

Two Modes of Dialogue in IR:

Testing on Western *versus* Non-Western Engagement with IR Theory

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Dialogue in International Relations (IR) is neither a unitary concept nor an undifferentiated process; the aim of this paper is to separate out two principal modes of dialogue, their attributes and differing efficacy in contributing to IR theory (IRT). The two mechanisms of ‘competition’ and ‘learning’ will be tested on selected cases of Western and non-Western applications of IRT to Asian international relations. By showing how ‘competition’ leads to sameness, I will explain current monolithic nature of IRT. The main argument I advance is that dialogue is particularly constructive when it operates in the responsive mode of ‘learning’, as contrasted with passive and reactive modes. This paper contributes to enhancing the application of dialogue as a method in IR. The applied analysis indicates that dialogue can be most fruitful via engagement with *existing* theory from Asian perspective. This finding could not be achieved when treating dialogue as a uniform practice.

Dialogue is a powerful tool for progress, so in international relations as a domain of practice (i.r.) as in International Relations as a domain of theorising (IR). I start out from the premise that dialogue is not a unitary concept. This differentiation can explain why dialogue generally brings mixed results. It can also explain why there has been little ‘dialogue’ beyond many *appearances* of dialogue. So often dialogue does not bring what it is expected to: more pluralism into IR theory (IRT). It should not be taken for granted that dialogue makes progress by itself, and that in itself dialogue is a powerful tool. For explaining it, the two modes of dialogue will be helpful. By showing how competition pressures in the field of IR push scholars in ‘one direction’, I aim to demonstrate that it is not a dialogue we have been hoping for. On the contrary, a responsive posture towards *existing* IRT helps to open more paths to ‘success’, without robbing the dialogue of its diversifying power.

Sadly enough, there has been little of *inter*-national dialogue in IR. Far too often two different nationalities speak as if they shared one nationality, with ‘nationality’ in this context understood as geo-culture of IR¹. I propose to refer to dialogue as international when it engages representatives of two geo-cultural *perspectives* rather than nationalities. The two

¹ On ‘geo-cultures of IR’ see Ole Wæver and Arlene B. Tickner, ‘Introduction: Geocultural Epistemologies’, in *International Relations Scholarship Around the World*, eds. Arlene B. Tickner and Ole Wæver (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 1-31.

perspectives will be Western and non-Western. In this paper, I narrow my working definition of non-Western to ‘Asian’. This is because I will be interested in applications of IRT within the field of Asian i.r.

To operationalise the Western/ non-Western division, I look at Asian empirical material (also known as ‘practice’ or ‘experience’) and non-Western scholars. For the latter, I use the inside/ outside categories. Non-Western scholars are those looking at the region from ‘inside’, i.e. from the empirical realities of that region. (I am not prejudiced by the country of their affiliation). Western scholars take an ‘outside’ perspective, which is IRT. Thus, the ultimate criterion for deciding ‘who is who’ is the perspective expressed in written material at hand. Sensitivity to Asian perspective is not a function of nationality. With these working definitions in mind, I propose to search for a conceptualisation of dialogue as it occurs when Western and non-Western approaches to IRT meet each other in the field of Asian international relations. I shall proceed so despite the unsettling fact that ‘[t]he two worlds of area specialty and international relations theory often do not meet’².

IR theory should help us understand reality, argues Jong Kun Choi. ‘We do not know what reality is. If we knew, then we would not need a theory’³. Competing answers at ‘what reality is’ interact and new answers appear. West/ non-West is one dimension of this interaction. How can the West talk *to* – not ‘about’ or ‘across’ – non-West, and vice versa? This is the subject of my analysis. Within this understanding, a dialogue can occur at two levels:

- i) between regional (Asian) practice and ‘global’ (Western) IRT;
- ii) when non-Western scholars engage Western IR community.

Now we may know what dialogue is, but what is the ‘*genuine* dialogue’ that Arlene Tickner and Ole Wæver call for⁴? In the Western/ non-Western dimension, I take for a fruitful dialogue the one that leads to regional theorising – or ‘theorising about a sub-system’, in the

² G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno, ‘Introduction: International Relations Theory and the Search for Regional Stability’, in *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*, eds. G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 1.

³ Jong Kun Choi, ‘Theorising East Asian International Relations in Korea’, *Asian Perspective* 32, no. 1 (2008): 200.

⁴ Ole Wæver and Arlene B. Tickner, ‘Acknowledgements’, in *International Relations Scholarship Around the World*, eds. Arlene B. Tickner and Ole Wæver (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), xiii, my emphasis.

words of Jong Kun Choi⁵. It is a challenge given that ‘conversations’ have been rare *even within the same sub-region*, as noted by Chaesung Chun: ‘Conversations among academia in Northeast Asian countries are rather lacking. IR scholars in Korea, China and Japan have different approaches. ... Without systemic conversations among scholars in the same region, it would be very hard to have regionally coherent IR theories’⁶.

