

Opening up the debate over 'non-western' international relations

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journals.sagepub.com/home/pol**Yong-Soo Eun**

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Abstract

This opening article maps the terrain of the ongoing debate over various forms of 'non-Western' International Relations (IR) theory-building enterprise with the aim not only of providing contextual background for the Special Section, but also, and more importantly, of identifying what is missing in the overall debate. It is often pointed out that IR as a discipline is 'too Western centric', and that much of mainstream IR theory is 'simply an abstraction of Western history'. In this respect, many IR scholars have called for 'broadening' the theoretical horizon of IR while problematising the Western parochialism of the discipline, and it is increasingly acknowledged that IR needs to embrace a wider range of histories, experiences, and theoretical perspectives, particularly those outside of the West. However, despite such a meaningful debate over non-Western IR theorisation and its recent contributions, several critical questions and issues still remain unclear and under-explored. I suggest that there are (at least) three sets of questions that require more careful attention in our discussion. First, does IR need to embrace theoretical pluralism? Second, to what extent has contemporary IR become pluralistic? Third, should IR pursue the promotion of dialogue and engagement across theoretical and spatial divides? Of course, each of these questions invites several subsequent questions. This discussion will serve as a useful point from which more substantial and exciting bearings may be taken in enriching the ongoing debate and moving IR towards becoming a more pluralistic discipline.

Keywords

Diversity, 'Global IR', IR theory, 'non-western' international relations, West-centrism

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International Relations (IR) 'marginalizes those outside the core countries of the West' (Acharya, 2014: 647). That is, IR as a discipline is 'too Western centric' (Acharya, 2016; Tickner, 2013). IR scholarship has long been focused on questions of 'importance to the great powers of the Eurocentric Westphalian system' (Tickner, 2016: 158); much of mainstream IR theory is 'simply an abstraction of Western history' (Buzan, 2016: 156).

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Furthermore, IR continues to seek ‘to parochially celebrate or defend or promote the West as the proactive subject of, and as the highest or ideal normative referent in, world politics’ (Hobson, 2012: 1; see also Lake, 2016; Ling, 2013; Tickner, 2013).

In this respect, many IR scholars have called for ‘broadening’ the theoretical or discursive horizon of IR while problematising the Western parochialism of the discipline, and it is increasingly acknowledged that IR needs to embrace a wider range of histories, experiences, knowledge claims, and theoretical perspectives, particularly those outside of the West (Acharya, 2017). In addition, calling for more diversity in IR theory and greater pluralism in the discipline is justified due to not only the under-representation (or marginalisation) of non-Western worlds in the theoretical study of IR, but also the intrinsic complexity, variety, and contingency inherent in twenty-first-century global politics (Breslin, 2011; Ferguson, 2015; Katzenstein, 2011, 2012; Lake, 2016; Paul, 2016). Of course, as will be discussed in detail in the following section, contemporary events such as the rise of China have contributed to the development of alternative (or indigenous) theoretical frameworks (Eun, 2018a; Ling, 2014; Qin, 2011, 2016a; Yan, 2011; Zhang, 2012; Zhao, 2009).

Mapping the terrain of the ongoing debate over ‘non-western’ IR

In these contexts, whether there are any substantial merits to developing a ‘non-Western’ IR theory and what such a theory would (or should) look like are topics of heated debate in contemporary IR. This interest in the theorisation of ‘non-Western’ IR results largely from discontent with the epistemic value of mainstream theories, namely realism, liberalism, and constructivism, all of which have ‘Western’ – or, more specifically, ‘Eurocentric’ (Patomaki, 2007) – analytical or normative underpinnings (Acharya and Buzan, 2017; Johnston, 2012). Western/Eurocentric theories, the criticism goes, misrepresent and therefore misunderstand much of ‘the rest of the world’ (Acharya, 2014: 647). In addition, advocates of ‘non-Western’ IR theory building often point out that Asia has cultures, institutions, norms, and worldviews that are inherently different from those derived from or advanced in Europe.

