

Conclusion: The State of IR in Southeast Asia—Heavily Western but Still Evolving

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Based on cross-national surveys and reflexive stocktaking, this special issue seeks to gain a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges to advancing the debates on Global International Relations (IR) in six Southeast Asian academic communities, namely Cambodia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam. Reflecting on various political and socio-economic variables that have shaped the contours of the discipline, it is argued that the primary challenges to advancing Global IR are the dominance of existing mainstream IR theories in teaching and research, and the propensity for scholars based in Southeast Asia to conduct policy- and empirical-oriented research. However, amid these challenges, the contributors have argued that there are some opportunities for the development of Global IR in the region. These include prospects for pre-theorization and conceptualization based on the abundance of empirical-based research, support for familiarizing students with publications by local scholars and constructivism's growing popularity. Finally, the article proposes some measures to advance Global IR.

Keywords: Global IR, Southeast Asia, academic communities, conceptualization, pre-theorization, reflexive stocktaking.

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Based on cross-national surveys and reflexive stocktaking, this special issue of *Contemporary Southeast Asia* seeks to gain a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges to advancing the debates on Global International Relations (IR) in Southeast Asia. The surveys were distributed among 615 IR scholars in six Southeast Asia countries, which include Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines and Vietnam. Altogether 250 responses were collected which equates to a response rate of 40.65 per cent. With this data, the contributors examined the current teaching, research and theoretical trends in IR in their respective academic communities. Reflecting on a variety of factors that have shaped the state of IR today, the contributors discussed how these six academic communities share some commonalities but also diverged in several surprising ways.

Most notably, the primary challenges to advancing Global IR shared among all six academic communities are the dominance of existing mainstream IR theories, and the propensity for scholars based in Southeast Asia to conduct policy- and empirical-oriented research as opposed to theoretical-based studies. Nevertheless, there are opportunities for globalizing IR, specifically the prospects for pre-theorization and conceptualization based on the abundance of empirical-based research, the considerable support for familiarizing students with the writings of local scholars to balance out the dominance of mainstream IR and constructivism's growing popularity.

This concluding article is divided into three parts. First, it explores why mainstream IR theories remain the dominant feature in Southeast Asia and why regional scholars prefer to conduct empirical- and policy-based research over theoretical-based studies. Second, it explores the opportunities for the development of Global IR. Third, it addresses what can be done to advance the debates on Global IR in Southeast Asia.

The Current State of Affairs

Even as debates on Global IR are gaining traction in many parts of the world, the level of interest in and contributions to Global IR in Southeast Asian IR academic communities still lags behind those in other Asian countries, such as India,¹ Japan² and China.³ Furthermore, discussions on regions such as Africa⁴ have inspired conceptual debates on negative sovereignty,⁵ while Latin America's experience gave birth to dependency theory. The latter has sparked many debates beyond its geographical origins.⁶ Such examples not

only show how different localities have contributed to the diversity of IR, but also how the exercise of contributing to the literature on Global IR is not necessarily a task confined to academics from outside the West.

Moreover, existing cross-national and cross-regional comparative studies of the sociology of IR primarily focus on the state and status of American and Western IR communities. For example, although the most recent 2017 Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) project has expanded its data collection to 36 countries, many non-Western academic communities were excluded from this survey. In fact, Singapore and the Philippines are the only Southeast Asian countries featured in the TRIP project.⁷

As one of the editors of this project and a scholar local to the region, learning from the survey results and subsequent discussions at the online workshop that the debates on Global IR in Southeast Asia remain marginal was not entirely beyond my expectations.⁸ However, based on previous projects as well as this one, I believe there are some opportunities for the advancement of local thought, concepts, and pre-theorization derived from indigenous history and contemporary experiences. Furthermore, in recent years there have been emerging and noteworthy contributions to the debates on Global IR from Southeast Asian academics and non-local scholars interested in Southeast Asia. To illustrate the point, there have been studies based on a broader regional analysis⁹ and on specific national trends, notably in Indonesia,¹⁰ Thailand,¹¹ the Philippines¹² and Malaysia.¹³ Meanwhile, there have been a few group projects, including a special issue published in the *Journal of International Relations of Asia-Pacific* (IRAP), edited by Alan Chong and Natasha Hamilton-Hart, that explore how various factors, including history and national legitimating myths, have shaped the direction of teaching IR in Southeast Asia.¹⁴ Prior to this project, my co-editor and I, along with several contributors to this special issue were involved in a separate project which investigated the implications of weaker state agency in Southeast Asia for Global IR.¹⁵