The argument proceeds in four stages. First I briefly survey the state of Western IRT engagement with Asian regionalism, to showcase the problem of how putatively failed approaches are applied to the region over and over again – like in the nightmarish Waltzian scenario, where ‘patters recur, and events repeat themselves endlessly’⁷. Second I outline my analytical framework⁸ which is not Asia-specific. I explain the two different mechanisms of dialogue that come into being depending on the mode: competition *or* learning. Here I also suggest my answer to the question ‘why no non-Western IRT on the horizon’. In the next section, which might be seen as the substantive part, I apply these modes in content analysis of my cases from the literature contributions on Asian regionalism (in English)⁹. Then in the final section, I open-out the debate to address the issue of power and its impact on dialogue. In conclusion, I argue that while facilitating Western/ non-Western dialogue is our current task, ultimately we have to move *beyond* it.

Western theories have failed, but new approaches have not been developed

‘Theories based on Western, and especially West European, experience have been of little use in making sense of Asian regionalism’¹⁰, argues Peter Katzenstein, a leading scholar on the subject. Why, then, have they been so widely used? Katzenstein implies an answer to this question in his later work, *A World of Regions*: ‘My answer to “how the world works” is this:

⁵ Choi, ‘Theorising East Asian International Relations in Korea’, 195.

⁶ Chaesung Chun, ‘Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? Reflections On and From Korea’ in *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives On and Beyond Asia*, eds. Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (London: Routledge, 2010), 85.

⁷ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass., and London: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 66.

⁸ Starting out from a theoretical/ analytical framework is, paradoxically to the topic of this paper, a paradigmatic characteristic of Western IR scholarship.

⁹ Why only in English? The very scope of this paper necessitates the focus on sources accessible in English, which is where Western/ non-Western dialogue can be expected to take place.

¹⁰ Peter J. Katzenstein, ‘Introduction: Asian Regionalism in Comparative Perspective’, in *Network Power: Japan and Asia*, eds. Peter J. Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 5.

“Think of the world as regions organised by America’s imperium”¹¹. Derived from the single extended Atlantic case study, dominant theories have become notorious for failing to explain Asia in many aspects¹². But failure of Western IRTs has not prevented scholars from continuously applying them to Asia, even though in the end result they may be ‘getting Asia wrong’, in David Kang’s vivid words¹³. This persistence can be explained with the widely criticised, but envied at the same time, ‘US theoretical preponderance’¹⁴. Taken together, it comes down to the US being dominant both in i.r. and IR: ‘[T]he study of international relations is conducted primarily from a specific geopolitical site (the United States) that happens to be the most powerful country in both international affairs and the discipline itself’¹⁵.

If Western-style approaches have failed, why new Asia-specific theories have not been developed? It is even more puzzling if we follow Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan in that ‘[r]egional focus can act as a subset of non-Western IRT’¹⁶. One reason for this state might be that theorising about non-Western regions has been neglected¹⁷. The question lingers, ‘[i]f European and North Atlantic *regional* politics could be turned into international relations theory, why not Asian regional politics?’¹⁸. This reminds us that much of today’s ‘global’ IRT started as regional explanations. Given the celebrated richness of empirical material from Asian i.r., the dearth of Asia-specific theories is puzzling. It is equally astounding that so much empirical material from non-Western settings did almost nothing to modify IRT.

However, why also non-Western scholars stubbornly apply theories made in the West, be it the US or Europe? Instead, they could let their diverse backgrounds ‘shine through’ and rely on indigenous knowledge. Ultimately, non-Western scholars tend to make something

¹¹ Peter J. Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), ix.

¹² Apart from Asian regionalism under discussion in this paper, it is also reaction of regional states to the rise of China that features as a prominent example of how theory-driven predictions did not withstand a reality check.

¹³ David C. Kang, ‘Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks’, *International Security* 27, no. 4 (Spring 2003): 57-85.

¹⁴ Shaun Breslin and Richard Higgott, ‘Studying Regions: Learning from the Old, Constructing the New’, *New Political Economy* 5, no. 3 (2000): 341.

¹⁵ Wæver and Tickner, ‘Introduction’, 5.

¹⁶ Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, ‘Conclusion: On the Possibility of a Non-Western International Relations Theory’, in *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives On and Beyond Asia*, eds. Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (London: Routledge, 2010), 230.

¹⁷ Choi, ‘Theorising East Asian International Relations in Korea’, 194.

