

**Indigenization of International Relation Theories in Korea and China:
Tails of two essentialisms**

Jungmin Seo
Yonsei University

Hwanbi Lee
Yonsei University

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I. Introduction

This paper aims to critically review the recent academic efforts to construct indigenized international relation theories (IRTs) in Korea and China. IRT scholars in this region increasingly criticize the ethnocentrism, both geographically and historically, of existing IRTs and pursue China-specific or Korea-oriented IRT while referring various IRT schools that seem to gain independent status from Anglo-American academic hegemony. Decades-long yearning for indigenous IRT in China inserted a few unique keywords in existing IRT vocabularies such as *Tianxia*. In Korea, while less audacious compared to Chinese efforts, vocabularies such as “Middle Power Diplomacy” gained significant currency among Korean academia. We argue that such efforts in China and Korea paradoxically strengthen the hegemonic status of the Western IRT’s claims for universalism by pursuing the strategy of self-orientalization, in other words, self-essentialization.

II. Theory Migration and Formation of Hegemony

The act of translation cannot but participate in the performativity of a language that circumscribes and is circumscribed by the historical contingency of that act. Lydia H. Liu¹

Virtually all modern theories of social sciences in East Asia started from the act of translation during the Meiji era and the late Qing period. Yet, very few scholars have investigated the complexity of the process of translation. In the process of translation of ideas, a translator (or ethnographer) has to face dual problems; deciphering the social, political and historical contexts of specific terms and logics while contemplating the practicality and utility of those terms and logics for the situational needs of the to-be-translated language. The dilemma and paradox of a translator, ironically, gives an agency who decides for which constituency and for what practical purposes. A translator’s or a theory importer’s task is similar to a Greek god of cunning and tricks, Hermes, the god of messenger. Both of above share the same problem; delivering their message convincing. They have to treat “the foreign, the strange, the unfamiliar, the exotic, the unknown” while making “use of all the persuasive devices at one’s disposal to convince his readers of the truth of his message, but, as though these rhetorical strategies were cunning tricks, he gives them scant recognition. His texts assume a truth that speaks for itself – a whole truth that needs no rhetorical support.”(Crapanzano 1986, 52) In this way, an indisputable agency emerges.

Theories migrated from the West to the rest of the World through the ontology of non-Western thinkers, especially in humanities and social sciences who are having intensive dialogue with the hegemonic theoretical framework of the West. In this process, translated modern concepts emerged such as “nation(*minzu*, *minzhoku*, *minjok*),” “state (*guojia*, *goku*, *gukka*),” and “Democracy (*minzhu*, *minshu*, *minju*).” When the western imperial societies used democracy in the contexts of emerging bourgeois and class revolutions, Chinese in the late Qing used democracy as a synonym for Western civilization as well as the “life-blood” of

¹ Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity-China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), xvii.

China's wealth and power. Yan Fu, for instance, defined democracy as "subduing the self for the benefit of the public in regard to punishment and law" (Wang 1997, 37). The translated concept was the result of intensive interactions and purposeful choice of translator who stood in between two separate historical conditions. The translation of democracy, therefore, was circumscribed by the socio-political conditions of the late-Qing China as much as the transplanted performativity of the vocabulary.

Though this study cannot go further regarding the translation of IRTs in East Asia, I believe that archeological works on the processes of IRT migrations from the West to East Asia from the end of the World War II are necessary for further investigation. Yet, what we do know is the fact that E. H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: an Introduction to the Study of International Relations* and Hans Morgenthau's *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* were introductory readings for majority of young IR students in 1950s and 1960s Japan and Korea (and probably in Taiwan). Yet, few of us ever investigated how the concepts of "national interest," "balance of power" or "sovereignty" were interpreted, translated and received by those who circumscribes and were circumscribed by historical conditions. I presume that amid intensive ideological confrontations within/without the national border, the concepts were subjugated to numerous contestations among different groups harboring different priorities and, therefore, varied narrativization of 'national interest' and 'sovereignty.'

