



BOOK REVIEW

The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at its Centenary, by Amitav Acharya & Barry Buzan.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 392

Reviewed by

Kevin Nielsen Magat AGOJO

City University of Hong Kong

To claim that the academic field of international relations was founded only in 1919 with the creation of the Department of International Politics and the Woodrow Wilson Chair in International Politics at the University College of Wales in the United Kingdom is a misleading, if not outright insensible, statement. The small ir (or the actual conduct of international relations) and big IR (or the discipline of international relations) have existed even before the said year. As rightly argued by Acharya and Buzan in *The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at its Centenary*, this founding myth not only establishes international relations as mainly about the repercussions of the First World War and the political affairs of the West, but it also spurns the periphery, which has long been instrumental in the conduct and discipline of international relations even before and more so after 1919.

Acharya and Buzan invite us to revisit and bestow due recognition to the long history of ir that shaped the development of IR. To thoroughly grasp the evolution of global international relations, the authors asserted the necessity of going beyond the perspectives of Western powers. And given their dominance, it is not difficult to understand why the initial thinking about international relations within the periphery centered on regional identities and anti-colonialism. For instance, Jose Protacio Rizal, a Filipino intellectual who was pivotal in the development of regionalism as an anti-imperialist reaction, was lionized by Acharya and Buzan as “a champion of the unity of the Malay race” (p. 60). Hence, while pre-1919 IR was fundamentally “an enterprise by and for the West,” it is also understandable why thinking about international relations within the periphery at that time was “in response to the encounters with both the West and modernity” (p. 55). IR in the periphery continued to prosper in the aftermath of the Second World War. Specifically, regionalism was regarded as an instrumental tool not only “for attaining national independence and sovereignty they had lost to the West” but also as a way for nationalist leaders “to advance decolonisation not only in their own countries but also more generally” (p. 125). Indeed, one needs to transcend West-centrism to gain a better and broader understanding of the making of global international relations.

Acharya and Buzan also underscored the importance of scrutinizing the unfolding of world affairs. In this book, they claimed that the current global international society is in a “deep pluralist form,” where there exists not only a “diffuse distribution of power, wealth and cultural authority” (p. 265) but also in which “both states and non-state actors play substantial roles [...] it describes a world not only without a global hegemon but in which

CONTACT Kevin Nielsen Magat Agojo, knagojo2-c@my.cityu.edu.hk, at Department of Public and International Affairs, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR

315

the very idea of such a role is no longer legitimate” (Ibid.). Simply put, the West has less dominance in the contemporary period, thereby paving the way for the ascent of alternative centers of authority and influence. That the United States of America (US) remains a significant politico-economic world power is irrefutable. Nonetheless, one must not neglect China, which soared from being a measly “third wheel in the great game of power and ideology” (p. 80) to the “most likely to challenge the US, both materially and politically” (p. 187).

However, an essential perspective that the authors sorely missed was a dedicated discussion of the notion and contemporary relevance of the global cop. In the Cold War, the US assumed the role of a global cop by leading military operations to counter the expansion of Soviet interests and influences (Carroll, 1996). A discussion on this self-assigned role would have been thought-provoking, especially as we examine its (ir)relevance vis-à-vis the rise of Trumpism, the growing influence of China, the withdrawal of US military troops in Afghanistan, and their non-deployment in Ukraine amid the Russian invasion.

This missing perspective, however, still upholds the authors’ central point: it is imperative to understand the praxis and theory of international relations beyond the history and views of the West. Please make no mistake: the authors never claimed that Western IR should be disregarded to favor non-Western IR. The two should not be deemed mutually exclusive but meant to be “convergent and mutually reinforcing” (p. 258). The objective is not to displace extant IR theories but “enrich them with the infusion of ideas and practices from the Non-Western world” (Ibid.). Aspiring for and attaining greater pluralization of international relations should be essential to make IR a genuinely global and comprehensive discipline. Global IR, as aptly asserted by Acharya and Buzan, “needs to embody pluralistic universalism and be grounded in a truly world history” (p. 319). Therefore, a complex but crucial challenge for students and scholars of world politics is to strive to make meaningful impacts on the further development of IR.

ORCID

Kevin Nielsen Magat Agojo 0000-0002-9778-4491

REFERENCES

Carroll, E. (1996). Should the U.S. be the world’s policeman?. *Peace Review*, 8(4), 477-483. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659608425999>