded from mainstream IRT. The referent object in human development/security is not necessarily the individual person (hence, making it seem like a liberal innovation),

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45. Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

46. Alexandrowicz, *An Introduction*, 65.

47. Mohammed Ayoob, ‘The Third World in the System of States: Acute Schizophrenia or Growing Pains?’, *International Studies Quarterly* 33 (1989): 67–79.

48. Amitav Acharya, ‘Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Orders: Sovereignty, Regionalism and Rule-Making in the Third World’, *International Studies Quarterly* 55 (2011): 95–123.

but *people* (more plural and more inclusively societal). While critical IR theories (including postmodern, post-structural, feminist and Marxist theory) shares some of the same concerns as these human-oriented approaches, as Chenoy and Tadjbakhsh argue, the latter can be conceptualised outside of the standard critical theories.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the ideas of human development and human security were developed by economists like Mahbub-ul Haq of Pakistan and Amartya Sen from India, even though they were appropriated by Western governments such as Canada and Norway.<sup>50</sup> Hence, a human perspective on IRT is a natural and indispensable companion to any meaningful search for non-Western IRT.

But much more work needs to be done here. There are unresolved debates over these human-prefixed concepts, especially what they mean, whose agenda they serve, how they are to be advanced and whether they are (especially human security) too broad to be analytically meaningful and too idealistic to serve any policy purpose. These questions mirror questions about the current IRT posed by critical approaches. But the linkages between various human-prefixed concepts are not sufficiently understood and often contested. For example, how is human development (freedom from want) related to human security (freedom from fear)? This is especially interesting from the perspective of non-Western IRT since it evokes a North–South divide, although there is now a growing acceptance that human security is both freedom from fear and freedom from want. Moreover, the human-prefixed concepts, while attracting growing interest, have not been advanced to the point where they challenge the centrality of the state, or the international institutions controlled by states, in any of the mainstream theories, including realism, liberalism and constructivism. How many college textbooks on international relations include a chapter on human security?

### *Bringing Area Studies back in*

There was a time not so long ago when, in most parts of the non-Western world, IR began and ended with area specialisation. One interesting feature, and potential danger, of the recent conversations about IRT beyond the West is that most of them are occurring without reference to, or serious engagement with, the area studies tradition. Although area studies, or ‘international studies’, lurks beneath these conversations, there seems to be a zealous effort and undue haste to move beyond area studies and differentiate it from IR. Somehow, area studies seems outdated, unfashionable. To some extent, the atheoretical nature of area studies generates the need to distinguish IR from it, especially those who focus on theory. Another reason is a perception, unjustified in my view, that the whole idea of area studies is becoming obsolete, whether through globalisation or through lack of demand from policymakers, which is crucial to funding and sustenance. This view, while popular in the 1990s, is ever more questionable today. It will be ironic if non-Western scholars move away from area studies, within which the study of IR beyond the West had been traditionally anchored (as in India), at a time when in the West there is growing confirmation of the need to bring area studies back in, and when the traditional

49. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh and Anuradha Chenoy, *Human Security, Concept and Principles* (London: Routledge, 2007).

50. Amitav Acharya, ‘Human Security: East versus West’, *International Journal* LVI, no. 3 (2001): 442–60.

conception of area studies is itself changing, especially with the advent of what might be called ‘transnational studies’, by scholars who are primarily trained in regional affairs but who are increasingly interested and involved in comparative research on trans-regional phenomena, with or without the help of the theory of a particular discipline.<sup>51</sup>

### *Contemporary Regional Worlds*

Following on from the above, we often forget that theorising about IR occurs in a fundamentally local/regional context. Stephen Walt, who reformulated balance of power theory by relying principally on Middle Eastern diplomatic history, defended his approach thus: ‘The argument that the Middle East is *sui generis* applies with equal force to any other region. Yet, international relations scholars have long relied on historical cases and quantitative data drawn from European diplomatic history without being accused of a narrow geographic, temporal, or cultural focus.’<sup>52</sup> His point is clear and persuasive, since Europe is the source of so much of IRT and no one complains about it, why not the Middle East, Asia, Africa or Latin America?