In addition, some other region-wide projects or country-based contributions have explored local experiences, some of which did not necessarily have the explicit purpose of contributing to debates on Global IR. Though an exhaustive list is beyond the scope of this article, significant contributions include debates on the regional order,¹⁶ which differs from that in Europe or Africa. Other research areas worth mentioning include smaller state strategies amid major power rivalry,¹⁷ such as institutional hedging¹⁸ and different types

of alignment behaviour.¹⁹ Some have argued that the latter often comes as a result of domestic factors,²⁰ such as local leaders' desire to secure authority and regime security,²¹ which are closely associated with local notions of legitimacy.²² These studies not only reveal alternative experiences that differ from Western accounts but also provide cases of comparisons with or implications for other smaller states in different regions. These discussions, in turn, hold the potential to stimulate further debates on Global IR in the region and beyond.

While there is an emerging awareness, this small body of literature is a reminder that levels of interest in the debates on Global IR in Southeast Asia have yet to gain momentum. This is also reflected in the survey results. Ja Ian Chong and Herman Kraft have cited a general lack of enthusiasm for advancing the Global IR project in the Singaporean and Philippine academic communities, respectively. In contrast, the levels of interest in Global IR are somewhat mixed in Thailand. The results also revealed that scholars whose works engaged with theory responded, to varying degrees, that it was important for students to learn about Global IR. However, they were less enthusiastic about contributing to the debates themselves. While this may be disheartening for proponents of Global IR, it must be emphasized that the survey results reflected the view of the majority, and there were nuances within each academic community which may not necessarily have been captured by the overall survey results. To illustrate this point, academics from these three countries have made recent contributions to the literature, as mentioned above.

In contrast, some academic communities cited a small but growing interest in Global IR. According to Thuy T. Do, a series of seminars given by Amitav Acharya in 2011 on Global IR inspired many local scholars (including herself) to contribute to the construction of non-Western IR theory. In fact, the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam's (DAV) forthcoming IR textbook will have a section on non-Western IR theory. Likewise, I Gede Wahyu Wicaksana and Yohanes William Santoso claim that there has been a growing awareness of non-Western IR discourses, as reflected in some recent publications by Indonesian IR scholars, though they have yet to become a more prominent feature within the Indonesian academic community. In Cambodia, scholars are supportive of theoretical pluralism in IR. Furthermore, 75 per cent of those surveyed deemed it crucial to introduce students to debates on Global IR.

Overall, the level of interest in Global IR varies across countries. Nevertheless, I personally think we have come a long way, given

that it has been almost 20 years since the idea of a non-Western IR theory (which later became known as Global IR) was first introduced in Singapore at a conference organized by Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan in 2005. Furthermore, more than a decade ago, Acharya observed that Asian scholars were generally averse to theory.²³ Yet, a special issue was published in 2007 by *IRAP* entitled “Why is there no Non-Western IR Theory?”, while other publications have similarly followed suit, as aforementioned. At the same time, this is not to deny that those interested in globalizing IR are still a minority in Southeast Asia. Based on online discussions, personal reflections and the survey results, the common challenges to advancing Global IR shared among the six academic communities are explored in the subsequent sections.

The Dominance of Mainstream IR Theories

The key questions pertaining to the debates on Global IR are how dominant existing mainstream theories are in local academic IR communities and whether there have been any attempts to draw upon indigenous experiences to formulate theories and concepts that may have implications beyond the region. To be clear, the aims of this special issue are by no means an attempt to dichotomize the debates on Global IR by essentializing the West and non-West. None of the contributors genuinely believed we should be done with studying and applying Western IR theories altogether. Rather, the purpose is to encourage diversity within IR by inspiring different localities to take stock of their own histories and experiences. Equally important is to think about alternative theories and concepts based on these histories and experiences, which can ignite conversations that serve to advance debates on Global IR.

