



What Pivot? International Relations Scholarship and the Study of East Asia¹

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Scholars of international relations (IR) simultaneously believe that their work is policy-relevant and that a gap exists between the academic and policy worlds of IR. Using data from the 2011 Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) survey and the TRIP journal article database, we explore this disjuncture in one specific area, research on East Asia. If US scholars' work addresses policy-relevant issues, as they believe, we would expect academic work to provide insights on a region that US policy makers have long thought to be growing in strategic importance. We find that academics recognize the strategic significance of East Asia, but comparatively few scholars teach about or do research on the region. Compared with the IR discipline more broadly, published research on East Asia is more paradigmatic, qualitative, and oriented toward the study of international political economy. The neglect of East Asia and the systematic differences in the way it is studied have potentially important consequences for the study and practice of IR.

Keywords: international relations discipline, East Asia

In a 2009 *New York Times* op-ed, Joseph Nye lamented the divide between the policy and academic spheres of international relations (IR), declaring that “scholars are paying less attention to questions about how their work relates to the policy world, and in many departments a focus on policy can hurt one’s career” (Nye 2009). Many scholars and practitioners share Nye’s concerns. Alexander George spent much of his academic career seeking to bridge the gap between the two worlds (for example, George 1993), and more recently, an increasing number of scholars have bemoaned the practical irrelevance of IR research and argued for more useful IR scholarship (for example, Jentleson 2002; Walt 2005; Desch 2009). On the other side of the divide, then Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced the creation in 2008 of the Minerva Institute, an organization designed to apply university-based social science research to US national security policy, arguing that policy makers “must again embrace egg-heads and ideas” (Gates 2008). At the same time that both scholars and practitioners lament what they consider a deep divide between the policy and academic worlds, a 2011 survey by the Teaching, Research, and International

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Policy (TRIP) Project of IR scholars in the United States reveals that a surprisingly large 40% of scholars believe that their work is policy-relevant.² These conflicting claims imply a disjuncture between scholars' perceptions of their own policy contributions and their concerns about the relevance of the IR discipline.

Our study addresses this disparity by asking whether IR scholarship speaks to contemporary policy issues and problems. The 2011 TRIP survey shows that US scholars of IR want to contribute, and that they believe their research does contribute, to policy debates. One strategically important area in which IR scholarship might speak directly to US foreign policy is the study of East Asia.³ If IR scholars' work addresses policy-relevant issues, as they believe, we would expect academic work to provide policy makers with important insights on and information about East Asia as these practitioners increasingly turn their attention to this strategically important area of the world.

The US turn to East Asia began in the 1970s with President Richard Nixon's opening to China, continued through President Bill Clinton's policy of engagement, and culminated, most recently, with President Barack Obama's famed "pivot to Asia." China's military, political, and economic presence in the region has grown significantly throughout this period. Today, China is home to a fifth of the world's population and had a 2012 defense budget approaching \$160 billion. At 2.3 million people under arms, it has the largest army in the world and it possesses a growing military capacity to threaten US power projection in the region (for example, see China's Military Rise 2012). The regional power's historical and contemporary role in contesting sovereignty in the South China Sea, support for the North Korean regime, competition for influence in Central Asia, controversial environmental and human rights policies, promotion of economic development through regional forums, and foreign aid commitments make it a prime strategic concern to the United States. Not surprisingly, the January 2012 US Department of Defense strategic guidance, which acknowledged that "China's emergence as a regional power will have the potential to affect the US economy and our security in a variety of ways," concluded that "while the US military will continue to contribute to security globally, *we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region*" (US Department of Defense 2012:2).

US scholars of IR, like US policy officials, believe that East Asia is a strategically vital region. According to the 2011 TRIP survey, IR scholars report in large numbers that they consider East Asia to be the region of greatest significance to the United States, and they believe that the region's importance will continue to grow over the next two decades. This consensus would suggest that, if scholars are doing policy-relevant work, at least a significant minority of the IR field should have begun to give its attention to this important area.

In what follows, we explore the policy-academic divide by asking a series of questions about how IR scholars in the United States look at East Asia: Have the percentages of scholars researching and teaching about the region changed over time? How does the way we study East Asia compare to the way we study IR more

²Scholars were asked "Does your research tend to be basic or applied? By basic research we mean research for the sake of knowledge, without any particular immediate policy application in mind. Conversely, applied research is done with specific policy applications in mind." Forty percent responded that their research is "primarily applied," "both basic and applied but more applied than basic," or "both equally." In 2008, 48% of US respondents said their research was primarily applied, more applied than basic, or both equally.

³Throughout this paper, we use the term "East Asia" to mean the geographic sub-region of Asia that includes China, Hong Kong, Japan, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Taiwan, and Tibet. Articles in the journal database are coded as East Asia only when they include data from one or more of these countries. The countries that comprise East Asia are not listed on the faculty surveys, but when respondents are asked questions, such as their area of study, response options always include Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, in addition to East Asia. We use the term "East Asia" instead of Asia Pacific, because the latter is generally understood to include the Oceanic countries, as well as the countries of East Asia.

generally? That is, do we use the same methods and theoretical approaches, or is there a unique approach to the study of East Asia?

To answer these questions, we use data from the TRIP Project, the most extensive data-collection effort to date on the field of international relations. The TRIP Project houses two major databases: the first includes results of four surveys of US scholars from 2004 to 2011; and the second includes data about articles published in the field's 12 leading journals from 1980 to 2011. We categorize each article in terms of 29 distinct variables, including methodology, epistemology, paradigm advanced, and region under study, among others.⁴

Our results reveal, first, that IR scholars have begun to recognize East Asia's strategic importance to US foreign policy. Second, however, these scholars do not practice what they preach: much smaller percentages of academics study or teach about the region than believe that it is strategically important. Third, when IR scholars do study East Asia, they approach their subject differently than they do the IR field more generally. Academic research on the region stands apart from the rest of the IR discipline, for instance, in its methods, theory, and substance. When compared with the IR discipline more broadly, research on East Asia is more paradigmatic, qualitative, and oriented toward the study of international political economy (IPE). Even when compared to the international relations of other geographic regions, the study of East Asia is more paradigmatic and more IPE-oriented.

