The Evolution of Social Constructivism in Political Science: Past to Present

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Abstract

This article aims to illuminate how social constructivism has evolved as a mainstream international relation (IR) paradigm within a short period of time. To be specific, I navigated core tenets of constructivism in terms of its ontology, epistemology, and methodology, respectively. I also explored the growing body of constructivist empirical research and ensuing theoretical refinement as well as the strengths and weaknesses of a constructivist approach. Through these discussions, this article argues that constructivist approaches, since its emergence, have hugely contributed to the development of the study of IRs, providing novel insights and distinct ways of understanding of social and international reality with its own added value, by focusing on the role of ideas, identity, and norms in shaping state preferences and world politics.

Keywords

constructivism, identity, idea, international relations, norms

How constructivism has become one of the most compelling approaches in rivalry with dominant rationalist and materialist theories in the study of international relations (IR)? In this article, I suggest that constructivist approaches, since its emergence, have truly provided important and distinctive theoretical and empirical insights in explaining global politics. The principal aim of this study is in this context to explore the rise of constructivism within the field of IR in the midst of the interparadigm debate and to explain the overarching theoretical underpinnings of constructivism—including its main ontological, epistemological, and methodological tenets. I also review a wide array of constructivist empirical works that have significantly contributed to the theoretical development and refinement for more than two decades. I finally evaluate some notable strengths and weaknesses of constructivist approaches.

The Emergence of Constructivist IR Theory

The Constructivist Turn in IR and Important Tenets of Constructivism

The main axis of the interparadigm debate—so called, the Third great debate—during the 1980s in the field of IR had been between rationalists and early critical international theorists. In this regard, Robert Keohane noted the emergence and the validity of a new approach in his 1988 address at the ISA Annual Conference, calling it "reflectivist" (Keohane, 1988; Weber, 2014; Wendt, 1992). In this process, the

rationalists–constructivists debate had gradually become the principal line of contestation (Price & Reus-Smit, 1998), as the 1990s have witnessed the rise of a constructivist approach in the study of IR. According to Price and Reus-Smit (1998), the reorientation of critical international theory, which resulted in the "constructivist turn in IR," was prompted by three mutually reinforcing factors. First was "the response by neoliberals and neorealists to the criticism leveled by critical theorists." As Keohane already noted, many admitted the potential of the reflectivist critical international theorists as a new provider of alternative insights into the intersubjective bases of IR. The second factor was the demise of the Cold War, which demonstrated "the failure of the dominant rationalist theories" in explaining such a dramatic international change. The third was a generational change of IR scholars who have been hugely enlightened by the insights of Third Debate critical theories (Price & Reus-Smit, 1998).

Adler (1997) articulates that constructivism is the view that "the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world" (p. 322). Likewise, constructivism is conceived as, according to Guzzini (2000), a "metatheoretical commitment" on the basis of three important tenets: as an

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epistemological claim, knowledge is socially constructed; as an ontological claim, social reality is constructed; finally, as a reflexive claim, knowledge and reality are mutually constitutive (Cited in Pouliot, 2007, p. 361). Constructivists have focused on the examination of nonmaterial factors such as norms, ideas, knowledge, and culture, stressing in particular the role played by "collectively held or intersubjective ideas and understanding on social life" in IRs (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, p. 393). In addition, Ruggie (1998, p. 856) describes constructivism as "human consciousness and its role in international life." At the most general level, constructivism is an approach to social analysis based on the following basic assumptions: (a) human interaction is not shaped by material factors, but primarily by ideational ones; (b) the most significant ideational factors in this context are "intersubjective" beliefs as shared collective understanding; and (c) these beliefs construct the actors' identities and interests (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, p. 393). Accordingly, the importance and added value of constructivism in the study of IR lie particularly in its emphasis on both the "ontological reality of intersubjective knowledge" and the "epistemological and methodological implications of this reality." In sum, constructivists firmly believe that IRs are made up of social facts, which can exist only by human agreement (Adler, 1997).