Unfortunately, as the survey results reveal, many Southeast Asian IR communities are still dependent on mainstream IR theories. To understand the present state of affairs, it is crucial to recognize that IR as a discipline was initially introduced to Southeast Asia as a Western import largely shaped by colonial legacies, Cold War dynamics, foreign funding and scholarships. Though initially imported, the dominance of mainstream IR has been entrenched by national policies aimed at integrating local academia into the wider international academic communities and the realities of individual Southeast Asian states in dealing with challenges on the international and regional stages. In turn, the internalization

of mainstream IR by local scholars²⁴ has influenced the direction of teaching and research.

To elaborate further, post-colonial structures left behind by the United States have continued to shape the trajectory of IR in the Philippines, which remains Western in terms of teaching and research. Despite being the only Southeast Asian country to escape colonialism, Thailand's status as a traditional ally of the United States secured it large amounts of US aid and scholarships during the Cold War. The influx of aid enabled local scholars to receive their training in America, paving the way for traditional approaches, especially realism, to take hold.

However, not all academic communities in Southeast Asia have been shaped by US funding and Western training from the onset. Furthermore, while IR in some academic communities may still be considered a Western import, "West" may not necessarily be confined to US IR theory and thought. Yet, similar to the experiences of Thailand, the establishment of IR as a discipline was interlinked with the politics of the Cold War in the region. As Do explains, IR as a discipline in Vietnam was heavily influenced by Marxism, which was first introduced by a generation of academics who received their training in the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. It was not until the end of the Cold War that a younger generation of academics travelled to the West, especially the United States, to further their studies. These developments also coincided with Vietnam's push for regional and international integration during the 1990s. Through an influx of foreign funding and support, institutions such as the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Ford Foundation have had a hand in promoting IR research and teaching in Vietnam. This prompted a range of mainstream Western theories such as realism to take hold, thereby reducing, but not entirely upending, the dominance of Marxism.

While Marxism gained a foothold in Vietnam, there was a rejection of such approaches among Cambodian IR scholars due to the experience of living under the Khmer Rouge's reign of terror until the late 1970s and Vietnam's influence thereafter. In comparison to other academic communities surveyed in this special issue, IR as a discipline in Cambodia was initially developed by foreign faculty members who were not necessarily trained in IR but were English teachers that coincidentally had political or social science degrees. However, it was not until the 2000s that indigenous scholars trained abroad were able to take over the helm in shaping the trajectory of IR, which remains predominately Western.

Although Singapore is the outlier in the region in many respects, like its regional neighbours, mainstream IR approaches are favoured over alternative ones. However, unlike its neighbours, this can be attributed to its large foreign expatriate population. Due to higher levels of economic development and larger budgets, Singaporean universities have attracted a number of renowned academics from outside the region to take up both permanent positions and short-term fellowships. In turn, academics are supported by well-endowed libraries and an abundance of resources. The consequences are two-fold. First, Singaporean academia has become largely integrated with Anglophone academic circles. Second, IR as a discipline is largely dominated by foreign scholars, with some²⁵ but not all having an interest in Southeast Asia; thus, many may not necessarily be interested in contributing to Global IR based on Southeast Asia's experiences, which in turn perpetuates the dominance of mainstream IR.

While IR was a Western import in the early stages of the discipline's history in Southeast Asia, several recent factors have contributed to the ongoing dominance of Western-derived IR in the region.

First, university policies have focused on internationalization, which requires local scholars to abide by the rigorous standards established by Western academia. Consequently, internationalization unintentionally acts as a deterrence against the critical questioning of Western mainstream IR concepts and theory. This, in turn, buttresses the hegemonic status of Western academia in debates, conferences, publication outlets, processes and institutions. To be clear, internationalization is a relatively recent trend witnessed in most academic communities, with the exception of Singapore, which has long been integrated with Western academic circles.