We divide our paper into four parts. After first describing the methodology of the survey and journal article coding project, we examine the views of IR scholars on the policy relevance of IR research, as well as East Asia's increasing political significance. We then turn to the study of the region within the academy, looking particularly at how and how frequently IR scholars study and teach about East Asia. We conclude with a look at possible causes of our findings and consequences for the theory and practice of international relations.

Methodology

We report data from two original sources. The first is the 2011 TRIP survey of IR faculty in the United States. TRIP investigators sought to identify and survey all faculty members at four-year colleges and universities in the country who do research or teach courses on IR. We included all *those scholars who create knowledge, teach students, and/or provide expert advice to policy makers about trans-border political issues*—regardless of whether they describe themselves as “IR” specialists. The overwhelming majority of respondents to these surveys have jobs in departments of political science, politics, government, social science, international relations or international studies, or in professional schools associated with universities.⁵ We supplement and compare the 2011 data with the results of TRIP surveys conducted in 2004, 2006, and 2008.⁶

⁴For a complete list of variables, see the TRIP journal article database codebook (Peterson and Tierney 2009). When complete, the article database will include all articles from 1980 to the present.

⁵The TRIP Project defines “IR scholar” as an individual with an active affiliation with a university, college, or professional school, so many researchers currently employed in government, private firms, or think tanks are not included in the sample. The sample does not include those scholars at professional schools of international affairs who do not teach or conduct research on international politics. TRIP researchers, in short, define IR largely as a subfield of political science, rather than as the interdisciplinary field taught at professional schools and many undergraduate institutions. For a critique of the TRIP Project based on its exclusion of economists, scientists, anthropologists, and lawyers teaching at schools of international affairs, see Goldgeier (2012). Many scholars surveyed do not identify themselves as “IR” scholars. The population therefore may include political scientists specializing in US politics who study trade and immigration. It includes researchers who study regional integration, as well as specialists of comparative politics, such as China specialists, who teach IR courses.

⁶On the 2004 survey, see Peterson, Tierney, and Maliniak (2005a,b). On the 2006 survey, see Maliniak et al. (2007a,b). On the 2008 survey, see Jordan et al. (2009); and Maliniak et al. (2009).

Teaching, Research, and International Policy researchers identified the populations to be surveyed by using the *U.S. News and World Report* 2007–2008 report on US higher education to compile a list of all four-year colleges and universities. There were 1,406 such institutions. We then added the Monterey Institute and seven military schools that were not rated by *USNWR* but that have a relatively large number of political science faculty who do research and/or teach courses on international relations.

Researchers identified a total of 3,751 individuals who met the criteria for inclusion in the TRIP survey. In all, 1,586 US scholars responded to the survey, either online or, in a small number of cases, by mail. If the intended respondents or their representatives did not inform survey administrators that they did not meet the sampling criteria, they remained in the total population used to calculate the response rate. The total response rate of 42.3% is conservative therefore, since there probably were additional individuals who were misidentified by the selection process, but did not inform researchers, remained in the sample, and did not complete the survey.

The second original data source is the TRIP journal article database, which includes information on articles in the 12 leading journals in the field. The journals selected were the most influential based on Garand and Giles's (2003) "impact" ratings: *American Political Science Review* (*APSR*), *American Journal of Political Science* (*AJPS*), *British Journal of Political Science* (*BJPS*), *European Journal of International Relations* (*EJIR*), *International Organization* (*IO*), *International Security* (*IS*), *International Studies Quarterly* (*ISQ*), *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (*JCR*), *Journal of Peace Research* (*JPR*), *Journal of Politics* (*JOP*), *Security Studies* (*SS*), and *World Politics* (*WP*). *Foreign Affairs* and *Foreign Policy* were ranked higher by Garand and Giles than some of the journals on this list, but they are not included in the TRIP database because neither journal peer-reviews articles. While both journals are more likely to include policy-relevant research, the TRIP Project seeks to measure research in the IR discipline, the standard of which remains the peer-reviewed journal article.⁷

The sample of 3,391 articles comprises about 48% of the population of articles published in the 12 leading journals from 1980 to 2011. In the IR-specific journals in the database—*EJIR*, *IO*, *IS*, *ISQ*, *JCR*, *JPR*, *SS*, and *WP*—TRIP researchers coded every article in the first and third issues for every year of publication between 1980 and 2011.⁸ In the general political science journals—*APSR*, *AJPS*, *BJPS*, and *JOP*—they coded only those articles in the first and third issues that fall within the broad definition of the IR subfield. That is, they did not code any non-IR articles in the general political science journals. Two researchers coded each article. If both coders independently agreed about the value of a particular variable, the observation was accepted as part of the final data set. If the coders disagreed on the value of any observation, a senior coder independently coded that observation.⁹

⁷In many parts of the discipline, the single-author monograph is the *sine qua non*. The TRIP Project has begun a pilot project coding books to compare books and articles across methodology, paradigm, epistemology, and numerous other variables.

⁸All articles in *WP* are coded—that is, it is considered an IR journal—even though an increasing proportion of those articles fall within the subfield of comparative politics. Nevertheless, coding all *WP* articles allows researchers to explore the waxing and waning of IR, as opposed to comparative, articles over time within the pages of this journal and to examine the changes wrought by the blurring of lines between the two subfields of political science.

