

RE-VISITING THE ASIAN IDENTITY: Approaches to break Eurocentrism of existing International Relations theories

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INTRODUCTION

The world order in a post–Cold War era has witnessed a significant shift of power and economy towards Asia. This paradigm establishes the notion of ‘new world order’ under the hegemony of the third world nation like China and India. With the mounting prominence of Asia in world politics, ontological assumptions about non- western behavior have increased. Epistemological question here arises is that who are the northwestern and who are westerns? Non-western countries are all those who don’t belong to Western culture or society. Definition of West is vague, but in the context of this paper, I am considering west as an American and European society or the colonizer states. The need of nonwestern theory is trailed from west centric nature of existing international relation theories. They apply western ideas of international relations over the whole world in Gramscian¹ style (Chen, 2010).

West and Global South both are social constructs, thus the relationship between both is always fluid and relational (Pan,1999). This division is not only geographical but more of geopolitical if carefully studied. This paper tries to deconstruct these socially constructed ideas of west and global south and further aims to introduce the approaches that could be incorporated to develop the universal nature of existing International Relations theory. I put my arguments forward stating that

¹Gramscian was Italian communist thinker, activists and political leader. His idea of hegemony refers to process of moral and intellectual leadership through which dominated or subordinated classes consent their own domination.

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there is a need for new approach which incorporates non-Christian traditions and post western experiences and history, to the existing mainstream theories. Revisiting the past and identity formation might hold the solutions or the approaches to be offered to existing field of international relations. The key finding of the paper is not to identify an alternative theory but an alternative approach.

Since ancient times, in Asia human rights have always been linked with duties as described in religious texts like Rigveda, Athar Veda, Manu Smriti, Quran Sharif etc. Man contributes to society and society in return rewards him with civil rights. The collectivism in Asia is widely discussed, but the historical formation of this concept will be discussed in this paper. Apart from this, Asian ideas of state and foreign policy are not close to Westphalian states but they are traced back from Buddhist philosophy, Ashokan Dhamma Vijaya, Chinese tribute system, Chanakya's mandala theory and very recent idea of Nehruvian NAM(Non-Alignment Movement). All these have different approaches but with common essence and this paper tries to study that commonality which can be absorbed by western IR theories. As believed that theory is the medium to understand a set of practices, which provide the same outcomes when applied in similar situations. To receive the correct outcomes from Asia it is also necessary to apply the right theory which understands post western approaches and set of practices.

For two decades, Asian scholars have been promoting the demands for integrating Asian ideas, Asian history and Asian values in international relations. This paper is an addition to the same demands and provides a solution that which of the post western approaches are to be absorbed by western theories to make itself universal in nature. The objective of my paper is to critically analyze the existing western theories

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and the need for broadening the western perspective of international relations by incorporating Asian identity and the voices of non-western nations.

ANALYZING THE REASONS F OF MISSING NON-WESTERN IDENTITY IN EXISTING IR

Non-western theories is a new concept which tries to occupy space in the intellectual sphere where western theory has already taken a dominate position. The incorporation issue comprises of two factor 'Gatekeeper practices' and 'linguistic and cultural barriers'.

International relations flourished in the era of Western dominance, incorporating the western notion of worldview. Western scholars argued that the theory should be systematized knowledge that provides similar results. In the Asian context it's more of a spiritual approach than a scientific approach which cannot be elucidated by '*self-binary code*' of western countries (Behera, 2007). Its also claimed that the western society follows the '*gatekeeping*' practice in International relations theory and only appreciates or incorporates the ideas which could benefit them. For example, nonalignment movement² of Nehru was adopted by approx. hundred nations in the cold war era, but there is very little literature available and its not given any high significance in western theories.

² Non alignment theory was introduced by Jawaharlal Nehru, Indian Prime minister (), political thinker and activist. He mentioned that 'we propose as far as possible to keep away from power politics of groups, aligned against one another which had in the past two World Wars and which may again lead to disaster or even waster scales.'