Scholars who are rooted in non-Western cultures and engaged in IRTs have performed the role of theoretical translators in the extreme conditions of asymmetrical power relations. In 1960s Korea, numbers of Korean students in American academic institutes were vigorously trained. For instance, the East-West Center in Honolulu actively recruited the brightest students from Korea with special scholarship program, aiming to create pro-American elite groups through education amid intensifying Cold War. Upon completing their studies, Korean intellectuals diligently studied, translated and taught Hans Morgenthau and Brzezinski, and other prominent IR scholars in elite institutions in Korea. At the same time, they were able to engage in policy-making processes as top policy advisors and appointed high-ranking government bureaucrats. Until recently, only one retired as a professor from the Department of Political Science at Seoul National University, while others as ministers, congressmen, and top presidential advisors and vast majority of them were beneficiary of the East-West Center scholarship program.

In various discussions on the history of Korean IRTs, virtually no space was devoted to the historical meanings of the first generation Korea IR scholars who were basically 'translators.' For instance, Hans Morgenthau's book, *American Foreign Policy: A Critical Examination* was first translated into Korean in 1957. E. H. Carr's *What is History?* was translated into Korean in 1966. Many students of political science testimony that those books were frequently used in the college classrooms. Yet, majority of political science professors in the 1960s were trained in Japanese (mostly in Laws) and few were directly exposed to the Western IRT by themselves. Hence, the first generation that studied in the United States in the 1960s and started to teach in the 1970s can be regarded as the first importer of IRTs. Though political domination of the United States in South Korea started from August 1945, academic hegemony of the Western social sciences started from the 1970s. The Department of Political Science and Diplomacy at Yonsei University was exemplary. Of seven newly hired professors

in the 1970s, five received Ph.D. from American institutions, one French and one domestic. In the 1980s, all of three newly hired professors were trained in the United States. From 1970 to 2017, the department has never hired an IR professor who was not trained in the United States or Europe². In this way, Anglo-American IRTs sat the standard for IR curriculums and syllabus at Yonsei University, followed by majority of Korean universities.

The second generation of scholars who explored as their academic career after the liberalizing study-abroad policy in 1988 engaged with American academia rather differently from their predecessors. With democratizing processes at home, they proactively sought the applicability of American IRTs in East Asian circumstances and tried to formulate country-specific and region-specific research that obviously overcame the simple translation, the works of their predecessors. They have arduously interpreted the meanings and implications of realism, liberalism and constructivism and tried to apply those to the past or current international affairs of East Asia. This generation eventually became the pivotal voices that called for the Korean-style IRTs, as I will discuss further in the later part of this section.

Yet, the economic crises in 1997 and 2008 produced a new generation of Korean IR scholars. The current Korean IR scholars in Korea and abroad, largely coming from different class background, few of them came from upper class anymore, focus their research within the scope of the job prospect and research trends of the Western academia so that either they can survive by publishing more articles in prominent English journals. Assumed as a countermeasure against the rampant nepotism in the faculty hiring process in Korean universities, the sheer number of publications in SCI and SSCI became the ultimate criteria for hiring, promotion and tenure in majority of Korean universities. This new criteria imposed since the early 2000s forced Korean scholars to become an integral part of the Anglo-American academic world. The only virtual way to prove one's research originality is publishing in English.