¹⁸ Amitav Acharya, ‘Will Asia’s Past Be Its Future?’, *International Security* 28, no. 3 (Winter 2004): 163, my emphasis.

completely different out of the same analytical material. It suggests that their observations could work better within distinct analytical frameworks. Certain patterns can be discerned in non-Western writing on Asian regionalism, when we allow for a notion of ‘cultural difference’, which fits rather uncomfortably with ‘American IR’¹⁹. For example, the language of ‘maritime’ or ‘continental power’ becomes *de rigueur* when Asians view their own region²⁰. The stark contrast to this is offered by Katzenstein and his notion of all divides melting down throughout East Asia so as to make room for pan-Asian connections among middle classes²¹.

International markets versus state control, cultural cosmopolitanism versus postcolonial nationalism, urban versus agricultural life, maritime-coastal versus interior-continental geographies – such oppositions do not capture the hybrid East Asia that is emerging Such hybridity undermines established preconceptions about the differences that separate Japan from China, or Orient from Occident... extending beyond all national models and fusing into a new regionalism, East Asia offers us a glimpse of a future marked by unexplored opportunities and new challenges²².

Although non-Western scholars see the reality of their regions differently, they nevertheless strive to ‘squeeze’ their observations into existing IR frameworks. Thus, they use their time only marginally for non-Western theory building or its advocacy.

¹⁹ Masaru Tamamoto, ‘Ambiguous Japan: Japanese National Identity at Century’s End’, in *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*, eds. G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 191. However, in fact American scholars did start to acknowledge the salience of cultural differences: ‘The scholars in this volume share the conviction that a deeper understanding of the effects of cultural divides between Asian and American policymakers is essential if the Pacific rim’s economic and regional security is to be safeguarded’. *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*, eds. G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), back cover.

²⁰ See references to maritime/ continental power in Kak-soo Shin, ‘The Implications of the Rise of China for South Korean Foreign Policy’, *Korea and World Affairs* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 32: ‘South Korea... [s]itting on the fault line between the maritime and continental powers’. See also Byung-kook Kim, ‘Between China, America, and North Korea: South Korea’s Hedging’ in *China’s Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics*, eds. Robert Ross and Zhu Feng (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), 211: ‘maritime American hegemon’, ‘continental Chinese superpower’.

²¹ Of course, not all Asian scholars are realists. I am not arguing for the opposite. I merely want to show styles that exist and go beyond theoretically-oriented choices.

²² Peter J. Katzenstein, ‘East Asia – Beyond Japan’, in *Beyond Japan: The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism*, eds. Peter J. Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraiishi (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), 14.

Two modes of dialogue

Competition leading to sameness: Why no non-Western IRT on the horizon

My method for distinguishing ‘competition’ draws from *mainstream* IR – the Waltzian notion of competition/ sameness. It is to say, some approaches that have been invented to describe interaction among states can be well applied to interactions among IR scholars. In an era of efficiency, such a genuine re-cycling of ideas can offer a fresh perspective in the ongoing debate: why no non-Western IRT on the horizon²³.

Some resemblances of dialogue are based upon pressures produced by competition, which through selection lead to *sameness*. Like in Waltz, ‘[c]ompetition produces a tendency toward sameness of the competitors’²⁴. Hence my answer to the question why no non-Western IRT on the horizon. It is because of competition, spurring imitation, and ultimately leading to sameness that makes for - in the words of Thomas Biersteker - ‘intellectual reproduction’ in the field²⁵: ‘A market socialisation process ensures that Ph.D. candidates are educated in the canon of the discipline in order to enable them to engage in the core debates, as well as to be marketable in the broader discipline of political science’²⁶. This putative socialisation, however, cannot be distinguished from *selection*²⁷. When social change is entirely material, there is new ‘material’ (explanations in the case of IR), but within non-existent ideational structure. In the mode of competition, ‘[s]ocial evolution is all material, and there is no *independent* role for learning, especially social learning’²⁸. Selection eliminates explanations that do not fit, without generating new ones – we would need learning to produce them²⁹.

²³ For competing hypotheses see Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, ‘Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 7, no. 3 (2007): 293-301.

²⁴ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 127.

²⁵ Thomas J. Biersteker, ‘The Parochialism of Hegemony: Challenges for “American” International Relations’, in *International Relations Scholarship Around the World*, eds. Arlene B. Tickner and Ole Wæver, (London: Routledge, 2009), 310.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 318.

²⁷ Analogously Alexander Wendt dismissed Waltzian ‘socialisation’ as selection. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁸ Shiping Tang, ‘From Offensive to Defensive Realism: A Social Evolutionary Interpretation of China’s Security Strategy’, in *China’s Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics*, eds. Robert Ross and Zhu Feng (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), 143.

²⁹ Here I borrow from *Ibid.*

In the end result, scholars all over the world join in the same game of making it into the ‘publication system’, as Ole Wæver calls the edifice of journals³⁰. The rules of this *system* are set by the Western academia. In the mode of competition, scholars knowledgeable of Asian i.r. make use of it by applying Western theory to their cases, thus introducing ‘new material’ for IRT to explain. It is competition, because the guiding principle of this mode is ‘get published!’. Competing for attention of Western journals, core and non-core scholars end up doing the same: applying/ testing Western IRT across their cases. Non-Western IRT has not made it to be a part of this game.