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Language and culture has always been a major barrier dividing an English speaking and non-English speaking nations. Western scholars do not largely study Eastern literatures. The once studies face a sequences of linguistic barrier like translation error, distorted, deceptive and lastly interpretational difference.

NEED FOR RE-ANALYZING THE EXISTING IR THEORIES

There is a great disparity between north and south, developed and underdeveloped nation, colonizer and colonized. When it comes to economy, power distribution or growth each region has its own configuration and history. Then how can such disproportional regional complexity can be explained by a monolithic construct? The answer to the question is provided in two layouts: 'wrong applicability of theory' and 'failure of mainstream IR to cover all'.

Theory is the medium to understand a set of practices which provide the same outcomes when applied in similar situations. To receive the correct outcome, it's also necessary to apply the right theory. If same theory is generalized and applied in all spheres, it will give limited outcomes. So as the case of Asian states where Realist predictions are failing in Asia, Liberalist predictions are not sufficient to explain Asia, constructivism never can explain a state behavior alone and need backup of other mainstream theory(Kang, 2003). The failure of mainstream theories to describe Asian behavior can be considered as that the applicability of western theory is only for the west. These theories provide better outcomes in complex situations of west because these theories were developed in the era of European supremacy and are completely based on the European perspective of viewing the world. Developing Asia in the world

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political table now brings the need to be seen by Asian lenses instead of European. Utilization of European lenses to understand Asia are failing to generate a viable outcome. The wrong applicability of Eurocentric theory in Asia leads to the need of introducing nonwestern IR theory.

Mainstream International relations theories cannot cover each and everything in the sphere in world politics. The coverage of each and every region in the same manner is impossible. There is a need of a different approaches to define different regional behavior which consist of the overlapping nature of all mainstream theories. Dominance of any region based theory limits the field of study and at the same time limits the expansion of theories. Incorporating comparative politics into International Relations can also be a solution.

REVISITING THE ASIAN IDENTITY THROUGH ITS UNIQUENESS

As discussed above, Non-Western approaches can conceptualize the Asian sentiment much better than the western theories or ideas. It is important to discuss the Asian ideas which could be incorporated into the existing International Relations instead of only demanding the increased role of non western ideas or non Christian traditions. It is important to know or study Asia with Asian history or Asian experiences. Understanding the regional identity construction by studying the Asian uniqueness and Asian history are the only means to clearly understand the Asian style of international relations. Scholars of International studies suggests for '*a need of theory which can define Asian ideas, Asian history, Asian concept of human rights in international*

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relations' (Amitav Acharya, Bary Buzan, 2010). There is a comparative disparity between European Westphalian system (informal hierarchy and formal equality) and East Asian tribute system (formal hierarchy and informal equality) (Kang, 2012, p. 20). This makes it more difficult for Eurocentric theories to understand Asia. This difference doesn't mean that Asia is recurring towards its past, but it shows a different Asian understanding of maintaining international relations than Europeans. In Western perspective, Confucianism seems ritualistic and paternalistic, making ethics a matter of manners and human relationships a matter of filiation (that is, bonding through role-playing). To a Confucian, the Western idolatry of the individual and the glorification of autonomy is an exaggeration of style that leads to extremes of conduct and disrupts settled patterns of culture and human relationship (Sim, 2004).

Uniqueness of Asia:

Asian uniqueness is based on four factors that are identity, culture history, and understanding of the state. Asian identity is more correlated to traditional behavior, which is most different from the Westphalian idea of identity. Asian states have the concept of 'collective identity/society' whereas western ideas are based on individual identity. That's why the ASEAN rationalistic structure is unique than western construct of European regionalism (Chong, 2012). Asian culture is indigenously constructed by politico-cultural traits which defines its cooperative relationship with neighbors. This structure is constructed from Confucius idea of harmony, which explains the cooperative structure in Asia better than any other mainstream theory. (Yu, 2010). Asian countries have a unique history that is very different from European History. The history of Europe is filled with 'bloody wars' whereas Asian history has very few wars

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and it was more of cooperation peaceful. (Kang, 2003). Asian understanding of state is also very distinct from the understanding of mainstream IR theories. The Japanese concept of 'normal great power', 'civilian power', 'trading system' or west Asian system, where non-state actors are more primary in society than state, which cannot be easily explained by existing theories (Amitav Acharya, Bary Buzan, 2010).