Different generations of scholars engaged in different works of translation and theories migrated accordingly. For the first generation, importing Western IR theories, that might replace the legacy of Japanese academic colonialism, was the primary task. IR courses in Korean college until the 1980s were largely conducted by reading and comprehension of classic IR textbooks under the guidance of America-trained professors. Applicability to Korean students' worldview was hardly concerned. Nevertheless, disruptions sometimes happened in classroom in 1980s when anti-Americanism gained strength in Korean campus by students' rejection of unilateral indoctrination of Western IRTs. The language of Leninist "Imperialism" circulated among student activists. This campus atmosphere somewhat influenced the research trends of the second generation Korean IR scholars. Korean IR scholars increasingly concerned regarding "Korea-centered IR theories," "East Asian international relations," and "Middle-power diplomacy." Korean IR scholars were rather uncomfortable with the basic premise of 'the Balance of Power,' "Power Transition Theory" or even "Democratic Peace Theory."

Theory migration processes can be easily identified in the history of Chinese IRTs which Qin Yaqing (2007; 2011) and Feng Zhang (2012) illustrate well in their articles. According to

² Of sixteen professors who belong to broadly defined IR subfield, twelve were trained in the United States, three in France, one in England.

Qin, Chinese scholars did research primarily on revolutionary thoughts of Marx, Lenin and Mao, and also gave attention to the Western thoughts as a subject of criticism before 1979. Theories played a role as a guideline for policy making and research reports were simply prepared for the government until then. Even the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 intensified ideological fervor in doing research.

The ‘reform and opening up’ policy that Deng Xiaoping initiated, though, led to the significant changes in Chinese IR studies. In the early 1980s, the first Chinese students who studied in American universities came back to their homeland and dedicated to teaching and doing research with their knowledge acquired abroad. Therefore, IRT studies in China were inevitably influenced by the American scholarly tradition (Qin 2011, 190). At the same time, the efforts were made to translate Western IR works into Chinese. For instance, the first translation series including Hans Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations*, Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* and other classics came out in 1990, which were mostly about realism. As the Cold War ended, Chinese scholars became conscious of the domination of realism in the IR discipline and put forth their efforts to import theories other than realism, thereby promoting four more series of translations (Qin 2007, 29). By 2000, majority of the important classics, most of which carried American IRTs, have been imported and translated into Chinese. Even marginal theoretical approaches such as feminism and critical theory were imported in the early 2000s.

Although the Chinese IR academic community were enriched by Western thoughts and witnessed remarkable development during this period, Chinese scholars were also concerned about the Western dominance of IR studies. The earliest reflection on Chinese style IRTs was provoked by the proposal that China needed ‘IR theory with Chinese characteristics’ during China’s first major IR theory conference in Shanghai in 1987 (Zhang 2012, 77). Since then, the discussions on its own IR theories have been deepened and even complicated, forming a general consensus that building IRT from a Chinese perspective is necessary (Qin 2011, 195) and adding its local resources to existing IRTs. The so-called Tsinghua approach is an exemplary of this. Still, those voices have failed to stop younger scholars in China from being directly exposed to and eventually dominated by Western scholarly discipline. Likewise, the academic hegemony of Western IR has been rapidly formulated since 1979 and continued even today.

From these theory migration processes in Korea and China, we can draw partial answers about following questions: (1) How did the hegemony of the Western IR theories emerge and (2) what are the mechanisms for maintaining hegemony. Firstly, a combination of open trade policy and education has facilitated the migration process of IRTs, which greatly contributed to the domination of Western IRTs in both countries. America-trained scholars have been a key actor to import and reproduce Western thoughts in their own homeland. In 1950s, Korean academic community explored an alternative to mitigate the Japanese academic colonialism and its study-abroad policy paved the way f

or it. For China, the aforementioned opening up policy in 1979 was a watershed. An increasing number of America-trained scholars in both countries have significantly influenced the hegemony of Western IR discipline, spreading Western knowledge and methodology to local students and creating its image as truth.