Long-standing interests and growing endorsement

Consider, for example, David Kang’s critique. In his well-known piece, ‘Getting Asia Wrong’, Kang (2003: 57–58) calls for ‘new analytical frameworks’, noting that ‘most international relations theories derived from the European experience of the past four centuries ... do a poor job as they are applied to Asia’. Critiques of this kind have long served as a starting premise in theoretical studies on Asian IR. Almost two decades ago, Peter Katzenstein (1997: 1) wrote as follows: ‘Theories based on Western, and especially West European, experience have been of little use in making sense of Asian regionalism’. Similarly, Jeffrey Herbst (2000: 23) commented that ‘[i]nternational relations theory, derived from an extended series of case studies of Europe, has become notorious for falling short of accounting for the richness and particularity of Asia’s regional politics’. Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan have made a similar argument in their edited volume, *Non-Western International Relations Theory*: ‘The puzzle for us is that the sources of international relations theory conspicuously fail to correspond to the global distribution of its subjects. Our question is “why is there no non-Western international theory?”’ (Acharya and Buzan, 2010: 1).

Here, China's rise has added momentum to long-standing attempts to build new or indigenous theoretical frameworks – especially within the Chinese IR community. Yaqing Qin at the China Foreign Affairs University argues that 'Chinese IR' theory 'is likely and inevitabl[y] to emerge along with the great economic and social transformation that China has been experiencing' (Qin, 2007: 313). The scholarly practices of building an IR theory 'with Chinese characteristics' are a case in point (Callahan, 2001, 2008). Although consensus on what 'Chinese characteristics' actually are has yet to be determined, many Chinese (and non-Chinese) scholars hold that the establishment of a Chinese IR theory or a 'Chinese School' of IR is desirable or 'natural' (Kristensen and Nielsen, 2013: 19; Qin, 2016b); in this light, Confucianism, Marxism, '*Tianxia*' (all-under-heaven), and the Chinese tributary system are all cited as theoretical resources for Chinese IR (see, e.g. Kang, 2010; Qin, 2016a; Song, 2001; Wan, 2012; Wang, 2011; Xuetong, 2011; Zhang, 2012; Zhao, 2009).

In short, there has been a great deal of studies that aim to ameliorate the Western parochialism of IR. This trend includes a strong and increasing commitment to the development of 'national schools' among non-Western (in particular, Chinese) IR scholars. In other words, many IR scholars in non-Western countries have made considerable attempts to discern their nations' unique social ontologies or historical-cultural traditions in their quest to develop an indigenous IR theory or 'non-Western' IR.

Criticisms

At the same time, a number of empirical, epistemological, and normative criticisms have been raised against attempts to develop a Chinese IR theory and (by extension) 'non-Western' IR. Empirically, Asian IR are not fundamentally different from those of Europe, in the sense that anarchy, survival, and the balance of power have been the key operating principles of state-to-state interactions since the pre-modern period. For example, based on a detailed archive analysis of China's foreign relations under the Song and Ming dynasties, Yuan-kang Wang concludes that in the 'anarchical' international environment at that time 'Confucian culture did not constrain ... [Chinese] leaders' decisions to use force; in making such decisions, leaders have been mainly motivated by their assessment of the balance of power between China and its adversary' (Wang, 2011: 181). This finding leads Wang to defend the theoretical utility of structural realism based on the Westphalian system.

Epistemologically, too, critics point out that it is 'unscientific' to emphasise and/or incorporate a particular culture or the worldview of a particular nation or region into IR theory, for a legitimately 'scientific' theory should seek 'universality, generality' (Choi, 2008; Song, 2001). Mainstream (positivist) IR theorists and methodologists argue that IR studies ought to seek observable general patterns of states' external behaviour, develop empirically verifiable 'covering law' explanations, and test their hypotheses through cross-case comparisons. For example, Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba make it clear that generality is the single most important measure of progress in IR, stressing that 'the question is less whether ... a theory is false or not ... than *how much of the world the theory can help us explain*' (King et al., 1994: 101, emphasis in original). From this perspective, any attempt to develop an indigenous IR theory, be it non-Western or Western, is suspect because it delimits the general applicability of theory. In the case of a Chinese IR theory, criticism of this kind can increasingly be found in studies by younger Chinese IR scholars. According to Xinning Song (2001: 68), Chinese scholars, especially

younger ones who have studied in the West, think that it is ‘unscientific or unnecessary to emphasize the so-called Chinese characteristics’. A similar criticism can be found among Korean IR scholars in regard to attempts to build a ‘Korean-style’ IR theory (Cho, 2015). Critics of the ‘Korean School’ of IR frequently ask how can we make a distinctively Korean IR theory *while* trying to be as generalisable as possible? In Jongkun Choi’s (2008: 215) words, ‘any theorising based on Korea’s unique historical experiences must be tested under the principle of generality’.