Within the Western publication system, selection of ideas takes place, and non-Western ideas are on the first front to be selected out: ‘The more *theoretical* a journal, the less likely it will be to make room for third world contributions’³¹. Yet, ‘[y]ou become a star only by doing theory’³², as Wæver has rightly put it. A scholar, whether Western or non-Western, educated abroad or at home, wants to make an *impact* on the discipline - that is become successful³³. Thus, it is a more rewarding enterprise to study mainstream IR than local approaches of Iran or Ghana. To participate in the global IR discussion (and again, publish in top journals), a scholar needs to engage with dominant approaches, in a fashion that is perpetuated by preferences of leading journals. They happen to be Western.

In my explanation, non-Western scholars accept the dominance of Western IRT *not* ‘largely unconsciously’³⁴; instead, they are acutely aware of how competition *via* leading journals functions. It has to do with the fact that American political science claims IR as its sub-field and equates ‘scholarship’ with general theory³⁵. ‘The Holy Grail for social theorists is the highest level of generalisation about the largest number of events’³⁶. Because ‘the ideal for political scientists in the United States is economics (and ultimately the natural

³⁰ Ole Wæver, ‘Still a Discipline After All These Debates?’, in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, eds. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): 304.

³¹ Arlene B. Tickner, ‘Seeing IR Differently: Notes from the Third World’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 32, no. 2 (2003): 301, my emphasis.

³² Wæver, ‘Still a Discipline After All These Debates?’, 306.

³³ The author of this paper is undoubtedly driven by the same competition pressure, which, I hope, does not diminish the relevance of the argument elaborated here.

³⁴ Cf. Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, ‘Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction’: 294.

³⁵ Tamamoto, ‘Ambiguous Japan’, 191.

³⁶ Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, ‘Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction’, 291.

sciences)³⁷, scholars who contribute towards reaching this goal are better positioned to publish in leading journals.

To be sure, in this mode dialogue still takes place. It is a dialogue between Western theories and non-Western practices. It is a question of whether Chinese foreign policy is defensive or offensive realist³⁸; whether Japan is a ‘normal’ country³⁹; whether ASEAN can ‘socialise’ regional powers⁴⁰. For the most part, Western theory remains intact throughout this application process; it comes and goes *the same* (passive mode) – or it is rejected (reactive mode). Competition has not brought us closer to non-Western IRT. Injection of primary regional material into IR has put Western IRT under heavy strain, but it has resisted without evolving.

Learning from the Asian experience for the sake of theory-building

First, why would we need a dialogue to build non-Western theory, if it could simply be projected from indigenous knowledge *via* non-Western ‘monologue’? As Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan write, ‘the development of non-Western IRT need not be a matter of projecting pure indigenous ideas, nor should it be a matter of wholesale adoption/ borrowing of foreign ones⁴¹, but that it can proceed through *mutual adaptations and localisation between the two*⁴². Thus, we need a dialogue.

³⁷ Ole Wæver, ‘The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations’, *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (Autumn 1998), 707.

³⁸ See discussion in Tang, ‘From Offensive to Defensive Realism’.

³⁹ ‘Japan is an economic great power that thus far has neglected to develop the commensurate military power and diplomatic initiative typically expected of a traditional nation-state’. Ikenberry and Mastanduno, ‘Introduction’, 2.

⁴⁰ Yaqing Qin and Ling Wei, ‘Structures, Processes, and the Socialisation of Power: East Asian Community-building and the Rise of China’, in *China’s Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics*, eds. Robert Ross and Zhu Feng (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008).

⁴¹ The question emerges whether ‘learning’ is overlapping with copying. Imitation, or copying, could be an early stage of non-Western IRT building, as observed in the case of Chinese IR scholarship in the 1980s ‘learning-copying period’. See Yiwei Wang, ‘China: Between Copying and Constructing’, in *International Relations Scholarship Around the World*, eds. Arlene B. Tickner and Ole Wæver (London and New York: Routledge, 2009). From this stage scholars can move on to a more responsive mode of engagement with IRT. Non-West could learn from the West, then create its own IRT before finally contributing to world’s IRT (along the lines of Oe’s argument, in Tamamoto, ‘Ambiguous Japan’, 199). In my explanation, I do *not*, however, conflate learning with copying.

⁴² Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, ‘Conclusion: On the Possibility of a Non-Western International Relations Theory’, 233, my emphasis.

Via 'learning' from the Asian experience, we generalise from it for the sake of (regional) theory-building. Shiping Tang advocates starting out from the empirical material found in Asia. This approach is in my definition non-Western. 'Contrary to the increasingly deductive approach in the United States and the grand theorising approach in Europe that have traditionally paid less attention to empirical facts, we believe that empirical facts provide the ultimate foundation for theorising about international politics'⁴³.