Secondly, “an international division of intellectual labor” (Min 2016, 478) has been

routinized. It is also related with the Cox's internationalization of the state and production (Cox, 1981, 144-149). In the process of knowledge production, less developed countries are mostly immersed in empirical testing while the developed work on theory-building. This pattern of hierarchical division of labor among countries has been reinforced over the generations. A survey of the Korean Journal of International Relations (KJIR) conducted by Byung Won Min reveals that there is a discrepancy between empirical studies and scholars' voices calling for indigenous theories in South Korea. Analyzing articles published by KJIR during the last ten years, he argues that Korean scholars have still concentrated on the empirical research applying Western IRTs to East Asian contexts, which has no bearing on their requests for indigenous theories. Similarly, an analysis of IR-related articles published in China from 1978 to 2007 shows that the number of research on Western IRTs, especially constructivism, was on the rise while there was little change in that on Chinese paradigm (Qin 2011, 188). In this regard, scholars in non-Western cultures seem to be hard to overcome path dependency as long as it remains as powerful.

For Korean and Chinese scholars, standards of evaluating academic performance have served as one of structural elements for maintaining hegemony. As mentioned above, Korean scholars should make tenacious efforts to publish articles in SCI or SSCI indexed journals for better social recognition and job prospect. Not unlike, the policy and promotion criteria of Chinese university and research institute encourage more international publications in SCI or SSCI journals not only for the social recognition and better job position, but also for governmental funds (Liu et al. 2015, 557-8). Scholars have been forced to follow the standards of Western discipline under such structures in both countries, and naturally, they tend to value publication in English for their survival in the academia. In addition, it is doubtful whether some of theories and theoretical criticisms of them were omitted in the process of theory migration, thereby creating a bias in favor of universalist existing IRTs. We can easily see this through international journals mostly carrying American or Americanized articles but we simply ignore or barely notice it. Then, where are the others? All these factors are feeding hegemony.

III. Possibility of Escaping from Hegemony

The processes of theory migration from Anglo-American mainstream academia to Korean academia feature an extreme form of asymmetrical power relations. In the sense that the Korean scholars could not imagine indigenous IRTs without using the "modern" political categories (Chakrabarty 2007, 4) such as sovereignty, international political economy, or diplomacy, Korean academia has been situated in the hegemony of the Western IRT. From 1990s to 2000s, a number of Korean IR theorists started to bring the issue of Koreanized

IRT³ while claiming that current IRTs in Korean academia is “failing to craft the critical tools to theorize their own unique political experience.” (Kang 2006, 120). And this effort, many claim that, should be “universally applicable” along with mainstream IRTs (Choi 2008). In that sense, Young Chul Cho criticizes that the efforts of indigenizing IRTs in Korea fell into the colonial mentality that “relegate Korean IR to being little more than a provider of ‘unique regional independent variable.’” (Cho 2015, 691)

In addition to Cho’s criticism, we wish to problematize another fundamental issue: the notion of “unique political experience.” Majority of Korean scholars believe that the unique political experiences such as “divided nation,” “intensive civil war,” “long-lasting homogeneous nation,” as the very grounds for ‘uniqueness of political experiences.’ The only way to ensure that the uniqueness of certain political experiences is to accept the notion of universal experiences. In other words, as much as the notion of ‘international’ is the outcome of ‘national’ (Lincicome 1999) and the notion of ‘chaos’ is the product of the concept of ‘order’ (Bauman 1991), to claim uniqueness, one should take ‘the universal’ for granted. If division, civil war or a long history of unified dynasty are experiences, those experiences are not influencing upon our current political consciousness as lasting ‘traces,’ ‘marks,’ or ‘inscription’ but as proactive behaviors of recollection by ever-changing political subjectivities (Ricoeur 2004). In other words, searching for ‘uniqueness’ is the very essence of the resistance that is pre-determined by hegemony that controls the concept of universality. Or, reversely, the very act of searching for uniqueness is reinforcing the notion of universality of the hegemonic theoretical frameworks. Hence, it might vitiate the domination of existing theoretical domination but strengthen the imagined universalist experiences upon which mainstream theories have been built.