Normative criticisms of attempts to build a ‘non-Western’ IR theory highlight the relationship between power and knowledge. Critics point out that although theory-building enterprises from the perspective of the ‘non-West’ commonly begin by problematising Western-dominated IR, the ongoing scholarly practices and discourses associated with ‘non-Western’ IR can also entail (or reproduce) the same hierarchic and exclusionary structure of knowledge production, which can fall prey to particular national or regional interests. For example, in his discussion of Chinese visions of world order, William Callahan doubts the applicability of ‘Tianxia’. He claims that what the notion of Tianxia does is ‘blur’ the conceptual and practical ‘boundaries between empire and globalism, nationalism, and cosmopolitanism’. Rather than help us move towards a ‘post-hegemonic’ world, Tianxia serves to be a philosophical foundation upon which ‘China’s hierarchical governance is updated for the twenty-first century’ (Callahan, 2008: 749). Supporting this view, Ching-Chang Chen (2011: 1) argues that:

re-envisioning IR in Asia is not about discovering or producing as many “indigenous” national schools of IR as possible. Scholars ... must also recognise and resist the pitfalls of equating the mere increase of non-Western voices with the genuine democratisation of the field, if they are to live up to their responsibility to jointly construct a non-hegemonic discipline.

In a similar vein, Josuke Ikeda (2011: 12–13) argues that ‘there needs to be a “post-Western” turn rather [than a] “non-Western” [one] ... in order to address another kind of “Westfailure” in IR theory’. In short, critics argue that although it is our ‘responsibility’ to make IR more pluralistic and democratic, ‘most intellectual endeavors to construct non-Western IRT in Asia run the risk of inviting nativism’ (Chen, 2011: 16). Most recently, Andrew Hurrell (2016: 149–150) has added that although developing culturally specific ways of understanding the world ‘undoubtedly encourages greater pluralism’, attempts to do so can also lead to a national and regional ‘inwardness’ that works to reproduce the very ‘ethnocentricities’ that are being challenged.

Response: ‘Global IR’

Sharing these concerns, more recent studies have begun to pay greater attention to the globalisation of IR in an attempt to render the discipline more inclusive. It sets out to safeguard against a tug of war between Western and non-Western IR and a subsumption of one of them in favour of the other. Amitav Acharya is probably the most passionate scholar in this regard. In his presidential address at the annual convention of the International Studies Association in 2014, Acharya explained what ‘Global IR’ is or should be. His background assumption is this: IR does ‘not reflect the voices, experiences ... and contributions of the vast majority of the societies and states in the world’ (Acharya, 2014: 647). Yet, instead of arguing for a counter (i.e. ‘non-Western’) approach, he presented the possibility of a ‘Global IR’ that transcends the divide between the ‘West and

the Rest'. In his views, IR should be 'a truly inclusive' discipline that recognises its multiple and diverse foundations. What 'Global IR' calls for is not to discard or disavow Western-centric IR, but rather to render it more inclusive and broader, so that it reflects voices and experiences outside the West more fully (Acharya, 2016). In this regard, Acharya and Buzan (2017) have recently noted as follows:

while the development of national schools can contribute to the goal of a Global IR ... our key concern about any national school is whether it can 'deprovincialize' – i.e. travel beyond the national or regional context from which it is derived in the first place. (Acharya and Buzan, 2017: 361)

What is missing in the debate?

To summarise, the terrain of the ongoing debate over 'broadening' the theoretical horizons of IR embraces a wide range of socio-epistemic concerns with varying emphases; there are meaningful contributions and developments in this scholarly endeavour, be it 'non-Western', 'post-Western', or 'Global' IR.

However, despite such a significant effort and discussion to go beyond the disciplinary dominance of Western IR scholarship, several critical questions and issues still remain unclear and under-explored. For example, neither advocates nor critics properly address acute issues and contested implications associated with various forms of 'non-Western' IR theorisation, namely theoretical pluralism. Although calls for the 'democratisation', 'globalisation', and 'diversity' of IR theory frequently appear in discussions, they remain a plea or an aspiration without specifying how they can be realised. Further, diversity in IR theory is often deemed to be an appropriate premise upon which the attempts to search for national or regional 'characteristics' are undertaken without pondering the manifold and contested implications that should actually be drawn from the premise.