Learning is an evolutionary process⁴⁴. Evolution involves a question of time. Learning is a responsive mode of approaching IRT. It sees Asian reality as it is, but it also takes IRT for what it is – and responds to it. This opens a path for empirical material from Asia to make an impact on current IRT. For a scholarship that aims to be regarded as IR scholarship, generalising from Asian experience must still take place within its parameters. IRT, however, often 'goes' as different from what it was when it first 'came'.

Now I would like to make one caveat. What I am saying seems to indicate that I consider development of non-Western IRT as implausible. This could be criticised as a status-quo bias inherent in my approach, even though I am arguing for learning. In answer to the criticism that I pre-empt, I consider non-Western IRT as possible, in the sense that 'the social environment in which these new states are socialised must be not only one that rewards or selects states that copy (...), but one that may also reward or support "deviant" heterodox behaviour'⁴⁵. I consider that purely non-Western approaches can emerge from wholesale rejection (in the reactive mode) of current IRT. They might find readership in non-Western outlets, even if English-speaking, like emerging journals of this type in Asia. But the identity of such non-Western approaches would lie outside of IR. 'However, when attempting to develop "post-Western IR" that takes into account more adequately the concepts and issues that matter in other parts of the world, a new dilemma immediately emerges: this kind of scholarship will be stronger if recognised by the discipline as being IR'⁴⁶.

⁴³ Shiping Tang, 'Introduction: Understanding "Living with China"', in *Living with China: Regional States and China through Crises and Turning Points*, eds. Shiping Tang, Mingjiang Li, and Amitav Acharya (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 3.

⁴⁴ Tang, 'From Offensive to Defensive Realism', 146-147.

⁴⁵ Alastair I. Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980-2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 5.

⁴⁶ Wæver, 'Still a Discipline After All These Debates?', 303.

Asian approaches to talk about Asian international relations

When talking in an ‘Asian’ voice, scholars from the region have to talk to a public (IR scholars) that are not familiar with their style of exposition and expect a ‘standard’ political science explanation. To pre-empt it, Masaru Tamamoto warns in an acutely self-conscious, non-Western voice about his contribution: ‘What follows is not the typical international relations theory paper Elsewhere in this volume, Thomas Berger presents a more political science approach to Japanese culture and identity and their effects on Japanese international behaviour. I leave to the reader the task of determining the pros and cons of the differing approaches’⁴⁷. Generally we are not offered this kind of disclaimer, but still have to think of the ‘pros and cons’ as Tamamoto advises. In this section I will present three examples that are dealing with Asian cooperation (i), by focusing on Japan-Korea relationship (ii). The first two cases cannot withstand the competition with ‘proper’⁴⁸, Western IRT application. They become selected out and remain at the margin or outside of ‘proper’ IR scholarship. The final example lies, in contrast, within Western IRT and it contributes to dialogue with higher efficacy.

Asian Liberalism: ‘Describing’ what has not happened

A paradigmatic example of an Asian approach to studying Asian cooperation is *promoting* Japan-Korea democratic and liberal alliance. ‘While the controversy surrounding democratic peace theory has received much international attention, Asia has figured minimally in these debates’, observes Acharya⁴⁹. It does not mean that scholars have not applied the ‘democratic’ logic to Asia. Only they did so differently.

Asian analyses of the Japan-Korea relationship often proceed in the normative ‘should-do’ or speculative ‘would-be’ mode. This style has gained certain popularity even in academic writing, as we see in the following example: ‘One plausible option for the successful integration in Northeast Asia is to take a gradual approach that will start from a Japan-South Korea FTA. This *would* bring together the two biggest democratic, capitalist

⁴⁷ Tamamoto, ‘Ambiguous Japan’, 191.

⁴⁸ I borrow such a use of the adjective ‘proper’ from Shaun Breslin and Richard Higgott, ‘Studying the Regions’, 344 (they refer to ‘proper’ regionalism).

⁴⁹ Amitav Acharya, *Asia Rising: Who Is Leading?* (Singapore, World Scientific, 2008), 144.

economies in East Asia'⁵⁰. It has also been fairly popular in academic-cum-policymaking outlets (alike *East Asia Forum*, run from the Australian National University)⁵¹. This style of exposition poses to students of Asian i.r. one central problem. Namely, Japan-Korea bilateral axis is *in reality* one of the weakest imaginable foundations for Asian cooperation. Thus, a text advancing such an argument has to be read as a policy recommendation rather than IR analysis. It has quite profound implications. To a large extent, it renders the text basically unusable for students of IR.