Admittedly, emphasizing uniqueness strengthens the notion of universality of hegemonic IR theory. However, it does so only when it is assumed that Western IR theories rest on universal experiences. In other words, if one breaks the imagined belief in universalist experience or discloses its partiality, arguing uniqueness would not reinforce the notion of universality. Rather, it would stress the particularity of experiences on which mainstream theories are based. Focusing on one’s particularity highlights the other’s particularity in the world of particularities. In fact, some have pointed to a false image of universality of hegemony. Acharya and Buzan (2007, 300) have suggested the possibility that Western IRTs can be seen as “particular, parochial, and Eurocentric”. Cho (2015, 694) argues that American IR is “not the anointed guardian of universal truths but merely one player on the global academic field.” Chun (2007, 232) also implies the partiality of Western IRTs. Nevertheless, it can be said that most of researches conducted in Korea has yet failed to resist against hegemony, prioritizing the systemic creation of indigenous theories over the systemic disclosure of hegemonic IRTs’ partiality.

Futhermore, many point out that state-specific theories still linger within Westphalian

³ Cho offers an excellent review of the history of Korean IR scholars’ efforts of Koreanizing IRTs. See, Young Chul Cho, “Colonialism and Imperialism in the quest for a universalist Korean-style international relation theory,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 28, no. 4 (2015). Also see Byung Won Min, “Not so Universal? The Search for Indigenous International Relations Theories in South Korea,” *Korean Journal of International Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3 (Dec. 2016)

narrative. Apart from it, I wish to indicate that Korean scholars take an assumption of existing IR for granted in theorization. The emphasis on *national* experiences could be traced back to existing IR theories which treat a state primarily as a ‘basic’ unit of analysis. Why then states have routinely been a key actor in international politics and who defined them as a salient player though there are multiple actors such as individuals and society? This assumption might be internalized in the process of creation and reproduction of hegemony. Thus, it has been conducted without any doubt in indigenous theorization among Korean scholars. Why a state should be a principal agent in formulation of indigenous theories? Although doubting and questioning a given order is a primary element of resistance, it seems that their theorization does not faithfully reflect their voices for resistance to hegemony.

IV. Essentializing ‘Culture’

One of the key characteristics of Chinese IRTs is the prevalent usage of structuralist and essentialist notion of culture. Following the fever of the Western studies in the 1980s, a China-centered approach was articulated as an alternative that often meant little more than a return to sino-centrism, with its attendant claims of particularism and Chinese uniqueness (Hart 1999, 47). For instance, Zhao Tingyang’s concept of *Tianxia*, Yan Xuetong’s notion of the centrality of morality in Chinese foreign policy or Qin Yaqing’s concept of relationality are all grounded in Chinese philosophical and cultural traditions, especially Confucianism. Yet, Confucianism today is the result of “a particular construction of the Western construction of China with the Chinese construction of the West, with both of these components interacting and interpenetrating each other” (Chen 1992, 688). Similarly, local (Chinese) knowledge or indigenous consciousness is in general the consequences of intensive interactions among the Western epistemological domination, construction of national identities and massive destruction of non-national culture and identities. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, East Asian societies already transformed into ‘modern’ nations while fundamentally reshaping their concepts of time, space, and self (see Tanaka 2004). That means Confucianism, through historical interactions in the 20th century, is not Chinese in civilizational terms but is Chinese in national terms. Once Confucianism became ‘national,’ (Cheung 2012) its notion of *tianxia* cannot supply the very needed quality of this concept, universality. Hence, the argument for *tianxia* can be very easily interpreted as ‘Chinese *tianxia*’ or, easily speaking, ‘Chinese hegemony.’ I can very easily reject the notion of the centrality of morality in a similar vein.