The remainder of this article intends to identify what is missing in the debate. I suggest that there are (at least) three sets of questions that require more careful attention in our discussion. First, does IR need to embrace theoretical pluralism? Second, to what extent has contemporary IR become pluralistic? Third, should IR pursue the promotion of dialogue and engagement across theoretical and spatial divides? Of course, each of these questions invites several subsequent questions. For instance, the question of whether pluralism needs to take place in IR requires us to think through the extent and types of diversity and pluralism that we (ought to) pursue. Likewise, the normative 'ought-to' question related to dialogue and engagement leads to additional questions, such as that of 'how-to'. I will elaborate on these questions and their implications in the ensuing pages.

Does IR need to embrace pluralism? If so, how much?

Obviously, pluralism is a core premise upon which 'non-Western', 'post-Western', and 'Global' IR projects are all founded. As discussed earlier, 'non-Western' IR theory-building enterprises reject the long-lasting dominance of Western/American IR scholarship over the field and are dissatisfied with the corresponding marginalisation of non-Western worlds in international studies. Their advocates persistently argue for the 'broadening' of IR beyond the disciplinary dominance of a particular region and call for embracing a wider range of theoretical, historical, or normative perspectives. In Acharya's words, IR should 'not impose any particular idea or approach on others but respects diversity', and

it should be grounded in ‘world history, theoretical pluralism’ (Acharya, 2016: 4–5). Qin’s ‘relational theory’ of IR, which emphasises ‘multiple cultures’ and the high degree of ‘intimacy’ in our ‘pluralistic world’ (Qin, 2016a: 39), is an attempt to give theoretical substance to Acharya’s idea of ‘pluralistic universalism’.

Yet, a pluralistic approach as a ‘way of knowing’ is not without its critics: there are a considerable number of IR scholars who favour epistemic unity or theoretical synthesis over pluralism. For example, John Mearsheimer (2016: 147) has explicitly stated that he ‘disagrees’ with the growing calls for broadening the theoretical horizons of American-centric IR. They believe that pluralism can leave us with ‘a divided discipline’ that not only fails to speak with one voice, but cannot agree on ‘what we should be studying’, and thus pluralism ‘masks’ the problem that we have ‘an incoherent field’ (Schmidt, 2008: 298; see also van der Ree, 2014: 218). In this vein, Michael Brecher and Frank Harvey (2002: 2) are deeply concerned with the lack of progress and knowledge accumulation in the field, pointing out that IR has difficulty ‘agreeing on what they have accomplished’ thus far. It is for these reasons that several scholars propose an epistemic synthesis, which has variously been referred to as a ‘paradigmatic synthesis’ of research traditions in IR (Brecher and Harvey, 2002); the theoretical ‘integration’ of different levels of analysis (Hudson, 2007); ‘analytic eclecticism’ based on the mixing and matching of approaches (Cornut, 2015; Sil and Katzenstein, 2010); ‘multi-method’ research that combines quantitative and qualitative methods and ‘middle ground epistemologies’ that combine positivist and interpretivist epistemologies (Bennett, 2015; Collier and Elman, 2008); and an ‘ontological synthesis’ based on ‘quantum consciousness theory’ (Wendt, 2015).

The point is that pluralism as such is not without controversy, although the view appears unproblematic among proponents of broadening IR beyond American/Western-centrism. Therefore, the ongoing ‘broadening IR projects’ – be they ‘non-Western’, ‘post-Western’, or ‘Global’ IR – ought to more fully address the contested implications of their underlying premise, namely diversity and pluralism. What is more, although it is increasingly agreed that diversity and pluralism are ‘desirable’ for a ‘better future’ for IR (Dunne et al., 2013; Hellmann, 2003; Jackson, 2015; Kratochwil, 2003; Lake, 2016), we also have to address *how much* – in other words, to what extent – IR should embrace pluralism. This question is of great importance in the ongoing debate because the answer affects the degree to which the contour and the contents of the ‘non-Western’ IR theory-building enterprises are to be either expanded (facilitated) or narrowed (constrained). Nevertheless, even in recent contributions to the broadening IR projects, this question is either ignored entirely or treated as something that can be ‘put aside’ (Bilgin, 2016: 5). I think the question of whether and to what degree IR needs to embrace pluralism can only be answered after we have a clear understanding of the current state of diversity in IR. Put otherwise, we need to first examine and comprehend where IR currently stands in terms of diversity in order to determine where it should stand.

