International Theory (2025), **17** (2), 268–286
doi:10.1017/S1752971925100043

International Theory

REJOINDER

How (not) to advance Global IR: a rejoinder

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(Received 01 June 2024; revised 24 January 2025; accepted 13 May 2025)

Abstract
In this rejoinder, we engage with the recent *International Theory* symposium on Global IR, situating it within the broader literature and outlining intellectual pathways for advancing Global IR's agenda. We explore how the main critiques identified by the symposium – namely, essentialism, geo-epistemologies, disciplinary reformism, and ahistoricism – have been and can be further addressed through recent developments in Global IR. This rejoinder is not an attempt to prioritise one version of Global IR over another; rather, it emphasises that Global IR comes in multiple versions, and these versions should continue to be a collective work in progress. Our engagement with the evolving debates in Global IR seeks to fulfil the promise of a more global and diverse discipline.

Keywords: Global IR; non-Western IR; post-Western IR; essentialism; non-dualism; relationalism; conversation

A symposium published in *International Theory* in November 2023 provides a number of critiques and correctives with the objective of advancing the Global IR agenda and increasing its 'impact and durability.'[1] A useful roadmap requires up-to-date coverage of the fast-evolving and expanding landscape on which Global IR unfolds. The symposium unfortunately falls short of meeting this prerequisite. It does not pay sufficient attention to Global IR's recent theoretical developments and analytical suggestions, and often reduces its agenda to selective contributions, thereby ending up offering a limited view of the same. Specifically, it tends to reduce Global IR to Amitav Acharya's Global IR and relies heavily on examples from Chinese IR scholarship to substantiate its claims. This narrowness obscures the symposium's broader potential for advancing the Global IR agenda. It ends up offering an overly restrictive pathway for advancing Global IR, which may inadvertently constrain the diversity of perspectives that Global IR aims to embrace.

[1]Barnett and Zarakol 2023, 428.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971925100043 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The movement towards a more global and diverse IR encompasses a multitude of interventions that aim to address IR's historical 'Western-centric' biases, decentre and open up the discipline, and incorporate a wider array of epistemic authorities from beyond the 'West.' Genealogically, the 'Global IR' agenda can be traced to multiple origins. One originates from 'postcolonial' critiques of the Eurocentric underpinnings of international theory.[2] Another originates from a growing interest in 'Third World' perspectives and experiences of IR.[3] A third originates from a sociology of knowledge interest in the comparative socio-institutional underpinnings of IR, first in the United States and Europe, later expanded to IR 'around the world.'[4] A fourth strand arose from an interest in 'non-Western' IR theory and the exploration of how to theorise world politics from 'non-Western' experiences and perspectives.[5] A fifth strand, dubbed 'post-Western' IR, sought to transform the discipline itself rather than simply discovering or fashioning 'non-Western' theories.[6]

Amitav Acharya, as President of the International Studies Association, coined the term 'Global IR' to encapsulate these diverse interventions.[7] The Global IR agenda has since generated a substantial body of scholarship. A growing number of scholars recognise the need to pluralise IR, and do so under the label 'Global IR.' However, even among those committed to or sympathetic with the project, there is a wide variety of perspectives and approaches, all with the shared aim of advancing Global IR.[8] The *International Theory* symposium inserts itself into this line of inquiry and questioning.

In this rejoinder, we discuss the symposium's critiques in view of the broader Global IR literature and chart intellectual pathways for advancing the agenda. We discuss how the main critiques identified by the symposium – namely, 'essentialism,' 'geo-epistemologies,' 'disciplinary reformism,' and 'ahistoricism' – have been and can be further addressed through recent developments in Global IR. This rejoinder is not an attempt to prioritise one version of Global IR over another. Global IR is not a particular theory tied to a particular theorist. Acharya may have coined the term, but his writings do not exclusively represent or exhaust the body of work that has grown under the intellectual ambit of Global IR. Global IR is better viewed as a 'conversation'[9] among both well-established and underexplored knowledge traditions, resulting in breaking new theoretical and practical ground for doing IR. We engage with the evolving Global IR debates with the objective of redeeming the promise of a more global and diverse discipline, an ambition the symposium authors also support.

[2]Darby and Paolini 1994; Hobson 2012.

[3]Ayoob 1995, 2024; Neuman 1998; Tickner 2003.

[4]Hoffmann 1977; Wæver 1998; Wæver and Tickner 2009.

[5]Acharya and Buzan 2007; Shilliam 2011.

[6]See, for example, Shani 2008; Behera 2007.

[7]Acharya 2014.

[8]For critical reviews, see Fierke and Jabri 2019; Anderl and Witt 2020; Murray 2019; Gelardi 2020a; Bilgin 2021; Eun 2023.

[9]Turton and Freire 2016; Hellmann and Valbjørn 2017; Eun 2018; Fierke and Jabri 2019; Ersoy 2023; Shahi 2023.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971925100043 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The study of 'differences' in Global IR: beyond essentialism

The main charge in the symposium revolves around the so-called 'essentialism trap,' which refers to a commitment to 'the notion that the world is constituted by preformed, fixed, internally coherent, and bounded social forms; [this] trap involves the overuse of essentialist categories by radical projects, a process that can result in the reinforcement of status quo categories and assumptions.'[10] A central manifestation of essentialism is Global IR's binarisation of differences between the 'Western' and 'non-Western' worlds or 'global South and global North.' Global IR, on that view, is premised on a starting assumption that rigidifies irreconcilable differences between Western and non-Western worlds defined by mutually exclusive social categories such as 'cultures, nations, regions, and civilisations' – thus propagating an 'ethos of separation'[11] and a penchant for 'exotifying differences between the West and the East.'[12]

