

FORUM

Practical Concerns and Power Considerations

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President Acharya should be congratulated for advancing the agenda of “global International Relations (IR).” I have long shared Amitav’s conviction that in order for IR to be more relevant for the real world, we need an IR enriched by *a diversity of theoretical perspectives, a diversity of geographical focus, and a diversity of scholars from different ethnic, national, geographical backgrounds*. Because the lifeblood of science is actually diversity or variation of ideas, I do not think that the scientific and the ethical grounds for a global IR are really disputable. Below, I shall focus mostly on practical matters.

Leveling the Playground of IR, at Least Somewhat

There exists a critical asymmetry in the business of doing IR, in two broad senses. The first is self-evident. To publish in mainstream journals and major publishers, mostly located at the center of IR (i.e., North America and Europe), scholars who work at the center of IR enjoy an enormous advantage due to their social and linguistic proximity. In contrast, scholars who work in the periphery of IR cannot possibly hope to enjoy the benefits of denser social networks that can facilitate their entries into the “mainstream.” Second, scholars who work at the center of IR only need to know one particular region (most likely, Europe), or even one particular country, well enough. In contrast, scholars who work in the periphery of IR see themselves obliged to include broader references (to the center) in order to be perceived as relevant, in addition to having to usually focus on more than one country or region.¹

Thus, when it comes to “publish-or-perish,” scholars at the center enjoy a critical advantage over those in the periphery, whether the former group recognizes or admits it or not. I do not think it is realistic or necessary to level the playground completely, but I do think that for the sake of advancing knowledge and a more “global IR,” the International Studies Association (ISA), and especially journals under ISA, can implement a few practical changes.

First, journals under ISA should encourage submissions that draw from more than one country and one region, including from scholars at the IR center. I believe that such a direction is consistent with Amitav’s insistence that regions should be one critical focus of IR theorizing, and a comparative approach toward regions will be quite helpful.

¹I shall point out that I do not think the fact that scholars who work in the periphery of IR may have to know more is bad, at least when it comes to knowledge accumulation.

Second, for most scholars in the IR periphery, the language barrier is real. Thus, when editors of ISA journals see a piece from the IR periphery that contains important knowledge progress and yet is not so well-written, the editors can recommend a rejection but invitation to resubmit and specifically ask the authors to improve writing style. Doing so will foster real diversity in IR.

Power in Academic Gate-Keeping

It may be desirable that the editorial board of all ISA journals has ten to twenty percent of its members be of non-European descent and non-North America- or Europe- (including its offshoots) based. The same can be said about book series from major university and commercial presses. These book series should be edited by a mixture of typical American/European scholars and also their non-European/non-American colleagues. Needless to say, having scholars from the periphery serve as members of the editorial board does not necessarily lower the academic standard of journals or book series.

Scholarly Community/Scholars in Major Regions Should Pool Resources

In East Asia, we have China-based *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Japan-based *International Relations of Asia-Pacific*, and several Korea-based English journals (e.g., *Asian Perspectives*). Yet, my impression is that none of these journals receive enough quality submissions. The same situation also holds true for Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East.

One possible solution to this situation is to build a flagship IR journal within a region like *European Journal of International Relations (EJIR)*, although EJIR's success certainly cannot be easily replicated. Also, these new regional flagship journals should not just repeat what the journals at the center have done or practiced. Rather, these new regional flagship journals should encourage more diversity in approaches and methods, though still maintaining a high academic standard.

Moreover, in order to facilitate a regional community of IR scholars, the editorship of these new regional journals should be rotated among different institutions within the region. Furthermore, the editorial boards of these journals should connect with scholars within the region more. For now, most members of these editorial boards are from one particular country plus a few (big) names from the United States or Europe. Publishers of these journals can encourage more progressive changes along these lines.

Incentives Structures, Back at Your Home Region or Country

Finally, I also think that in order to have a genuinely global IR, the IR communities in the periphery should restructure the incentives faced by young scholars back in their own countries or regions. You just cannot encourage all the young scholars to publish in only American-styled/based mainstream journals. We have to encourage young scholars to publish high-quality work not only in mainstream journals, but also in regional flagship and domestic journals. If we truly want to have a "global IR," this has to be done.