The extent of diversity in IR: ‘What types’ of diversity are we talking about?

Contemporary IR literature in general and arguments regarding ‘non-Western’ IR theorisation in particular have a slim understanding of the extent to which contemporary IR has become diverse and pluralistic; this is mainly due to their partial and limited attention. The simplest way to understand the extent of diversity in IR scholarship is to look at how many knowledge claims exist. Even so, to understand diversity in this numerical sense is

not simple as it may appear because knowledge claims are associated with several complex dimensions, including ontological, epistemological, theoretical, methodological, praxical, and geographical ones. Furthermore, even if we zoom in on 'theoretical' dimension, we need to look at diversity in terms of not only the number of theories available in the field, but also the epistemological, methodological, and empirical aspects of diversity, for all of them relate to theory building and theory testing.

Unfortunately, however, the ongoing debate tends to focus attention on only theoretical dimension; furthermore, theoretical diversity tends to be approached narrowly, in terms of the *geographical origins* of key IR concepts, theories, or theorists. For example, although the 'Global IR' project intends to transcend the West/non-West divide, its main claim is made along geographical or geopolitical lines: either inside or outside of the West. It rests on geopolitical assumptions that IR often 'marginalizes those outside the core countries of the West' and that scholars beyond the Anglo-American core have the capabilities and resources necessary to render IR 'truly' global (Acharya, 2014: 647). In this sense, Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al. (2016: 18) note, 'geography plays a central role in the Global IR Debate', and 'the Global IR literature repeatedly categorizes scholars into ... regional and national schools'. Interestingly, their study (Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al., 2016: 24), based on the 2014 TRIP survey data,¹ shows that non-Western IR scholars 'are more likely to have geographically bounded perceptions of IR communities' than their Western counterparts.

Of course, it is true that non-Western worlds and their voices sit on the margins of the discipline; we must grapple with this marginalisation or underrepresentation. The point is not that these geographically based concerns are misplaced, but that the current terrain of the 'non-Western' or 'Global' IR debate needs to extend to issues of epistemology and methodology in order to see the extent of the 'parochialism' of IR more clearly, and thus ameliorate it. This is especially necessary, given that there are conflicting views of the extent to which IR has actually become diverse and pluralistic. A cursory survey of the IR literature on pluralism and the sociology of the field will suffice to illustrate this point.

On the one hand, some scholars argue that the discipline has *already* become pluralistic and diverse. For example, Nicholas Rengger notes that contemporary IR is 'a plural, and pluralist, field ... Whether one likes it or not ..., that is simply the reality' (Rengger, 2015: 32). Likewise, Tim Dunne, Lene Hansen, and Colin Wight argue that 'IR now seems to have settled into an uneasy truce on the question of pluralism' due to 'the proliferation of theories' in the discipline (Dunne et al., 2013: 405, 416). On the other hand, the argument that IR is still monistic and parochial is also repeatedly made, not only in the 'non-Western' IR theorisation literature, but also in the IR literature on post-positivism and reflexivity. A recent work by Inanna Hamati-Ataya is a case in point. Calling for 'strong reflexivity', she argues that 'three decades after the launch of the post-positivist critique, however, reflexive IR ... remains located at the margins of the margins of the discipline' (Hamati-Ataya, 2012: 670; Hamati-Ataya, 2014: 171–172). Similarly, in a discussion of the state of theoretical diversity in IR, Christian Reus-Smit (2013: 604) observes that '[t]raditionally, mainstream International Relations scholars (and political scientists) confined the field to empirical-theoretic inquiry on [positivist] epistemological principle ... The tenuous nature of this position is now widely acknowledged, increasingly by mainstream scholars'. And David Lake argues that 'positivists either subsumed the critiques offered by the reflectivists ... or just simply ignored and marginalized them' (Lake, 2013: 570). It is in this respect that Patrick Jackson calls for 'a broad and pluralistic definition of science' based on a variety of ontologies (Jackson, 2011: 32, 193).

