

Defining Fair & Inclusive International Relations

Host:

It's safe to say that most people agree the principles of fairness and inclusivity should be tenets of international relations, particularly in our current geopolitical landscape.

Yet, many struggle to define what these terms mean in practice.

Without clear definitions guiding our principles, we risk fostering idealistic notions that sound great on paper but don't hold up in the real world.

So to help provide us with the vocabulary to articulate these principles, we're joined by renowned political theorist and geopolitical strategist Dr. Brian Wong.

An expert in the study of ethics and politics, Dr Wong will now share his definition of a fair and inclusive international relations paradigm and explore the complexities involved in achieving it.



Dr. Brian Wong:

When it comes to an inclusive world or way of looking at the world at large, it's vital to remember that throughout vast swathes of our history, the ways in which different countries or different civilisations at large have sought to understand international relations is often quite parochial. And that doesn't just stem from the sort of post-Westphalian order in Europe, in the US and the UK, where there's often been this narrative centred around, you know, the Western values of democracy, of freedom, of civilisation, prior to that, which obviously are parochial insofar as they are couched and rooted deeply in the interests of one small select fragment of the vast population of the world.

And this applies to non-Western civilisations as well. So I want to be very clear here that international relations, at least throughout history, has struggled as a discipline, not just because of Western colonialism and imperialist tendencies, but also because of the inward looking and also largely nativist tendencies of civilisations elsewhere.

And the same could be said of the Indian subcontinent. You know, the richness of its histories and the depth of individual principalities and also kingdoms obviously rendered the subcontinent a fascinating place to study for international relations history. And yet the flip side to that as well is that there hasn't or hadn't historically been much thinking about the world beyond the subcontinent, beyond western borders of what is now Pakistan or the eastern borders of Nepal, so on and so forth.



So this sort of provincialised regionalism had been a historical phenomenon. And it's all the more important that we try to tackle it, especially given, right, that these sentiments and their percolation till this very day have led to the likes of unwarranted foreign invasions by, say, America or an American led order in the Middle East, or alternatively the Soviet Union in relation to Eastern and Central Europe during the Cold War, in proxy wars, so on and so forth.

These are all instances where a non-inclusive international relations theory is dangerous and devastating. So the step number one to tackling the inequities we see today is, in my humble opinion, to broaden the world order to include precisely different countries that may not be proximate to your own, may not see eye to eye with yourselves in terms of values, may not be, you know, fundamentally similar in a way they're constituted or governed, and yet it's important to recognise their voices.



And that applies to, of course, giving the Global South more than what's already been given to them in the status quo, which is very little, as well as acknowledging that between a Global North and South and within each of these camps there exists a wide range of heterogeneities, that is to say, differences, diversity and also cultural pluralism that need to be reflected in a way institutions are shaped, whether it be in reallocating or rejigging voting weights, in granting special protected voices and status to countries that are disproportionately affected by certain global issues like climate change and rising sea levels and also floods and irregular weather patterns.

I don't think personally that the term reparations ought to be out of bounds or to be seen as taboo, because in truth, many countries in the world do owe others, those that they pillaged, plundered and exploited in the past, some sort of reparation, compensation and apology. So the step one to this sort of dualistic framework is to make the world more inclusive. All of these steps, and then some must be undertaken.

Fairness: Levelling the Playing Field

Having established that, then we need to ask, what does fairness entail, right? Because in theory, you could imagine an assembly, a general assembly, where you have, say, all countries on earth represented. Everyone gets a say, very inclusive, and they all get to take part in the decision-making procedures. And yet the system could still hypothetically remain unfair.

And why is that?

It could be because the rules used to filter and process the inputs from different countries are fundamentally skewed. They are not reflective of reasonable justification, okay? Alternatively, the justification, the rationale used by them is rooted in again, the dangerous parochialism that I highlighted just then, the sort of belief in a civilisation myth, or the argument that you should have suzerainty, they should show their respect to dominant and central powers.



Suzerainty

When one powerful state is in control of the
foreign policy of a subservient or vassal state

These are misinformed and unfair myths that unduly render inclusive institutions unfair in the arbitrariness and also asymmetry in how these judgments and decisions are made. It's not enough for us to have, you know, institutions, have everyone involved, and that everyone gets an equal say, and also equal ability to partake in it. That's a minimum necessity, but it's not sufficient.

On top of that, we also need more robust institutions to ensure fairness between countries in how decisions are made. But also, and this is crucial within countries, the voices of citizens within each and every one of these individual countries must be fairly channeled, right?



And one of the primary reasons why the world has struggled so much with overconsumption as well as this depletion-driven campaign of resource usage is precisely because the victims that suffer under overconsumption, over-depletion and environmental degradation, they don't really have a say. They don't really get to have this state and political participatory token that enables them to influence how decisions are made in the corridors of power. So we want a fair world at large.



We need to start with fair countries. And with fair countries, the prerequisite is fair cities. And that is why we just zero in on the concept of designing a city for our future. It's not good enough

that they have environmentally robust and sustainable architecture. That's good, but that's not good enough, right?



What's needed here too is direct mechanisms by which their people can have their voices heard, can hold the elite accountable, and fundamentally have an opportunity to partake in the designing of the rules, of the institutions and of the outlines and the outlaying sort of overarching structures of the cities. And therefore we move from cities to countries and countries to the world at large.

Host:

If international relations is to address geopolitical challenges, it must be based on the principles of fairness and inclusivity.

Inclusive international relations should broaden the world order to include those it presently overlooks. The plurality of humanity must be reflected in its structures to have a system that is truly representative of diverse perspectives and experiences.

A fair international relations paradigm, on the other hand, would mean equal representation that is also equitable in its approach.

True fairness means providing all stakeholders with a commensurate voice in the decision-making processes that ultimately affect their lives and wellbeing.