Warnings about the risks of essentialism, particularism, nativism, and parochialism – levelled against Global IR and its predecessors for decades – should be taken seriously. We can only agree that Global IR should avoid the 'gravitational pull presented by the essentialism trap.'[13] But we do not agree that the entire body of Global IR literature remains 'rooted in essentialist, substantialist, internalist commitments.'[14] 'Global IR' is a broad tent. We do not intend to defend everything that goes under the label. Some studies are susceptible to the critique of essentialism understood as nativism and ethnocentrism premised on irreconcilable national or civilisational differences. Elements of this were traced in works related to Latin American IR,[15] Russian IR,[16] and Chinese IR.[17] The early works of Qin, Yan, and Zhao[18] are frequently cited by critics concerned with the essentialism of Chinese IR. It is not difficult to detect an essentialist undercurrent in these Chinese efforts at IR theorisation that dichotomise complex thought systems into contrasting camps of rationalist versus relational thinking, hegemonic versus moral leadership, or Westphalian dualism versus Tianxia monism, and then assigns the former to Western (e.g., modern European) culture and the latter to Chinese culture.

However, several recent interventions by Chinese IR scholars proceed with more reflexivity about the essentialist trap and offer alternatives to essentialist or nationalist approaches in constructing a 'Chinese School' or defining 'Chineseness.'[19] For example, several scholars of the Shanghai IR community have developed a symbiosis theory (*gongsheng*) and positioned it within the debate on 'Chinese IR.'[20] This theory proclaims that the 'pluralist coexistence' among actors with 'different roles and functions' in social systems, including the international system, represents the 'ideal

[10]Barnett and Zarakol 2023, 429.
[11]Ibid., 512.
[12]Hui 2023, 480.
[13]Barnett and Zarakol 2023, 440.
[14]Ibid., 512.
[15]Tickner 2008.
[16]Makarychev and Morozov 2013; Tsygankov 2023.
[17]Lu 2019.
[18]Zhao 2006; Yan 2011; Qin 2016.
[19]See, for example, Lu et al. 2024.
[20]Ren 2020; Xiong et al. 2024.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971925100043 Published online by Cambridge University Press

state of nature.'[21] In this theory, there is no such thing as a fixed function or essential property such as 'Chineseness,' but rather *yizhi* (heterogeneous) symbiosis that functions as the organising principle of the international system. Going a step further, Chih-yu Shih has criticised Chinese IR for its 'self-centrism,' being committed to only one (i.e., Chinese cultural) way of forming relationality, and proposed opening up Chinese relationality by 'understanding the self from the perspective of a different relationality.'[22] This approach, he argues, enables Chinese IR to embrace other ways of being relational, thereby facilitating 'self-transformation' beyond an essentialised Chinese IR. These developments notwithstanding, it is probably inevitable that *some* theorists will wish to present theirs as *the* Chinese theory – and may do so in an essentialist contradistinction to Western theories. But this does not imply that such a wager is accepted and becomes hegemonic. Of all developments in Global IR, the Chinese School has gained the most attention in mainstream IR, and thus understandably features prominently in the symposium's critique of Global IR. But in the broader picture, it is an outlier.

If we lift our gaze, there is much more resistance towards this kind of essentialism in other contexts. For instance, there has been sustained opposition to the idea of forming an Indian IR school, juxtaposed to 'Western' IR, based on exactly the dangers of succumbing to 'essentialist' and 'nativist' notions of Indianness, and because of the instability, permeability, and complicated history of 'Indianness.'[23] Indian IR scholars have emphasised the need to 'avoid a monolithic conception of IR that emerges from India.'[24] Likewise, it is difficult to view the 'Kyoto School' as *the* Japanese school.[25] In fact, there has been a cacophony of voices surrounding the debate over what Japanese IR is, or what it should be,[26] with some arguing that 'there is no such thing as Japanese IR theory … there is a variety of ways of thinking relations between the self and the other, the West and the East, peace and war, the region and the state, private and public, the egg and the wall, local and global.'[27] Similarly, Korean IR scholars have argued that, if a 'Korean IR school' exists, it should be characterised by 'hybrid' or 'twisted' (post)coloniality,[28] given that European modernity has been reappropriated through Korea's postcolonial experiences in the politics of IR knowledge-making. If we look beyond Asia, for example, to Latin America, Eastern Europe, or Central Asia, Global IR efforts are less premised on essentialised civilisational and cultural differences and more often positioned as hybrid or in-between 'West' and 'non-West' (or rather 'South').[29] These works demonstrate that Global IR has evolved with a growing awareness of the 'essentialist trap' and by increasingly embracing non-essentialist positions.

[21] Ren 2020, 405–6, 2024.
[22] Shih 2024.
[23] Behera 2007; Kristensen 2015, 2019.
[24] Mallavarapu 2014, 8.
[25] Shimizu 2022.
[26] Inoguchi 2007; Chen 2012.
[27] Watanabe and Rösch 2018, 9.
[28] Eun 2020, 7; Seo and Cho 2021, 619.
[29] Deciancio 2016; Owen et al. 2017; Kristensen 2021; Mälksoo 2021; Tussie and Acharya 2022; Zemanová and Druláková 2024.