The growing worldwide interest in the comparative study of regionalism and regional orders offers a rich source of IR theory, although its potential is yet to be fully realised. It is commonplace to see how IR scholars gravitate towards local and regional contexts and concerns of their time. Theoretical discourse is thus effectively regionalised: for Asia, it may be about growth (and now ‘rise’); for Africa, it has been about marginalisation; for Latin America, it is dependence, hegemony and defence of democracy, and so on. Just as the meaning of ‘theory’ varies between the US and Europe,<sup>53</sup> so the study of IR means different things in different regions.<sup>54</sup> But added together they make a significant contribution to IRT.

Let me note three contributions, although this list is not exhaustive. Africa offers a striking example of the disjuncture between the more universalistic claims of Western IRT and the reality of the politics and security of regions and regional dis/orders in the non-Western worlds. As noted, Africa’s place in IRT has been famously framed in terms of ‘juridical’ versus ‘empirical’ sovereignty, but the real challenge Africa poses to IRT lies somewhere else. According to Dunn, Africa challenges (1) neorealism’s (Waltz’s) anarchy–hierarchy divide, given that there is no ‘hierarchy’ in the Waltzian sense within states that are too weak to police themselves; and (2), IR’s domestic–international divide, given the prominent role of international actors in keeping Africa’s fragile states going, and more generally the centrality of the state in IRT, because the state there has given way to, or at least competes with, multiple other forms of authority. The development of

51. For further discussion, see Amitav Acharya, ‘International Relations and Area Studies: Towards a New Synthesis?’, Paper presented to the ‘Workshop on the Future of Interdisciplinary Area Studies in the UK’, St Antony’s College, Oxford University, 6–7 December 2005.

52. Stephen Walt, *The Origin of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 14–15.

53. Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, ‘Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction’, in *Non-Western International Relations Theory*, eds Acharya and Buzan.

54. Itty Abraham, Review of *International Relations Scholarship around the World*, edited by Arlene Tickner and Ole Waever, *International Studies Review* 12 (2010): 471.

warlordism in some African states should not be viewed as ‘temporary aberrations’, but as ‘alternative structures and practices to the dominant Westphalian state systems’.<sup>55</sup>

Latin America shows that regional political and economic resistance to hegemony can be a fruitful basis of developing theory. Haluani identifies several theories with strong Latin American roots, including dependency theory, populism, liberation theology and Cepalism. Cepalism, Comision Economica para America Latin (CEPAL), the UN’s economic commission for Latin America, challenged the IMF and World Bank’s development and reform strategy with something that came to be known as *Cepalismo*, which ‘sought to work on indigenous models, based on local capabilities and priorities’.<sup>56</sup> Economists including Raul Prebisch criticised the technocraticism in the IMF and the World Bank. As Haluani points out, their criticism of international financial and development institutions for their ‘socially and culturally insensitive’ policies also held that globalisation and the free market benefited mainly Western countries.<sup>57</sup> This kind of Cepalism also has equivalents in other regions, including Africa and Asia, thereby creating a more universal base.

Asia is key to our growing interest in understanding how and why regional institutions differ, and what the implications of these differences are for theories of international relations. The difference between European regionalism and that in other parts of the world, especially Asia, has emerged as a major area of contention that has undermined the hitherto ‘paradigmatic status’ of European regionalism.<sup>58</sup> Differences between Asian and European institutions, such as the former’s soft, informal, networked-type regionalism versus the latter’s heavily institutionalised and legalised variety, no longer automatically lead one to consider the latter as a more desirable universal model.<sup>59</sup> More work on the distinctiveness of different regions and differences in the design and performance of regional institutions is important in adding diversity to IRT and allows us to focus on the local construction of global order – a necessary counter to the hyper-globalisation perspective.