Unlike neorealism or neoliberalism, Constructivism in IR is "not a substantive theory of politics" per se (Adler, 1997, p. 323). Rather, it is a "theoretically informed approach to the study of IR" (Ruggie, 1998, p. 880). In other words, constructivism is a social theory, which "makes claims about the nature of social life and social change" (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, p. 393). Contradicting neorealist and neoliberal precepts that have been particularly concerned with the examination of "how the behavior of agents generates outcomes" (Wendt, 1992, 1999, p. 391), constructivism takes "a sociological perspective on world politics, emphasizing the importance of normative as well as material structures, and the role of identity in the constitution of interests and action" (Price & Reus-Smit, 1998, p. 259).

Contra neorealism and neoliberalism, constructivist approaches emphasize, again, the reflexivity of society and the self, assuming that agents and structures are mutually constituted (Checkel, 1998; Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001; Hopf, 1998; Price & Reus-Smit, 1998 ; Wendt, 1999). This ontological tenet has provided the new constructivist interpretation of anarchy that fundamentally refutes the neorealist postulation—anarchy as systems of self-help. Wendt (1999) asserts that there can exist multiple logics in anarchic structures, arguing that "anarchy as such is an empty vessel and has no intrinsic logic; anarchies only acquire logics as a function of the structure of what we put inside them" (Wendt, 1999, p. 249). In his analysis, Wendt claims that there are three different cultures of anarchy as in imagined community, naemly Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian, respectively. In each culture, a dissimilar structure of roles dominates the

international system—enemy, rival, and friend, respectively. In other words, there actually exist different "anarchies," which vary greatly depending on the roles that dominate the system. The emphasis on the mutual constitution of agents and structure also destabilized the taken-for-granted black box, treating identity and interest of agents as an important empirical question (Checkel, 1998; Hopf, 1998; Wendt, 1992). These constructivist claims thus challenge the methodological individualism, which underpins neorealism and neoliberalism's agent-centered view (Checkel, 1998).

According to Finnemore and Sikkink (2001), the main analytical competitors of constructivism can be singled out into two kinds: (a) "materialist theories, which see political behavior as determined by the physical world alone" and (b) "individualist theories, which treat collective understandings as simply epiphenomena of individual action and deny that they have causal power or ontological status." Similarly, Fearson and Wendt (2005) argue that the debate between rationalism and constructivism can be principally framed in disagreement with metaphysical positions (ontology) and empirical descriptions of the world. Whereas rationalism is based on individual ontology, constructivism assumes a holist ontology in which wholes cannot be reducible to interacting parts. Moreover, they disagree on whether preferences or interests of agents are exogenously given or endogenous to a social interaction; while rationalism follows *homo economicus*, which is based fundamentally on the logic of consequences, constructivists maintain that actors are *homo sociologicus*, which takes the logic of appropriateness (Fearson & Wendt, 2005). The emergence of constructivism, marked as the social theoretic turn in IR, has created room for treating identity and interest as well as norms as promising dependant or explanatory variables in the study of global politics (Weber, 2014).

Many Constructivisms? The Variants of Constructivism

Whereas some scholars, for example, Price and Reus-Smit (1998), suggest that the categorization within constructivism in IR is unnecessary by asserting that conventional constructivism has to be seen as an intellectual outgrowth of critical theory—and that it does not violate principal epistemological, methodological, and normative tenets of critical international theory—many IR scholars have claimed that the distinction can be made depending on theoretical and epistemological differences (Farrell, 2002; Fearson & Wendt, 2005; Hopf, 1998; Weber, 2014).

First, Hopf (1998) categorizes constructivism into conventional and critical variants. While admitting that constructivism shares some foundational elements of critical theory, Hopf (1998) suggests that "to the degree that constructivism creates theoretical and epistemological distance between itself and its origins in critical theory, it becomes conventional constructivism" (p. 181). Although conventional constructivists aim to

produce new knowledge and insights based on "minimal foundationalism" by accepting that a contingent universalism may be necessary and possible, critical constructivists pursue human emancipation and enlightenment by unmasking naturalized order and asymmetrical power relations in our social world (Hopf, 1998, pp. 183-185). Hopf in this context argues that conventional constructivism operates between mainstream IR and critical theories, in that while conventional constructivists deny the mainstream position that "world is so homogeneous that universally valid generalizations can be expected to come of theorizing about it," they at the same time reject the critical constructivist presumption that "world politics is so heterogeneous that we should presume to look for only the unique and the differentiating" (Hopf, 1998, p. 199). By the same token, Adler (1997) maintains that constructivism—specifically conventional constructivism—can play an important role as the middle ground between rationalists (neorealists and neoliberals) and adherents of interpretive epistemologies (such as postmodernists and critical theorists).

