1 Introduction

East Asia, including both Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia for this textbook as shown in Map 1.1, is a major center of power and prosperity in the world and is complex in multiple dimensions. Brute geographical facts separate East Asia from the rest of the world, but not as neatly as is shown in Map 1.2. The geographical facts of East Asia become problematic upon scrutiny, and to different degrees in different functional areas. As a case in point, Japan and the United States have advocated a geopolitical regional concept of the "**Indo-Pacific**" linking the Pacific and Indian oceans to counter China's growing influence (He and Feng, 2020; Medcalf, 2020; Liu, 2020). Russia, which has territories in East Asia, would like to be included but is often not recognized as part of East Asia. China is squarely centered in East Asia but is also part of Eurasia, along with Russia. India historically has had a large impact on East Asia through Hinduism/Buddhism as well as through trade. Moreover, when it comes to money and trade, in particular, East Asia makes sense fundamentally from a global perspective.

In this book, I theorize the international relations of a particular region in the world, and I have to make hard choices about the boundaries of that region for a focused analysis. Concepts of boundaries are also socially constructed and have evolved. Efforts were made to conceptualize regions scientifically in the 1960s and 1970s but with few clear results (Lombaerde et al., 2010: 735–36). A focus on East Asia can be justified by the simple fact that this is a region that has identifiable common features and patterns of interactions over millenniums. East Asia has often been subsumed into larger regional groups, but that does not negate its existence as a distinct unit. For example, East Asia can be viewed as a constitutive part of the Indo-Pacific, along with the Pacific countries and South Asia, but one can still zero in on East Asia, the Pacific, and South Asia separately. Some countries like China can be part of both East Asia and Eurasia, just as Russia is part of both Europe and Asia, and as the United States is part of both the Pacific and the Atlantic. All regions experience outside influence, but they are regions that can be studied as a unit. East Asia is no different.

Map 1.1. Political map of Asia.
Credit: loops7/Collection: DigitalVision Vectors, Getty Images.

1.1 Thinking Theoretically

This section provides the theoretical framework for the book. It starts with a subsection on how to think theoretically, followed by another subsection justifying use of evolutionary theory for international relations.

1.1.1 What is Theory?

There is a difference between vernacular use of the word "theory" and what scholars have in mind when theorizing. In daily use, if we say, "I have a theory about this,"

Map 1.2. Asia topographic map.
Credit: FrankRamspott/Collection: E+/Getty Images

it normally means that we have a guess about something. By contrast, scholars treat **theory** as a simplified version of the world singling out specific causal factors to explain the observed patterns or unobservable forces in a transparent and rigorous fashion. As an example of a definition of theory from an International Relations (IR) textbook, "theory is nothing but systematic reflection on phenomena, designed to explain them and to show how they are related to each other in a meaningful, intelligent pattern, instead of being merely random items in an incoherent universe" (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 1997: 15). Theories can be tested. In fact, theories that cannot be tested are normally viewed as suspect. There are also different kinds of theories – some grand, some middle-ranged, and some more specific – appropriate

for different levels of research questions. In practice, most students learn to think theoretically by emulating reputable and credentialed scholars.

Scholars often seek a "scientific" theory. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (Gove, 1993: 2032), "scientific" has several meanings, such as: "agreeing with or conducted or prepared strictly according to the principles and practice of or for the furtherance of exact science." From an academic perspective, Peter Achinstein (1968: 138; italics in the original), a philosopher of science, argued that "to call a theory 'scientific' might be to say simply that it is arrived at or justified scientifically. More typically, however, it is to say that it is a theory in *science*." Early on, most IR scholars aspired to be scientific. Edward H. Carr (1964: 1–2) thought that he was observing "the science of international politics in its infancy." Hans J. Morgenthau (1973) also made it clear that he was constructing a science of international politics, which was the title for Chapter 2 in his classic *Politics among Nations*. There has been a long-standing contention in the IR field between those who are trying different ways to make the field scientific, and those who dismiss the endeavor (see, e.g., Ake, 1972; McLean and Postbrief, 1972; Wight, 2002; Brady, 2004; Mintz, James, and Walker, 2007; Bull, 1966). The "American school" of International Political Economy (IPE), for example, prefers scientific methods (Cohen, 2008: 3–4).