⁹Overall inter-coder reliability between the first two coders was over 80% although inter-coder reliability varied across the different variables in the database. Coders were very likely to agree on the value of dichotomous variables (like whether the article contained a policy prescription), for example, but they were less likely to match perfectly on variables, such as paradigm, that could take multiple values and required complex reasoning to match an observation to a definition.

The TRIP survey and journal article databases provide valuable evidence with which to answer some of the key questions explored in this paper. As the most detailed information source on teaching, research, and publication in the IR discipline, it allows us to explore the extent to which IR scholars practice what they preach. Specifically, these databases allow us to examine how much of the literature is devoted to the study of East Asia, what percentage of scholars say they study this region, and what methodological, theoretical, and substantive tools they use.

Scholarly Views on the Academic–Policy Nexus

US scholars of IR believe that the academic and policy worlds should be tightly linked and that IR scholarship should address contemporary policy problems. Indeed, on the TRIP surveys these faculty say in large numbers that their research and teaching respond to issues and events in the real world. A closer look reveals, however, that their work tends to be far less policy-relevant than they think.¹⁰

Scholars at US colleges and universities believe that there should be a close relationship between the academy and the beltway. When asked about the ideal relationship between the academic and policy communities, 92% of respondents on the 2011 survey said that “there should be a larger number of links,” and only 8% believed “there should be a higher wall of separation.” Similarly, when US scholars of IR were asked what they thought primarily motivates research in the discipline, 54% said issue area or problem, and 29% said policy relevance. No other response received more than 9% of responses.

When it comes to teaching on general policy issues, IR professors seem to practice what they preach. Respondents to the 2011 survey said that they devote approximately 28% of their undergraduate Introduction to IR courses to policy analysis and/or policy-relevant research and approximately 35% of the courses to contemporary empirical issues in IR. These respondents also reported that their IR classes for masters’ students are weighted somewhat more heavily toward preparing students to be informed about foreign policy and international issues and debates (43%) than toward introducing students to scholarship in the IR discipline (38%). Eighteen percent reported that their courses do both about equally.

Scholars at US colleges and universities also intend their research to be policy-relevant. When asked what motivates their own research, for example, 35% listed policy relevance and another 40% said issue area. At the same time, though, when these same scholars were asked whether their research is more basic—research for the sake of knowledge, without any particular immediate policy application in mind—or applied—work done with specific policy applications in mind—60% of IR scholars described their work as “basic” or “more basic than applied.” Only 24% called their work “applied” or “more applied than basic,” and this percentage may be declining over time. As Figure 1 shows, in the 8 years since the TRIP surveys were first put in the field, the percentage of respondents who consider their work to be more basic than applied has climbed steadily from 31% to 39%. As Figure 2 shows, moreover, younger scholars just emerging from graduate school are less likely to do applied research than their older colleagues. It should not be surprising, given scholars’ research preferences, to learn that a scant 10% of all articles in the top 12 journals in the discipline contain policy prescriptions.

¹⁰For more on this argument, see Maliniak et al. (2011).