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Turning to the problematisation of the West/non-West binary, this, too, has a long history in the Global IR debate.[30] Although early studies on Global IR, particularly those focused on 'non-Western' IR theorisation, use the West/non-West binary as an entry point for making their cases, few contemporary Global IR scholars treat terms like 'West and non-West' or 'global North and global South' as substantial entities that exist independently of each other.[31] Moreover, there is an emerging literature on 'dialogue beyond the West-non-West distinction' in the Global IR discussion. Shahi, for example, has explicated the complexities of a dialogic approach to Global IR.[32] Ersoy has devised the mechanisms to dismantle epistemic hierarchies and asymmetrical dialogues through Global IR.[33] Echoing this move towards dialogue, Chu has underlined the need to rethink interlocutors in Global IR and the utility of an 'embedded observer approach,' the approach that grants the observer not only thick descriptive knowledge but also possibly transformative experience as s/he approximates the perspectives of differently situated Western and non-Western actors with an objective to release their common emancipatory potential in IR and beyond.[34] Even Acharya, the symposium's primary target for criticism, writes, 'Global IR accepts neither the "West" nor the "Rest" (or "Global South" or "Third World") as enduring categories, but focuses on their mutual engagement and reconstruction.'[35] Elsewhere, Acharya and Buzan also acknowledge that the terms 'West' and 'non-West' have lost any analytical significance and exist only as (uneasy) terms of convenience.[36]

The distinction between 'non-Western' and 'post-Western' strands is important here, as the latter has been devoted to a rejection of the 'ethos of separation.' Advocates of 'post-Western IR' would reject 'non-Western' IR either because it remains caught in a binary negation (ignoring hybridities) or because it reinforces dualist epistemologies (rigidifying the ethos of separation despite accepting hybridities) and continues to view 'the world from a particular perspective centred by Western epistemology, [thereby] projecting the world as imagined by the Western eye.'[37] Advocates of 'Post-Western IR' have specifically rejected dualist ontologies and epistemologies that reinforce divisive self-other interactions between various mutually separated binary groupings: for example, West/non-West, core/periphery, global North/global South, haves/have-nots, hyper-masculine-self/hyper-feminine-other, elites/masses, colonial/post-colonial, and oriental/occidental. In contrast, the 'non-Western' strand imitates these same dualisms, but reverses them in performing surveys wherein the non-West is established as the 'self' and the West is installed as the 'other.'[38]

Global IR studies in the post-Western strand, attentive to the risks of essentialism and the West/non-West binary, have proposed redefining the notions of time and

[30]Bilgin 2008; Hutchings 2011; Shilliam 2011; Fawcett 2012; Eun 2018; Shahi 2018; Murray 2019; Kristensen 2021.
[31]Bilgin 2021; Eun 2022.
[32]Shahi 2020.
[33]Ersoy 2023.
[34]Chu 2022.
[35]Acharya 2024, 14.
[36]Acharya and Buzan 2019.
[37]Ozkaleli and Ozkaleli 2022, 192.
[38]Shahi 2019a.

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space to eliminate the divide between multiple phenomenal and noumenal worlds. The Tianxia theory refers to the cosmic movements that unfold in time-space between heaven and earth: the abstract forms of *bi* (round heaven) and *cong* (square earth) are deployed as ideational tools to instil links between the human and supra-human worlds or phenomenal and noumenal worlds[39]; from this standpoint, the 'conceptual Tianxia system of all-under-heaven should envision an all-inclusive world of no outside with great harmony of all peoples or compatibility of all civilizations…[contrary to the prevailing apprehensions, one is] not sure if China could be considered as a Tianxia paradigm.'[40] The Advaita theory defines the time–space matrices as necessary means to grasp the fleeting realities of the phenomenal world, but whatever is known or unknown in the phenomenal world is assumed as a fragmented reflection of an all-pervasive noumenal world; in so doing, this theory pre-instals the objectified universal reality of 'time-space indivisibility' to deal with the issues of irreconcilability related to divergent subjectified annals of geo-historical realities.[41] Theorisations inspired by Nishida Kitaro's spatial-temporal notions of 'nothingness' and 'eternal present' consider the noumena as the unifying power of reality and the phenomena as the state of conflict in reality's progress through differentiation.[42]

These Global IR studies – which problematise dualism – revive the timeless phenomenal-noumenal expanse of human consciousness, thereby restoring an invisible yet inescapable connectedness between multiple de-territorialised selves and others who would otherwise subsist in a territorialised world. This, in turn, supports the vision of 'pluralistic universalism,' a vision that allows plural ontologies from diverse Western and non-Western worlds to continually emerge, contradict, complement, co-adjust, and coexist through non-binary and, thus, non-essentialist, ever-evolving relations. As such, the vision of pluralistic universalism does not logically or emotionally subscribe to the ethos of separation. Global IR studies based on this vision of pluralistic universalism neither project 'the national' as a predominant conceptual category nor treat 'the national' and 'the international' as discordant domains. So, it is unfair to label the entire body of Global IR literature as essentialist or nativist. Realising the solidarity of life in the national and international domains, these Global IR studies do not naturalise the state as the main unit of analysis; rather, they argue that the progress in the national domain demands progress in the

[39]Wang 2012.

[40]Zhao and Hanafi 2024.

[41]Shahi 2018, 2023.

[42]Shimizu 2022. One caveat is worth noting: Nishida's philosophy, particularly his notions of 'nothingness' and the 'logic of place,' was used to justify Japan's imperial and colonial expansion. The concept of a harmonious, overarching 'place' was (re)interpreted to suggest that Japan had a leading role in unifying East Asia under the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.' This notion was subsequently used to assert Japan's legitimate influence over colonised territories. Furthermore, Nishida's ideas were appropriated by his students in Kyoto during the 1940s to frame an ideology of unique Eastern values and to support a Japan-centric international order in opposition to the Western-led world order. For instance, Nishida's disciple, Tanabe Hajime, adapted his philosophy to bolster 'ultra-nationalist' discourse, reinforcing the idea that Japan was destined to establish a distinct East Asian order in resistance to Western dominance (see, e.g., Goto-Jones 2005). This highlights the critical importance of examining how philosophies – whether Western or post-Western – are applied in the realm of policy, as much as the philosophies themselves. Examples of how Global IR can lead to policies that do not reify an 'ethos of separation' will be discussed in later sections.