As to the notion of relationality or actors-in-relations, it is not easy to distinguish that concept from similar notions appeared in Actor-Network-Theory (Latour 2005) or Structuration Theory (Giddens 1983). In theorizing processual constructivism with relationality at the core, Qin (2011) elaborates the following assumptions of its key concept: process is independent from results; process has its own dynamics from changing relations; and dynamics of process cannot be reduced to single individual. For Giddens, a continuous process is represented as action and the first two assumptions can be explained by each term “unintended consequences of action”, “production and reproduction of social action” in structuration theory. Further, it is explicitly articulated in Giddens’ theory that society cannot be reduced to activities of a single constituent, which is exactly the same as the last assumption. Above all, unlike Western orthodoxy’s top-down approach, a main idea of

relationality passing through core assumptions is the interaction between structure and agents, which parallels ‘duality of structure’, a core concept suggested by Giddens. In a similar vein, even though Latour sets a broader definition of actor, the core of both still exists in actors-in-relations. Therefore, it cannot be said that Chinese thoughts based on relationality are original.

Many of Chinese and Korean IRT scholars works start with Robert Cox’s insight that theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose. Nevertheless, the burden to prove a theory’s partiality and intentionality is on theoretical challengers. I do not recollect that the supporters of Chinese IRT or Korean IRT successfully fulfilled the mission of revealing those partiality and intentionality, though we are very easily sympathetic to Cox’s notion. When resisting hegemony in the form of universality is difficult, we are tempted to utilize the method of strategic essentialism to resist against hegemonic universalism (Spivak 1996). The efforts to bring Chinese traditions to re-interpret contemporary world order can be seen as a sort of strategic essentialism. Nevertheless, Spivak herself had to discard this concept because the deployment of this strategy in politics means internal oppression. Chinese (as a nation not as a civilization) academic desire to universalize its essentialistic interpretation of the past might greatly vitiate other non-Western others’ moral and political sovereignty. The discussion of ‘hierarchical order’ is a good example.

The Tributary system worked in the pre-modern era. Nevertheless, recent influential works on East Asian nationalism and nation states agree that there was an epistemological revolution in the late nineteenth century that fundamentally altered the concepts of sovereignty, nationhood, and statehood. The emergence of nation-centered linear history in the modern national building processes of East Asia created a radical demarcation between modern and pre-modern political identities. Therefore, it is not empirically rigorous to use the pre-modern tributary system as the foundation for understanding how modern East Asian states perceive themselves and their neighborhoods. Moreover, Feng (2009) argues the tributary system had been changing throughout Chinese history showing each dynasty had their specific tributary rules. Youngin and Buzan (2012: 20-23) also contend that the tributary system during Han dynasty was kind of expedient trading arrangements for strategic interaction and economic exchanges in search of peaceful relations with the Xiongnu and the Mongols while that of Ming and Qing was an institutional expression of Chinese civilizational superiority. For this reason, they endeavor to overcome its original usage and conceptualize it as an international society inspired from the English school. However, its newly defined significance does not seem to transcend the original idea of international society again. Likewise, evolving aspects of tributary system reveals that Chinese scholars have not covered all changes of historical institution but articulated specific characteristics of it enforced during specific period. This selective use of history without consideration of its alteration is unconvincing as a theorization.

Furthermore, modern nationalism tends to force these states to re-interpret ancient history through the prism of the nation state. That is how the issues of Tibet and Xinjiang are inherently confounded with different (ethnocentric or nationalistic) understanding of the tributary system in the present. Hence, the notion of Asian hierarchical order is an extreme reification of history as an ahistorical logic to serve the goal of properly defining the

country's rising international status.⁴ Cheung (2012; 2014) demonstrates that the development of its own IR theory becomes an important opportunity both to expand its discursive power as a part of its rise in world politics and to secure its domestic legitimacy as a new nationalist discourse. Hegemonic IRTs are criticized for being ahistorical. Yet, the effort to extrapolate pre-modern international system in East Asia to today's world is violently ahistorical because it ignores or camouflages the fact that 'local knowledge' has always been historically situated.

