Part I

Culture and Social Theory

1   Social Theory and the Multicultural World

The universality of social theory has long been both a dream for realiza-
tion and a topic for debate. Theory of the natural sciences is almost
universally acknowledged as universally applicable, and, following this
logic, the behavioral revolution in International Relations (IR) seems to
have won an overwhelming triumph in the debate between the scientific
school and the traditional approach, making universality the standard for
evaluating a social theory. Mainstream theorists of IR, especially those in
the United States, have persisted in the principles of the natural sciences,
trying to develop theories that are universally valid, across time and space
and beyond culture and geography.

At the same time, challenges to this mainstream belief have also been
persistent. It is true that a well-established social theory should have
broader applicability and gain more validity, even though no social theory
is completely universal in the final analysis. However, it is absolutely
necessary to discuss how a social theory originates in the first place.
Social theory may well aim at universality and it is in a sense justifiable,
but no theory starts from a temporo-spatial null, in a uniform homoge-
neity, and with an initial universal meaning. A social theory tends to
originate in a particular geo-cultural setting, which shapes the practices
of the cultural community and thus defines the efforts to develop theory,
too. Social theory is therefore from the very beginning imprinted with the
characteristic features of the cultural community of its origin, for it is this
community that shapes the background knowledge of its members and
thus provides the menu for the theorist to choose throughout the process
of her theoretical construction. Furthermore, the theorist herself has lived
in this community, being immersed in its culture, following its practice,
and thinking spontaneously and effortlessly as a member of the commu-
nity. In other words, social theory bears a cultural birthmark, which will
be with it even when it becomes a well-established theory with a higher
level of universality. This birthmark is indelible.

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It is thus clear that I place particular emphasis on culture as a significant incubator and shaper of social theory. In fact, culture used to be taken as an important factor for social studies. "In the 1940s and 1950s, much attention was paid to culture as a crucial element in understanding societies, analyzing differences among them, and explaining their economic and political development."[1] In IR, "from the 1940s to the 1960s culture played a meaningful part in IR theory and research."[2] However, in IR, as well as in other disciplines of social studies, culture as an analytical element declined conspicuously in the United States later on due largely to the triumph of the behavioral revolution and the rise of the ambition for grand and scientific social theory. Even with the revived interest in culture as an explanatory variable since the 1980s, culture seems to be used mostly for analysis of actors' behavior and has never had a place in building and developing IR theory. I intend to explore the link between culture and social theory construction, arguing that to a significantly large extent, culture shapes social theory. It is not a far-reaching exaggeration to argue that the social sciences are in fact the cultural sciences, for "nature" is paired with "culture" rather than "society." It is undeniable that social theory is developed by people, who are cultural beings and have deeply embedded background knowledge of the cultural communities where they are brought up. In this sense, social theory is a product of culture. As to exploring how and why culture shapes theory, we need first to discuss social theory and analyze the two major approaches to social theory building and development.

Theory and Social Theory

Theory is a system of ideas. No matter whether it is in the natural or the social sciences, theoretical construction means to systemize ideas[3] and produce abstract knowledge.[4] Immanuel Kant has made a meaningful

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[1] Harrison and Huntington 2000, xiii–xiv.   [2] Lapid 1997, 5.

[3] The definitions of "theory" in *the Oxford English Dictionary* include, *inter alia*, : (1) "A scheme or system of ideas and statements held as an explanation or account of a group of facts or phenomena; a hypothesis that has been confirmed or established by observation or experiment, and is pronounced or accepted as accounting for the known facts; a statement that is held to be the general laws, principles, or causes of something known or observed;" (2)"Systematic conception or statement of the principles of something; abstract knowledge or the formulation of it: often used as implying more or less unsupported hypotheses." The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, 3284.

[4] The definitions of theory by *Webster's Dictionary of the English Language* include, *inter alia*,: (1) "the body of generalizations and principles developed in association with a field of activity . . ."; (2) "the coherent set of hypothetical, conceptual, and pragmatic principles forming the general frame of reference for a field of inquiry . . ."; (3) "abstract knowledge." Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, 2371.

definition of "system" by referring to architectonic. It is meaningful because it shows clearly why we should take theory as a system of ideas or systematic knowledge. He says,