Some scholars may be uncomfortable with my call for giving more space to the study of regions, regionalisms and regional orders as a pathway for advancing IR studies beyond the West. To clarify, I am not asking for ‘regionalising’ the discipline at the expense of universalism. This would be going too far. The concept of what constitutes a ‘region’ remains contested, although there seems to be greater agreement that regions are socially constructed rather than geographically or culturally preordained.<sup>60</sup> I have already pointed to the dangers of parochialism and exceptionalism inherent in ‘provincialising’

55. Dunn, ‘Tales from the Dark Side’.

56. Makram Haluani, ‘How “International” Are Theories in International Relations? The View from Latin America’, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, San Diego, California, USA, 22 March 2006, p. 8.

57. The phrase ‘socially and culturally insensitive’ is presumably from Raul Prebisch. Haluani, ‘How “International” Are Theories in International Relations?’, 8–9.

58. Richard Higgott, ‘The Theory and Practice of Region’, in *Regional Integration in East Asia and Europe: Convergence or Divergence*, eds Bertrand Fort and Douglas Webber (London: Routledge, 2006), 23.

59. Peter J. Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Amitav Acharya, *Whose Ideas Matter? Agency and Power in Asian Regionalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

60. Amitav Acharya, ‘Review Essay: The Emerging Regional Architecture of World Politics’, *World Politics* 59, no. 4 (2007): 629–52.

IR (e.g. Chinese School or Indian School), although I support it under certain conditions. But the study of regions, and regional perspectives on IR, are extremely important for the development of the discipline. This view is confirmed – and I am sure many others will have the same experience – by my encounters with the expectations of fellow IR scholars from all around the world. The study of regions brings greater richness and diversity to the discipline. It also offers a useful pathway for integrating area studies and IR to the benefit of both. Regional perspectives are not antithetical to universalism, as the ‘regional world’ approach developed at the University of Chicago attests.<sup>61</sup>

## How to Study IR: The Question of Epistemology

A colleague at American University contends that, ‘to be genuinely non-Western, we need ways of generating theory that are not prone to King, Keohane, and Verba type of generating theory’.<sup>62</sup> What is, then, important is not just the content of IR, but the ways of doing IR. Part of the answer lies in broadening our conception of what the philosophy of science behind IR actually means, as Jackson in a recent contribution has so admirably tried to do. Patrick Thaddeus Jackson makes a powerful case for pluralism in IR, particularly in so far as our understanding of what constitutes ‘science’ is concerned.<sup>63</sup> In so doing, he strikes a powerful blow against the claims of those who have found it convenient to dismiss non-Western experiences and voices as the ‘stuff of area studies’ or as ‘unscientific’.

But Jackson also insists that ‘putting the “science question” to rest certainly does not mean that we enter a realm where anything goes’.<sup>64</sup> Scientific knowledge for him has three indispensable ‘constituent components’: it must be systematic, it must be capable of taking (and one presumes tackling successfully) public criticism and ‘it must be intended to produce worldly knowledge’.<sup>65</sup> But one has to be careful here. A good deal of what one might bring into IRT from the non-Western world may indeed be ‘worldly knowledge’. But other sources could be religion and cultural and spiritual knowledge that might not strictly qualify as ‘this-worldly’. They may lie at some vague intersection between science and spirituality or combine the material with the spiritual. Thus, Shani suggests the Sikh Khalsa Panth or Islamic Ummah as sources of post-Western IRT, because these concepts offer ‘an alternative conception of universality – and a potentially more “solidarist” conception of international society – than that offered by western Westphalian IR’.<sup>66</sup>

61. Sita Ranchod-Nilsson, ‘Regional Worlds: Transforming Pedagogy in Area Studies and International Studies’, available at: <http://regionalworlds.uchicago.edu/transformingpedagogy.pdf>; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

62. Comments at the launch of *Non-Western International Relations Theory* by Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, American University, Washington, DC, 3 May 2010. The reference was to: Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

63. Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics* (Oxford: Routledge, 2010).

64. *Ibid.*, 196.

65. *Ibid.*, 193.