IV. Where are the West and non-West?

Back to Cox's definition of problem-solving theory and critical theory, we can identify where Chinese and Korean researches searching for their own IRTs are positioned. Theories share some of features of both kinds of theory but are usually inclined to one approach (Cox 1981, 130). Research questions represented in majority of indigenous IR-related articles in Korea and China are primarily of how indigenous theory with their characteristics can be made, not of how hegemony came into being and how it can be changed. They seem to be trapped in an illusion of indigenous theorization as the only alternative to hegemonic IR (Min 2007: 43). In this vein, Chinese and Korean researches on indigenous IRTs are closer to problem-solving theory which concentrates on solutions within a prevailing order, rather than critical theory which stands apart from a given order. These kinds of theory have a different starting point in that the former begins to decolonize within the periphery of hegemony while the latter at the core. Chen (2011) clearly articulates that building indigenous national schools is "no more than constructing a 'derivative discourse' of Western modernist social science" and the empire will be sustained if we decolonize only non-western IR, leaving aside the western part.

Few scholars deny the dichotomy between the West and non-West. Even scholars who argue that the current efforts to build indigenous theories regard the West as the reference point are inextricably involved in this dichotomy. Few ask why people predominantly use West and non-West dichotomy rather than East and non-East. We are not arguing that we should use the East and non-East dichotomy but wish to indicate that we cannot rule out the possibility that language itself can influence our thought. Here, three things need to be addressed. First, since Amitav and Buzan (2007) sparked the discussion of West/non-West IR theories, East Asian scholars followed it without casting doubt on its verbalism. Yet, we point out that "East" and "non-West" terms are residual concepts defined by the West, and thus, they are based on the West and its dualistic view. The very start of Amitav and Buzan's discussion rests on the Western-centrism in this regard. If we use this demarcation, the West is still a reference point because those who seek non-Western ideas should search for what is not Western. Second, a number of Korean and Chinese scholars define the West/East relationship as opposite from a dualistic perspective. Chen (2012, 472) criticizes that "as long as East and West are treated as oppositional entities, the competitive mood to become another English school or a superior alternative to Western theories will persist in the search for

⁴ How the Chinese see the rise of China and the role of morality in international politics is well illustrated in Yan's article. See Xuetong Yan. "The rise of China in Chinese eyes." *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 10, no. 26, 2001.

indigenous IR theory in Japan.” In addition to Chen’s criticism, we wish to investigate the West/non-West relationship which is not simply opposite. In terms of verbalism, non-West exists only when the West emerges, and the West loses its significance when non-West disappears. In other words, those two terms have significance only when they co-exist. Therefore, they are interdependent and complementary though they are seen as mutually exclusive and conflicting. In this light, simply defining their relationship as contrary should be reconsidered.

Then, what does it mean by the West for East Asian scholars? Against whom they are resisting? Geographically, the West is usually Anglo-America and/or Europe but we are not struggling with Anglo-America or Europe in a strict sense. According to Inoguchi (2007), the West is those areas which have been characterized as modernity during the periods from the nineteenth to the first half of the twentieth century.⁵ By him, the West is geographically fixed and cannot be changed because his definition is based on a given point in the past. Shih (2010) argues, however, the West is not the geographical but epistemological West in Chinese, Japanese and Western political discourse. Interestingly, unlike geographical definition, epistemological West is constantly changing depending on the frame (Shih 2010, 554). Majority of Korean scholars still regard the West as universal instead of being a ‘West’. In contrast, Chinese epistemological frame under the *tianxia* locates the West at the periphery while positioning China at the center. The same can be said about Japanese Greater Asian narrative. This variability of the West reflects that the West term has been constructed and empowered by interaction between the so-called West and non-West.