Given all of the above, the following question arises: *what types* of diversity are we talking about? Depending on our answer to this question, our understanding of the extent to which IR has become diverse and pluralistic will vary substantially, as will our rationales for and approaches to the ‘non-Western’ and ‘Global’ IR projects. For example, if projects to broaden IR consider the issue of the hierarchy of knowledge in terms of not only geography (i.e. Western-centric IR), but also epistemology and methodology (i.e. the dominance of positivism), then their proposals can find common ground with post-positivist IR scholarship, whose epistemological underpinnings are marginalised by *both* the West and the non-West. Let us take an example from Chinese IR. Several scholars have expected that ‘US parochialism’ and growing interest in IR theory in the non-Western countries would lead to the ‘waning of American disciplinary power’ while opening up ‘new spaces’ for international studies (Tickner, 2013: 629; Tickner and Waever, 2009). Furthermore, considerable attempts to develop an indigenous IR theory ‘with Chinese characteristics’ have been made by Chinese scholars for more than two decades.

Contrary to the general expectation, however, the research trends in the American and Chinese IR communities are quite similar in terms of epistemology and methodology. The latter also lacks sufficient attention to alternative or critical approaches. For example, according to the data provided by Eun’s empirical analysis, 78% of theoretical IR studies in China fit within the existing mainstream theoretical paradigms in IR – namely, neorealism and neoliberalism – both of which ‘lie within the methodological and epistemological ambit of positivism’ (Eun, 2016: 33). Recent studies on developments in IR theory in China reach similar conclusions. David Shambaugh’s work (2011: 347) that analyses the articles published between 2005 and 2009 in Chinese IR journals demonstrates that realism, liberalism, and constructivism dominate Chinese IR theory articles – with realist articles being the most numerous. Similarly, Yaqing Qin (2011: 249) observes that ‘most of the research works in China in the last 30 years have been using the three mainstream American IR theories [realism, liberalism, and constructivism]’.

What the above discussion indicates is clear: the hierarchy of knowledge and scholarship is an issue that cuts across several realms of inquiry in IR, beyond the geopolitical influence or geo-historical origins of theory. In particular, the lack of diversity in IR can be seen in terms of epistemology and methodology, as the case of Chinese IR shows. The ‘marginalisation’ of post-positivist scholarship in IR exists everywhere, the West and the non-West alike. As it stands, however, the lack of epistemological or methodological diversity and how it is connected with the marginalisation of non-Western voices in IR do not receive the attention they deserve in the ongoing debate. Too much attention is being paid to only one dimension of diversity, namely the geographical origins or historical foundations of theory.

Should IR promote dialogue across theoretical and spatial divides? If so, how?

What has been discussed thus far ultimately asks us to consider the issue of theoretical fragmentation, a potential offshoot of our persistent pleas for diversity and pluralism as a way to address ‘the current West-centrism of IR’ (Buzan, 2016: 156). That is, regardless of whether we achieved a consensus on the extent and types of diversity that we (ought to) pursue, the goal would remain the same from the perspective of the ‘broadening IR’ project, be it ‘non-Western’, ‘post-Western’, or ‘Global’ IR. To put it in the simplest terms, a shared goal means greater diversity. This, however, can raise concerns about the

fragmentation of IR scholarship. For instance, the more diversity IR has, the greater the number of dividing lines that are likely to emerge in the field, and the emergence of dividing lines would lead the already divided discipline of IR to what Oren (2016: 571) calls a 'fragmented adhocracy', which is a hindrance to knowledge accumulation and thus progress in IR. This, as mentioned earlier, is part of the reason that some IR scholars take issue with pluralism (Schmidt, 2008: 298). In particular, greater divergence between the racially (or regionally) ordered professions of the field could place IR's disciplinary coherence at risk. Daniel Levine and David McCourt (2018: 104) note that 'a time may come – or, perhaps, has come – when IR scholars from different professional *milieux* lack any shared points of reference'.

In response, scholars working on broadening IR, particularly in the name of 'Global IR', often suggest that IR needs to engage in active 'dialogue' across theoretical and spatial divides. Hurrell (2016: 150), for example, notes that Global IR should aim to have 'a far broader conversation' regarding differently situated accounts and concepts about IR. Acharya (2011) makes this point clear:

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 ... that have their origin in the South. (Acharya, 2011: 620)

Elsewhere, he has added that 'encouraging debate and dialogue across perspectives ... is a *core* purpose of the Global IR project' (Acharya, 2016: 14, emphasis added). Going a step further, Acharya and Buzan posit that the project is 'more likely to fail if it does not draw in the broadest group of scholars, including those in the Western mainstream' (Acharya and Buzan, 2017: 354).