66. Shani, ‘Toward a Post-Western IR’, Abstract.

The world's oldest religion, Hinduism, presents another example. The Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, which describes a fratricidal conflict between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, should be a rewarding source of concepts and theories of IR; it is after all a meta-narrative of just and unjust wars, alliances and betrayals, self-interest and morality, and good and bad governance.<sup>67</sup> The *Bhagavad Gita*, Hinduism's most sacred text, is a component of the *Mahabharata*. Its opening describes Arjuna, the Pandava camp's most celebrated warrior, halting at the edge of the battlefield, overcome with remorse at the prospect of slaying his own relatives who are arrayed on the opposite side. Lord Krishna, Arjuna's god-charioteer, counsels him to fight on because death only destroys the mortal body, while the soul (*atman*) is permanent: 'Our bodies are known to end, but the embodied self is enduring, indestructible and immeasurable, therefore, Arjuna, fight the battle'.<sup>68</sup> Krishna also gives Arjuna several other reasons for not abstaining from war – just cause, personal honour, shame from enemies and the opportunity to rule. The following passages from *Gita* are especially noteworthy: 'If you refuse to fight this righteous war, then [you would be] shirking your duty and losing your reputation' (Chapter 2, passage 33); 'the warrior chiefs who thought highly of you, will now despise you, thinking that it was fear which drove you from battle' (Chapter 2, passage 35); and 'Die, and you will win heaven; conquer, and you will enjoy sovereignty of the earth; therefore stand up, Arjuna, determined [sic] to fight' (Chapter 2, passage 37).<sup>69</sup> In other words, Lord Krishna's pleadings with the warrior Arjuna not to abstain from war resonate with the logic of righteous action which is both 'this-worldly' (honour, shame, power) and 'other-worldly' (the indestructibility of the soul or the *atman*).

Can we bring these insights into IR knowledge if we insist on a conduct of enquiry that demands a strict separation between this- and other-worldliness, and between the material and the spiritual? We could of course self-consciously include elements such as scriptural knowledge which may not easily pass the test of this-worldliness, and call them the non-scientific elements of IRT. But that might mean consigning them to second-class status, since, as Jackson points out, the label 'scientific' carries much prestige and disciplining impact in IRT. Our insistence on science thus risks further marginalising a good many of the sources of IR knowledge which are wholly or partially unscientific or whose affinity with science cannot be clearly established.

To illustrate the complexities and dilemmas involved in drawing IR knowledge from non-Western philosophies, I will give one important example, taken from Buddhist philosophy, which has received practically no attention from scholars of IR.<sup>70</sup> I choose this because, as noted earlier, it is a transnational religion, having spread from India to China, Japan, Korea and South-east Asia. Its pan-Asian nature is not unimportant in our present quest for non-Western or post-Western IRTs, since Asia is supposedly the rising continent, and IRT has often been subservient to power.

In a fascinating study, the present Dalai Lama explores the relationship between science and Buddhist philosophy. Buddhist philosophy accepts and employs the empiricism

67. One might also look at Raymond Westbrook and Raymond Cohen, *Isaiah's Vision of Peace in Biblical and Modern International Relations: Swords into Plowshares* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

68. Chapter 2, passage 18, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, trans. Barbara Stoler Miller (New York: Bantam Dell, 1986), 34.

69. *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, ed. Ashok Kaushik, English trans. Janak Datta, 7th edn (New Delhi: Star Publications, 2007), 55–7.

70. With the admirable exception of Chan, Mandaville and Bleiker's *The Zen of International Relations*.



of science, especially ‘direct observation’ and ‘reasoned inference’ (i.e. knowledge ‘can be phenomenally given or it can be inferred’), but parts company with science when it comes to a third way, ‘reliable authority’. Buddhist philosophy believes in a ‘further level of reality, which may remain obscure to the unenlightened mind’. This includes ‘law of karma’, ‘scripture cited as a particularly correct source of authority’ and the teaching of Buddha, which, for Buddhists, ‘has proven to be reliable in the examination of the nature of existence and path to liberation’.<sup>71</sup> Although Popper’s falsification thesis would render the gap between the scientific method and Buddhism wider by excluding ‘many questions that pertain to our human existence’, including ethics and spirituality, falsification ‘resonates with’ Tibetan Buddhism’s ‘principle of the scope of negation’, which underscores the difference between that ‘which is “not found” and that which is “found not to exist”’.<sup>72</sup>

It is not difficult to see that the ‘further level of reality’ may well apply to most other religious doctrines, such as the Islamic Sunnah and Hadith, or the Hindu *Bhagavad Gita*. While the Dalai Lama argues that science excludes questions of metaphysics and ethics,<sup>73</sup> not all IR theory (although some versions more so than others) does – which justifies keeping some distance between them (i.e. science and IR).