Diverse Ideas in Asia:

Islamist ideology, Chinese tribute system, Indian Non Alignment theory, Buddhism, Kautilya's realism, the Japanese concept of civilian power, Japanese ideas of the Meiji restoration, Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence and the current perspectives and foreign policies of Asian states all are different voices of one Asia. A theory should be a general practice which can be commonly implied over the whole region. There is 'no one voice of Asia' (Amitav Acharya, Bary Buzan, 2010) so even if an Asian theory is developed considering historical/existing theory differences, it would still be multiple theories than a single nonwestern international relations theory of Asia. One of these theories should be picked or a completely new theory should be developed by incorporating all these ideas is a question which is very difficult to answer. Similarly scholars of which nation or which Asian state (east, west, central, south) will contribute in developing this theory might also be a matter to be discussed.

Asian Style of Human Rights:

_In India, the concept of human rights already existed in Ancient Indian society and these can be traced with Ancient texts like Rigveda, Athar Veda and Arth shastra.

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Rigveda³ declares equality of all human beings and mentions svabhava(nature of human), svadharma(duties of human) and svadhikara(rights of human). Under svadhikara, there are three civil rights – tana (body), Skridi (dwelling place) and jibhasi (life). Atharveda⁴ mentions about equal right of all over food and water and Arth shastra⁵ elaborates legal and civil rights of human beings explained by Manu in Manu smriti⁶. (Selvan, 2010, p. 42)

Rights in Indian concept have always been incorporated with duties which an individual has towards society and what society in return will provide. Similarly in East Asian society, human rights are understood under Confucianism defines rights in the form of moral relationships of one person with another. According to Confucianism, rights should be distributed among members of a family as their lives are joined with each other and they stand as support to each other. By looking at Indian and East Asian style of human rights, we find that these are more of collective nature and duties are reciprocal to human rights that are completely different from western concepts of human rights. How west centric theories will explain these duties-human right relationship? This leads to the need of an Asian theory to understand Asian concepts.

³Rig Veda is a collection of inspired songs or hymns and is a main source of information on the Rig Vedic civilization. It is the oldest book in any Indo-European language and contains the earliest form of all Sanskrit mantras that date back to 1500 B.C. - 1000 B.C

⁴Atharveda is the fourth among four Vedas. It consists of spells and charms prevalent at its time, and portrays a clearer picture of the Vedic society

⁵Arthshastra is a Sanskrit word which means “the science of benefit, of practical life”, Arth shastra is an ancient Indian treatise, a collection of precepts on government. Authorship is ascribed to Kautilya (fourth century B.C.). It is a major source of information on the social relations, economy, and political institutions of ancient India.

⁶Manusmriti is an ancient Indian text written between 1500 B.C. to 500 A.D. it talks about how to lead the life' or 'way of living' by various classes of society. It discusses rights and duties of different classes and males and females.

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Non-alignment movement:

The Indian Non Alignment movement⁷ has all potentials to be considered as a theory of international relations that rejected western self-other codification and accepted a neutral approach by not taking sides during the cold war. Nehru had stressed the morality belief, values of justice, fairness and tolerance in his book discovery of India which justifies the theory of NAM. (Amitav Acharya, Bary Buzan, 2010, pp. 10-14). This theory was widely accepted by approx. hundred newly independent commonwealth nations (Jain, 2000, p. 21). If not for NAM, Cold War would have been broken into an active conflict. The NAM groups have weakened the western concept of binary relationship between states which is based on self or other relationship. Though it's a widely accepted theory still NAM never got recognized by western scholars of IR. India and the newly independent nations or their scholarship had no place in forming theories of international relations. NAM never even got popularized/published in Europe because it did not talk anything of European interest. What I am trying to state is that European dominance was so strong in defining International relations that European ideas and experiences have generalized the whole world that doesn't completely fit in to explain.