Meanwhile, Fearson and Wendt (2005) divide constructivism into three distinct strands—positivist, interpretivist, and postmodern—depending on their epistemological positions. According to them, these three constructivisms answer differently to the following two epistemological questions: "Whether knowledge claims about social life can be given any warrant other than the discursive power of the putative knower (relativism issue)"; and "Whether causal explanations are appropriate in social inquiry (the naturalism issue)." Although a positivist position answers yes to both questions, an interpretivist answers yes and no, respectively, and postmodern constructivists answer no to both (Fearson & Wendt, 2005). Fearon and Wendt thus conclude that one cannot speak of "constructivism" in the singular because epistemological dissimilarities between them are fundamentally deep.

Despite the sharp differences between several variants within constructivism, they do share notable theoretical fundamentals in general. First, constructivists have common interests in examining how practices of social life and the objects are "constructed" (Fearson & Wendt, 2005). In other words, they seek to "denaturalize" the social world; they aim to reveal how practices and identities that people usually take for granted as exogenously given are rather the product of social construction by human agency. Second, they also commonly emphasize the significance of mutual constitution of agents and structure, believing that intersubjective reality and meanings are paramount data to grasp social world, when these data are appropriately "contextualized" (Hopf, 1998) Third, all kinds of constructivist variants are based primarily upon a methodological holist research strategy rather than methodological individualist perspective (Fearson & Wendt, 2005).

Methodological Tenets of Constructivist Approach

The methods and methodology of constructivism that enables to capture the intersubjective meanings have been shaped by constructivism's core assumption (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001). Constructivist approach is primarily a process-centered one based on "the dialectical constitution of knowledge and reality" (Pouliot, 2007, p. 364). Constructivist scholars are, therefore, basically skeptical about claims to "all-encompassing truth,"—what Price and Reus-Smit (1998) call "Big-T"; rather, they are more concerned with "small-t" contingent claims. Such partial claims still constitute causal explanation in a way different to that which realists and liberals understand causality (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, pp. 394-395). Likewise, Adler (2005) maintains that constructivists share an epistemology "in which interpretation is an intrinsic part of the social sciences and emphasizes contingent generalizations." For him "contingent generalizations do not freeze understanding; rather, they open up our understanding of the social world" (Adler, 2005, pp. 10-11). Similarly, according to Finnemore and Sikkink (2001), constructivists recognize that "all research involves interpretation, and thus there is no neutral stance from which they can gather objective knowledge about the world, but they differ about how this interpretation should be one and what kinds of explanation it yields" (p. 395).

It is important to recognize that modern, or so-called conventional, constructivists follow similar methodological tasks of rationalist or utilitarian camps; gathering evidence, assessing it and arbitrating among explanations. They rely on several sources similarly that other social scientists widely utilizes to extract reliable and relevant evidence (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001), whereas postmodern or critical constructivists are concerned more with "discourse" that has recently arisen a key theoretical concept in the social sciences. By challenging the "scientism" of mainstream IR, studies of discourse about the knowledge/power nexus have become one of the fast thriving and vibrant areas across the academic disciplines (Milliken, 1999, pp. 225-226). For example, in her study of international aid, Nair (2013) analyzes how enduring asymmetric power relations between international aid donors and recipients have been discursively constructed. According to her, "representations about what aid does, its modalities and dispensations" contributes to the reproduction of hegemonic aid discourse that reestablishes hegemonic authority of the donor over the recipient (Nair, 2013, p. 630).

As such, there is no single constructivist research design or methods. Constructivists choose the methods and analytical tools best suited to their particular research questions, taking advantage of process tracing, interviews, participant observation, structured focused comparison, genealogy, discourse analysis, content analysis, and many others to capture intersubjective meanings (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001).

