

BOOK REVIEW

The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at its Centenary by Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, published by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2019, XI +320 pages.

If 1919 is taken as the founding year of International Relations (IR) as an academic discipline, the year 2019 marks its completion of 100 years. Such milestones are usually observed by highlighting the discipline's phenomenal contributions and reverence for its scholars. But instead of glorifying the discipline as it is, prominent scholars Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan adopt an alternative path of celebrating this big occasion of IR's centenary. They decide to pause, take stock and question how IR came into being, what was accomplished, what was left out and what it could be rather than what it is at present. The book ***The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at its Centenary*** is a documentation of that process. It takes the readers on an introspective journey of critically reviewing the major happenings of IR in the past 100 years and debunks several longstanding myths in the process. It begins by questioning whether 1919 is the actual founding year of IR and in retrospect, it brings forward the thoughts and practice of international relations from a century before the academic discipline IR was founded. Next, through a core-periphery analysis, the book reveals how the perspectives and concerns of the core, particularly the West are structured deep into the very DNA of the discipline and how the periphery was neglected in the entire process. It uncovers the dark legacies of racism and negligence in the making of IR and ponders how the discipline could look like if it had been invented in China, India or the Islamic world, or, if the perspectives of thinkers from these regions were incorporated with the ideas of the core. At this juncture, Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan visualise an alternative making of IR. The authors chalk out ways in which IR can rebalance itself by being inclusive and global. While it might seem like wishful thinking to some, by contextualising the idea in a transitioning post-Western era with the rise of China, India and 'the rest', the authors give it a rational ground. Here they explore possibilities of a third founding or re-founding of the discipline on normative grounds and resulting in a Global IR. This endeavour makes a timely contribution to IR literature and is likely to have a lasting impact on how IR is perceived and studied across the world, particularly across the Global South.

However, this is not the first endeavour as such. For more than a decade, the authors has been on an expedition to make the voices of Asian IR scholars

heard, promote their histories into global debates and find out the reasons behind the nonexistence of a non-Western IR theory.¹ This book is a continuation of the effort in a more holistic manner. It divides the historical evolution of IR into five phases, i.e., from nineteenth century to 1919, 1919–1945, 1945–1989, 1989–2017 and looking forward from 2017. These historical phases are presented through five pairs of chapters. The first chapter of each pair sketches out the international history (ir) of the period, and the second chapter sketches out the evolution of IR as a discipline in that specific timeline. The abbreviations ‘IR’ and ‘ir’ are frequently used to draw contrasts between the institutionalisation of International Relations and the practicality of international relations as it unfolded in real time. It draws an analogy of how IR as an academic field, developed through the happenings at the core in that phase and also points out the happenings in the periphery which made contributions to international relations but was not included in the making of IR.

To critically reflect on the making of IR as a west-dominated field, the authors present a broader history of IR’s foundation. While they do not disagree that IR became a formal field of study in 1919 as a response to the catastrophe of the First World War, they label this longstanding narrative as a founding ‘myth’ of IR. The word myth labelled in a quote, takes into account the substantial developments that took place in IR prior to 1919. While the trauma of the First World War refocused the priorities of the new field towards the core’s problem of war and peace, the systematic thinking and theorising about modern IR were already in place in the previous century. The authors question why the happenings of world affairs of the previous 130 years are not taken into consideration, i.e., they years between 1789 when the term ‘international’ was coined as a reference to the legal transactions between sovereigns, and 1919, when ‘International Relations’ became a specific field of study. While that century was profoundly transformational, states and societies of the core experienced a relatively long peace and it was in those core societies that IR thoughts developed. Thus, the authors advocate that IR ‘was not so much a new birth, as the repackaging and relaunching of things that had been going on for a long time.’ Reflection on this phase of IR’s history gives an insightful answer to the readers regarding why the discipline was core biased from the very foundational years.

¹ Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *Non- Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives On and beyond Asia*, London: Routledge, 2010 and Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, “Why Is There No Non- Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction”, *International Relations of the Asia- Pacific*, Volume 7, Issue 3, 2007, pp. 287-312.