As Do duly notes: "Despite criticism of the Western-centric nature of the discipline, IR scholars worldwide remain dependent on Western knowledge, particularly in terms of theory development, knowledge dissemination through IR textbooks, the hegemony of English and the institutional pressure to publish in Scopus journals." As a result, some indigenous scholars may lack the confidence to challenge Western theorists.²⁶ Chong explains that while internationalization boosts the number of publications in North American and Anglophone academic outlets by Singaporean-based academics, it also hinders the urge to challenge the status quo. As a result, IR in Singapore is likely to follow existing practices and thought rather than develop a new theory based on local experiences.

However, it is also important to note that aside from being a contributing factor to the Western dominance within the discipline, internationalization has had other varying effects across Southeast Asia. For example, while internationalization has raised the profile of many Singaporean academics in regional or wider international academic circles, it has had the opposite effect on Cambodian scholars. Though the majority do publish in English, these publications are typically circulated in other types of outlets, such as policy think tank websites. Part of the reason for this is that many believe that publishing in an international peer-reviewed journal takes too much time and effort, as it requires them to abide by the rigorous standards established by Western academia.

Interestingly, recent publications by Thai scholars in international peer-reviewed journals have seen a handful of contributions to Global IR. It is the publications in Thai that have generally remained faithful to mainstream IR, especially the various strands of realism. However, what is disconcerting is that even though universities have encouraged Thai academics to publish in Scopus-indexed journals, the majority of the respondents that do publish in English indicated that such endeavours do not necessarily increase the chances for academic promotion, which has left many disheartened and disillusioned with the current state of Thai academia.

Second, it is widely believed that the essence of mainstream theories, especially realism, is suited for interpreting the tribulations of Southeast Asian states, such as the struggle for autonomy amid major power rivalry. After all, how policymakers view the world and what theoretical traditions academics abide by are not far removed from the reality we interact in. With that, the content of IR can also be viewed as a reflection of national foreign policy.²⁷ As Vannarith Chheang argues, realism is still popular among Cambodian IR scholars because of their fixation on state survival and regime legitimacy, largely because of Cambodia's status as a smaller state sandwiched between two larger neighbours, namely Thailand and Vietnam. Chong explains that the study of IR is largely shaped by state funding and Singaporean policymakers who can relate to the language of realism because it resonates with the harsh realities of politicking by smaller states under constant threat. Furthermore, scholars based in Singapore have a strong focus on security issues in East Asia given the ongoing conflicts in the region, which may also justify the enduring appeal of realism. Singapore's interest in security is reflected in its role in hosting the UK-based International

Institute for Strategic Studies' Shangri-La Dialogue and the various publications and seminars organized by its local think tanks.

However, Southeast Asia's smaller states are not the only ones attracted to realism. Wicaksana and Santoso note that Indonesian students learn about past and present experiences, such as how Indonesian leaders fought bravely against colonialism but later continued their struggle to protect the country's autonomy in an anarchic world where larger powers exploit weaker ones. Furthermore, various strands of realism are reinforced by proponents of the theory who have become involved in policymaking in different capacities, including Juwono Sudarsono and Rizal Sukma.

In contrast, some participants of this project argued that the interactions within the contemporary regional order have in effect stimulated alternative thinking. As Do points out, even though academics are attracted to the appeal of realism because of the myriad of security challenges Vietnam is facing, especially the South China Sea dispute, Vietnamese IR scholars are increasingly convinced that Vietnam's conduct on the international stage does not necessarily fit the confines of a single Western theoretical approach. This largely comes as a result of the country's flexibility, the host of strategies aimed at engaging positively with China and its ability to forge partnerships with the other major powers to ensure its autonomy. Hence, Do argues that a Vietnamese style of hedging or a new form of "bamboo diplomacy" holds the potential to ignite discussion or revise existing IR concepts. Paradoxically, though realism remains popular among Thai academics, the country's experience with major power rivalry has stimulated debates on bamboo diplomacy. Policymakers' propensity to pursue institutional hedging also creates opportunities for conceptualization and theorization.