Why do we need theories? Scholars need theories to truly understand their respective fields of expertise, but theories also have practical implications. Decision-makers are guided theoretically whether they are aware of it or not (Walt, 2005). People, including policymakers, often act based on what they believe is the explanation, which also justifies their policy choices.

When IR scholars focused on East Asia talk about "thinking theoretically," they normally discuss how prevailing theories apply to East Asia and how East Asia may contribute to general IR theory in return, rather than on foreign policy issues for any specific country (see, e.g., Acharya, 2022; Johnston, 2012; Haggard, 2004). Students using this book would have normally taken an introductory course on IR theory. Theoretically inclined IR scholars are also arguably familiar with and influenced by Kenneth Waltz's (1986: 329) insistence that IR should be about a few big and important IR issues rather than messy foreign policy details.

1.1.2 Why the Theory of Evolution?

The prevailing IR theories will be discussed in the next chapter, but here we discuss evolutionary theory to highlight its importance. Not to be confused with Social Darwinism that has been discredited as a pseudoscience (Hawkins, 1997; Dennis, 1995; Bannister, 1979), evolution theory is well known, and there are many texts about it that are readily available for those interested. While some evolutionary theory will be introduced throughout the book when relevant, this chapter does not have the space to give a full-blown introduction to the topic. Rather, it justifies the applicability of evolutionary theory to international relations.

Fundamentally, international relations as human relations belong with the life sciences, not the physical sciences. Political scientists study unique occurrences in

the political structures of humans, and as Morgenthau (1973: 18) notes, "the most formidable difficulty facing a theoretical inquiry into the nature and ways of international politics is the ambiguity of the material with which the observer has to deal." That is because the events that IR scholars study "happened in this way only once and never before or since." And that feature of political life makes it virtually impossible to emulate physics, which deals with materials and laws that are not unique. Evolutionary biology also studies unique species and events that "happened in this way only once and never before or since."

Broadly speaking, then, political scientists ask questions more relevant to biology than to the physical sciences. As John Maynard Smith (1990: 65) noted, biologists ask two questions, namely how something works and what it is for, while physical scientists ask only the first question. Political scientists ought to, and often do, ask both questions, because the reasons why specific events happened are central to understanding politics.

Evolutionary theory is a proven science, but the fact that evolutionary scientists still debate should not be viewed as discrediting the theory of evolution. Rather, scientific controversies are a normal process of scientific research, and it is rational to follow in the footsteps of proven scientists. Alexander Rosenberg (2000: 8–9), for example, has noted, "If any well-established scientific theory can teach us about ourselves, it is Darwin's. Other theories, which might teach us more, which might even limit the writ of Darwinian theory for understanding human affairs, are either so far not well-confirmed, or even well-formed."

Natural scientists have made advances that link new scientific discoveries to human nature and human affairs (e.g., Green, 2018; Alexander, 1979; Barash, 1977), and they have made much progress in studying the human brain and human behavior (e.g., Alexander, 1987; Sapolsky, 2017; Westen, 2008; Tuschman, 2013; Kentrick and Griskevicius, 2013; Tomasello, 2014). Edward Wilson (2000: 547–75) argues forcefully and controversially that the humanities and social sciences ought to be viewed as specialized branches of biology if we imagine ourselves as aliens observing Earth from another planet. Darwinism can be used to explain human affairs, and it is incumbent upon political scientists to use such scientific knowledge to make further contributions.

Evolutionary theory gives IR scholars analytical advantages for six specific reasons. First, evolutionary theory is well suited to explain change (Tang, 2013). As George Modelski (1996: 323), an early advocate for using evolutionary theory in the IR field, states clearly, "the most basic evolutionary considerations center around 'change.'" An evolutionary approach can therefore "help us comprehend rapidly changing reality," such as the end of the Cold War and the rise of East Asia (Modelski and Poznanski, 1996: 315). By contrast, the three main schools of IR theory, realism, liberalism, and constructivism, have had difficulty analyzing changes in international relations (Snyder, 2004: 61–62). Change is the fundamental issue for IR, so specific IR theories grounded on evolutionary theory can provide more specific explanations for historical events. We are today in another period of fundamental change in the world.