Empirical and Theoretical Development of Constructivism

Constructivism's empirical research program has been largely shaped by its core assumptions in various ways (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001). Thanks to the huge

contribution made by growing constructivist empirical works, "the once controversial statement that norms matter is accepted by the most diehard neorealists" (Checkel, 1997, p. 473). The constructivist approach has thus become one of the most influential and compelling perspectives in mainstream IR. In this section, I will examine the theoretical development and refinement guided by constructivist empirical works over more than two decades.

Sociological Institutionalism/World Polity Theory

Prior to the rise of constructivism as a promising paradigm in IR, the sociological institutionalists—so-called neoinstitutionalists or world polity theorists—had offered new perspective on "how 'world culture' reconfigured state policies in many different policy arenas" (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, pp. 396-397). The core argument of this Stanford School of thought was that "the modern world society causes the diffusion of common institutional models and patterns of legitimacy among nation states" (Burawoy, 2000, p. 2). World polity approach, therefore, emphasizes an omniscient role of world society models, according to Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez (1997, pp. 144, 173), which "shapes nation-state identities, structures, and behavior via worldwide cultural and associational processes." In this regard, Boli and Thomas (1997) state that

> For a century and more, the world has constituted a singular polity. By this we mean that the world has been conceptualized as a unitary social system, increasingly integrated by networks of exchange, competition, and cooperation, such that actors have found it "natural" to view the whole world as their arena of action and discourse. (p. 172)

In other words, the rise of isomorphism among the contemporary nation-state particularly in terms of institutional models and legitimate authority stems from a singular world polity alongside globalization. Therefore, for sociological institutionalists, the structure takes precedence over agents; "it creates actors but it is not created by them" (Finnemore, 1996, p. 333).

For example, in their study of "cross-national acquisition of women's suffrage rights" from 1890 to 1990, Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan (1997, p. 743) demonstrate that the universalization of women's suffrage among many nation-states was primarily enabled and largely facilitated by the "existence, development, diffusion, and influence of a more inclusive world model of political citizenship" rather than national political factors. Similarly, Kim and Sharman (2014), through their empirical studies, argue that the recent rise and diffusion of individual accountability norms for both leaders' human rights crimes and corruption are a product of "an overarching modernist world culture privileging individual rights and responsibilities, as well as rational-legal authority" (Kim & Sharman 2014, p. 417).

As we all might know, sociological institutionalism is not equivalent to constructivism in IR; however, they are much similar in some significant aspects. First and foremost, in both perspectives, "actors are treated not as unanalyzed 'givens' but as entities constructed and motivated by enveloping frames." Put simply, "the nature, purposes, behavior, and meaning of actors are subject to redefinition and transformation as the frames themselves change" (Boli & Thomas, 1997, p. 172). Moreover, in contrast to the rationalist approach such as realism and liberalism—which assume individualist ontology "in which wholes are reducible to interacting parts," constructivism and sociological institutionalism share a holist ontology "in which parts exist only in relation to wholes" (Fearson & Wendt, 2005, p. 53).

Although it seems that they resemble each other, they also differ in some ways. First, many of the world polity theorists take advantage of quantitative methods to clarify overall characteristics of cultural and normative structures and the changes in them over time. However, this approach is less convincing to understand *why* and *how* these changes occur. Constructivists can effectively fill this gap, utilizing a vast array of methods to capture intersubjective meanings (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Also, in contrast to the sociological institutionalist emphasis on "structure at the expense of agency" (Finnemore, 1996, p. 342), constructivists—especially agentic constructivists—stress the mutual constitution of structure and agency. In this regard, Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, p. 397) insist that sociological institutionalists often look "dangerously biased," in that "these scholars sometimes overlook the fact that international norms have to come from somewhere and may not identify feedback effects from local agents onto global structures."

