

WISC-AMEI Exploratory Workshop
“The current state and future of IR studies in the Global South”
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A Personal Summary

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The workshop started off with a discussion on whether the analysis of international studies in the Global South deserves to be a field on its own. In other words, are the key themes and theoretical concerns different from those in the Global North? While some participants argued that themes and concerns such as poverty, inequality, violence, or development are specific to the countries and regions located in the Global South and thus necessitate conceptual and theoretical frameworks on their own, others suggested that these topics have a universal nature and should therefore be integrated into what Amitav Acharya has called “Global IR” (see his ISA presidential address last year). A subsequent consensus among the participants emerged that the popular binary division between Global North and South does in fact cause more damage than it helps the discipline to advance towards becoming a truly global one. Rather than geographically restricted concerns, global problems such as poverty and peace demonstrate that North and South share common themes and theoretical concerns. While the recent emergence of “regional schools”, most importantly in China, reflects a growing awareness and visibility of non-Western traditions in International Studies, these schools need to transcend their narrow regional focus in order to engage in both an inter-south and a north-south dialogue. While all participants did agree on the need for (more) dialogue, some took a rather skeptical view regarding the prerequisites and existing conditions to make dialogue work in the IR discipline. Apart from missing incentives structures to engage in dialogue, mutual recognition and understanding, often related to rather practical issues such as learning foreign languages, paradigms, and vocabularies, is still an elusive concept for many IR scholars. In addition, some argued that the potential for (theoretical) innovation, especially beyond their own countries or regions, among IR scholars in the Global South is inferior to their capacity for contestation vis-à-vis Western concepts and theories.

While global dialogue is indeed necessary, though difficult to achieve given the absence of prerequisites, participants agreed that the process (according to the old adage of Max Weber that politics is akin to the drilling of hard boards) is more important than a specific end product. In this vein, three projects were discussed in some detail. First, the creation of a database of syllabi on IR introductory courses with a view to obtain an

empirical base to gauge the status of IR teaching in the Global South (similar exercises have already been done in the North). However, some skepticism existed regarding the willingness to share syllabi and the potential value-added contribution of the project. Rather than focussing on such a time- and resource-consuming task, participants supported the idea of a WISC-sponsored workshop on teaching IR differently, in collaboration with a local host in the Global South. Second, the idea of a dictionary of key IR concepts as used in different cultural contexts was launched. Third, a (problem-based) global textbook for undergraduate students to be used in introductory IR courses, made accessible as an open-source publication, constitutes the most ambitious project to be potentially undertaken in the future.