Second, evolution theory offers a constitutive causal logic that is appropriate for studying complex political situations. With such a theoretical approach, we may engage in descriptive studies to build a discipline. In fact, one major difference between **biogeography**, an evolutionary science, and other sciences is that "it is usually dependent on data collected by many individuals working over large areas for long periods" (Lomolino, Riddle and Brown, 2006: 9). Adopting an evolutionary approach to IR therefore means that we depend on past descriptive studies of politics, which are integral to an evolutionary study of politics. Similarly, an evolutionary perspective ought to alert political scientists to the fact that today's common sense political knowledge must have resulted from our past political experience and possesses practical value.

Third, evolutionary theory, particularly biogeography, is principally based on observations of large patterns rather than controlled experiments because "it usually deals with scales of space and time at which experimental manipulation is impossible" (Lomolino, Riddle and Brown, 2006: 9). That is, controlled experiments are difficult for studying patterns and trends of politics, and experimental manipulation of leaders is impossible. As an example, the Wallace Line drew inspiration from field observations in the Malay Archipelago about the distinct Asian and Australian distributions of animals. Like all science projects, later scholars such as Max Carl Wilhelm Weber sought to improve Wallace's groundbreaking findings (see Box 1.1). Following the sample principles of evolution, it is possible to draw lines as well between distinct political institutions.

Fourth, evolutionary theory allows new areas for theoretical and empirical investigation and analysis of broad phenomena and development. Dennis McCarthy (2009: xviii) notes that while many fields have become very specialized, "modern biogeography continues to zoom outward, often illuminating the broader patterns and principles that occur on a continental, oceanic, or even global scale." Many scholars have recognized that IR has become too focused on narrow research topics and that it needs more visualization and precision. Evolutionary theory also has novel and powerful analytical tools that may benefit IR research.

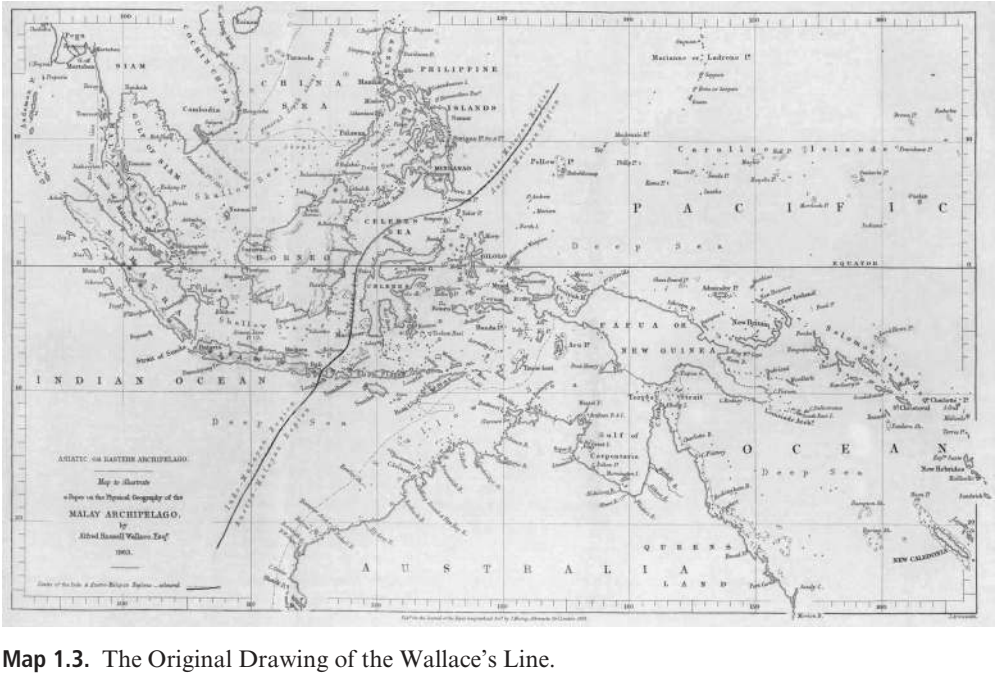
Fifth, evolutionary theory offers an ecological perspective for the social sciences. Political scientists view power as all-important, but that is not always the case. When the environment changes dramatically, the bigger objects, forms, and creatures go extinct first. Economists consider efficiency highly desirable, but as some evolutionary scholars explain, the most efficient predators are also the most vulnerable to chance. Predator and prey cannot coexist if predators are too efficient (Sigmund, 1993: 45).