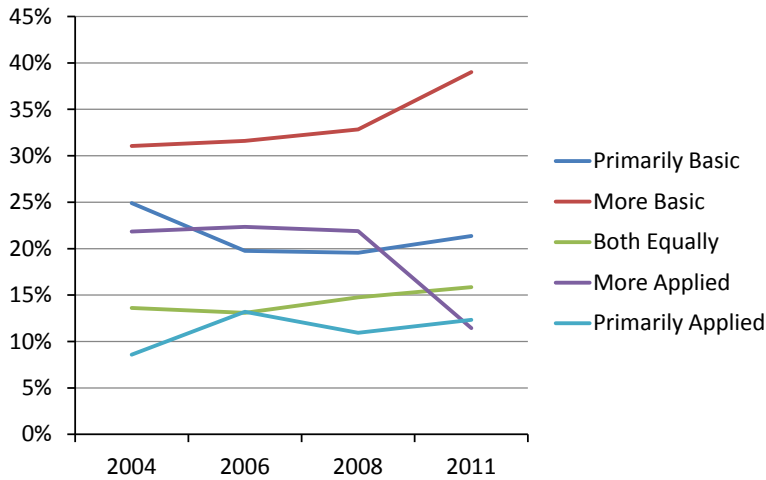


FIG 1. Percentage of US Respondents Doing Basic vs. Applied Research over Time

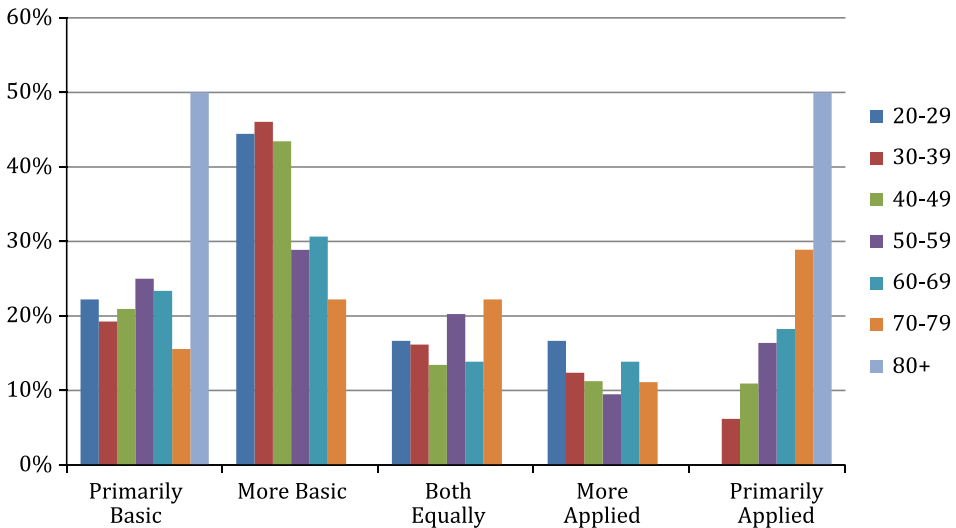


FIG 2. 2011 US Respondents—Basic vs. Applied Research by Age Group

East Asia's Strategic Importance

Scholars of IR claim to want a closer relationship with policy officials, and these scholars believe that their work should and does speak to policy issues and debates. The growing strategic importance of East Asia, and the IR discipline's recognition of that importance, allows us to explore the policy ambitions of IR scholars. If academics are, in fact, doing policy-relevant work, we would expect to see a shift toward East Asia in their teaching and research, given the shift in attention toward the region among policy makers over the last several decades.

IR scholars already have turned their attention toward East Asia in one very real sense. Large percentages of US respondents to the 2011 TRIP survey reported both that East Asia is of growing strategic significance and that its influence will increase in the future. Forty-six percent described East Asia as the region of greatest strategic importance to the United States today. This

response far surpassed all other possible answers—including the Middle East and North Africa (the second most frequent response at 30%) and Western Europe (third at 9%). The contrast between the percentage of respondents who chose East Asia and those who indicated other regions was even more striking when respondents were asked about the future of the international system. When asked what region of the world would be of the greatest strategic importance to their country in 20 years, an astonishing 72% of US respondents selected East Asia. The second most popular response, the Middle East and North Africa, lagged far behind at 8%.

China's political, economic, and military growth may be the main driver behind IR scholars' concern over East Asia. Thirty-two percent of IR scholars identified the "rising power of China" as one of the three most important foreign policy issues facing their country in 2011 (the year of the survey).¹¹ This response ranks a close second overall, behind the Arab Spring at 33% and ahead of the global debt crisis at 28%. IR scholars' belief that the rising power of China will pose an increasingly important challenge to the United States in the future may be powering their belief that the larger East Asia region's strategic importance will increase over time. When US scholars were asked to make a prediction about the top three foreign policy issues facing their country 10 years from now, the percentage of respondents identifying China's rise increased by 11 points to 43%. Global climate change, the second most frequent response, received 38%.

IR scholars are acutely aware of the increasing influence China wields on global politics, especially relative to the United States. When asked to rank China's influence today on a scale of 1–10, with 10 indicating the greatest influence, IR scholars on average gave it a 4.51, while they ranked the influence of the United States at 6.80. When asked to rank the expected influence of these countries in 2020, IR scholars reported a narrowing gap: 5.34 for China's influence compared to 5.97 for the influence of the United States.¹²

IR scholars' awareness of China as a central player in world politics, and the strategic importance of East Asia more broadly have increased over time. Between the 2008 and 2011 TRIP surveys, for example, the percentage of US scholars who responded that East Asia was the region of greatest strategic importance rose from 30% to 46%, surpassing the Middle East in 2011 to become the number one choice of US scholars. The percentage of US respondents ranking East Asia as of top strategic importance has grown from 16% in 2004 to 19% in 2006, 30% in 2008, and 46% in 2011. This is particularly significant when compared to the percentage of US scholars who selected the Middle East/North Africa. The latter answer dominated US responses with 58% in 2004, 62% in 2006, and 46% in 2008, but it dropped to only 30% in 2011. Not surprisingly, these percentages closely track US involvement in the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan over the survey period. More telling, perhaps, is the slow but steady increase, despite those wars, in the percentage of IR scholars who predicted that East Asia would be the most strategically important region to the United States in 20 years, up from 60% in 2004, to 66% in 2006, to 68% in 2008, and up again to 72% in 2011. Despite the fact that US doctrine only formally turned to the region in early 2012, IR scholars' recognition of China as a central player in world politics, and the strategic importance of East Asia more broadly, is not a recent development.

¹¹ Respondents were given a list of 29 possible answers, including "other," and asked to select a total of three. Respondents could write in up to three "other" options.

¹² Interestingly, IR scholars do not believe that the rise of China and the narrowing gap of influence between the United States and China will lead to war in the foreseeable future. On a scale of 1–10, scholars on average reported a 1.34 likelihood of war between the United States and China in the next 10 years and only a 2.28 likelihood within the next 30 years. Scholars' perceptions of the likelihood of war in the future were somewhat higher, but the prospect still remains relatively unlikely.

East Asia and the IR Discipline

Given the consensus among US students of IR about the importance of policy-relevant research and the significance of East Asia to international relations and US foreign policy, we would expect scholars to emphasize the region in their teaching, research, and scholarly publications. In reality, the gap between what IR scholars practice—whether measured by time devoted to teaching about East Asia, the number of scholars who identify East Asia as their primary or secondary region of study, or the percentage of articles on the region being published in popular IR journals—and their perceptions of the importance of the East Asia region is significant. Moreover, IR scholarship on East Asia differs theoretically, methodologically, and substantively from the rest of the field: When compared with the IR discipline more broadly, research on East Asia tends to be more paradigmatic, qualitative, and oriented toward the study of international political economy. Even when compared to the study by IR scholars of other geographic regions, which is more qualitative than the rest of the IR discipline, East Asia studies is more paradigmatic and more oriented toward IPE.

IR Scholarship: What Pivot to East Asia?