Western theories face challenges when they are fired by puzzles like Asian style of human rights, NAM of India, Asian peace, China's peaceful rise, band wagoning with China instead of balancing etc. Same mainstream theories very easily explain US presence in Asia or European actions. Mainstream theories are developed under European model but faces challenges in Asia, because they haven't been developed

⁷ Non Alignment Movement, Nehruvian theory of not aligning to any of the cold war blocs.

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under the Asian model. With 'Asia rising' there is a strong need in the field of international relations to understand Asian model in Asian style.

REVISITING THE ASIAN IDENTITY THROUGH HISTORY

History helps us to understand past, present and the changes that how the society we live in came to be. History also provides the moral understanding and identity. Thus we can argue that the whole Post- western identity is lost with its history in Western centric IR theories. As argued by EH Carr, history is the key to understand the present. It is important to utilize the same historical key to understand the present Asian identity and values. It is not possible within the scope of a paper to discuss all the aspects of Asian history that has influence over International Relations. But to explain the need to understand Asian History with, I shall analyze four evidences/examples of history, which have had great influence over Asian IR and still have their strong impact.

Buddhist Philosophy of Maintaining Foreign Policies

Buddhism had spread from India to all over Asia. It strengthened international relations between states and increased numbers of ambassadors and travelers of one country to another e.g. Xuan-Zang⁸, Faxian⁹, I-tsing¹⁰etc. (Bolton, 1982, pp. 80,129). Buddhist philosophy also explains that how a state politics should be and how its foreign policy should be maintained. According to Buddhist philosophy, foreign

⁸XuanZang (Huen-tsang), (630-645 A.D.)was Chinese Buddhist monk, scholar, traveler and translator who visited India for 17 years and his experiences are recorded in Chinese text 'great tang records on the western regions'. He visited court of Harshavardhna and attended Buddhist conference.

⁹Faxian (Fa-hien) (405-411 AD) : He came to India during the reign of Chandragupta II Vikramaditya. He was the first Chinese pilgrim to visit India to collect Buddhist texts and relics

¹⁰ I-tsing(671-695 AD) : A Chinese traveler, he visited India in connection with Buddhism.

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policy(IR) should be based on following principles:(a) promotion of friendship, (b) non aggression and cooperation (c) promotion of the welfare of entire human community. A state should realize the following four objectives 1. Atthasukha(economic security), 2. Bhogasukha (abundance of food and other essentials);3. Ananasukha(freedom from debt), 4. Anavajjasukha(blameless moral life) (Kariyawasam, 2004). This History of Buddhism gives us an idea of traditional ways of maintaining IR in Asia. Such history should be considered in understanding contemporary IR in Asia because these are the roots of Asian IR.

'Ashokan 'Dhamma'

Indian emperor Asoka who was following the aggressive foreign policy of *DigVijaya* (victories in all directions) shifted his state ideology to *Dhammvijaya* (conquest of righteousness) and became a nonviolent king who introduced state/foreign policy like 'dhamma' (Seneviratna, 1993, pp. 180-200).AshokanDhamma¹¹ is not Dharma(Religion) but its Ashokan concepts of explaining rightful behavior and duties of a state, its king, its ministers and its individuals. It also explains the way a state should deal with another state. How western theories will explain this history of India and such peaceful transformation of a victorious king to a nonviolent king. This history is still marking its presence on Indian currency as India's national emblem 'Ashok Chakra'¹². This again demands for understanding Asia through Asian lenses to get the positive assumptions about Asian behavior.

¹¹Ashokan 'Dhamma' was Ashoka's state policies towards its citizens and their duties towards state. Dhamma refer to qualities of the heart that underlie moral action.

¹²The Ashoka Chakra is a depiction of the Buddhist Dharmachakra, represented with 24 spokes from which twelve represents casualties and twelve represents life.