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international domain and vice versa.[43] To harmonise the physical, psychological, and institutional aspects of worldly existence, these Global IR interventions introduce the principle of 'world-ness' that transcends the norms of (inter)nationality: the principle of world-ness instructs us to analyse affairs of the world by a 'world standard,' not a 'national standard.'[44] In fact, these Global IR studies agree that there exists a variety of ways of thinking about the self-other, national-international, or West-non-West relations. These ways of thinking become political only when interpreted in a specific space-time intersection.[45] It is the analytical fixity to a specific space-time intersection that leads to 'singularity,' 'nativism,' or 'essentialism.' Exceeding this understanding of singularity, nativism, or essentialism, these Global IR studies prefer to enquire how IR discourses cause suffering by victimising peoples for the sake of the temporally and spatially fixed ideals of national sovereignty or world order that are nothing more than ontologically passing 'temporal visions' or 'subjective snapshots.'[46]

As seen above, many Global IR undertakings have risen above the limitations of ethnicism and nationalism to form what is arguably a genuinely Lakatosian research program.[47] Furthermore, by evoking a non-dual epistemological approach, Tianxia-, Advaita-, and Buddhism-inspired Global IR studies look for solutions to protracted border disputes and ecological disasters. The Sufi methods formulate spiritual tactics for conflict transformation,[48] while the Amazonian rituals suggest schemes to counter colonising attitudes.[49] A growing body of Global IR literature demonstrates the feasibility of innovative policy experimentations that remain informed by an array of Indigenous concepts: for example, *dharma* as it directs the 'righteous policy actions' of the diplomats,[50] *aikido* as it guides the practitioners in responding to the attacks while emphatically 'caring for the attackers,'[51] *ubuntu* as it motivates a 'humanist soft power project,'[52] and *runa* as it 'unites the human and non-human constituents' to inculcate empathetic praxeological capacities,[53] among others. These kinds of policy experimentations can be considered as exemplifications of the alternative ontological proposals of Global IR's pluralistic universalism.

The crucial point is this: the act of discussing 'differences' between Western and non-Western worlds does not necessarily essentialise and binarise differences; these 'differences' can be explored and presented not as fixed characteristics or properties that are endogenously generated and geographically bounded, but as transient assemblages that are actualised in specific contexts of time and space. A fundamental problem embedded deep in IR is that these assemblages, which manifested in various human societies long before 'the rise of Europe' in the eighteenth century, remain neglected in the discipline's core narratives. As many critics, including the symposium's authors, point out, the discipline's long-standing practice of universalising

[43]Shahi 2018.
[44]Li 2021.
[45]Watanabe and Rösch 2018.
[46]Shahi 2018; Shih et al. 2019; Zhao 2021; Fierke 2022; Shimizu 2022; Watanabe 2023.
[47]Shahi 2023.
[48]Imady 2020.
[49]de Vienne and Nahum-Claudel 2020.
[50]Datta-Ray 2015.
[51]Hagström and Bremberg 2022.
[52]Doma 2021.
[53]Reddekop 2021.

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understandings of how the world works in contemporary, Euro-Atlantic terms continues to prevail. Global IR's analytical focus on the non-Western world is (and should be, we argue) rooted in a reflexive move to address and rectify this epistemic parochialism. From this standpoint, it is possible to maintain a non-essentialist ontological orientation while still exploring the 'differences' (i.e., different manifested assemblages) between Western and non-Western worlds. Ultimately, the symposium authors seem to conflate two aspects of difference – essential differences that remain fixed at the ontological level, and representational differences that can be identified at the epistemic level – in their critique of Global IR's commitment to essentialism and an ethos of separation.[54]

The geo-epistemologies of Global IR: surpassing 'geo-fixities'

The symposium argues that Global IR suffers from the problem of 'geo-epistemology,' a trait whereby 'theories of world politics are commonly categorised by geographic referents, [e.g., the calls for] national, regional, and civilisational schools of IR.'[55] The embrace of geo-epistemologies, which in their view risks subordinating reason to cultural or geographical fixities, reduces IR scholars to the representatives of their geographical contexts. One article argues that the geo-epistemological commitment – and the resulting focus on IR in different places – is a distortion of Stanley Hoffmann's argument about IR as an 'American Social Science.' Allegedly, this distortion resulted from Ole Wæver's comparative sociologisation of the U.S.–European differences that became further consolidated through its later third-hand receptions and applications in 'other nations.'[56] It was Wæver, and the subsequent applications of Wæver's work, not Hoffmann, the symposium contends, that introduced assumptions about the influence of regions and national academies on knowledge production.[57]

This genealogy of Global IR is important, but the argument itself hardly holds. If anything, it can even be argued that Global IR has gone too far in Hoffmann's footsteps. It was Hoffmann who stated that 'scholars do not like to think of their intellectual dependence on the status of their country' as 'it disturbs their sense of belonging to a cosmopolitan, free-floating community of science.'[58] Hoffmann provided a historical analysis of American IR vis-à-vis its institutions and relations to power. Many of the adaptations of Hoffmann or Wæver to various non-Western contexts do exactly that. The main 'political circumstance' for the emergence of IR as an 'American Social Science,' according to Hoffmann, was the United States' rise to global power. Though the symposium authors rightly point out that Hoffmann called for a more historical IR that could also understand the 'weaker and revolutionary' sites, his own analytical focus was exactly on the emergence of the United States and American Social Science. Likewise, much of the attention in Global IR has been on contributions from contemporary rising great powers, which partly explains the enormous attention to the Chinese School, at the expense of the under-exploration of many weaker but revolutionary sites of knowledge production.

