

BOOK REVIEW

Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at its Centenary*
(Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019)

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The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at its Centenary

Amitav ACHARYA and Barry BUZAN

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Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan's *The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at its Centenary* is a sophisticated survey of the history of modern international relations and the discipline of International Relations (IR) from the perspective of Global IR. The authors embark upon a project to embrace greater pluralism and overcome the Western hegemony in IR. The book covers the international and disciplinary histories from the nineteenth century to the present. Its overall argument is that the evolution of IR has mirrored that of modern international relations. Accordingly, the authors examine what they call versions 1.0, 1.1 and 1.2 of Global International Society (GIS) and their consecutive parallels in IR in ten tight-knit chapters.

They first examine the making of modern international relations from the nineteenth century to 1919. This analysis observes that owing to the ideational and material revolutions of modernity, "the first ever global-scale international society" (p. 17), namely version 1.0 of GIS, emerged in this period. This international society was characterized by a strict core-periphery division with a Europe-led world economy, colonialism, and racism. When it comes to the corresponding story of the discipline, the authors suggest that "the main foundations of IR, in terms of both its agenda of issues and the theoretical approaches to the subject matter, were laid down during the several decades before 1919" (p. 34), criticizing the 1919 myth of IR. This "IR before IR" (p. 4), including such schools of thought as Geopolitics and International Law, was exclusively dominated by the concerns and perspectives of the core, particularly reflecting power gaps, hierarchy, racism, and colonialism. That said, "the first shoots of modern IR thinking" (p. 55) were also in play in the periphery under the umbrella of anti-colonialism and culturalism.

Moving to the interwar years, Acharya and Buzan demonstrate how the structure of international relations sustained its version 1.0 with the continuation of its West-dominated core-periphery order and major institutions from colonialism to territoriality, albeit with a set of changes such as the League of Nations. This maintenance was echoed in the schedule of interwar IR, which was also institutionalized as an academic discipline. The core thinking was largely obsessed with the issue of great power war and peace due to the trauma of the First World War, but it still incorporated more diversity than

simply narrating the myth of the realism-idealism debate. IR thinking in the periphery, in return, revolved around anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism as well as “ideas about internationalism, world order, international development, cooperation and justice” (p. 97).

In their examination of the Cold War, Acharya and Buzan diagnose an updated GIS, namely version 1.1. On the one hand, this new international society was characterized by two main themes in the core: bipolarity, which implied a new distribution of power and a competition on the future form of “the political economy of modernity” (p. 115), and the revolutionary impact of nuclear weapons. On the other hand, decolonization and its relevant themes such as nationalism, development, and regionalism prevailed in the periphery. Notably, the interplay between bipolarity and decolonization rendered international relations “truly global for the first time” (p. 132) through the norm of sovereign equality and the superpower rivalry in the Third World. When it comes to IR, the authors associate the Cold War with the second founding of the discipline, which they regard “more serious than the one in 1919” (p. 138). A deepening and widening of a US-led institutionalization still reflected the concerns of the core, with the dominance of realism, liberalism, and strategic studies. However, a considerable amount of diversity also found its way within the core IR, owing to the critiques of positivist philosophy of science, such as the English School, and the challenge of Marxist and Gramscian perspectives, which deviated from the hegemonic bias of mainstream IR. Concerning the periphery, decolonization substantially directed IR thinking, albeit in less institutionalized and poorly resourced ways. In this context, the main challenge of periphery IR sprang from the emergence of dependency theory and postcolonialism.

Their analysis of post-Cold War international relations identifies the heyday of version 1.1 of GIS, marked by the themes of globalization and American unipolarity. It also draws attention to the beginnings of version 1.2 of GIS toward a post-Western order with the rise of the “rest” from the first decade of the 21st century onwards. This latest version is one “with an expanding core, eroding West-centrism and a shrinking periphery” (p. 217) and the addition of a set of shared-fate issues such as terrorism and cybersecurity. Its mirroring involved IR operationalizing this blurring of boundaries between the core and the periphery, with a set of internal variations within the mainstream agenda, the rise of critical theory, constructivism, feminism and postcolonialism, increasing voices for greater pluralization and recognition, and eventually, growing demand for Global IR.

In their final empirical chapter, Acharya and Buzan attempt to predict the eventual nature of the transition of GIS in a wide range of issue areas from distribution of power to normative structures. They map the future of what they call the “deep pluralism” of this emergent order, which implies “a diffuse distribution of power, wealth and cultural authority” (p. 295). Their forward-looking examination prefigures that this burgeoning order can move toward either “contested” or “embedded” pluralism (pp. 265-266), with the former involving a set of antagonistic moves against deep pluralism and the latter referring to a world of coexistence. In the end, they channel this prospective analysis into a call for a new founding of the discipline, and present Global IR as a pioneering and anticipating move toward explaining and understanding this emergent post-Western order.

The book has multiple strengths. First, it is the first macro-scale operationalization of the agenda of Global IR with its examination of modern international history and the evolution of the discipline of IR, offering a whole raft of empirical evidence both from core and periphery. Second, it provides a holistic account of the conversation between international relations and IR, which has been popularly

articulated by the experiences of Cold War politics and the dominance of realism. Third, it implies a strong interaction between the agenda of Global IR and the English School, operationalizing the originally Euro-centric concept of international society.

The book is not without problems. The final chapters persistently attribute their call for Global IR to the empirical emergence of a post-Western order, but this insistence obscures the valuable critiques of the preceding chapters against the historically hegemonic status of Western IR. Would we not need a Global IR had this post-Western order not been in the making? It is also problematic that in its global history approach, the interaction between the core and the periphery is still understood as little more than “core-plus-periphery.” Importantly, the themes and sensitivities of the book, such as its interest in regions and area studies, rely on the underdeveloped theoretical agendas of Global IR as a new research framework amid its deep horizons.

In conclusion, *The Making of Global International Relations* should be considered a must-read for those interested in the research agenda of Global IR. Even if it is far from being exhaustive, as the authors acknowledge, it is substantially helpful and has potentially far-reaching openings, and is particularly sensitive to the conceptions of and contributions from the non-Western world. In the final analysis, this book should be taken as an essential point of departure, rather than a full-fledged framework to be applied in future studies, toward developing a “truly global” discipline.