After debunking the founding myth of IR, the authors present a critical view of major theories of the field. This can be evaluated through Robert Cox's idea, 'International Relations theory is always for someone and for some purpose.'² Here the authors argue that IR has been largely built on the assumption that western history and western political theory *are* world history and world political theory.³ Thus they consider IR theories like Realism and Liberalism to be more of an abstraction of Western history interwoven with western political theory. For example, they reevaluate realism as an abstraction from eighteenth century European balance-of-power behaviour combined with sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and indeed ancient Greek political theory. Liberalism is also seen as an abstraction from nineteenth and twentieth century western intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) and theories of political economy. Thus, the dominance of the western core on major theories of the field becomes evident. Although the authors provide disclaimer that this narrative might be an oversimplification, this helps the readers to re-examine IR theories from its root.

Next, the authors debunk another foundational myth, i.e., the great debate between Realism and Idealism during the interwar years by referring to the works of Brian C. Schmidt, Peter Wilson and L. Ashworth.⁴ The book points out that international relations during that time was much more complex, wide-ranging and interdisciplinary than implied by the 'great debate' formulation. The debate fails to recognize 'Scientific' racism, nationalism and geopolitics that played into it, especially on the side of realist power politics. In the words of the authors, while previously racism was between the 'civilized' West and the 'barbaric' periphery, in the interwar period, racism started to intensify within the core and often merged with hyper-nationalism. Thus, the debate between only two schools of thought should not be seen as IR's foundation in the post-

² Robert Cox, "Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory", in Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 204– 54.

³ Reference of more arguments related to IR theory and World History can be found at Barry Buzan and George Lawson, "The English School: History and Primary Institutions as Empirical IR Theory?", in William R. Thompson (ed.), in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Empirical International Relations Theories*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 783-799. ; Barry Buzan and George Lawson, "Rethinking Benchmark Dates in International Relations", *European Journal of International Relations*, Volume 20, Issue 2, 2014, pp. 437-462. ; George Lawson, "The Eternal Divide? History and International Relations", *European Journal of International Relations*, Volume 18, Issue 2, 2012, pp. 203-226 ;and Torbjørn Knutsen, *A History of International Relations Theory*, 3rd edition. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2016.

⁴ Lucian M. Ashworth, *A History of International Thought: From the Origins of the Modern State to Academic International Relations*, London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 134-137. ; Brian C. Schmidt, *The Political Discourse of Anarchy: A Disciplinary History of International Relations*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998; Peter Wilson, "The Myth of the First Great Debate", *Review of International Studies*, Volume 24, Issue 5, 1998. pp. 01-15.

Second World War period. Instead, critical evaluation of the happenings is required to understand the development of this phase of IR.

The prioritization of the core and influence of racism in the discipline is further elaborated by presenting a critical analysis of several more concepts which are fundamental to IR. Classical geopolitical theories are seen as an extension of the bias towards the core and suppression of the periphery. The authors opine that the periphery was merely seen as an object of great power expropriation and rivalry amongst scholars and practitioners of these theories. For example, Friedrich Ratzel's idea of *Lebensraum* is viewed from a Social Darwinist approach of powers competing for control of territory without any concern to the rights of indigenous inhabitants. Halford Mackinder's idea of the 'heartland' or 'pivot' is seen as a racist-realist theory that is offensive-imperialist in nature and blends geopolitics and eugenics. The idea of 'Greater Britain' is also seen as a blend of geopolitics, racism, nationalism, and empire. Alfred Thayer Mahan's emphasis on the building of sea power is seen as prevention against the east from gaining any sort of foothold. Therefore, even if IR incorporated the periphery into its concerns, it did so mainly from the perspective of the core, i.e., seeing the Third World and its events largely through the lenses of superpower rivalry and manipulation. The authors believe that this acknowledgement of race as an important force in international relations and thought of the pre-First World War and interwar period is important as it suggests that IR emerged not only from an idealist-realist divide in the west, but also from a racial, economic and political divide between the west and the rest.

While the dominance of the core and marginalisation of the periphery in the thinking and institutionalisation of IR continued through different phases, several developments were happening in Asia, South America, Africa and the Middle East which have been neglected and seriously understudied. The authors point out that while IR in the periphery focused on anti-colonial thinking for a long period and was not institutionalised like in the west, it still made significant contributions to the development of key concepts of IR. Thus, the writings of scholars from the periphery regions are cited and quoted in the book to give an alternative narrative to many established ideas of IR. The book finds that the development of IR thoughts and practices in these regions can be traced way prior to the dates when the western IR literature considers it to have started, for example the *Mahabharata*.⁵ Moreover, in the periphery,

