

Workshop for Younger Scholars

Alternative Cosmologies and the Knowledge Systems in International Relations: Voices from the Global South

Date: January 11-12, 2016

Venue: India International Centre, Delhi

A Personal Reflection

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Although academics of International Relations have been increasingly aware that this discipline's knowledge production is not really "international," how to "do IR" in alternative ways or raise our awareness about our ontological and epistemological assumptions when conducting research remains a challenging hurdle to overcome. Institutionally, it has also become clear that having a large number of "overseas" members does not naturally make a country-based academic association capable of representing the interests and concerns of IR scholars and practitioners around the world.

It is for these reasons that I found my participation in the WISC-IRIIS workshop on "Alternative Cosmologies and the Knowledge Systems in International Relations: Voices from the Global South" a very refreshing and rewarding experience. To begin with, the organizers themselves came from diverse geocultural backgrounds and they specifically chose to hold this workshop in a Global South city - Delhi. Moreover, 16 participants (mainly early-career scholars and PhD candidates) were carefully selected to ensure a balanced representation of perspectives from different regions and gender (by the way, this process was done with an impressive efficiency as the organizers spent less than a month for selecting the paper proposals). To be honest, it was not easy to write my first draft in a month toward the end of the year and to look at other participants' drafts in a few days right before the event, but the workshop has proved a friendly and supportive environment. Unlike other workshops or symposiums I had attended, we participants were not expected to present our research in the WISC-IRIIS workshop. Instead, each of us only briefly talked about our own project's problems and challenges for five minutes. This was followed by a 25-minute feedback section where we received constructive comments and suggestions from fellow participants including mentors.

The mentor system was, I think, a key factor of the workshop's success. Our mentors are experienced scholars in the field who played an important role in moderating each session and facilitating focused discussions on the second day. We were divided into three small groups based on the orientation of our respective projects. I was then given sufficient time to address certain questions raised the day earlier regarding my preliminary research on Confucian diplomacy while receiving helpful advice from my two mentors, who rightly

reminded me that the problem with the IR theoretical toolbox is not because it is Western/Eurocentric per se but because it does not allow us to see the past and the present in many parts of the world. For a university teacher-cum-researcher who is about to enter his mid-career and is struggling to stay research productive (both qualitatively and quantitatively), this “problem-solving” approach has proved it very valuable. I benefited from intellectual exchange during the coffee breaks as well: on the one hand, I was able to meet some of my favorite authors who until then only appeared in the IR literature. On the other hand, I could share my ideas and concerns with many like-minded researchers. In fact, I was so encouraged by my mentor that I decided to restart my long postponed plan of turning my doctoral dissertation into a book manuscript.

By participating in this workshop, I also got to know how different (and once ignored) research sources (e.g. living traditions and knowledge production practices of indigenous people) have been gaining attention among a newer generation of IR scholars. Although the workshop could not discuss much about how to promote professional success of these “Young Turks,” the concluding session did cover participants’ future publication plans and opportunities and agreed to create online platforms for information sharing and dissemination (which led to the birth of the Delhi Group!) in addition to the WISC’s existing website. Last not least, I would like to take this opportunity to thank staff members of the WISC and the hosting IRIIS and MAK AIS for making this fruitful workshop possible. I am convinced that this good practice should be continued in the future, and I will be willing to contribute to intellectual endeavors such as this.