Because mainstream IR remains dominant in Southeast Asian IR academic communities, IR curricula have continued to emphasize Western IR. As Kraft notes, "the idea that Western IR is IR" has been further entrenched because the majority (or two-thirds) of IR scholars in the Philippines see the importance of introducing "students to the discipline of International Relations (including theory, methods, and academic debates)", a reflection of Western IR's dominance. In another example of how engrained traditional/mainstream IR is in Thailand, when asked to name three scholars who have made an impact on the discipline in the last 30 years, Thai respondents did not mention any non-Western scholar or IR theorist (regardless of ethnicity) except for Amitav Acharya. Similar trends were also reported in Singapore.

Although the majority of respondents (75.8 per cent) believed that it is important for Indonesian IR students to be introduced to the debates on Global IR, Wicaksana and Santoso assert that the most popular readings assigned to students largely echo themes associated with realism and, to a lesser extent, constructivism. To add insult to injury, in recent years, teaching IR in Indonesia has been redesigned to incorporate more practical learning to serve the demands of the job market, thereby reducing the importance of theory altogether. This diverges from the Cambodian case, where the reinforcement of mainstream IR theories has come as a result of IR being taught in English. Because of this, university lecturers based in Cambodia rely on textbooks written in English by Western scholars, in contrast to more established academic communities such as those in Indonesia and Thailand, which have used a mixture of textbooks in their respective local languages and English.

A Preference for Empirical- or Policy-based Research

Aside from the dominance of mainstream IR, the contributors noted that there has been a general lack of enthusiasm for theory-based research. During the online workshop, we thought that observation was particularly noteworthy, as theory-based research and publications are the main means to advance debates and discussions on Global IR. Such research can take many forms, including the use of empirical data to critique or revise an existing Western IR theory as well as propose an alternative theory through inductive reasoning. Yet, as the contributions to this special issue show, most academic communities in Southeast Asia have mainly reported incentives for academics to carry out empirical and policy-oriented research.

As discussed by the contributors in reference to the IR academic communities in Cambodia, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines and Vietnam, the survey results show that the majority of respondents pursue empirical-based research, with a range between 20 and 33 per cent being engaged in theory. There are a number of reasons why scholars based in Southeast Asia prefer to conduct policy-oriented and/or empirical-based research over theoretical-based discussions. One explanation is the close connection between IR academics and government officials. Institutions like ASEAN-ISIS have reinforced that connection. Academics have also taken up positions in government or have worked behind the policy-making scenes. In the case of Cambodia, part-time IR lecturers are also working for government agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs. However, the case of Thailand differs slightly from the rest because there are no university-based research centres or stand-alone think tanks specifically dedicated to international affairs; thus, there is a lack of institutionalized space for officials and academics to intermingle. Though ISIS-Thailand is located on the campus of Chulalongkorn University, the majority of its fellows are neither academics nor officials.²⁸

Funding has also played a role in dictating the direction and/or the type of research. As Chong explains, state funders in Singapore prefer to support research that has practical value. In the case of Thailand, due to the country's location in the centre of mainland Southeast Asia, state agencies and universities close to one of the borders have provided funding for policy-related research concerning bilateral relations and border security as broadly defined. Furthermore, IR theorists in Thailand are not necessarily held in higher regard than those pursuing other types of research, providing less of an incentive for academics to engage in theory.

Kraft explains that the study of IR in the Philippines continues to have a strong policy resonance. Part of the reason can be traced back to the main purpose of establishing the discipline, which was to train locals to staff the bureaucracy during colonial times. This is also the case for Vietnam. In addition, although the survey results indicate that 32.1 per cent of the respondents in the Philippines described their work as theory-based, it is crucial to note that this mainly involves the exercise of validating current Western-derived theories rather than the discussion of theory-building from local experiences. For Vietnam, IR research is driven mainly by the interest in Vietnam's position amid the region's geopolitical changes since the end of the Cold War.

Opportunities

Despite the dominance of mainstream IR and a preference for policy- and empirical-based research, there are opportunities for debates on Global IR to be advanced. While the current state of affairs reflects the views of the majority of survey respondents, there exist small segments of the academic population that see the importance of globalizing IR. Furthermore, what is seemingly an obstacle may provide opportunities to encourage a more diverse discipline.