The Role of Strategic Agency

Recent constructivist researches have kept its distance from the crucial tenets of sociological institutionalism, especially by offering new insights concerning "the role of strategic agency" (Kim & Sharman, 2014, p. 444). These agentic constructivist works have primarily focused on the purposive exertion of individuals and groups who attempt to change existing norms and rules in the sphere of politics or generate new norms and persuade a mass of norm leaders (states) to embrace new norms. In this norm entrepreneurship literature, an attempt has been made to explain how these activists operate and what might contribute to their success. These are not easily elucidated by dominant utilitarian approaches; constructivist approaches can be niche alternatives (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; 2001).

As an illustration, Price's (1998) work on how nonstate actors—which he terms "transnational civil society"—generate international norms prohibiting antipersonnel land mines and teach states is particularly noteworthy. Price suggests how the constructivist approaches effectively shed light on the security issue area, which has been conventionally

regarded as the realm of the high politics. Similarly, high-lighting the increasingly crucial role of nonstate actors in world politics, Keck and Sikkink (1999) distinguish these activists whose formation was motivated by principled ideas or values from economic actors/firms and What Hass terms epistemic communities (Haas, 1992). Keck and Sikkink (1998, 1999) call them *transnational advocacy networks*, which embrace those actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services. They refer to transnational "networks" rather than civil society or coalition to stress the "structured and structuring dimension in the actions of these complex agents" (Keck & Sikkink, 1999, p. 90). The emergence of transnational advocacy networks, according to Keck and Sikkink (1999), is a new and transformative phenomenon in many aspects. They specifically comment that

> What is novel in these networks is the ability of non-traditional international actors to mobilize information strategically to help create new issues and categories, and to persuade, pressurize, and gain leverage over much more powerful organizations and governments. Activists in networks try not only to influence policy outcomes, but to transform the terms and nature of the debate. They are not always successful in their efforts, but they are increasingly important players in policy debates at the regional and international level. (pp. 89-90)

In their other volume *Activists beyond borders*, Keck and Sikkink (1998)—by examining the cases of human rights advocacy networks in Latin America, environmental advocacy networks in Third World such as Brazil and Malaysia and relatively novel emergence of advocacy networks on violence against women—asserts that these advocacy networks have had an influence not only on the preferences of their own countries, but also on the preferences of other states and other nonstate actors such as activist groups and individuals by means of persuasion, socialization, and pressure. In comparison with earlier focus of women's network on female circumcision, women's suffrage and discrimination issues, such a newly arisen issue networks have been rapidly developed once they frame violence against women as a violation of human rights (Carpenter, 2005, 2006; Keck & Sikkink, 1998), either through online/virtual space (Carpenter & Jose, 2012) or real-space counterparts.

Bringing International Norms Back Into Domestic Politics

Owing to the devotion of constructivist IR scholarship that has demonstrated the significance of norms in world politics over more than two decades, it is no longer controversial to allege that norms matter (Towns, 2012). Unlike the theoretical tenet of sociological institutionalism, which focuses exclusively on one-directional causality, constructivist

scholars have rather identified that international norms often have different impacts on different agents. Therefore, capturing and explaining these differences have become a central task of constructivist research (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001). In this regard, Checkel's (1997, 1999) works have profoundly contributed to the literature on cross-national variation of international norms' effects. By arguing that there is significant variance in mechanisms by which international norms are socialized and internalized within each domestic political arena, he maintains that the effects of international norms reach deeper; they not only constrain societal actors as neoliberals argue, but also constitute identities and interests of actors at the domestic level (Checkel, 1997).

Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) examine how norms affect political change, by introducing the path-breaking theory of norm "life cycle," which articulates the evolution of norms in three stages—norm emergence, norm cascade, and internalization. They argue that different actors, different motives, and different dominant mechanisms engage in different stages. Cortell and Davis (1996) also argue that domestic political actors' appropriation of international norms and rules can influence the state policy choice. Based on the case study of U.S. policy choices in the realm of economy and security, they underline the role of domestic structural contexts as an intervening variable in determining the degree to which domestic actors' appeal to international norms affect the state preferences. Acharya (2004) navigates how transnational norms have an impact on institutional change in ASEAN. By paying particular attention on norm localization dynamics, he suggests that normative contestation between emerging global norms and preexisting regional norms can be settled by norm localization in which norm-takers' congruence-building is a key in this process. In this way, these scholars have created intersectional research agenda between IR and comparative politics (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001).