To some extent we would expect to see a time lag between changes in percentages of scholars who think a region like East Asia is important and changes in the percentages of scholars who teach about and conduct research on the region. Given the time it takes for individual scholars to acquire language skills and cultural and historical knowledge and to conduct fieldwork, and for graduate programs to hire new faculty and change their curriculum, we would expect a lag between policy and perceptual changes, on the one hand, and disciplinary changes, on the other. At the same time, however, IR scholars have long understood East Asia's strategic importance, given US strategic interests in Taiwan, its alliance with Japan, and its other historical economic and security interests in the Asia-Pacific region. When the first TRIP survey was put in the field in 2004, during two US wars in the Middle East, the overwhelming majority (60%) of US scholars of IR said that they believed that East Asia would be the most strategically important region in 20 years. As we have seen, that number continued to climb to 72% in 2011, but there has been little change over time in the amount of teaching and research devoted to East Asia.

Although IR faculty in the United States appear to provide fairly good teaching coverage of the region, the actual time devoted to teaching about East Asia probably is limited. Forty percent of faculty devote one or more classes in their undergraduate Introduction to IR courses to the study of East Asia. Only two regions, Western Europe and Middle East/North Africa, receive more attention. At the same time, however, this number (40%) pales in comparison with the 72% of US scholars who believe that East Asia will be the region of greatest strategic importance to the United States in 20 years. Moreover, US scholars have shown increasing concern over time about East Asia—in 2004, 16% considered it the region of greatest strategic significance to the United States compared to 46% in 2011—but the percentage of faculty teaching at least one class about East Asia increased by only 3% in more than seven years, from 37% in 2004 to 40% in 2011. Finally, the TRIP survey only asked respondents whether their courses included *at least one class* devoted to the study of East Asia, a very low threshold for measuring teaching coverage of the region.

The TRIP survey provides better measures for scholarship on East Asia, and the results show a lack of research engagement by US scholars. In the 2011 TRIP survey, only 9% of US scholars noted a primary research focus on the region, while another 16% of scholars also reported a secondary research interest.

Moreover, scholars' research interests do not appear to be shifting to East Asia over time. Nine percent of US scholars reported in 2004 that their primary region of interest was East Asia, compared to 8% in 2006, 10% in 2008, and 9% in 2011. Even if we include all scholars with any research interest in the region, rather than just those who focus primarily on East Asia, the numbers remain remarkably stable: 26% in 2004, 27% in 2006, 28% in 2008, and 25% in 2011. Additionally, in 2006, the last year the question was asked, only 4% of US scholars said that the rise of China had a significant impact on their research.

The gap between theory and policy, between what scholars believe about the political world and what they study in their academic lives, is also reflected in academic publishing. At the same time, trends in publishing are likely to change even more slowly than change in respondents' research interests, given the potential for entrenched editorial preferences at leading journals. Our data show that, despite the strategic importance of the East Asian region, 12% of all articles published in the 12 leading IR journals from 1980 to 2011 were devoted at least in part to the study of East Asia. These articles were concentrated mostly in three journals, *International Security* (which published 24% of the articles with an empirical focus at least in part on East Asia), *International Organization* (which published 17%), and *International Studies Quarterly* (which published 14%). At first glance, 12% of all articles may seem like a fairly good representation for East Asian studies, since only 9% of respondents in 2011 described themselves as having a primary research focus on the region. Indeed, the percentage of scholars with a primary focus on East Asia has not topped 10% on any of the four TRIP surveys conducted since 2004.

It is important to note several things, however. First, these are not necessarily articles about East Asia; they are articles that draw some data from the region, but they may also contain qualitative and/or quantitative data from other geographic areas. Second, by comparison, 29% of articles looked at the United States, and 22% focused on Canada and Western Europe, although 8% of respondents report a focus on the United States and 11% on Canada and Western Europe. Finally, the percentage of articles devoted at least partly to East Asia has not increased substantially over time. There is variation (generally between 9% and 16%), but not an upward trend, in the percentage of articles per year relating to East Asia. The percentage of articles with empirical content dedicated exclusively to East Asia, as opposed to multiple regions including East Asia, is even lower and more static, varying between 1% and 5%. *Publication of scholarly articles on the region, then, is both modest and relatively unchanging.*

This may seem less surprising than the limited change in teaching and research. When compared to trends in the study of other geographic regions or issues of importance to US foreign policy, however, IR scholars' neglect of East Asia is apparent. Figure 3 illustrates the publication rate of articles on East Asia compared to articles published about the Former Soviet Union (FSU)/Russia and articles about terrorism, both research areas that have had the potential in recent decades to be closely connected to trends and events in the political world. Our data show that published IR articles related to FSU/Russia and terrorism correspond with—that is, change in response to—these real-world events. The percentage of articles published on FSU/Russia, for example, peaked at 33% in 1991, the year in which the Soviet Union collapsed. Research with a substantive focus on terrorism has risen steadily since the September 11th attacks, peaking at 18% of all IR articles published in 2011.

Given the decades-long global shift in the balance of power toward East Asia, and the fact that IR scholars clearly did alter their research and publication in response to other real-world events having to do with both the FSU/Russia and terrorism, it is telling that we are not seeing an increase in research and publications on East Asia within the IR discipline. It is possible, of course, that such an