First, it is vital to note that empirically informed publications are not necessarily on the opposing ends with endeavours to conceptualize or theorize. Neither should policy-oriented work be

viewed as an obstacle to advancing Global IR. After all, theory is never far removed from the historical, political and social realities we interact with and reside in. As I have pointed out in my article on Thailand in this special issue, the country has faced a series of threats, ranging from European expansionism during the late nineteenth century to the multiplicity of threats that surfaced during the Indochina Wars, which became the basis for the concept of “bamboo bending in the wind”. As the main architect of ASEAN and other multilateral frameworks in the Mekong subregion, such as the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS), Thailand’s foreign policy can also stimulate discussions about institutional hedging.

Furthermore, there are opportunities for pre-theorizing, which Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan define as “elements of thinking that do not necessarily add up to theory in their own right, but provide possible starting points for doing so”.²⁹ Considering Asia’s growing prominence in the contemporary world, there is an abundance of opportunities for pre-theorization, conceptualization, and theorization based on empirical-based research or inductive reasoning. However, this depends on whether researchers are interested in making inferences or seeking patterns based on empirical or policy findings. When asked what their main areas of research were,³⁰ the majority of the respondents in most countries indicated that it is predominately country- or area-focused. As expected, most respondents in many countries had an interest in geographical areas closer to home, most notably Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia, which could provide opportunities for Global IR based on local experiences.

For example, Wicaksana and Santoso exemplified how different types of publications pertaining to Indonesian foreign policy, diplomacy and strategic culture hold the potential to contribute to the debates on Global IR. Likewise, Chheang discusses the impact of the late King Norodom Sihanouk, whose thought and writings continue to exert influence over contemporary foreign policy analyses. In effect, his writings remain one of the key sources of inspiration and learning for Cambodian foreign policy analysts and policymakers. Similarly, Do notes how the emerging Ho Chi Minh School of Diplomacy, which embodies Vietnamese traditions, history and culture, along with a mix of elements of Western and Eastern philosophy, presents the greatest potential for a Vietnamese contribution to Global IR.

While these writings open up possibilities for pre-theorization, theorization or conceptualization, many local studies still await

translation into English for these ideas to travel beyond the confines of national-level debates. As Do explains, the older generation of Soviet-trained scholars are unable to communicate in English, which is an obvious obstacle preventing them from participating in this survey and publishing in international journals. Consequently, most local thought and ideas will remain limited to national academic circles unless translated into English, a point emphasized by Chong during the workshop discussions.

Second, despite the prevailing dominance of mainstream IR, to varying degrees, many Southeast Asian academic communities also see the importance of familiarizing students with writings produced by indigenous scholars. However, this does not necessarily suggest that local authors should be given priority. Rather, provided that these writings offer insight into alternative thought, exposing students to a balance between existing IR theories and theories or pre-theories based on experiences outside the West should help reduce the dominance of mainstream IR in teaching curricula.

To demonstrate, about 50 to 60 per cent of the respondents in Cambodia and Indonesia believed it is essential for students at the postgraduate level to read publications written by local scholars. However, this is not necessarily a promising trend among all six Southeast Asian academic communities. Vietnamese academics are more enthusiastic about encouraging students to read publications by local thinkers at the master's level rather than at the undergraduate level. While 29 per cent of the respondents in Singapore and 30 per cent of the respondents in Thailand deemed it important for postgraduate students to be exposed to publications written by local thinkers, these figures are still considerably lower than those of the other IR academic communities covered in this special edition. Furthermore, though 30 to 35 per cent of the respondents in most countries deemed it important for undergraduates to be assigned readings written by local thinkers, just over 16 per cent of the Thai respondents and 20 per cent of the Singaporean respondents believed that such endeavours were worthwhile. The survey results in Singapore are particularly surprising considering that when asked to name three scholars that have shaped IR in Asia, the respondents in many countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam) showed an appreciation for Singaporean academics, such as Australia-based Evelyn Goh. Nevertheless, there seems to be a healthy level of interest in local scholarship across most of Southeast Asia.