Norms, International Policy Diffusion, and Social Hierarchies

Despite the rise of empirical research on norms in the study of IR, ranking dynamics of norms has been significantly overlooked in existing literature. Towns's (2010, 2012) thought-provoking works on norms and social hierarchies nicely fill this gap. Towns (2012) argues that

> in setting out standards of behavior, norms also draw on and generate social hierarchies. In defining what is normal and desirable, norms set the terms for what is abnormal and undesirable behavior and provide the means for ranking those states that do not meet a norm as deficient and inferior. (p. 180)

Through the empirical case study of the international diffusion of legal sex quotas from Latin America, Towns (2012) maintains that "new policy measures may emerge from 'below' as peripheral states attempt to improve their

standing" (pp. 182-183). In other words, states in lower ranking in international society are often eager to become leaders in certain norm diffusion processes with intent to raise its rank within a given order or as a means of rejecting an existing order. This argument can also offer an persuasive account of why core states attempt to diffuse new policies; that is, they do so to maintain their international standing and to be admired (Towns, 2012).

Constructivism and Security Studies

Power and politics, which has traditionally been a realm of realist research program, has been facing a stiff challenge by the development of an alternative paradigm—constructivist approach—to the subject. This ideational turn in security studies are concerned mainly with "the impact of norms on international security" (Farrell, 2002, p. 49). For example, Walling (2013) shows social constructivist approach to the issue of humanitarian intervention of the U.N. Security Council. Shedding light on how violation of human rights has become one of the major threats to international security and, therefore, how humanitarian intervention has become justified as international human rights norms become increasingly legitimate, the author maintains that "interests are shaped by normative values" (Walling, 2013, p. 15). Criticizing an incomplete explanation of rationalist approach to humanitarian intervention that assumes material interest and power as a pivotal driver, Walling demonstrates that constructivist accounts of norms and ideas also matter significantly in the area of security studies where rationalism has traditionally predominated. Similarly, Finnemore (2004) elucidates the historical changes of military intervention and points out that the old notion of *realpolitik* cannot explain such transformations. States sometimes use force for different purposes, according to her, just as the case of humanitarian intervention shows. As Finnemore argues, what have really changed over time are the social purposes of intervention, and that the utility of the use of force depends increasingly on its legitimacy. Other scholars have put ideological variables at the center of security issues. In his book *Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics*, Haas (2005) shows the ideological distance among actors—the degree of ideological similarities and differences—plays a crucial role in leaders' perception of threat and shaping national interests.

In contrast to the realist position that regards national interests as "objects that have merely to be observed or discovered," Weldes (1996, p. 280) conceptualizes the national interests as "social constructions," which are "created as meaningful objects out of the intersubjective and culturally established meanings with which the world, particularly the international system and the place of the state in it, is understood." According to her, national interests are constructed by the state itself, mainly by state officials and elites, through representations drawing on a variety of cultural and linguistic sources, simply for the state to "enable to make a decision or to act in a particular situation" (Weldes, 1996, p. 281). Accordingly, the representations created by state officials "make clear both to those officials themselves and to others who and what we are, who and what our enemies are, in what ways we are threatened by them, and how we might best deal with those threats" (Weldes, 1996, p. 283).

An increasing engagement of critical constructivists in security studies has been noteworthy as well. According to Cho (2009), the key differences between conventional and critical constructivism is that "identities are often regarded as explanatory variables for certain security phenomena in conventional constructivism, but in critical constructivism the identities themselves are to be explained to make sense of the cultural productions of insecurities" (pp. 96-97). In this regard, in Weldes's (1999) other volume *Culture of Insecurity*, she points out that "insecurities, rather than being natural facts, are social and cultural productions," and this insecurity is itself "the product of processes of identity construction in which the self and the other, or multiple others, are constituted." In other words, "identity and insecurity are produced and reproduced in a mutually constitutive process" (Weldes, 1999, pp. 10-11, 59). Weldes empirically traces the production of insecurity during the Cuban Missile crisis and claims that the crisis in 1962 was a product of social construction that dominant masculinist U.S. Cold War identity was reasserted.