> By architectonic I understand the art of systems. Since systemic unity is that which first makes ordinary cognition into science, i.e. makes a system of a mere aggregation of it, architectonic is the doctrine of that which is scientific in our cognitions in general, and therefore necessarily belongs to the doctrine of method.
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> Under the government of reason, our cognitions cannot at all constitute a rhapsody, but must constitute a system, in which alone they can support and advance its essential ends. I understand by a system, however, the unity of manifold of cognitions under one idea. This is the rational concept of form of the whole, insofar as through this domain of the manifold as well as the position of the parts with respect to each other is determined *a priori*.
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> For its execution, the idea needs a schema, i.e., an essential manifoldness and order of the parts determined *a priori* from the principle of the end.[5]

I do not mean here to discuss Kant's ontological position, his argument on the rule of reason, and his means-end justification, but what is important in his understanding of theory is the difference he makes between an "aggregation of ideas" and a "system of ideas." His differentiation of "system" from "aggregation" indicates the essential quality of theory and his "one idea" refers to a system or a "schema" of thoughts. Thus, "a system of ideas" provides a general definition of theory. It is acknowledged by Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan as they point out one of the important conditions for IR theory: "its contribution identifies it as a systematic attempt to abstract or generalize about the subject matter of IR."[6]

It seems true that there is little argument or disagreement about this general definition of theory, but controversies and debates flare up when social theory is drawn into the picture. One of the most conspicuous disagreements is whether social theory is the same as natural theory, behind which is the argument as to whether the social world is the same as the natural world. In the study of IR, for example, Kenneth Waltz distinguishes between "theory" and "thought," arguing that Raymond Aron and Hans J. Morgenthau provide mere realist thoughts and not realist theory because theirs do not "take the fateful step beyond developing concepts to the fashioning of a recognizable theory,"[7] which, among others, has distinctive dependent and independent variables to explain the causality.[8] Robert Keohane discusses "rationalistic" and "reflective" approaches to the study of international institutions, believing that the latter is "less specified as theories," need to develop testable

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[5] Kant 1997, 691.   [6] Acharya and Buzan 2007, 292.   [7] Waltz 1995, 71.   [8] Ibid., 70.

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hypotheses, and carry out "systematic empirical investigations."[9] Martha
Finnemore believes that the English School of IR cannot be qualified as
theory in a strict sense.[10] It is clear that all these scholars have a deeply
internalized yardstick to judge what social theory is and their primary
benchmark is no doubt the principles for theory construction in the
natural sciences, underlined by a strong positivist worldview, one that
has existed in the background knowledge of the IR community, especially
in the United States, represented by mainstream theorists there and
reinforced by IR students elsewhere in the world.

Acharya and Buzan, in a project for exploring non-Western IR
theory,[11] gave two different definitions of social theory: "the harder
positivist, rationalistic, materialist and quantitative understandings on
one end of the theory spectrum, and the more reflective, social, construc-
tivist, and postmodern on the other."[12] Their categorization of hard
positivism and soft reflectivism, similar to the distinction of "scientific"
and "hermeneutic" theories by Martin Hollis and Steve Smith,[13] has
important implications: The former, dominating in the study of IR in
the United States, recognizes only one form of social theory, i.e. theory
that fits into the "hard positivist definition" and stresses "being scienti-
fic," which means the provision of neat explanations, including hypoth-
eses with clear causality, rigorous empirical testing, and a deductive
approach to observation. Causal mechanisms are considered the objec-
tive of theorizing and empirical testing is the method for "scientific"
research. The latter, or the reflective definition, is much "softer," requir-
ing putting forward meaningful questions, setting out systematic ideas,
and developing a set of concepts and categories for the production of
abstract and general knowledge.[14] Acharya and Buzan label correctly
their own approach as the "pluralist view," for it recognizes various

[9] Keohane 1989a, 174.   [10] Finnemore 2001.
[11] Acharya and Buzan organized a project entitled "Why is there no non-Western IR theory:
reflections on and from Asia?" The participants were mainly scholars from Asian coun-
tries. The title suggested that it was a challenge to the monist approach to IR theorizing.
The organizers were puzzled by the situation: On the one hand the Western IR theory
cannot readily answer questions that have arisen from a globalizing world and on the
other hand there is no non-Western IR theory that is recognized by the academic IR
community. The participants listed several causes that have led to such a situation,
among which the one that all were agreed on was that IR remained massively dominated
by Western thinking though it was now a global activity. However, "the case studies" in
the project, as the two organizers said, "point to the existence of abundant intellectual
and historical resources that could serve as the basis of developing a non-Western IRT
that takes into account the positions, needs and cultures of countries in the region."
Acharya and Buzan 2007, 427.
[12] Ibid., 291.   [13] Hollis and Smith 1990, quoted in Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff 2001, 22.
[14] Acharya and Buzan 2007.