Third, constructivism in many Southeast Asian academic communities has been on the rise in recent years. As discussed in my contribution on Thailand, constructivism is a means to showcase the diversity of culture and identity in different localities other than the West. It also allows us to understand and trace the cultural and ideational origins behind state behaviour. For the Thai case, an interest in ideational approaches such as constructivism and ontological security has come as a result of a new generation of scholars that were trained in non-US institutions. Similar observations have been made by Wicaksana and Santoso, who note that the younger generation of Indonesian scholars are keen to move away from realism and pursue constructivist approaches that have resonance for those exploring Indonesia's conduct on the international stage.

Though the majority of Singapore-based scholars lean towards realist approaches, Chong notes that the interest in constructivism during the 1990s and early 2000s was stimulated by broader discussions about "Asian values" and the "ASEAN Way". However, as he further explains, these discussions can also be seen as a convenient way to dodge uncomfortable deliberations concerning "authority, popular participation, public oversight, as well as transparency associated with institution-building". Although the reasons behind its increasing popularity may differ from one academic community to another, the rise of constructivism in Southeast Asian IR academic communities is a trend to monitor in the years to come.

The Steps Ahead

Given the number of obstacles, globalizing IR will be an uphill task, but nonetheless achievable. Ideally, popularizing Global IR should be a two-way effort endorsed by both the wider IR academic community and scholars local to Southeast Asia, as well as those who have an interest in the region. After all, advancing the debates on Global IR in Southeast Asia should not only be an exercise confined to Southeast Asians but inclusive of anyone with an interest in making IR a global discipline, regardless of ethnicity and residency.³¹

On the one hand, the wider IR academic community needs to continue taking steps to ensure diversity to make IR truly global. To be sure, some journals and academic forums such as the International Studies Association (ISA) have made an effort to encourage not only marginalized voices but also an equal gender distribution across a

range of settings.³² One noteworthy development is the creation of the Global IR Section (GIRS), which was approved on 25 March 2022. It is also perhaps worth mentioning that the petition for the creation of GIRS was signed by 536 supporters from 54 countries. The diversity of countries is somewhat encouraging, though it remains to be seen what topics and panels GIRS will feature in the coming years.

While an increase in journals with an interest in different regions would provide outlets to showcase a wealth of experiences, it is also important that journals with a particular focus on a subfield of IR such as security or International Political Economy (IPE) are also open to submissions that explore geographical areas outside the West. Furthermore, the survey results also show strong support for journal editors to actively encourage authors to cite overlooked authors and literature, with 50 to 75 per cent of the respondents in each country indicating support for this initiative. Though this is one way to raise marginalized voices and encourage academic debates, it also requires journal editors and individual authors to see the importance of globalizing IR.

On the other hand, local scholars outside the West need to see the importance of displaying indigenous experiences, with the aim of developing alternative concepts or theories on their own terms. This also means moving on from negating or critiquing an existing Western IR theory. Instead, indigenous scholars need to look beyond Western mainstream theories to find ways to propose alternatives through inductive methods, thus becoming agents of knowledge.³³ Maiken Gelardi suggests revising theories, as exemplified by Carlos Escudé's theory of peripheral realism, which marries elements of realism with Argentina's experiences.³⁴ However, it is also crucial to recognize that knowledge based on one locality should have useful implications beyond its borders and region. After all, exceptionalism runs the risk of hindering the debate, which is considered essential for the progress and development of the discipline. That said, comparisons across countries or regions create opportunities for generalizations and inferences to be made about key issues that are integral to the study of IR. Thus, it is important to encourage projects that explore key themes in several countries by local authors. As previously mentioned, a number of issues, such as weaker state agency and alignment behaviour, are among the contributions that have been published as special issues in recent years. With the exception of Singapore, funding for large

group projects in many Southeast Asian academic communities is scarce or non-existent. Hence, those seeking to pursue such projects may need to look for external sources of funding. For example, I co-led two projects that explored the potential for Global IR in Southeast Asia, both of which were generously funded by the Korea Foundation. Although both grants covered travel costs and accommodation for 14 participants across Asia and the United States, the COVID-19 pandemic only permitted us to organize one in Bangkok, while the other was held online.