[54]Barnett and Zarakol 2023, 431.
[55]Barkawi, Murray, and Zarakol 2023, 445.
[56]Wæver 1998.
[57]Barkawi, Murray, and Zarakol 2023, 449.
[58]Hoffmann 1977, 49.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971925100043 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The symposium authors further warn against naturalising the state as the main unit of analysis for Global IR. Many studies of 'IR around the world' have indeed focused on IR within a nationally bounded academia. But the objective of Global IR is not to reduce scholars to representatives of their national political contexts; nor to say that national or geographical positionality are the only conditioning factors for their theorising. The symposium, if read generously, can be understood as a warning against a flattened conception of geocultural context (simply nationality or geography), which, when coupled with unhelpful meta-cartographies such as 'South' or 'non-West,' too easily falls into the essentialist trap. This is a valid concern that aligns well with the more sociologically inclined strands of Global IR. These interventions go to greater lengths to avoid explanations that rely on such 'externalist reductionism' and instead try to nuance our conception of context to include academic, disciplinary, institutional, material, embodied, spatial, and temporal context.[59] Another useful way to challenge flattened conceptions of context, much in line with the relational pathway in the Global IR literature and also proposed in the symposium, is recent attempts to de-territorialise context and interrogate how hybrid subjectivities influence international thought, for example, through autoethnographic accounts.[60] Global IR has thrived, and will continue to thrive, without simplistic meta-geographies such as West/non-West, North/South, core/periphery, and coloniser/colonised.[61] However, one should also be aware that the de-territorialising pathway, which stresses the idiosyncrasies of academic trajectories and the multitude of exposures and amalgamations, also comes at the cost of potentially fragmenting the Global IR conversation.

A less radical way of challenging territorialised conceptions of context is to place even greater emphasis on the divergences in the IR discourses operating 'within' a state. By now, most studies of the Chinese School underscore precisely that their divergences are more interesting than their Chineseness.[62] These studies explore how there is no singular 'Chinese School,' but that IR discourses in China have gradually diversified through the competition among Qin Yaqing's relational/guanxi approach, Yan Xuetong's Tsinghua School of moral realism, Zhao Tingyang Tianxia system, and increasingly also include Tang Shiping's evolutionary theory and Ren Xiao's symbiotic theory in this structured rivalry. The diversity within the Chinese School debate, of course, does not preclude that they could all be essentialising Chineseness and starkly contrasting it to 'Western' IR, albeit in different ways. It does, however, debunk the notion that geocultural context is somehow deterministic and homogenising. An approach that brings out the heteroglossia of seemingly 'national IRs' would be useful when studying IR in other contexts, so as to avoid binary West/non-West comparative frameworks. It is also worth pointing out that even Global IR scholars who delimit their analytical scope to a specific local, national, or regional context are often well aware of its global entanglements and internal heterogeneity. To continue with the China example, not all Global IR studies of China analyse 'Chinese IR' as a reified or self-contained unit; several, in fact, position this assemblage of approaches within the historical-institutional linkages to IR elsewhere.[63]

[59]Wæver 1998; Alejandro 2018; Kristensen 2019; Loke and Owen 2024.
[60]Eun 2021, 10; Karkour and Vieira 2023.
[61]Bilgin 2008; Gelardi 2020b; Kristensen 2021; Zemanová and Druláková 2024.
[62]Katzenstein 2024; Lu et al. 2024.
[63]Zhang 2003; Kristensen and Nielsen 2013; Hwang 2021.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971925100043 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The symposium authors warn against the risk that the reliance on geo-epistemologies might lead IR down a fragmented, parochial, and ethnocentric road where 'only Chinese scholars can teach and research about China.'[64] But this borders on strawman logic. This alleged 'risk' reads more like a reflection of identity politics playing out on the campuses where the symposium authors are based (geo-epistemology in action?). Most Global IR scholars would probably view such restrictive culturalism as a highly unproductive and dangerous path, one that would deglobalise IR rather than the opposite. It also misreads the Chinese schools. More generous readings by other prominent 'Western' theorists suggest that the Chinese schools, though sometimes presented in stark contradistinction to Western thought, be read as invitations drawing on Chinese cosmologies, not vain attempts to essentialise Chinese culture.[65] Though it is sometimes presented in essentialist ways, the Chinese school is fused with 'Western' IR theories and fundamentally premised on a search to gain international recognition and interlocutors, not to make the study of China the prerogative of Chinese nationals.[66]

The question of situatedness remains, however: Can we not reject the ethnocentrism of a 'Chinese school for the Chinese to research China' yet still acknowledge the difference between studying China in a Chinese, Vietnamese, or U.S. sociopolitical context? The point is not authenticity or a quest to arrive at some mystical culturally transferred insight, but that loci of enunciation matter. To fully discard 'knowwhere'[67] and to turn a blind eye to the reality that knowledge is produced somewhere would be an over-correction with equally conservative effects. The project of globalising IR can only be enacted through particular contexts, and what 'globalising,' 'pluralising,' or 'decolonising' means also depends on whether you are situated on the East Coast of Africa or North America.[68] Advancing Global IR requires more, not less, reflexivity about the context of our knowledge production, including problematisations of how those contexts have been worlded in the first place, and their often hybridised character.[69]

As 'geographies of knowledge' is one of the main contentions of the symposium, it is worth noting that this critique itself is not coming from nowhere. The symposium is written from the standpoint of critical scholars trying to correct Global IR and suggesting better ways to challenge the 'IR citadel' rather than only giving 'workers' visas' to Global IR,[70] or, by ensuring 'affirmative action' leading to an equal representation of nations, turning Global IR into a 'United Nations of IR.'[71] But, then again, this is the citadel itself speaking. A critique of Global IR coming from the citadel should be taken seriously, but, when expressed as a critique of the citadel itself, also critically. If geo-epistemologies do not matter, the citadel can be left intact: IR can comfortably continue to be regulated from the east coast of the United States and the greater London area – if done with the 'proper' tools from relational global history. This is hardly the way to advance Global IR.