'Encouraging dialogue' is not as simple as it may appear, however. As Kimberly Hutchings aptly notes, 'dialogue' can be a mere exchange or encounter that is already 'staged and scripted' by the mainstream (namely the West and positivists in the case of IR); as such, it could turn out to be 'a piece of rhetorical bullying' (Hutchings, 2011: 645). In addition, a 'staged and scripted' dialogue across theoretical paradigms can lead to a tug of war between rival camps over truth claims and a turning inwards. Indeed, this is one of the hallmarks of the so-called 'great debates' in IR; in response, some scholars suggests that IR ought to pursue 'working-within-paradigms' rather than 'working-across-paradigms' (Lake, 2013: 567, 580)

Despite these concerns, many IR scholars, including Hutchings, do not oppose dialogue *per se*. Indeed, 'vigorous' dialogue across cultures and regions and active engagement between theoretical perspectives are frequently proposed by those who wish to broaden IR. Moreover, this is also the case in reflexive discussions regarding the prospects of IR and IR theory. The 'integrative pluralism' advanced by Dunne, Hansen, and Wight is a case in point. In 'The End of International Relations Theory?' they argue that IR should move towards 'integrative pluralism' in which not only diversity, but also, and more importantly, 'engagement' across competing theoretical paradigms is encouraged (Dunne et al., 2013: 416–417). In a related vein, Patrick Jackson foregrounds 'engaged pluralism', which 'brings unlike elements into dialogue with one another without fusing them into a specious synthesis' (Jackson, 2011: 207). More than a decade ago, Yosef Lapid argued that if 'pluralism ... is the most feasible and deserving destination for the international relations theory enterprise in the foreseeable future, then dialogue must figure prominently on our

agenda at the dawn of the twenty-first century' (Lapid, 2003: 129). In short, the importance of dialogue *per se* is readily acknowledged in the IR literature.

The question then is *how* we can ensure proper dialogue and engagement across theoretical and spatial divides without subjugating marginalised perspectives or engaging in a narcissistic turf war. This question is important because what the 'non-Western' theory-building project aims to achieve could fragment the field even further. It is also important because those who make a plea for active dialogue and engagement do not generally elaborate on *how* we could embark on this project. To be sure, there are a few exceptions (Bilgin, 2016; Hutchings, 2011); in general, however, our call for dialogue is not well matched by a corresponding elaboration of how it can be realised. As a result, 'dialogue, a persistent dream in IR, remains elusive, recurrent cycles of small openings followed by closure' (Pasha, 2011: 684). In the context of the 'non-Western' IR theorisation, in particular, the existing literature lacks a methodological understanding of how we can establish and expand useful 'points of contact' across fragmented understandings resulted from both the Western parochialism of IR and monological attempts to develop non-Western IR. In short, the question of *how* to promote a two-way dialogue between Western and non-Western IR scholarship needs to be tackled head-on. In this regard, it is first of all necessary to clarify what kind of thing dialogue is and should be precisely because in social-scientific disciplines, dialogue can have several different connotations (see, for a fuller exploration, Eun, 2018b).

Our special section: Rationales and implications

What is missing in the on-going debate over the 'non-Western' IR theory-building enterprise is what cuts to the heart of the project, namely the attempt to broaden IR. In a coordinated and systemic effort to advance the case for the 'broadening IR' project, we held an international workshop that brought together prominent IR scholars who have varying theoretical interests and area backgrounds and put together this Special Section.² Sharing an interest in the broadening of the theoretical and practical horizons of IR beyond the disciplinary dominance of Western/American IR scholarship, we address various aspects and questions underlying the 'broadening IR' project. In particular, the contributions included in this Special Section examine the following specific questions. What is wrong with the existing set of Western-centric (i.e. mainstream) theories in IR? Should we go beyond them? If there is a lack of diversity in international studies, what theoretical or philosophical resources do we have in developing an alternative IR theory?