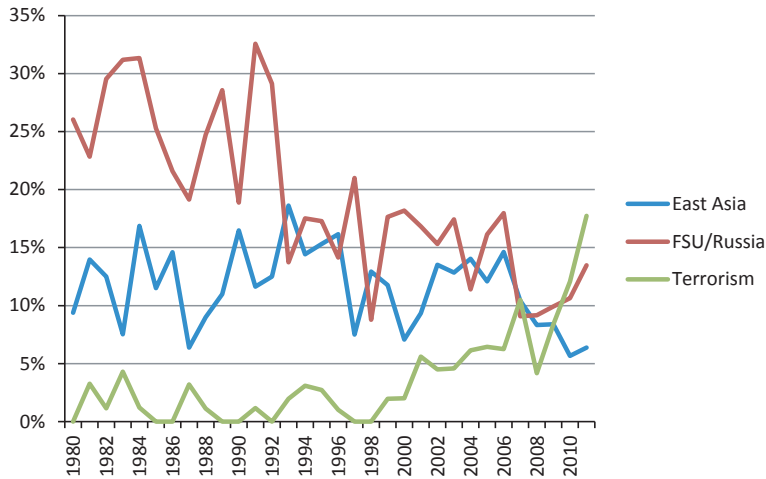


FIG 3. Percentage of Articles Published on East Asia vs. Former Soviet Union/Russia vs. Terrorism over Time

increase may have begun in the 1970s after the initial opening to China, or even earlier after crises in US foreign policy toward the region. Nevertheless, given IR scholars' claims about the policy relevance of their research and their desire for closer links between the academy and the beltway, we would expect that the high and growing levels of strategic importance that IR scholars attribute to East Asia would translate into continued increases in scholarly interest in and publications on the region.

East Asia Research: A World Apart?

When IR scholars do turn their attention to China and East Asia, they often do so in ways that differ from the rest of the field. First, research on East Asia is more paradigmatic than the rest of the IR discipline. In 2011, only 28% of articles published in the top 12 IR journals advanced a paradigm (realism, liberalism, constructivism, or Marxism). By comparison, a striking 66% of published articles focusing on East Asia advanced a paradigmatic argument. Of these paradigmatic analyses, most advance realist (for example, Hagstrom 2005; Ross 2006; Fravel 2008) and liberal (for example, Peng 2002; Press-Barnathan 2006; Goldsmith 2007) arguments. Fourteen percent of articles about the region are realist, and 27% are liberal. Figure 4 illustrates this comparison. The prominence of realism among East Asia scholars is even more striking when examining the 2011 survey data: 34% of US respondents who listed East Asia as their main region of study identified themselves as realists, compared to only 16% of US scholars overall.

In the overall field of IR, the largest group of articles published in the leading journals from 1980 to 2011 is non-paradigmatic¹³ (50%), with realist and liberal articles comprising only 8% and 20%, respectively, yet only 38% of articles on East Asia are non-paradigmatic. The representation of non-paradigmatic analyses in the East Asia literature is lower than that in the literature on any other region of study in the TRIP journal database. In fact, more than 50% of the articles

¹³Non-paradigmatic articles advance or test a theory, but they do not fit within one of the major traditional paradigms (realism, liberalism, constructivism, Marxism). Descriptions of this and all variables can be found in Peterson and Tierney (2009).

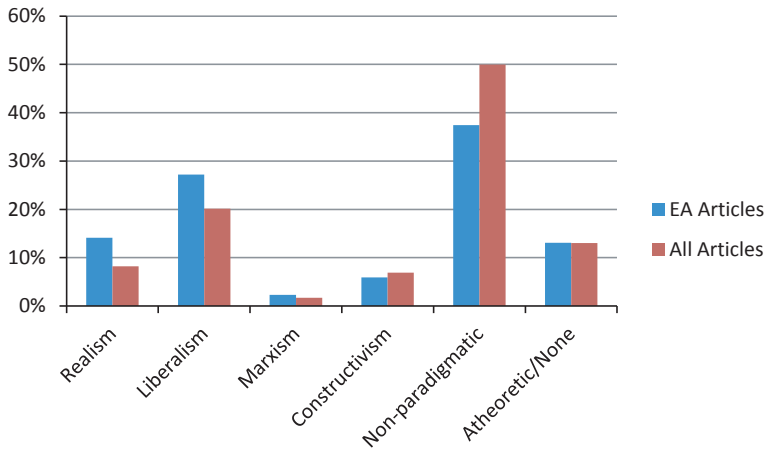


FIG. 4. Paradigm Advanced in Articles on East Asia Compared to All International Relations Articles

published on Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa are non-paradigmatic. The different theoretical approaches to the study of East Asia compared to the rest of the IR discipline, and the tendency to cling to realism and liberalism, may be explained at least in part by the potential to test those theories against the rise of China in recent decades. IR scholars of East Asia, in other words, confront an issue that IR theorists often had confronted during the Cold War when they ask whether institutions and economic interdependence foster cooperation between the United States and China or, in contrast, whether military balancing defines the relationship at the expense of absolute economic gains.¹⁴

The prominence of paradigmatic analysis in the IR literature on East Asia has declined in more recent years, following general trends in the discipline. The percentage of realist articles on the region peaked in the mid-to-late 1990s, for example, and its prominence has been declining since then. The same trend is true of liberalism. A striking 57% of articles on East Asia advanced the liberal paradigm in 2000, compared to 33% in 2011. At the same time, non-paradigmatic analysis has increased steadily from 33% in 1980 to 44% in 2011. This change reflects the decline of paradigmatic analysis in the broader discipline, but the percentage of articles on East Asia advancing a paradigm still remains higher than that in the IR field generally.

Second, research on East Asia is far more likely than IR articles more generally to employ qualitative methods. Only 34% of all IR articles published in the leading journals from 1980 to 2011 use qualitative methods, but a surprising 54% of articles that draw on a significant amount of evidence from East Asia use qualitative methods. This is not, apparently, because of a lack of available quantitative data specific to East Asia: 29% of articles on East Asia in the leading journals use statistical methods, compared to 36% of all IR articles.¹⁵ Other methodological distinctions exist between East Asia and the field in general. Thirteen percent of articles that are at least partly about East Asia use descriptive methods—in which qualitative or quantitative information is used to describe the case, but no attempt is made to test a hypothesis or develop broader theoretical generalizations—compared to 10% of all IR articles. Not surprising, far fewer articles that

¹⁴Friedberg (2005) provides an overview of each of the three major paradigms and how these different camps typically view the rise of China.