forms of theory through identifying a "theory spectrum," including hard positivism, the soft reflectivism, and perhaps some others in between.[15]

Buzan uses "pluralism" and "monism" to tell the methodological position of the English School theory of IR from that of the American mainstream IR theory. He has argued that American mainstream IR theories, such as neorealism and neoliberalism, take a monist approach to social theorizing, for they believe that all theory, natural and social alike, should follow the single and same set of standards, while the English School adopts a pluralist approach, for example, taking history into serious consideration.[16] For the purpose of this study, I will explore in some more detail the two approaches of monism and pluralism and analyze their implications for the construction of IR theory, especially in non-Western cultural settings.

Monism

Monism holds that the natural sciences and the social sciences are both scientific by definition, and therefore the ontology, epistemology, and methodology should be the same.[17] Science aims at finding laws, laws in the natural world and laws in the social world, too. The most important or the essential law, by the influence of the Enlightenment, is causality. For every effect there must be a cause. In this sense, there is little difference between the natural and social sciences. International studies used to be more flexible, combining a multiplicity of factors such as history, law, and culture. However, IR in the post-WWII United States, especially since the behavioral revolution, has typically reflected the positivist and scientific tendency. Monism has become the signboard of the mainstream American IR theory and exerted strong influence in the rest of the world.

Monism seeks homogenization of social theory. In Robert Cox's words: "In the Enlightenment meaning universal meant true for all time and space – the perspective of a homogeneous reality."[18] Inspired by Cox,

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[15] Ibid., 290–291.   [16] Buzan 2001.

[17] Patrick Jackson has discussed in detail dualism and monism. He defines dualism as an ontological stance whose "central presupposition is a kind of gulf or radial separation between the world and the knowledge about the world," and monism as its opposite that does not posit such "a radical gulf and does not begin by separating things and thoughts as dualism does." Monism assumes a fundamental continuity of knowledge with the world. Jackson 2008, 132, 133. I do not use here the term of monism as Jackson does. Rather I argue, with Acharya, that the opposite of monism is not dualism, but pluralism, for it covers more areas and concerns competing ontological positions even inside the social sciences.

[18] Cox 2002, 53, quoted in Acharya 2014, 3.

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Acharya criticizes the dominant meaning of universality in today's IR discipline as follows:

> The dominant meaning of universalism in IR today is what I would call a monistic universalism, in the sense of "applying to all." It corresponds closely to Enlightenment universalism, which may also be called "monistic universalism." . . . And the Enlightenment has a dark side: the suppression of diversity and justification of European imperialism . . .. In IR theory and method, such universalism manifests as a way of much arbitrary standard setting, gatekeeping, and marginalization of alternative narratives, ideas, and methodologies.[19]

Since there is only one set of standards, there is necessarily only one form of theory. Furthermore there is only one form of social reality, too. Representative of this approach is no other than Kenneth Waltz, whose monumental work of *Theory of International Politics* in 1979 seems to have won the decisive battle for the scientific school over the traditional school in IR. For him, IR theory is a set of laws and must satisfy three conditions: It is a distinct system of the international; it indicates with clarity the causal directions; and it is parsimonious and rigorous.[20] He admires Newton's theory of universal gravitation, for it "provided a unified explanation of celestial and terrestrial phenomena. Its power lay in the number of previously disparate empirical generalizations and laws that could be subsumed in one explanatory system ...."[21] He stresses the universal oneness, the explanatory power, and the empirical testing, and his structural realism is indeed an imitation in the international relations world of the Newtonian theory in the natural world: An international system with anarchy as its ordering principle, a systemic structure with the distribution of capabilities as its most distinctive feature, and rational nation-states as the like units of the system, who abide by the principle of anarchy, weigh rationally the structural balance of power, and take action through a means-end calculation.[22] In this way Waltz does not only establish a distinctive system of international polity clear of all other features and develop a systemic and scientific theory of international politics, but more importantly, he sets the homogeneous standards for evaluating an IR theory. A theory is qualified as a theory if and only if it satisfies the conditions set forth by this homogeneity. The publication of *Theory of International Politics* not only marked the triumph of structural realism over other strands of IR theories, but also started an era of Waltzianization of IR theory, which is characterized by using one set of overwhelmingly positivist standards for evaluating all IR theories: It is qualified as a theory if the Waltzian standards are satisfied; otherwise it is dismissed as a non-theory. Thus the standard-setting and gatekeeping