‘The idea of reappropriation in a different regional setting is one of the things that should be paid more attention to in East Asia’⁵², argues Takashi Inoguchi, a leading IR scholar in Japan. Non-Western IR scholars often produce ‘translations’ that cannot be found in the (Western) original⁵³; this in brief constitutes the idea of reappropriation.

Preoccupation with (in)equality: How history bears on power

Equality is a popular variable for Asian scholars studying Asian regionalism. Tamamoto writes: ‘Japan today is a rather equal place This Japan has the chance to forge an Asian regionalism based on the idea of equality’⁵⁴. To make the argument, Yoshihide Soeya offers an alternative view of Japan as not a great power, but rather Korea’s equal – both situated between China and the US. ‘A genuinely cooperative relationship as true equals’ between Japan and Korea would mark an ‘epoch-making’ moment for East Asian regionalism⁵⁵. In about two decades, ‘twin states’ will coexist in East Asia – a degraded great power and upgraded middle power. This similarity - adding up to the standard argument of democracy and liberalism - bodes explicitly well for Japan-Korea relationship, and by extension

⁵⁰ Young Jong Choi, ‘Northeast Asian Regional Integration: Regional Theories, Current Realities and Future Prospects’, in *Political Economy of Northeast Asian Regionalism: Political Conflict and Economic Integration*, eds. Jehoon Park, T. J. Pempel, and Gerard Roland (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2008), 54, my emphasis.

⁵¹ For recent examples see: Yoichi Funabashi, ‘Japan-Korea FTA cornerstone of the East Asian Community’, *East Asia Forum*, April 20, 2010; or Masao Okonogi, ‘Japan-Korea relations in a new era’, *East Asia Forum*, August 24, 2010.

⁵² Takashi Inoguchi, ‘Japan, Korea, and Taiwan: Are One Hundred Flowers About to Blossom?’, in *International Relations Scholarship Around the World*, eds. Arlene B. Tickner and Ole Wæver (London: Routledge, 2009), 100.

⁵³ Tamamoto, ‘Ambiguous Japan’, 191.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁵⁵ Yoshihide Soeya, ‘An East Asian Community and Japan-China Relations’, *East Asia Forum*, May 17, 2010.

cooperation in Asia⁵⁶. Yoichi Funabashi argues for Asian regionalism that is horizontal or ‘equal among nations’; it should be championed by two ‘closest neighbours’, Japan and Korea⁵⁷.

*In*equality, on the other hand, becomes a variable that synthesises historical animosity and economic disparity, with Japan at the heart of the problem: ‘Many of the problems of Japan in Asia have been results of the inequality of power between Japan and the rest of the Asian countries’⁵⁸. Diminishing inequality, therefore, it seems to augur well for cooperation in Asia. But because history cannot be annihilated, ‘equality’ as it is understood by Asian IR scholars, cannot fully emerge even in the presence of power symmetry.

Counter-example: How to talk about Japan-Korea ties in the language of IR

Victor Cha’s *Alignment despite Antagonism*⁵⁹ is an exercise in theory-refinement from Asian perspective. Cha has not built an ‘Asian theory’, but merely enriched a Western method: ‘This more precisely delineated version of Realism can explain seemingly anomalous behaviour among East Asian states and, as a result, helps to close the gap between Western methods and Asian experiences’⁶⁰. It may not satisfy proponents of ‘Asian IRT’. However, he has made it to publish in recognised journals, and his prize-winning book is widely acclaimed, and quoted also by those who have not even noticed the modest allusion to ‘Western methods and Asian experiences’ on page 5. While it cannot satisfy ‘radical’ proponents of non-Western IRT, it is something that works. We can therefore distinguish between ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ non-Western IRT⁶¹. By allowing for such a bridge – talking in the language of IR – between Asian experience and IRT, we can expect highly ‘publishable’ dialogue to emerge⁶².

Need to talk in the language of IR

⁵⁶ Okonogi, ‘Japan-Korea relations in a new era’.

⁵⁷ Funabashi, ‘Japan-Korea FTA cornerstone of the East Asian Community’.

⁵⁸ Tamamoto, ‘Ambiguous Japan’, 208.

⁵⁹ Victor D. Cha, *Alignment despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁶⁰ Cha, *Alignment despite Antagonism*, 5.

⁶¹ Alexander Wendt makes a distinction between ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ constructivism, arguing that his own approach cannot satisfy the latter. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 1-2.

⁶² A prominent example of how IRT as a language makes dialogue possible is the Kang/ Acharya (2003/ 2004) debate in *International Security*.

The applied analysis indicates that Asian voices can be best heard - and *even* listened to - when engaging with *existing* IRT. Criticising and rejecting IRT does not work as a fruitful dialogue; by doing so, scholars with a non-Western perspective still cannot escape the selection pressures. It is a disciplinary cul-de-sac, a contradiction to the development of IR as a discipline. Simply dismissing IRT as wanting in terms of explanatory power is a ‘reactive’ mode of dialogue that does not take us far. Even criticising or going ‘beyond’ Western IRT starts from applying it. Thus, scholarship that aims to redress America-centric imbalance in IRT bites its own tail by measuring non-Western IR with a Western yardstick.