In comparing scientific enquiry with Buddhist philosophy, the Dalai Lama brings particularly to attention the doctrine of emptiness, or *sunyata*, originating from the Indian Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna (2nd century), which is the source of the Buddhist schools of Madhyamika (Middle Way) and Yogacara. The core argument of *sunyata* is the ‘fundamental disparity between the way we perceive the world, including our own experience in it, and the way things actually are’. *Sunyata* rejects the tendency to perceive the world, including ‘all things and events, whether material, mental or even abstract concepts like time’, as if they ‘possess self-enclosed, definable, discrete, and enduring reality’, or as if there is ‘an essential core to our being, which characterises our individuality and identity as a discreet ego, independent of the physical and mental elements that constitute our existence’. But:

To intrinsically possess such independent existence ... would mean that nothing has the capacity to interact with or exert influence on any other phenomena ... In the theory of emptiness, everything is argued as merely being composed of dependently related events; of continuously interacting phenomena with no fixed, immutable essence, which are themselves in dynamic and constantly changing relations. Thus, things and events are ‘empty’ in that they can never possess any immutable essence, intrinsic reality or absolute ‘being’ that affords independence.<sup>74</sup>

In the doctrine of emptiness, change is the order of things: ‘nothing can possess unchanging essence, nothing ever *is*, for all is subject to change and is in the process of becoming which never becomes. Importantly, the self, too, is ultimately of the same changeable, non-permanent nature.’<sup>75</sup> The Dalai Lama finds ‘an unmistakable resonance’ between

71. Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality* (New York: Morgan Road Books, 2005), 28–9.

72. Dalai Lama, *Universe in a Single Atom*, 35.

73. Dalai Lama, *Universe in a Single Atom*, 35.

74. Dalai Lama, *Universe in a Single Atom*, 46–7. See also Gajin M. Nagao, *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra: A Study of Mahāyāna Philosophies. Collected Papers*, trans. Leslie S. Kawamura (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 174–5.

75. Merv Fowler, *Buddhism: Religious Practices and Beliefs* (New Delhi: Adarsh Books, 2000), 85.

these Buddhist ideas of 'emptiness and interdependence' and the new quantum physics of relativity, which challenged the old Newtonian physics, with its 'mechanistic world-view in which certain universal physical laws, including gravity and the laws of mechanics, effectively determined the pattern of natural actions', and claimed matter 'to be less solid and definable than it appears'.<sup>76</sup>

Some may be tempted to compare the above tenets of Buddhist philosophy with some of the core ideas of constructivism (and to some extent postmodernism), especially claims that interests and identities (self and the other) are never permanent, or fixed, but constantly changing and evolving through their mutual interdependence and interactions. This would seem to some as a methodological sin, that is, projecting modern concepts backwards to classical wisdom. But Western IR theorists have not shied away from attaching labels like realism and liberalism to past writers such as Thucydides, St Thomas Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Kant. Can we dismiss the theory of emptiness and ideas like 'self-nature', 'dependent origination' and 'store consciousness' as too unscientific or other-worldly to deserve a place in IR? In my view, such knowledge should have its place in IR, especially where it helps us understand the contexts, motivations and outcomes of the behaviour of actors embedded within these beliefs and approaches. This fits well with Moshirzadeh's call for 'understanding the contexts within which non-Western IRs are developed'.<sup>77</sup> There are lots of alien ways of producing knowledge out there, including the wisdoms of other civilisations and classical and modern international and regional systems which are wonderfully and creatively 'unscientific'. IR can ignore them at its own peril, especially in its moment of liberation from the disciplining hands of an American social science now being resisted from within.