[64]Barnett and Zarakol 2023, 437.
[65]Guzzini 2024.
[66]Rosenberg in Lu et al. 2024.
[67]Agnew 2007.
[68]Loke and Owen 2024.
[69]Karkour and Vieira 2023; Bilgin and Smith 2024.
[70]Barnett and Zarakol 2023, 434.
[71]Barkawi, Murray, and Zarakol 2023.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971925100043 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The symposium also highlights an additional problem of 'geo-fixities'; namely, that Global IR 'encourages diffusionist ideas of the spread of knowledge from an origin [the West] to a destination [the non-West], and essentialist representation of specific geographies of knowledge.'[72] As a counterpoint to these 'geo-fixities,' one symposium paper contends that 'in a sense' IR was already 'global at birth.'[73] It illustrates this by pointing to how South Asian scholars already in the early twentieth century published in mainstream Western journals, were present in foreign universities, and had created associations, journals, and think tanks such as the Indian Political Science Association in 1938, the *Indian Journal of Political Science* in 1939, and the Indian Council of World Affairs in 1943. Global IR, the argument goes, is therefore spreading an ahistorical conjecture that IR is an 'American social science that is only now beginning to globalise,' a conjecture that nurtures the above-mentioned problems concerning 'essentialist narratives of national "schools"' and global mapping exercises that stimulate 'orientalist tropes of epistemic difference.' It is useful to show that the history of IR in, say, India is more complicated than a diffusionist West-to-Rest account suggests, that knowledge does not travel in a linear fashion, and that 'Indian IR' was not a complete void before the arrival of 'Western IR.' But we do not agree that this makes IR 'global,' except 'in a [very narrow] sense.' Using the institutionalisation of South Asian IR and its scholars' presence in 'Western' journals as an indicator of IR's 'globality' constitutes a performative contradiction. As the symposium authors continuously emphasise, a truly Global IR is exactly not just about the inclusion of 'non-Western' IR scholars in Western journals and institutions or about launching institutions, associations, and journals for the study of IR in 'non-Western' parts of the globe. This brings us to the third contention with Global IR.

The 'normative commitments' of Global IR: moving past disciplinary reformism

A concurrent theme in the debates on Global IR concerns its normative commitments. These normative commitments are attacked on two grounds: first, for their reformist stance vis-à-vis mainstream IR, and second, for their additive attitude towards the ideas operating outside mainstream IR. The symposium authors criticise Global IR, particularly Acharya's version, for working with 'existing approaches' and operating 'within existing ecologies' rather than seeking to 'replace' them. Since Acharya's version of Global IR does not aim to replace existing approaches, they argue that this attitude leads to a 'disciplinary compromise.' This interpretation is not entirely incorrect. Acharya's version of Global IR does not seek to replace existing approaches but to add/include several previously ignored non-Western voices with the aim to 'diversify' existing approaches so that the mainstream theories are not left 'as is.'[74]

Take the example of realism. Some realist contributions to 'Global IR' are more about 'globalising realism' and making it more universal, for example, by including 'non-Western' applications and canonical texts.[75] However, such interventions do not necessarily leave Western-centric realism as is. The Chinese moral realism

[72]Bayly 2023, 462–63.
[73]Ibid., 463.
[74]Acharya and Buzan 2019, 304.
[75]Foulon and Meibauer 2020; Cerioli 2024.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971925100043 Published online by Cambridge University Press

asserted that 'the popularity of an action defines the morality of the action, irrespective of whether the cause of the popularity is because of political values or secular interest'[76]; the Indian 'Kautilyan realism' defined the religiopolitical trait of 'moral-energetic action' as 'psychological power', thereby undermining the 'power versus morality' debates that often cause a disquiet in Eurocentric IR[77]; also, the Japanese pacifist realists portrayed 'pacifism not as an alternative to realism, but rather as its logical conclusion.'[78] As these non-Western voices reform the mainstream theories, they disrupt the taken-for-granted mindset that the ability to theorise IR is the sole prerogative of the West.

The Global IR agenda must do more than disrupt and reinterpret cognate concepts and theories, however. It is also about pursuing post-Western pathways that exceed the 'derivative discourses' of Western IR and 'exceptionalist discourses' that remain applicable to limited native time-space zones (e.g., exceptionalist discourses that deepen the ethos of separation). Global IR must also build alternative frames of 'globality' and forge novel intellectual connections and dialogue. To do so, the 'Global IR research programme' suggests two methodological routes:[79] first, taking cognisance of 'covariance,' which presupposes that genetically similar ideas/practices can emerge at temporally and spatially distant places – so, IR scholars located at any geographical site can analyse and apply the travelling ideas/practices that are provincially neither Western nor non-Western; and second, showing readiness for 'recontextualisation,' which implies that the idea/practice that originates at one place can be integrated, adapted, and reused at another place, thereby inviting IR scholars to use their own thoughts/values/beliefs while engineering their inventive plans for enriching Global IR.