In his article, 'When balance of power meets globalization', TV Paul points out the imitations of neorealism and its signature arguments in Asian contexts and shows the usefulness of a pluralistic analysis. How can most small states in the South Asian region exercise influence on China and India and acquire substantial investment from both of the two big powers 'without falling into the strategic orbit of either power?', he asks (Paul, 2018: 1). Although this question seems an 'anomaly' in the neorealist balance-of-power theory, Paul (2018: 12) shows that 'the state behaviour in the region ... does not reflect the Cold War era style competition or cooperation but a mixed pattern of limited balancing and continued economic interactions'. This finding implies that we need theoretical and analytical diversity and dialogue keenly attentive to the relationship between 'local' agents and the 'global' economic environment. With a broader focus on East Asian regionalism, Yong Wook Lee gives theoretical substance to 'pluralistic' thinking. In 'Relational ontology and the politics of boundary-making', Lee (2018: 1) takes issue with

the ‘individualistic ontology’ of mainstream IR theories derived mainly from Western history and Western philosophy of knowledge and suggests ‘relational ontology’ as an alternative. He argues that relational ontology, in which national interests are considered not as given outcomes, but as emergent properties of specific relational contexts, can offer ‘a better analytical fit’ (Lee, 2018: 2) when it comes to understanding regionalism, particularly the dynamics of financial institutions in East Asia. LHM Ling follows up on the discussion about alternative ways of ‘knowing’ in IR and thus ‘doing’ IR with a deeper engagement with metatheory. Based on a thick understanding of local histories and indigenous philosophical knowledge in Asia, Ling (2018: 4–7) suggests ‘epistemic compassion’ as an alternative to Eurocentric ‘epistemic violence’ marked by Hegelian dialectics. She argues that this epistemic compassion, which draws on Buddhist ontology (i.e. Interbeing) and a Daoist ‘trialectical’ epistemology (i.e. yin/yang dynamics), helps to prevent or mitigate violence and increase the possibility of ‘local agency and global responsibility’ (Ling, 2018: 3); her careful discussion of China’s Belt and Road Initiative further elucidates her argument.

In short, this Special Section unpacks concerns over the current West-centrism of IR, justifies the call for more diversity and pluralism in the study and practice of IR, and addresses what is at stake in developing a pluralistic IR from non-Western (i.e. Asian) perspectives. Of course, the discussion in the Special Section is by no means exhaustive. Nor do I imply that the discussion offers fully satisfying answers to all of the complex questions and issues at stake regarding the non-Western IR theory-building enterprise or, by extension the ‘broadening IR’ project. Far from giving definite answers, our Special Section offers alternatives while indicating critical aspects we need to (re)consider in order to gain a firmer grasp on the complexities of the issues of parochialism and pluralism in IR theory and practice. More research on our suggestions is thus essential, and will be most welcome.

Hutchings (2011: 639) comments, rightly in my view, that debate and discourse ‘help us to expand the parameters of our disciplinary imaginations and pave the way for a new era of discovery’. If so, the ongoing debate should become richer and wider. In order to open up parochial IR, the opening up of the current debate and the discourse thereof is *also* vital. I hope that this Special Section, despite its necessary brevity, will serve as a useful point from which more substantial and exciting bearings may be taken in enriching the debate and moving IR towards becoming a more pluralistic discipline. In addition, I hope that my review paper here will be useful in helping us to have a clearer understating of the remaining gaps in developing non-Western or Global IR theorisation and to lead us to critically ask ourselves whether our scholarly practices have been rich enough to go beyond the mainstream paradigm and do justice to our varied life experiences and intuitions (i.e. multiplicity) in both our publications and our classrooms. If this piece and our Special Section stimulate other researchers in this self-reflexive vein, I will be satisfied.

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Notes

1. The Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) project conducts a periodic survey of IR scholars regarding teaching and research practices. The survey results and relevant data from TRIP are available at <https://trip.wm.edu/home/index.php/data/data-overview> (accessed April 12, 2018).

2. This Special Section is based on the insights generated by the discussion among the following workshop participants: Shaun Breslin (University of Warwick), TV Paul (McGill University), Yaqing Qin (China Foreign Affairs University), LHM Ling (The New School), Tim Dunne (University of Queensland), Colin Wight (University of Sydney), Yong Wook Lee (Korea University), and Cheng-Chwee Kuik (National University of Malaysia). Although some of the conference papers are not included in this Special Section, as the organiser of the workshop as well as the editor of this Special Section, I must express my sincere thanks to all of these individuals for their support and help, as well as their intellectual stimulation and contributions. I am very saddened to learn of the passing of Lily Ling, our Special Section contributor, a distinguished scholar, and my dearest friend. Professor Ling passed away on 1st October, 2018. I received the news as I was giving the final touch to this Special Section. I express my deep condolences to the family of Ling, who will long be remembered for her outstanding contributions to international studies. Her incredible insights into alternative thinking and sincere ‘compassion’ for others will keep her very much alive in our conversation and efforts to create a positive force in a world where cynics abound.

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