VI. Conclusion

I am very struck by the irony that, in the very act of criticizing Western domination, one often ends up reifying the power of denominator to a degree that the agency of non-Western cultures is reduced to a single possibility: resistance. Lydia H. Liu ⁶

The history of East Asia has been blurred with imperialism since the pre-modern era. It went through successive imperial orders led by different states – China, Britain, Japan and America in turn. Some believe that the age of imperialism was over but it is doubtful whether it really was as its latent legacy recently emerges in the minds of Asian scholars. As many point out, it is imperialistic to force others to accept a theory which is centered on one’s own culture and experiences and thus might vitiate the others’ sovereignty. In this regard, current efforts to draw a border in knowledge world and to make nation-specific theory which is universally applicable at the same time might lead to unending imperialism in terms of intellectuality.

Having gone through the modernization, the concept of state has been altered. However, without considering its alteration, the past is perceived and interpreted from the

⁵ Inoguchi defines non-West as those areas which have not been seriously affected by what is called modernity in the nineteenth and the former half of the twentieth century. See Takashi Inoguchi, “Are there any theories of international relations in Japan?,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2007.

⁶ Liu, op. cit. xv.

contemporary perspective in Korea and China. There was no concept of sovereignty or Westphalian system in a pre-modern era. Thus, traditional culture that Chinese scholars emphasize was of the 'civilizational' state. When seeking to construct indigenized theories with civilizational properties, though, they use the state in national terms as its base. Despite the differences of those two concepts of state, they converge on contemporary concept in Chinese political discourse.

Although worth trying to construct theories among Chinese and Korean scholars given the awareness of intellectual colonialism, it does not always weaken hegemony. As hegemony is closely related to the internalization of Western ways of thinking, it is worthwhile to ask why Chinese and Korean scholars are obsessed with and locked in an indigenous theorization box, which is also derived from Western thinking. In addition, efforts to theorize with local resources have failed to escape from hegemony as its assumptions, logics or narratives still follow the dominant way of thinking. For these reasons, recent endeavors to utilize local resources as a strategy in Korea and China ended up remaining in Western-centrism, simply disclosing its ambition for discursive power.

Further, as seen in Korean and Chinese discourse, they respectively argue two different essences in explaining international relations. Then, what is the true essence constructing international relations, culture or history? Is there any invariable essence in international relations? Local resources they use are outcomes of ongoing interaction between various actors, which means they are not invariable in nature. Considering their incessant interaction, focusing on fixed property cannot reflect or keep up with changes in international relations.

It is hardly deniable that existing IRTs, firmly grounded in the notion of the Westphalian concept of international order, cannot solve trans-national and global problems. That makes the *tianxia* epistemology sensible. Yet, what matters is not the weakness of the existing IRTs but the global reality of fast globalization that vitiates the existing state system. It happens first in financial sector, followed by global production networks which greatly assisted the rise of China. Emergence of right-wing statism (in disguise of nationalism) is the reaction against deeply globalizing world economy. Current IRTs are not able to follow the fast changing realities. Nevertheless, that does not mean that pre-modern epistemology such as *tianxia* or *zhongyong* dialectics suddenly became workable, however it might look attractive.

Past experiences or 'traditional culture' can be useful resources for building a new paradigm or perspectives. Nevertheless, all the experiences become sensible only through a certain form of epistemology. Likewise, traditional/cultural relics come to recognition only through certain socio-political positions that usually take the form of 'narration.' (White 1973) In Korea, the foundation grounds for the necessity of Korean-style IRT are Korean *national experiences*, which can be perceived only through positing Korean nation as the hegemonic subject of history. The emphasis on Korean national experiences, therefore, might repress non-national political experiences such as class, gender and other groups that fiercely seek the opportunity to gain the status of political subjects. By reifying past culture and tradition in the form of epistemology and discourses as something passed down without altercation, the efforts to utilize them might nothing but instrumentalizing the past to justify the desire of the current regime. When the templates (historically situated forms of nation and modernity) are given by hegemony, resistance with culture and experiences against domination becomes an integral part of hegemony.

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