Finally, political science and IR are not predictive sciences. Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow (2010: 32) argue that it is possible to predict human events but that it would take so much energy to do all the calculations, it would not be worth it. Evolutionary biology is also not predictive. As David Reznick and Joseph Travis (2018: 738) have pointed out, "evolutionary change over time can be governed by multiple factors, the relative influence of which vary over time," and that "without deep biological understanding of the system under study, predictive models are not

Box 1.1. The Wallace and Weber Lines

Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913), who independently discovered the theory of evolution, drew a famous line dividing the Indonesian archipelago into a Western region of animals of largely Asian origin, such as tigers and pheasants, and an eastern region, where animals of Australian origin such as kangaroos and cockatoos were found (see Map 1.3). Based on a field expedition and examination of plant species and vertebrate species, Max Carl Wilhelm Weber (1852–1937) concluded that the Wallace Line was not the most important biogeographical boundary, and he proposed Weber's Line to the east of the Wallace's Line instead.

Source: McCarthy (2009: 25–29).



Map 1.3. The Original Drawing of the Wallace's Line.
Credit: Wallace (1863).

likely to offer much insight into either the past or future."[1] The best we can do is to forecast general tendencies and scenarios (see, e.g., Openheimer, 2016). The theory of evolution is better at **retrodiction**, which is the act of predicting the past rather than predicting the future.

Philosophers have thought deeply about scientific theory, but other than teaching in the classroom, IR scholars largely do not engage actively on that front in today's

[1] For brave efforts at prediction of political events and human affairs, see Philip Tetlock and Dan Gardner (2015).

published scholarship.[2] It seems more productive to instead focus on theoretical problem-solving than debate over foundational questions. Methodology has prevailed over philosophy in graduate school training, but IR scholars should give more thought to explanation and science, which directly relate to our theoretical research. Explanation will be discussed in detail in the next section.

1.2 Explanation and Evolution

It is common for theoretically inclined IR scholars to teach students to establish causal explanations by examining the relationship between variations in the dependent and independent variables. Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba (1994: 99–100), for example, state that a causal hypothesis "specifies a posited relationship between variables that creates observable implications: if the specified explanatory variables take on certain values, other specified values are predicted for the dependent variables." Their working definition of causal explanation is convenient for showing students how to explain events. Nevertheless, to engage in theory building, rather than theory testing, we need to examine the basic premise of explanation.

1.2.1 Evolutionary Explanation

To that end, the philosopher J. J. C. Smart (1990: 2) defines "explanation of some fact as a matter of fitting belief in this fact into a system of beliefs." This view is helpful for reflecting on what we do when engaging in an explanatory act. Scholars are subject to the same human tendency to be influenced by their own belief systems, which dictate what questions to ask, what analytical facts to privilege, and what facts to use for evidential support for their arguments. Thus, Smart's definition also explains why it is difficult for a scholar to accept facts contrary to his or her belief system and to demand the burden of proof only from an alternative research agenda.

Smart (1990: 3) characterizes explanation as a "speech act" that explains something to oneself or someone else. When it comes to explaining things to others, explanation involves pragmatic calculations of the state of knowledge of the person to whom we try to explain something. In part, Smart's definition explains why academic IR is increasingly criticized as a narrowing discourse among a small group of like-minded elite colleagues. Worse, academics prepare and train those to whom they want to explain things, their students, who in turn become academics or political leaders, and they also determine what should be viewed among academics and their students. These circumstances explain why the IR field has less and less influence outside its ivory tower, even though some IR scholars are active in

[2] For exceptions, see, e.g., Patrick Jackson (2016); Colin Wight (2002); Chris Brown (2009); Fred Chernoff (2002).

decision-making. Moreover, academics in the IR field need to ask whether and why people care to listen if they intend to explain something.

Herein, I argue for a broader view of explanation that is more than just hypothesis testing. Evolutionary theory has often been dismissed in the IR field as offering a mere tautological explanation, with one factor defined by another and vice versa – leading to the notion that everything can be explained away, without telling us why. However, since evolutionary theory is supposed to explain why something happens, we have to ask: is this a case in which evolutionary explanation is misunderstood or misapplied in the IR field? Maynard Smith (1990: 66), a biologist and philosopher, offers some useful clarification using a biological explanation that differentiates short-hand explanations and underlying full evolutionary explanations. The sentence "The heart beats in order to pump blood around the body" is a short-hand explanation for "Those animals which, in the past, had hearts that were efficient pumps survived, because oxygen reached their tissues, whereas animals whose hearts were less efficient pumps died. Since offspring resemble their parents, this resulted in the fact that present-day animals have hearts that are efficient pumps." Thus, for IR's purpose, we need long evolutionary explanations to account for changes in international relations.