¹⁵Johnston (2012) raises concerns, however, that quantitative data on East Asia may be coded incorrectly.

draw evidence from East Asia use analytic, non-formal methods that attempt to illuminate features of IR or IR theory without using significant empirical evidence or a formal model (5%) compared to IR articles more generally (16%).¹⁶ The significant language barriers to entry for qualitative research, the fact that quantitative research is published at a much higher rate than qualitative research (Maliniak et al. 2011), and the reliance on qualitative methods among IR scholars of East Asia together mean that publications on the region are likely to increase only modestly, if at all, in the near future.

Finally, research on East Asia is more oriented toward the study of international political economy (IPE) than the IR field at large. In general, the IR discipline is heavily weighted toward the study of international security. Of all IR articles published from 1980 to 2011, 35%, the largest percentage, are characterized primarily as international security, while only 13% are devoted to IPE. Among published articles on East Asia, in contrast, a much higher 28% are categorized as IPE. While 32% of articles on the region have a substantive focus on international security, only Western Europe and Oceania have a higher rate of IPE articles than East Asia. In 2011, moreover, 23% of US respondents who identified East Asia as their primary region of study indicated that IPE was their primary area of research, compared to only 16% who listed international security. These findings suggest that China's massive economic power and high trade volume have captured the attention of IR scholars in a way that is unusual in the field.

Interestingly, however, there are some issue areas—such as human rights, the environment, and international organization—where based on international events one might expect to find significant numbers of articles with an East Asia focus. This does not appear to be true, however. Only about 1% of all articles on East Asia have a substantive focus on human rights or the environment, and about 3% of articles focus on international organization. These percentages are similar to or lower than those in the IR literature more generally (2%, 1%, and 6%, respectively).

IR and the Neglect of East Asia

How we study IR has important implications for our ability to provide accurate and policy-relevant information on international issues and problems. Our findings reinforce those voices that have warned of a significant gap between the academic and policy worlds of international relations (that is, Jentleson 2002; Walt 2005; Desch 2009; Nye 2009). IR scholars identify East Asia as an area of critical concern to US foreign policy, but they do not study it in significant numbers. These scholars may bemoan their lack of policy influence, but they do not act on these concerns. Put simply, they do not teach, research, or publish at a rate that comes close to reflecting East Asia's importance to the IR discipline or the policy world. Those who do study the area, moreover, stand apart from the rest of the field in important ways. They comprise a small population that often is more paradigmatic in analysis, qualitative in methodology, and IPE-oriented in issue area than the rest of the discipline. The academic field, in other words, has yet to experience the pivot to Asia that has come to define US policy.

Together, our findings suggest a disjuncture regarding the study of East Asia within IR that bears further study in terms of both its causes and consequences. One obvious possible cause for the relative paucity of research and scholarly

¹⁶Articles are not coded as analytic, non-formal if they employ quantitative, qualitative, formal, or descriptive methods. This means that many articles with a significant non-formal theoretical component do not get coded as "Analytic/Non-formal" even if they make a significant theoretical contribution. See Peterson and Tierney 2009.

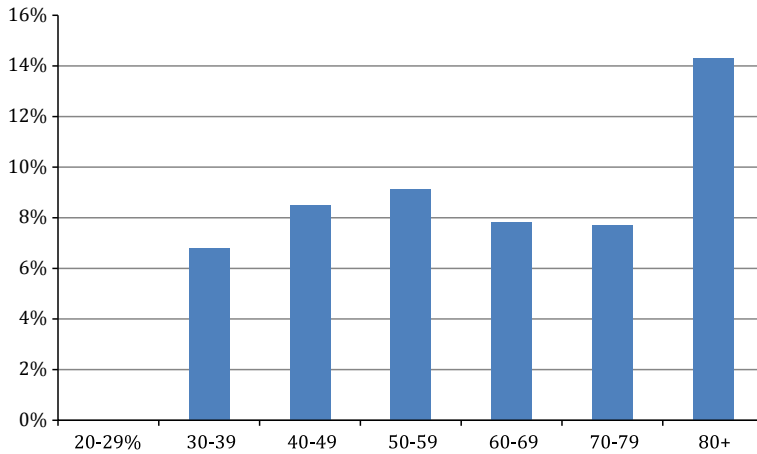


FIG 5. Percent of US Scholars in Each Age Group Listing East Asia as Primary Region of Focus

publications on the region is the barriers to entry in the field: As we have noted, IR scholars must spend many years in graduate training and beyond learning foreign languages and conducting field research in another political system and culture. This is true, of course, of most so-called area studies. Indeed, the percentage of IR faculty who describe themselves as having a primary research focus on East Asia compares favorably with that of other geographic regions. Eight percent of respondents in 2011 reported that their primary area of study was the Middle East/North Africa, 7% each said Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, and 10% said West Europe, while the percentages of scholars who responded that they study transnational, global, or no region were 9%, 19%, and 10%, respectively. At the same time, given the enormous strategic importance attached to the East Asia region by policy makers, but also by IR scholars themselves, we would expect to see greater interest in the study of this critical area of the world.

Second, and related, it is possible that slow but steady shifts in the balance of power between the United States and China, and of challenges to US interests in East Asia more generally, may not have as significant an impact on what IR students choose to study as sudden transformations, such as the end of the Cold War or the events of 9/11. Particularly for subjects with high barriers to entry, it may take some sensational event to capture the imagination of scholars and cause them to change their area of study. In this case, we would expect to see a gradual increase in recent decades in the number of IR scholars pursuing PhDs in and conducting research on East Asia. We do not have a direct measure of this change over time in the TRIP database, but a look at the relationship between age and field of study does not suggest such a gradual increase. As Figure 5 shows, older scholars study the East Asia region in slightly higher percentages than their younger colleagues. Assuming relatively traditional ages of study, these scholars likely were in graduate school from the early 1970s to the early 1990s, perhaps suggesting that the opening to China created a subsequent opening in the field of East Asian studies. Interest in the region has not continued to grow, however, and may be declining slightly among younger scholars, despite Chinese military modernization, the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, and Chinese economic reform and growth since the 1990s.