⁵ More analysis regarding the use of classical Indian texts to explain Indian foreign policy and strategic choices can be found at Amrita Narlikar and Aruna Narlikar, *Bargaining with a Rising India: Lessons from the*

political and religious leaders, military figures and public intellectuals had an enormous role in IR thinking alongside academics. Here the authors reflect on major contributions of non-Western thinkers from ancient to modern time. For example, in India, Ashoka, Kautilya and Nagarjuna had immense contribution. Rabindranath Tagore's criticisms of nationalism and imperialism seem to have predated Toynbee's and J. A. Hobson's theories of imperialism. M. K. Gandhi's ideas about non-violent resistance had both practical and intellectual influence worldwide. Jawaharlal Nehru critiqued and rejected power politics, advocated for greater international cooperation in the form of 'commonwealth of states', or a 'world association' even before the Second World War was over. However, his ideas about non-alignment and non-exclusionary regionalism received little attention in the IR theoretical debates of the core. In China, role of Sun Tzu, Han Feizi and Confucius was vital. Sun Yat-sen's role is acknowledged for advancing the idea of cosmopolitan and Sino-centric internationalism. Mao's thoughts about socialist politics and development resonated widely among the far left in many places. His 'three worlds theory' from the mid-1970s was both a political project against the hegemony of the two superpowers and a way of understanding the dynamics of world politics overall.⁶ Mao, along with Che Guevara and Régis Debray, also developed, promoted and practised the idea of guerrilla warfare which later came to be known as 'asymmetric warfare'. Contribution of Islamic world thinkers like Ibn Sina, al-Farabi, Ibn Rushd and Ibn Khaldun is also acknowledged by the authors for their exemplary works.

Additionally, the authors reflect that the idea of regionalism had emerged in South America a hundred years before the European Economic Community (EEC). South America also contributed to the idea of sovereign equality and non-intervention, international development and human rights. In contrary to popular belief, the origin of globalisation can also be traced back to the multi-cultural trading systems which linked Eurasia and Africa for more than two millennia. As a result, while the periphery is credited mainly for post-colonialism and dependency theory, it can be seen that several fundamental concepts of IR developed in these regions way before the west. It contained ideas about internationalism, world order, international development, cooperation and justice. These ideas had the potential to guide IR in a very

Mahabharata, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.; Deep KDatta-Ray, *The Making of Indian Diplomacy: A Critique of Eurocentrism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015 ; Pradeep Kumar Gautam, "Kautilya's Arthashastra: Contemporary Issues and Comparison", IDSA Monograph Series no. 47, New Delhi: Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, 2015.

⁶ John W. Garver, *China's Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 327-328.

different path, however, they remained unexplored. Moreover, many of these thoughts and practices shaped and continue to shape the foreign policy beliefs and practices of countries, especially the emerging powers such as China and India. Inclusion of those thoughts in the study of IR could have given a multi-dimensional perspective regarding present day global politics and the changing world order. Thus, in pursuit of discovering the making of IR, it is important to broaden the genealogy of key concepts to exposes and register the power-knowledge relations, and bring those things or thoughts to surface which have been buried, covered over, or excluded from view in the writing and making of history.⁷

While the authors spend a reasonable amount of time in highlighting differences between the core and periphery, they also separately analyse role of countries that did not fit into the polarised spectrum and were somewhere in the middle, like Japan in the interwar period and China in post-Second World War period. Here the formation of ‘core’ is critically evaluated. The authors argue why Japan was rejected from a place in the core during the foundational years of IR despite being modernised and having military strength similar to the western core. Japan’s military victories seemed to have failed to overcome the racism of Western colonial order. The authors consider this as a turning point of Japanese policy which laid the basis for geopolitical contestation during the interwar years. In the post-1945 period, the composition of core is again under scrutiny. In this period, global change shifted the center of gravity of both ir and IR to the United States which reinforced the existing dominance of the Anglosphere as the core of the discipline. But other countries were undergoing swift developments in the same time and it became difficult to define which side of the story they belonged to, for example China. This led the authors to put China in a category of its own, i.e., the enigmatic outsider, as the country began to play an independent role opposing and challenging both superpowers in the bipolar world.