Aside from the above-mentioned pathways to advancing Global IR, there are some existing avenues that local academics could explore and possibly expand. For example, those teaching IR in Southeast Asia could help familiarize students with the existing literature on small state behaviour based on experiences from Southeast Asia. This would expose students to alternative concepts and thought based on indigenous practices. However, it is important for local academics to consistently ensure a balance between traditional or mainstream IR and alternatives based on experiences in a variety of locations.

In addition, locally established conferences, associations and journals are also important venues for developing the discipline as well as Global IR. However, progress in these areas across Southeast Asia is somewhat uneven, given the lack of funding or institutional support. The Asian Political and International Studies Association (APISA) was first established in 2003 in Singapore. Kraft has brought attention to the Philippine International Studies Organization (PHISO), which can be credited for expanding its links with various institutions in the Philippines. As a result, PHISO has fostered a sense of community among IR scholars and has enabled a book series on IR to be published by Routledge. Furthermore, as noted by Do, some Southeast Asian academic communities have been successful in establishing international journals, such as Singapore's *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, in addition to the *Indonesian Journal of International Relations*. Although the Philippines-based *Asian Politics & Policy* is not specifically focused on IR, it does attract a number of submissions by IR scholars. While these existing networks bring regional scholars and scholars with an interest in the region together, more can be done. As this concluding article and the individual contributions reiterate, many challenges to advancing Global IR remain. At the same time, many of our contributors have offered small glimmers of hope for the advancement of the

debates on Global IR in Southeast Asia. How these debates expand or change their course of direction in the years to come is up to the present and future generations of both local scholars and those that have an interest in Southeast Asia to decide.

Conclusion

Based on a comparative perspective, this special issue examined the opportunities and challenges regarding the advancement of Global IR in six IR academic communities in Southeast Asia. As the contributors reflected on the survey results and their own personal experiences, the challenges to advancing Global IR shared among all six academic communities are twofold. First, the dominance of mainstream IR theories remains a prominent feature in Southeast Asia. Part of the reason is that IR as a discipline was a Western import reinforced by factors such as colonial legacies and Cold War relationships. In recent decades, the entrenchment of Western IR theories, most notably realism, came about as a result of policies seeking to integrate local academia with wider international academic circles and experiences of individual Southeast Asian states in responding to a host of challenges at both the regional and international levels. Second, scholars based in Southeast Asia tend to conduct policy- and empirical-oriented research, which is largely attributed to the close connections between academics and policymakers, as well as the demands of local funders who prefer research with practical value. As a result, theoretical-based research has not gained much traction in Southeast Asia.

Nevertheless, within these challenges lie opportunities for the advancement of Global IR. After all, we must not forget that there have been notable contributions by scholars, regardless of ethnicity and residency, to the debates on Global IR. First, despite the propensity for local scholars to conduct empirical- and policy-based research, it is important to remember that the exercise of conceptualizing and theorizing is not detached from the reality we operate in. More precisely, while empirical- and policy-based research seems to run counter to the formulation of new theories and concepts, this need not necessarily be so. Patterns and more generalizable inferences derived from local experiences and articulated in empirical- and policy-based research can contribute to theory-building. Second, there is a certain level of appreciation for local scholarship, which could balance the dominance of mainstream IR,

especially in teaching. Third, constructivism is growing in popularity, providing the opportunity to understand norms and identity from different localities outside the West.

This article concluded by proposing a few ways to further advance Global IR in Southeast Asia. On the one hand, the wider international academic community needs to ensure the inclusivity of scholars from the Global South in conferences and academic outlets. On the other, local academics need to realize the importance of not just negating existing mainstream theories but also thinking about revising or proposing new concepts and theories based on local experiences. Equally important is making sure that these new conceptual and theoretical proposals have the potential to travel beyond the boundaries of states and regions. Towards this end, some existing forums, such as national IR associations and local journals, can provide useful venues for regional scholars to contribute to Global IR debates.

NOTES

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