To some extent the study of East Asia within IR looks a lot like research on other areas of the world in that it is more qualitative than the rest of the discipline. This may reflect the historical, cultural training of many area specialists,

the difficulties of conducting survey research in non-native languages and cultures, the availability of statistical data sets, and/or differing national conceptions of IR.¹⁷ Unlike the study of other regions, however, the IR of East Asia is more paradigmatic and oriented toward IPE.

Finally, limitations in our data may have led us to mischaracterize or overstate the gap between what IR scholars profess and what they practice. Indeed, the TRIP data do not contain measures for several key variables that would have helped test our argument. We have no direct measure, for example, of how much teaching on East Asia occurs in US universities and colleges. We can report only descriptive statistics from the question that asks IR faculty whether they devote one or more classes in their Introduction to IR course to teaching about East Asia. Second, we cannot test whether there was a significant shift in publication on the IR of East Asia in the late 1970s, following a change in US foreign policy in the early 1970s, because our database contains information from 1980 to 2011. Finally, many political scientists might object that much of the study of East Asia, and of regional studies more generally, happens within the field of comparative politics, not IR. We do not disagree, although we would add that the boundaries between these subfields are blurring, and there are many IR students whose research has a regional focus. More importantly, because we defined our survey population to include all faculty who taught or did research on any transnational issue, we captured many political scientists who consider themselves comparativists. Indeed, 46% of respondents to the 2011 TRIP survey described themselves as specialists in comparative politics, while only 29% called themselves IR experts. Because we included *World Politics* as an IR journal, moreover, our article database also likely includes many comparative politics articles.¹⁸

Regardless of the reasons for the gap between the academic and policy worlds, the neglect of East Asia by IR scholars may have significant implications for both the study and practice of international relations. As Johnston (2012) argues, IR theory and empirical findings are impoverished when the field ignores the study of this critical region. Certainly, TRIP data suggest that students of East Asia hold different views on international policy than IR scholars do more generally. Respondents who say that East Asia is either a primary or secondary area of study, for example, believe that conflict between the United States and China is more likely than do other IR scholars. On a scale of 1–10, scholars of East Asia reported on average a 1.57 likelihood of war between the two powers in the next decade and a 2.55 likelihood in the next 30 years. IR scholars who do not study the region reported on average a 1.25 likelihood of war in the next 10 years and a 2.18 likelihood in the next three decades. This finding is particularly striking given the East Asia subfield's relative focus on IPE. It is possible, in other words, that the difference between these regional scholars and the rest of the IR field on the issue of the likelihood of conflict between the world's two largest powers could grow, if East Asia scholars were to turn their attention toward security issues.

The neglect and differences in the study of the IR of East Asia relative to IR more generally may create something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Despite the region's growing policy relevance, and IR scholars' own belief that the region is of critical importance to the United States, the nature of research on East Asia may make it difficult for students of the region to publish articles in leading IR journals. Over time, under-representation in journals could limit future interest among graduate students and scholars and perpetuate the low levels of published research in the subfield. If authors of scholarly articles on East Asia continue to produce largely qualitative, paradigmatic research, they may find

¹⁷On the latter see Maliniak, Peterson, and Tierney (2013); and Tickner and Wæver (2009).

¹⁸See n. 6 above.

fewer publication outlets than their colleagues in other subfields who produce more quantitative, non-paradigmatic work. As Maliniak et al. (2011) show, articles using quantitative methods are published at a far higher proportion than their representation in the general population of IR scholars, and the percentage of quantitative articles in the top 12 journals has been steadily increasing over the past 30 years. Moreover, fully half of all articles in these journals are now non-paradigmatic. Continued dependence on qualitative methods and paradigmatic analysis in the East Asia literature, in other words, may limit the outlets for research on the IR of East Asia.

Finally, the tendency of IR scholars of the region to favor IPE, produce largely qualitative research, and mire their work in the paradigmatic wars of earlier decades may limit their ability to create cutting edge research of interest to policy makers, although the jury is still out on this question. Critics of the discipline bemoan its increasing emphasis on methods-driven research at least in part because they believe that such a field is less likely to speak to the issues of concern to policy makers (Walt 2005; Gallucci 2012). Indeed, respondents to the 2011 TRIP survey identified formal models and quantitative analyses as among the least useful types of research, and this finding was corroborated in a parallel TRIP study of current and former national security policy makers (Avey and Desch 2013). In this sense, the qualitative focus of much IR research on East Asia may appeal to policy makers seeking to learn more about this strategically important region. At the same time, however, some of the same critics of contemporary IR lament that a focus on grand theory and paradigmatic battles has limited the discipline's policy relevance (Gallucci 2012). Interestingly, both the scholars and policy makers surveyed by TRIP also identified theoretical analyses as among the least useful types of research for policy makers. IR research on East Asia is mixed in this regard—it is more qualitative and often similar to the area studies work that IR scholars rank as most useful, but it also is more paradigmatic and theoretically driven than the rest of the field. In any case, the relative neglect of the IR of East Asia subfield limits the discipline's claims to policy relevance: unless more IR scholars turn their attention and the full range of their research tools to empirical puzzles and policy problems in East Asia, academic research will not speak to policy makers' needs, and policy makers are unlikely to listen to IR scholars.

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