## Conclusion

The pathways to a more universal discipline of IR that incorporates the ideas, voices and experiences of the world beyond the West are neither singular nor identical. There remain important differences between the structural conditions for the study of IR in the non-Western world and those in the West, which should be recognised. At the same time, both the West and the rest are increasingly diverse within themselves and there are cross-cutting cleavages, interests and identities between these categories. There can be little doubt, as Moshirzadeh notes, that 'studies done from a Third World perspective have similarities to and differences from those done by Western scholars'.<sup>78</sup> I agree with Knud Erik-Jorgensen that, in moving the discipline forward, one should 'acknowledge the actually existing global diversity of practicing the discipline'. But while 'diversity should probably not be cherished for its own sake', the challenge is to 'take the steam out of several claims about universal validity' in existing, Westerncentric IR, and also to 'raise the important issue of the relative merits of the different ways of knowing the "international"'.<sup>79</sup>

One of the key challenges facing IR is our collective failure to understand and foster its development as a two-way dialogue. Power structures and intellectual predispositions,

76. Dalai Lama, *Universe in a Single Atom*, 50.

77. Moshirzadeh, 'A "Hegemonic Discipline"', 343.

78. Moshirzadeh, 'A "Hegemonic Discipline"', 342.

79. Knud Erik Jorgensen, 'The World(s) of IR: Continental Perspectives', 28 April 2010, available at: <http://www.e-ir.info/?p=3991>.

shaped by history and identity, stand in the way of acknowledging the agency and contribution of other voices, even when one knows them to be out there. In her discussion of two powerful traditions of dialogue, Socratic and Habermasian, Professor Hutchings exposes how the concept of “West” in relation to dialogue is not, and has never been, a neutral descriptive term.<sup>80</sup> Since Western political philosophy is one major source of contemporary IR theory, her discussion helps us to better understand one of the more powerful reasons behind Westerncentrism in international relations studies. For example, Professor Hutchings says that the ‘identification of the thought and practice of Ancient Greece with the “West” is, of course, highly contested. Ancient Greek thought did not emerge in a vacuum, but was shaped by, as well as influencing, traditions of African and Asian thought. It is no more “Western” than “non-Western”.’ Yet, how many scholars, especially IR theorists, recognise that first element of the proposition, that is, that Greek thought might indeed have been shaped by African and Asian thought? Otherwise, our IR textbooks would have been written very differently. Similarly, the development of IR theory has rarely been seen as a two-way process with the infusion of the ideas and experiences of other societies and peoples.

In essence, therefore, what I argue here is for the discipline of IR, its theory in particular, to acknowledge its global heritage. Here, Amartya Sen’s point about the roots of democratic dialogue in India is instructive. In discussing his book *The Argumentative Indian*,<sup>81</sup> Sen first points out that the Indian practice of democracy is not just about elections, but also about civic discourse, including a ‘willingness to listen to different points of view’. This upholds the ‘long and written-up argumentative tradition’ in India. To illustrate his point, Sen invokes the argument in *Bhagavad Gita* between Lord Krishna and the warrior Arjuna about the necessity and morality of war (which I have also discussed in this article, before I actually heard Sen’s interview). But Sen also points out that this tradition of dialogue is not unique to India, but ‘actually a global heritage’. To quote his own words: ‘There is a global tradition here, the whole idea that it is all Western is quite mistaken.’ He rejects the underlying assumption that this tradition ‘somehow belongs to the West and then it is for the West to decide whether to impose it or not impose it, rather than recognizing the global background’.<sup>82</sup>

Yet, IR theory has been written and presented, and is still being written and presented, as if it springs almost entirely from an exclusively Western heritage. Only by uncovering the assumptions and power structures that obscure IR theory’s global heritage can we move from dissent to dialogue and then dialogue to discovery. This indeed is the central point of my article.

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80. Hutchings, ‘Dialogue between Whom?’.

81. Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

82. Sen’s interview with National Public Radio in the United States: ‘Amartya Sen, “The Argumentative Indian”’, aired 13 October 2005, available at: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4957424>.