While the core-periphery framework is suitable for explaining the formation of IR in the first two phases of its history, it started to change after the period of decolonisation as former colonies became independent members of the international society and gap between core and periphery blurred. It is observed that during this period, some IR from the periphery was beginning to register in the core. This trend picked up significantly during the 1990s and continues till today. While the United States and European dominance remains central in global

⁷ Richard Devetak, “Postmodernism”, in Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater (eds.), *Theories of International Relations*, New York : St Martin’s Press, 1996, p. 184.

politics, it is increasingly being challenged as China and India move into the great power club, and China and Russia align against the United States. Vibrant national IR communities are also emerging in non-western countries like Japan, South Korea, Brazil, Taiwan and Turkey. But the IR scholarship still remained western-dominated. The authors argue that even when diversity was claimed among IR scholarship, it was mostly a diversity within the core and among the three mainstream theories: Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism. However, they opine that diversity is not just a matter of theoretical or methodological orientation. It is also about the identity of the group: who is included and excluded. On this note, they present their idea of making a Global IR which will be inclusive and plural. They visualise it as a framework of enquiry and analysis of international relations in all its diversity, especially with due recognition to the experiences, voices and agency of the non-western people, societies and states that have so far been marginalised in the discipline. Global IR research agenda calls scholars to discover new patterns, theories and methods from world histories; analyse changes in the distribution of power and ideas after more than two hundred years of western dominance; explore regional worlds in their full diversity and interconnectedness; engage with subjects and methods that require deep and substantive integration of disciplinary and area studies knowledge; examine how ideas and norms circulate between global and local levels; and investigate the mutual learning among civilisations, of which there is more historical evidence than there is for the ‘clash of civilisations.’⁸ The book advocates for inclusion of religion, cultural and spiritual knowledge sources along with ‘worldly knowledge’ from the non-western world. It highlights the potential role of religious philosophy such as those of Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity and different sections within these, as well as later religions such as the Khalsa Panth, for providing insights to IR theory. However, the authors realise that there are caveats and risks associated with Global IR and acknowledge that some of those, like the possibility of domination from resource rich non-western countries, emergence of Chinese School of IR etc. They also realise that a too broad IR may lessen its analytic value and make theory building difficult. But they remain optimistic that keeping the risks in focus will help global IR scholars to avert them. With this aspiration, the book concludes on a very high note.

For the readers, there are several takeaways from this book. It is a refreshing and thought provoking take on IR and very appropriate in the context

⁸ Amitav Acharya, “Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies”, *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 58, Issue 4, 2014, pp. 647– 659.

of the changing world. The narration is seamless, transitions are smooth and each phase gives a brief recap of the previous, making it easy to pick up from where one left. Through critical analysis of both the core and periphery, the authors offer the readers several arguments to re-examine foundations of IR. It presents alternative ideas regarding how theories and concepts of the field can be understood and studied. However, the book is not without limitations. While the first two phases of IR's history, i.e., the pre-1919 and the interwar periods are very interesting to read as there are several revelations and critical evaluations of IR's are made, the same cannot be said for the third phase between 1945-1989. Here, writing of incidents and the making of IR get a little monotonous for readers. The fourth phase covers too many incidents but without much analysis on most. While it is understandable that the authors wanted to present almost all incidents of the period in a nutshell, but in doing so, many crucial insights are lost. Next, the idea of the post-western world order seemed to be framed on the rhetoric of Brexit, President Trump and rise of China. More analysis on the actors and a reflection on how domestic policies impact IR could provide more insights for the remaking of IR. Another noticeable thing is the limited analysis on the Soviet Union and Russia's role in IR's history. While the book extensively covers the making of IR in the western core and also the development of thoughts in the periphery from ancient to modern time, the former Soviet Union and Russia are not adequately engaged in the conversation. More analysis on this in the core-periphery analysis could offer interesting dimensions of IR in different phases. Apart from these few areas, the book excels both in writing and content and contributes immensely to the frontier of knowledge.

Through this book, Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan cater to the need of both established IR scholars as well as IR students just starting their undergraduate journey. They noted that at present, US dominance is found not only in higher level theoretical literature but also in introductory textbooks. Undergraduate students studying realism and liberalism as universal theories of IR, are seldom told about the link and justification of these theories for cultural racism and imperialism. Also, the biggest founding philosophers of these theories are rarely have critical evaluation to expose the inbuilt-racism and suppressive ideas. But through this book, students are offered an insight on what all has been lost in the process of studying IR from the western lens and why it is important to broaden IR across multiple sources, historical evidences and regions to envision a global IR. The authors Amitav Acharya and Barry

Buzan deserve to be revered for writing a book in which academics of the Global South can picture themselves, students of these regions can find a sense of purpose to study and possibly contribute to the making or remaking of IR.

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