Hypothesis testing is not the only way of doing scientific research, particularly if we adopt the method of biological reasoning. As noted biologist Richard Dawkins (1982: 2; italics in the original) observes, "it is *possible* for a theoretical book to be worth reading even if it does not advance testable hypotheses but seeks, instead, to change the way we see." Such theoretically informed description is integral to our scientific research. Physicist Richard P. Feynman (1963: 1–2) once remarked that the one sentence he would pass on to future generations if all scientific knowledge has been lost is as follows: "All things are made of atoms." That sentence might well be dismissed by some political scientists as descriptive, with atoms undefined, but explanation is often embedded in the description if we have a clear underlying theoretical framework. Stephen Gould (2002: 1337) argues that "our increasing willingness to take narrative explanations seriously has sparked a great potential gain, through admitting a pluralism of relevant and appropriate styles of explanation, in our accurate understanding of nature's wondrous amalgam or rulebound generalities and fascinating particulars."

Biological reasoning uses process-based constitutive causality (see, e.g., Lebow, 2009), which is different from a linear causality that establishes necessary, but not necessarily sufficient, conditions and leads to predicted consequences. Biology asks how and why questions. Of the leading IR scholars, Alexander Wendt (1999: 79, 83) offers a clear discussion on constitutive causality. In his terminology, "constitutive theorizing" differs from "causal theorizing." If we say X causes Y, we assume that "(1) X and Y are independent of each other, (2) X precedes Y temporarily, and (3) but for X, Y would not have occurred." By contrast, constitutive theorizing is about "requests for explications of the structures that constitute X or Y in the first place." Social construction can be connected with an evolutionary theory of international relations.

To study the purposes of the political systems under investigation, we need not assume that political and historical dynamics have to be the way they are. There is no such thing as historical inevitability. Rather, what we observe today may have resulted from highly contingent circumstances and chance happenings. That is, "a particular adaptation may have been produced by several different evolutionary pathways" (Mayr, 1988: 19). To understand how political change affects future evolutionary change, we need to examine its advantages and disadvantages (Lieberman, 2013: 44–47).

Put in plain language, explanation comes in different statements, such as in Box 1.2.

Proposition 1 is rationalist. In IR, both realism and liberal institutionalism are rationalist because they both assume that countries and non-state actors are motived by self-interests even though they differ in what those interests are. Marxists largely follow Propositions 1 and 2, with interests mainly as class interests, which also dictate the values and norms. Constructivists basically follow Proposition 2. As will be explained later in this chapter and in Chapter 2, IR scholars are more eclectic in practice. For example, Waltz's structural realism does not engage interests and instead attributes the cause of action to a structurally determined "right" thing to do. Asian traditionalists are also in the Proposition 2 camp and differ from Eurocentric scholarship only in terms of what is the right and appropriate thing to do. Proposition 3 is essentially evolutionary, which is not mutually exclusive from either Propositions 1 or 2 in that interests and norms are also evolutionary products. George Kennan, an early realist grand strategist, anchored his arguments largely on what he believed was Russia's way of behaving.

Consistent with Smart's definition of explanation as making events fit with our belief system, we can see that whichever of the three propositions we accept depends on our belief system. If we believe that human action is driven by egoistic interests, we would likely place the burden of proof on alternative propositions. One standard defense is that one's own approach belongs to a large tent and critics are attacking a strawman. No one can cover all aspects of an approach, however, and it is not unreasonable to engage with idealized approaches. It is not just evolutionary theory that needs to be substantiated but all approaches. Evolutionary theory, in fact, has a distinct advantage because it is a science rather than a philosophy.

Box 1.2. Explanatory Statements

Proposition 1: A has acted because A believes it is in A's best interest to do so.
Proposition 2: A has acted because A believes that is the right or appropriate thing to do.
Proposition 3: A has acted because that is the way A is.