The following opinion about IR scholarship in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) points directly to the sources of harsh judgements of ‘peripheral’ IR scholarship: It is not theoretical enough. ‘In general, the discipline [in CEE] also continues to lack strong academic standards and local foundations. Journal articles are usually written without reference to *any explicit theoretical framework*’⁶³. A ‘theoretical framework’ is built from the repertoire of Western IRT tools. Scholars who aim for ‘international’ recognition overcome local atheoretical predilections by learning Western IRT and applying it.

Examples from economics – and economic development theory in particular – demonstrate that, cumulatively, best effect is achieved when non-Western perspectives try to engage the existing body of theory⁶⁴. ‘Communicability’ with what constitutes IR as a discipline is thus essential. For non-Western scholars, the challenge is to make their research ‘communicable’⁶⁵ to the ‘global’ IR community. The feature that obstructs Asian-Western dialogue within IRT is the Asian style of writing or the ‘problem-solving prescriptions for current affairs’⁶⁶. In the West, this type of exposition simply lacks what might be called ‘disciplinary legitimacy’⁶⁷. Again, the much criticised disciplinary straitjacket in fact facilitates dialogue, enabling scholars to ‘talk’ to each other across diverse geo-cultural perspectives.

⁶³ Petr Drulák, Jan Karlas, and Lucie Königová, ‘Central and Eastern Europe: Between Continuity and Change’, in *International Relations Scholarship Around the World*, eds. Arlene B. Tickner and Ole Wæver (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 244, my emphasis.

⁶⁴ Choi, ‘Theorising East Asian International Relations in Korea’, 209.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁶⁷ Tamamoto, ‘Ambiguous Japan’, 192.

Regionally-based IRT communities beyond the West can learn much from the European experience. European Union (EU) studies have almost grown beyond IR(T). They talk in their own language, and they talk to each other:

Like many disciplines, professional career advancement in EU studies concentrates energies and activity within the peer community. This is almost certainly at the expense of contributing to wider disciplinary comparative studies. Thus we return to the need for regional-based groups/communities of scholars to talk more within a disciplinary framework in order to provide a basis for dialogue and comparison⁶⁸.

Although EU scholarship *per se* does not offer a ‘European school of IR(T)’, it might be the parameter of what would happen if regional approaches became so strong as to separate themselves from general IR scholarship. At the moment, the closest to it might be ASEAN scholarship, as implied by David Jones and Michael Smith in their pungent treatment thereof⁶⁹.

Power and dialogue

Power bears on the outcomes of dialogue. Is ideal dialogue the one in which the ‘better argument’⁷⁰ always wins? Even if it is, material forces - like geography and power - affect intellectual developments⁷¹. Dialogue, just as any other social process does not happen in a vacuum: ‘... it happens within the international environment, with both material forces and ideational forces in play’⁷². Top journals are the ultimate sites of power in IR; publishing in them opens the door to the field’s most coveted positions – not vice versa. They decide what a ‘good argument’ in IR is.

Do the less powerful always have to learn – or indeed be taught? Social processes surely are affected by power disparities. Because the sites of dialogue are predominantly Western (like this conference), everything seems to speak against the weaker side. If IRT is like a foreign language that has to be learnt, ‘core’ IR scholars have a double advantage. IR communities beyond the West display the tendency to be monopolised by a few or indeed one

⁶⁸ Shaun Breslin and Richard Higgott, ‘Studying Regions’, 343.

⁶⁹ David M. Jones and Michael L. R. Smith, ‘Making Process, Not Progress: ASEAN and the Evolving East Asian Regional Order’, *International Security* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 148-184.

⁷⁰ Thomas Risse, “‘Let’s Argue!’: Communicative Action in World Politics’, *International Organisation* 54, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 16.

⁷¹ Tang, ‘From Offensive to Defensive Realism’, 145.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 148.

scholar who has managed to master the two ‘languages’ – English and IRT. In this sense, power asymmetries have to be understood as both - theory and language.

If knowing English and operating from the ‘centre’ (IRT) is sufficient to make a stellar career in today’s IR, is there anything to motivate Western scholars to go beyond the West? In other words, is all the job of diversifying IRT to be made by ‘peripheral’ scholars? After the Cold War, the trend in America has been to downsize foreign language training in favour of mathematics and statistics⁷³. The question is important, given such prosaic barriers like language. First of all, is a Western scholar – trained but in IR methods and theories – in a position to play a pro-active role in the dialogue? It seems that scholars who ‘go native’ in the region, learn language(s) and acquire broad knowledge of so-called local conditions, tend to lean towards area studies, distancing themselves from theory: ‘Those who construct abstract theories dream of a future in which politics all over the world are alike; academics in the field of area studies dream of a past when each locale in the world was largely isolated’⁷⁴. If power is an opportunity ‘not to learn’⁷⁵, a dearth of avid learners populates the core as well as emerging sites of power⁷⁶.