The symposium authors raise an important point by stressing that globalising IR implies more than simply adding more voices and stirring. Global IR is not just about increased insertion of input from Chinese, Indian, Japanese, African, or Middle Eastern voices clubbed together under the rubric 'non-Western IR,' the term initially used by Acharya. This is reminiscent of the critique advanced by 'post-Western' IR scholars. We must at the very least critically interrogate the relations among 'existing approaches' and what is 'added.' More importantly, Global IR works with existing approaches as a *means* to attain a greater diversity, *not as an end in itself*; Barnett and Zarakol may be conflating the two. As discussed by Eun,[80] a greater diversity does not always arise from conversations among the like-minded, for example, the critics of mainstream IR. The conversations among the like-minded may lead to disciplinary segregation *without* 'mutual learning.' Without speaking a recognisable language, this disciplinary segregation may create a situation where critical voices that aim to dismantle the citadel are at best tolerated at the margins, while the citadel goes on with business as usual. Global IR therefore calls for mutual learning through modes of 'interlocution' within and without existing approaches,[81] an intellectual exercise that

[76]Yan 2020, 2.
[77]Shahi 2019b, 119.
[78]Gustafsson, Hagström, and Hanssen 2019, 515.
[79]Shahi 2023.
[80]Eun 2018.
[81]Chu 2022.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971925100043 Published online by Cambridge University Press

has eventually gone beyond existing approaches and shaped new frameworks to expand the boundaries of IR.[82]

The symposium authors also criticise Global IR's insistence upon geographical representation and inclusivity. They construe the end goal of Global IR as something akin to securing an equal representation of all nations in IR journals, a scenario they derisively label a 'United Nations of IR.'[83] They furthermore ridicule the 'cottage industry' that maps geographical representation in IR journals as a limited form of inclusion. This, again, conflates *means* and *ends*. Global IR scholars do not study inequalities in publication patterns because they think the equal representation of all nations' scholars in IR journals is the 'be all and end all' of Global IR. This is just a means to shed light on, and raise awareness about, prevailing inequalities in publishing patterns. If we did not study these patterns, we would not know IR's 'politics of knowledge.' By now, many journals have begun to monitor and devise ways to increase geographical representation. We therefore find it hard to fathom that the symposium authors, some of whom have been on the editorial board of the leading journal, *International Organization*, do not find it disconcerting that approximately two percent of the articles ever published in that journal have an author whose affiliation is outside North America, Europe, Israel, Australia, or New Zealand.[84] That certainly is a controversial stance for scholars who portrayh themselves as allies in the project of globalising IR.

Promoting greater representativeness in IR does not mean that the mission of 'Global IR' stops there. The motive of Global IR lies in promoting a 'politics of knowledge' that is not just restricted to disciplinary reformism that seeks to modify existing approaches by adding more voices, but to encourage publications that aim at 'disciplinary transformation' by way of designing and applying innovative approaches, the approaches that allow us to rethink and broaden our views on what counts as a 'good theory' or 'valid method' for IR knowledge production.[85] It is in this sense that Global IR aims to develop alternative theories, methodologies, concepts, pedagogies, and policy initiatives that could outdo orthodox styles of studying the 'global', 'globality', and 'globalism',[86] thereby improving the shortfalls in the habitual Western-centric ways of doing IR.

The 'inter/multidisciplinarity' of Global IR: transcending historicism

Lastly, the symposium authors raise the issue of Global IR's 'ahistoricism.' They identify a concern for widening IR's historical frames of reference in Global IR, but opine that 'the relationship between Global IR and history is the least developed part of the project's agenda.'[87] Global History is indeed one productive pathway for

[82]Çapan 2016; Sevilla 2017; Kavalski 2018; Shahi 2018; Doak 2019; Dübgen and Skupien 2019; Zhao 2021; Fierke 2022; Layug and Hobson 2022; Shimizu 2022; Eun 2023; Watanabe 2023.

[83]Barkawi et al. 2023.

[84]This figure is calculated based on author affiliations in *IO* articles published from 1956 to 2024. Data retrieved from the Web of Science on 6 January 2025. The 'West' is defined here as the United States (78%), Canada (5%), the United Kingdom (5%), Europe (9%), Australia (1%), New Zealand (0.1%), and Israel (1%). When restricted to the 2000s, the figure increases but remains below 5% (at 4%).

[85]Eun 2019, 2022; Kristensen 2019, 2021.

[86]Shahi 2023.

[87]Barnett and Lawson 2023, 499.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971925100043 Published online by Cambridge University Press

research in Global IR, but the symposium also reads as a call for turning the entire Global IR project into 'Global History for IR.' Though the symposium authors claim not to offer a 'single solution,' most of its authors work within the domain of historical sociology/global history and advocate this domain as a single platform for Global IR. They nonetheless seem to unanimously prefer 'thick relationalism,' that is, the historical enquiries of global entanglements, circulations, and transboundary relations, as the correct pathway for Global IR. These kinds of contrapuntal historical enquiries into the hybridity of global entanglements have already been conducted by quite a few Global(ising) IR scholars.[88] Indeed, even the recent works of Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan provide a well-argued view on the uneven and combined thoughts that go into the making of relational 'global history.'[89] The recent works of Acharya[90] are also more mindful of the problems with civilisational binaries, and in fact align rather well with the study of 'patterns of connections…[and] structural entanglements.'[91]

Despite the obvious merits of Global IR, turning Global IR into a Global History for IR is not without problems. One may wonder whether the thick relationalism inspired by Global History can permeate IR's core narrative and transform it, thereby ultimately 'replacing' its conventional outlines. Thick relationalism can at best, and in fact does already, provide one of the many strands of Global IR. But following a 'global history or nothing principle' does not promise to offer the highest degree of inclusivity. An intellectual strategy of co-opting and then boundary policing 'proper Global IR' will inevitably have exclusionary effects. For instance, if we buy the argument that Global IR should challenge Eurocentrism only by exploring pan-Eurasian entanglements, and not by recovering the Asian or any other understudies,[92] does this imply that one should shy away from exploring alternative theories and practices of IR that are not as directly 'entangled'? The circulations of ideas and practices in steppe culture or the Indian Ocean are fascinating avenues for doing Global IR, true. But would it be productive to premise Global IR scholarships on the exclusion of China's pre-Qin philosophy, ancient Indian scriptures, traditional Andean practices, etc., just because transboundary relations were not as developed or evident when these knowledge traditions cropped up or evolved? Should Global IR completely rule out the study of a concept, theory, philosophy, cosmology, worldview, or an entire discipline coming from 'nation X' or 'region Y' just because it does not *also* study its historical-sociological global entanglements? Are we allowed to study these thought systems only *after* the imperial encounter with the 'West'?