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Chinese Tribute System

Thirdly, Medieval Chinese society was based on tribute system where China was hegemonic state and rests of the states were ranked by their closeness to China. As mentioned above, this system had concept of formal hierarchy and informal equality. It is very difficult to explain this system under the light of Eurocentric theories that why states considered it as a pride to serve China. Connecting this ancient tribute system with contemporary rising China, it can be argued that like ancient times where states happily accepted Chinese hegemony is being repeated in present. In contemporary politics, states are also not balancing against rising China but they are band wagoning with China. This band wagoning can only be explained after studying the East Asian History.(Kang, 2012)

Mandala Theory of Kautilya

The mandala (circle) model of Kautilya has been explained in his work Arth shastra, which (321-296BC) was perhaps the first work of state system and empire building in the intellectual history. He defines that a state is encircled by 11 other states where friend's friend state is friend state and enemy state's friend is enemy state. According to this, every second, fourth, sixth, eighth, tenth state is enemy and third, fifth, seventh and nine states is friend state in the circle. Twelve circles are neutral circles. These 12 kings constitute the basic structure of Kautilya's international system. Centuries before the development of Realism, Kautilya defined balance of power and realism which played key role in shaping Indian History. In the field of International relations, very less has been taken from Kautilya's ideas of power and balancing. To understand

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Indian politics, Kautilya's theory of politics and mandala model ¹³ must be taken into the consideration. (Bandhopadhyaya, 1993, p. 137)

I have only traced four examples from Asian History but these four historical examples shows that Asia has many hidden theories. A nonwestern approach to IR can better explain Asia by incorporating Asian histories and Asian ideas.

How western theories will explain Asian behavior without having an understanding of Asian 'history'. In the words of Peter N. Stearns (Scholar, American Historian Association), *'history help us understand people and society, history help us understand changes and how the society we live in came to be, history contributes to moral understanding and history provides identity'*. (Stearns, 1998) My motive behind picking western definition of history is to analyze that if history has such great importance for west, then why Asian history is not being considered in studying Asia? With 'new world order' now its need of time to develop Asian theory of IR which can provide an understanding of Asian people, society, changes, moral understanding and most importantly Asian identity.

ASIAN IDENTITY THROUGH RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND BEHAVIOR

¹³Mandala theory in Kautilya's model upon which the king could decide on collusion, cooperation, alliance, acquisition or destruction in dealings with other nations. Through all of this he set forth a scheme of covert dealings, misinformation, spies, planned assassinations and poisonings. Kautilya can be seen as "predecessor" of Machiavelli, and like him is viewed as both a sinner and a saint on management principles and practices

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In Asian context, religion plays very important role in defining political and social behavior. A historical example mentioned above provides an idea that how Buddhism played a great role in defining/practicing international relations in Ancient Asia. From ancient to modern times religion still carries the same importance and influences the contemporary politics. Due to the lack of understanding Islam, western theories are unable to provide a proper justification for the peace and war associated with religion (Jonathan Fox, Shmuel Sandler, 2004, pp. 163-166). Western theories fail to explain Islamist ideas of democracy, governance, individual rights and drafting laws. In Hinduism, Vedic ideas about strategy and politics have been invoked as the justification of India's acquisition of nuclear weapon (Karnad, 2002). In Asia, everything is assimilated with religion whether its society, human rights, politics, hygiene or moral values. Though critical constructivists also talk about role of religion in shaping state politics but in Asian context especially in Islam, where the whole society is primarily governed by religion and state comes to secondary place. However, this concept cannot easily be explained by western theories. Those have been constructed on basis of experiences of Westphalian states where state is primary actor. Revisiting and understanding all these Asian ideas carries the potential to provide an entirely new perspective to develop an universal nature of existing International Relations Theory.

ROLE AND DILEMMAS OF SCHOLARS IN PRODUCING **ASIAN APPROACHES**

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Shifting Intellectual Dominance:

Field of International relations, since its beginning has been dominated by western scholars who saw the world through western lenses. With 'New Asian Order' the intellectual interest is also slowly shifting the paradigm towards the scholars of nonwestern world. Amartya Sen's concept of rethinking India, Wolter's mandala state (1982), Geertz Negara (1980), Fairbank's Chinese world order (1968), Huntington's Confucian international systems (1996) and kang's notion of hierarchy (2003-4) which may not help IR scholars studying other regions of world but which do capture distinctive Asian patterns and experiences. Developing new Asian theory of international relations will also encourage academia class to study international relations in context of Asia. This will simplify the complexities of understanding Asia which contemporary mainstream IR theories are facing.