Need to engage Asia(ns) directly

Western scholars have been putatively unwilling to ‘engage Asia directly’⁷⁷. According to the already mainstream belief, ‘the theoretical insights of international relations need to be brought more closely into contact with the rich history and complex reality of the Asia-Pacific region’⁷⁸. Much has been said about lack of original data collection by Western scholars⁷⁹, who have ‘tailor-made the regional cases of the relevant issues to fit what their theory

⁷³ Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, x.

⁷⁴ Ibid., xi.

⁷⁵ Deutsch, as cited in Hanns W. Maull, ‘The European Security Architecture: Conceptual Lessons for Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation’, in *Reassessing Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific: Competition, Congruence, and Transformation*, eds. Amitav Acharya and Evelyn Goh (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 2007), 270.

⁷⁶ China’s (current) sense of bigness might obstruct its ability to ‘learn’. Alice D. Ba, ‘Who’s Socialising Whom? Complex Engagement in Sino-ASEAN Relations’, *The Pacific Review* 19, no. 2 (June 2006): 171.

⁷⁷ David C. Kang, ‘Hierarchy, Balancing, and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations’, *International Security* 28, no. 3 (Winter 2004), 174.

⁷⁸ Ikenberry and Mastanduno, ‘Introduction’, 1.

⁷⁹ Tang, ‘From Offensive to Defensive Realism’, 143, ft. 7.

dictates'⁸⁰. The task for Western scholars is to pay more attention to empirical material found in Asia, thus engaging the region directly.

Scholars from non-Western regions may find themselves too busy with national or at best regional 'problem solving', and treat grand theorising as a 'luxury'⁸¹. It does not mean that their policymaking proclivity needs to be disposed of. 'By telling their side of the story, they project a distinctive regional voice in the ongoing debate'⁸². For Western scholars doing regional research, the challenge is to engage in dialogue with problem solving-prescriptions by incorporating regional sensitivities into analytical lenses. Simply dismissing historical animosity variable, for instance, as non-scientific leads to the kind of research that lacks a crucial link to the reality – 'the real world'⁸³ that local scholars wrestle with on a daily basis.

Conclusion: Neither Western nor non-Western

The central argument I advance is that learning is a very effective mode – as long as it can satisfy one condition. It needs to speak in the language of (established) IR and it has to make some connection to the (established) IRT. This is a bridge that must be built in order to project Asian knowledge to IR. This paper finds that building non-Western IRT would do no good to prospects for dialogue. Just as the European example indicates, national/ regional schools would migrate to *sui generis* boxes only to further obstruct disciplinary conversations.

Approaches stemming from Europe are not universal; we need some that can 'travel'⁸⁴. 'First, European-derived theories in general and realist theories in particular frequently have difficulty explaining Asian international relations'⁸⁵. Therefore, approaches that draw from universal (social) science – like social evolution⁸⁶ or something *à la*

⁸⁰ Choi, 'Theorising East Asian International Relations in Korea', 202.

⁸¹ Ibid., 211.

⁸² Tang, 'Introduction', 2.

⁸³ Ibid., 1.

⁸⁴ Jeffrey T. Checkel, 'Social Mechanisms and Regional Cooperation: Are Europe and the EU really All That Different?', in *Crafting Cooperation: Regional International Institutions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 243.

⁸⁵ Kang, 'Hierarchy, Balancing, and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations', 165.

⁸⁶ Shiping Tang offers a 'social evolution' lens and grounds it in IR. Tang, 'From Offensive to Defensive Realism'.

‘institutional darwinism’⁸⁷ – may be gaining currency. At the level of methods and approaches, this is a trend that we should be on the lookout for. At the absolute frontier, the Western/ non-Western IRT debate is already on its way out. ‘Instead of drawing a sharp distinction between what is European and what is Asian, theoretical perspectives on Asian regionalism should explore commonalities that are quite substantial and would constitute the core of a universal corpus of knowledge about regionalism in world politics’⁸⁸, powerfully argues Acharya. New emerging theories, at this juncture, are poised to be neither Western nor non-Western.

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⁸⁷ T.J. Pempel, ‘Soft Balancing, Hedging, and Institutional Darwinism: The Economic-Security Nexus and East Asian Regionalism’, *Journal of East Asian Studies* 10, issue 2 (2010): 209-238.

⁸⁸ Amitav Acharya, ‘Theoretical Perspectives on International Relations in Asia’, in *International Relations of Asia*, eds. David Shambaugh and Michael Yahuda (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 76.