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[19] Acharya 2014, 3.   [20] Waltz 1995, 67–82; Waltz 1979.   [21] Waltz 1979, 6.   [22] Ibid.

role of the Waltzian phenomenon is much more influential than his substantive theory of structural realism. Later comers within the mainstream camp, despite the fact that they have strongly criticized the assumptions and hypotheses of structural realism, have followed closely Waltz's logic of theorizing, the positivist principles, and the scientific methodology. The emergence of neoliberal institutionalism and social constructivism, rather than fundamentally challenging Waltz, have in fact proved and reclaimed the victory of Waltzianization and of homogeneity in IR theoretical development. Its powerful influence or perhaps unconscious violence has continued to exist in a dominant way up to date.

Homogeneity means, by necessity, exclusion. The mainstream of the American IR studies, for example, offers little recognition of the reflective approach, and scholars of mainstream theories, especially the "big three" in the United States, simply refuse to give credit to it. Waltz believes that anything that does not follow the positivist tradition cannot be qualified as "theory": Non-positivist studies provide mere thoughts, for they are the "kind of work that can neither provide satisfactory explanations nor lead to the construction of theory. Such studies cannot explain the causal mechanisms with certainty and clarity."[23] Keohane, in his influential presidential address to the International Studies Association in 1988 entitled "International Relations: Two Approaches," contrasts the rationalistic approach with the reflective approach, arguing that the former is hard while the latter is soft, very much like the Acharya-Buzan categorization, and that the former is positivist while the latter is analytical; that the former is rigorous while the latter is complex; that the former aims at finding the causal mechanisms while the latter seeks coherent arguments. Keohane explicitly supports the former and believes that the rationalistic approach, despite the fact that it is not perfect, has made remarkable achievements, for it successfully explains actors' behavior. Scholars who use this approach are self-conscious about the methodology and their products are widely recognized.[24] As for the reflective approach, Keohane puts forward sharp criticism, saying:

Indeed, the greatest weakness of the reflective school lies not in deficiencies in their critical arguments but in the lack of a clear reflective research program that could be employed by students of world politics. Waltzian neorealism has such a research program; so does neoliberal institutionalism, ... Until the reflective scholars or others sympathetic to their arguments have delineated such a program, and shown in particular studies that it can illuminate important issues in world politics, they will remain on the margin of the field, largely invisible to the

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[23] Waltz 1995, 68–69.   [24] Keohane 1989a, 160.

preponderance of empirical researchers, most of whom explicitly or implicitly accept one or another version of rationalistic premises.[25]

Keohane's criticism of the reflective approach in fact indicates his belief that such an approach cannot produce qualified social theory because it does not have theoretical hypotheses and pays little attention to rigorous empirical testing. His emphasis on a clear research program, on causality, and on the function of explanation shows that what in his mind constitutes theory is the positivist one or the so-called scientific one and other theories can be only on the margin of IR studies until they change and live up to the scientific standards or until they become the same with rationalistic theories like Waltz's and his own. Before they become the same as positivist and scientific theory they are no theory at all. Keohane, with his neoliberal institutionalism, has not reduced the significance of Waltzianization. Rather, he has helped the Waltzian way of theorizing to further establish itself as a universal standard. Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba again stress the importance of causal inference and further define the model process of scientific research by dividing a research design into four components: the research question, the theory, the data, and the use of the data, making the standards for being scientific more specific and operational.[26] As one of the most influential textbooks in IR methodology, *Designing Social Inquiry* tells IR students the right way to carry out scientific inference in qualitative research.

The scientific standards and positivist assumptions embedded in the mainstream IR theory of the United States have thus become the only yardstick to judge whether or not a self-claimed theory is a theory. Martha Finnemore expresses similar views about theory in her criticism of the English School. She again argues that the English School does not produce theory, that it lacks clarity in methodology, and that therefore its effort for theory building is not successful. American IR studies focus on causal relationship, make clear hypotheses on it, and try to find it in rigorous testing, while "much of the English School work does not fit well into the independent/dependent variable language that dominate the

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[25] Ibid., 173. Keohane later realized the importance of ideas in international relations. The book coedited by Judith Goldstein and himself was entitled *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Goldstein and Keohane 1993). However, his rationalistic way of thinking did not change and the ideational factor was treated as a mere additional causal variable. As the editors said, ideas helped actors to clarify principles and conceptions of causal relationships, and to coordinate individual behavior, but they do not "challenge the premise that people behave in self-interested and broadly rational ways" Goldstein and Keohane 1993, 5.

[26] King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 13.