Moreover, if we focus only on global entanglements, we will miss how a large part of our everyday work is shaped through institutions located in a given socio-political context. Yes, there are transnational institutions, and the surveys of philanthropic foundations, scholarly associations, and journals have proven productive in comprehending the global flow of ideas. Yet, these transnational institutions are not creating seamless transboundary relations, and they remain unevenly distributed globally. At the very least, it is necessary to admit, as Manjeet S. Pardesi does in the

[88]Hobson 2004; Çapan 2016; Thakur and Vale 2020.
[89]Buzan and Acharya 2021.
[90]Acharya 2023, 2024.
[91]Barnett and Zarakol 2023, 439.
[92]Hui 2023.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971925100043 Published online by Cambridge University Press

'response section' of the symposium,[93] that relationalism (thick or thin) might not work in all contexts and for all purposes. What is more, as Zeynep Gülşah Çapan warns,[94] an optimistic embrace of relationalism that takes global entanglements as the ultimate goal of globalising IR should be met with caution, especially if our studies of such entanglements remain focused on the 'visible' cases, that is, the cases of global entanglements 'within' the vocabularies already made meaningful to the core narratives of the discipline. We believe that the exclusive focus on visible cases of global entanglements may reinforce the problems of Western centrism, thereby impoverishing other possible solutions.

Of late, the non-Western parts of the globe have contributed several theories/concepts that originate from their 'philosophical heritage,' for example, *Tianxia* (all-under-heaven) from China, *Advaita* (non-duality) from India, *basso ostinato* (recurrent underlying motif) from Japan, *ubuntu* (collective personhood) from Africa, *wahdat-al-wujud* (oneness of being) from Turkey, and *runa* (from Latin America). But whenever a non-Western philosophical heritage is evoked to comprehend contemporary realities of IR, its merits are often assessed on the basis of its 'historical limits': tactlessly, a philosophical heritage is considered fruitful only to the extent that it succeeds within the temporal-spatial boundaries of its origin. In a way, history is mobilised as an instrument to truncate philosophy. But historical readings of a philosophy have their own limits. If a philosophy works at a particular historical juncture, it does not mean that it automatically transcends time; similarly, if a philosophy does not work at a particular historical juncture, it does not necessarily belong in the garbage bin of history. In this regard, the question that needs to be asked is this: Why should we necessarily accept 'history' (or records of the past) as a natural limit to future human potential?[95] The strategy to restrict Global IR to Global History with a relational ontological commitment runs counter to the project's ethos. Global IR is not a single theory, ontology, or definition of universality that can be confined within a single discipline, whether history or philosophy. As a growing and evolving research programme, it offers ample space for disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary specialists who aim to contribute to pluralising and globalising the study of how the world works.

Concluding remarks

The *International Theory* symposium on Global IR, edited by a range of prominent scholars, is a forceful intervention in the ongoing disciplinary debate on Global IR. In this rejoinder, we have read the symposium as an intervention that aims to advance the Global IR agenda by providing some useful correctives and cautionary notes for how not to advance Global IR – essentialism, geo-fixity, reformism, and ahistoricism – but as also limited by its narrow view of the Global IR agenda and too restrictive in its proposal for how to advance Global IR. We have explored how the four main critiques identified by the symposium can be and have been addressed through recent developments in the wider Global IR literature. Building on the symposium's critical points and ideas, we have sought to provide a fuller view of Global IR and to consider ways in which 'different' worldviews and lifeworld experiences can be regarded as

[93]Pardesi 2023.
[94]Çapan 2020.
[95]Shahi 2020.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971925100043 Published online by Cambridge University Press

legitimate epistemological resources for IR – without (re)producing fixed, essentialised knowledge claims.

This is not to say the developments discussed and the suggestions offered above are without controversy or contention. Indeed, these are far from undisputed. Our intention here is not to propose one proper way of 'doing Global IR.' How (not) to advance Global IR is not a question to be settled once and for all, but an open one that requires continuous deliberation among diverse forms of knowledge emanating from all corners of the globe and by deep engagement with the key charges levelled against Global IR. Global IR should continue to be a collective work in progress. What makes it hang together, then, is not just its objective to address the issues of diversity, exclusion, or marginalisation that are entrenched in the discipline, but also to arrive at innovative, alternative non-dual or non-binary theoretical and practical findings that could further improve the general human condition at the current juncture in history. From this perspective, we are all fellow travellers, occasionally taking divergent paths but moving towards the same destination through a reasonably contrasting, complementary, and collective learning journey. We hope that our rejoinder will be read in this spirit of mutual learning, one that broadens Global IR understandings and sparks new inventions.

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Cite this article: Eun, Yong-Soo, Peter Marcus Kristensen, and Deepshikha Shahi. 2025. "How (not) to advance Global IR: a rejoinder." *International Theory* **17** (2): 268–286, doi:10.1017/S1752971925100043

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971925100043 Published online by Cambridge University Press