Not an Opportunity to Vaunt:

Constructing a new approach to incorporate Asian ideas of international relations is not an opportunity to say 'Asia is better'(Young Chul Cho, Josuke Ikeda, 2012). One of the major challenges associated with constructing a new Asian approach is that it might be taken as an opportunity to vaunt about Asia. Scholars should simply and clearly state the formation of Asian identity, ideas and beliefs instead of comparing them with west in order to project Asian supremacy.

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INCORPORATING THE NON-WESTERN APPROACHES

Universal and Adaptable Theory:

As stated through out the paper that there is a need to develop a universal theory which can be comfortably explained the existing world and its ideologies, policies, behavior etc. This theory should be adaptable and flexible to incorporate the new changes that occur with time. Theory is not just an orthodox supremacy of some ideas but the theory is each practice which is commonly followed in a repetitive fashion. For example, Liberalism talks about institutionalism and economic cooperation that can overpower conflicts and struggles. Whenever same outcome of cooperation is considered in a conflict situation, liberalism theory best fits in to explain the circumstances.

Existing theories are Eurocentric and when narrowed down on the approaches we identify though there is a need for developing nonwestern IR theories but they might also limit to be a regional theories. To solve this situation, Universal theory should be developed with broad approaches. The notion presented here is to develop a universal and adaptable theory of international relations with considering the difference and similarities existing in north and the south , west and the east.

Twin Layer of Theory:

One or few theories at international level that cannot explain all the dynamics in the regions. There should be recognition of a two layer theory, one fitting into the broader global aspect and second on a regional aspect. While studying a state behavior,

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an international theory explain the inter-state relations. At regional level, state behaves unique depending on the geopolitics of the region. For Ex like ASEAN cooperation and EU both are regional organizations but behaves different or the, spread of radicalization in West Asian Muslim counties is a regional feature. Thus regional theory can study these regional features.. Developing this twin layer approach of constructing Regional theory of international relations at regional level and universal theory of international relations at international level might solve the problem of factors that shows multiple behavior when multiple theories are fit in.

CONCLUSION

Asian system is contrasted to the western system and the theories designed by western experiences are not proficient to provide the correct outcomes when applied in Asian structure. This calls for the need of incorporating non Christian traditions and the non-western experiences in the existing international relations theory. Linguistic barriers and gatekeeping practices of west has kept international relations away from Asian ideas but with Asia rising its important for whole world to understand and predict Asia. Asia has its own unique identity, history, culture and understanding of concepts like state, hegemony, hierarchy, equality and human rights. Asian understanding is completely European understanding of these ideas.

There is an ongoing debate among scholars for producing a nonwestern IR theory to explain Asian through the Asian style. But this is challenged by regionalist character of such theory that it will face same issues that Eurocentric theories are facing. A theory of Universal, flexible and adaptable nature should be developed by

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incorporating the Asian/ Non-western approaches in existing International Relations. Another idea suggested in this paper is to develop 'twin layer' of theory that can help in better understanding of regional politics and international relations.

As discussed through this paper, my idea is not to boycott existing theories and introduce a completely new utopian theory, but it is to broaden the perspective of international relations. Developing a nonwestern theory will not solve the purpose rather only challenges the existing field of international relations. This can only be solved by developing a nonwestern approach to international relations which incorporates the ideas and culture of all regions but still is not paralyzed by any regional biases. These approaches have always remained a question and I personally believe Asian History and Asian culture are the thoughts to be incorporated. This also calls for the roles of Asian scholars to re-produce the ancient works in English and break the linguistic barriers between the West and non-West societies. Revisiting the Asian history and identity holds the solutions for breaking the Eurocentric nature of existing theories in International relations.

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