State Identities, Interests, and Its Behavior

One of the most innovative scholarly contributions of constructivism to the field of IR would be the following argument, established by several empirical works, that states identity shapes its interests, preferences, and behaviors. As Hopf (1998) points out, "in telling you who you are, identities strongly imply a particular set of interests or preferences with respect to choices of action in particular domains, and with respect to particular actors. The identity of a state implies its preferences and consequent actions" (p. 175). Being credited for placing identity issues at the heart of constructivist theorizing, Wendt (1992) and Katzenstein (1996) are considered pioneers in this area. However, they differ greatly in terms of the weighted influence of international versus domestic attributes on constituting state identities; while Wendt's systemic constructivism puts particular emphasis on international factors, Katzenstein focuses primarily on domestic environments as a key source of shaping state identities (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001).

As mentioned several times, rationalist approaches such as neorealism and neoliberalism treat the agents' identities and interests as exogenously given (Ruggie, 1998). According to Wendt, however, they are rather endogenous to interaction. Drawing on sociological structurationist and symbolic interactionist perspective, Wendt develops constructivist theory "in which identities and interests are the dependent

variable" in contrast to the liberal claim that "international institutions can transform state identities and interests" (Wendt, 1992, p. 394). Wendt asserts that "identities are the basis of interests" and "actors do not have a portfolio of interests that they carry around independent of social context; instead, they define their interests in the process of defining situation" (Wendt, 1992, p. 398). In Katzenstein's volume (1996), however, identity is closely associated with domestic attributes. That is to say, identity is commonly articulated as "varying constructions of statehood" and "varying national ideologies of collective distinctiveness and purpose" across countries; therefore, these variations in turn constitute state interests which have a further influence on state policy.

The Role of International Institutions

Although a majority of scholars of IRs might agree that international institutions matter, less consensus has been made on how they have exact effects (Checkel, 2005). Some constructivist scholars have focused on "the role of international organizations in disseminating new international norms and models of political organization" (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, p. 401). Although the traditional regime theorists have dealt with the issue of international organization and norms, their exact focus was on how norms and a convergence of expectations produce international organization, but not on whether the reverse case might be possible (e.g., Krasner, 1982). In this regard, Finnemore (1993) suggests that international organizations do produce and promote new norms, and even "teach" states, unlike the regimes literature generally assumes. Others have explored the issue of international institutions and socialization, focusing particularly on the ways in which international institution plays a socializing role. For example, Checkel (2005) illuminates a social constructivist perspective on socializing role of institution in Europe. Whereas rationalist approaches traditionally grasp socialization as a result of agents' strategic calculation such as sanctions or material incentives followed by a logic of consequences (Schimmelfennig, 2005), constructivists sees socialization in the context of a logic of appropriateness. Checkel (2005, p. 812) further argues that—based partly on Habermasian communicative action theory—"normative suasion" primarily through "talking" between agents within institutions or organizations plays a pivotal role in socialization. For him, international institutions are thus important venue for socialization.

The Role of Language, Speech Act, and Argument

Following Wittgenstein, Searle and Habermas, other constructivists have examined the role of "language," "speech," and "argument" as a key mechanism of social construction (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001). Although each of the scholars of this variant of constructivism has an interest in different scholarly topic of research, they truly share a similar ontological claim, the linguistic construction of reality, which might offer a prospective bridge between constructivism and poststructuralism (Pouliot, 2004).

Drawing on American philosopher Searle's (1969, 1995) language and speech act theories, Nicholas Onuf—who first introduced the term "constructivism" to the field of IR—argues that "talking is undoubtedly the most important way that we go about making the world what it is" (Onuf, 1989, p. 59). His basic presupposition in mind underlying his argument is that "people always construct, or constitute, social reality, even as their being, which can only be social, is constructed for them" (Onuf, 2013, p. 1). For him, a principal means of social construction is language. Onuf (2003) further argues that when it comes to constructivist analysis of language and agency, "language makes us who we are" (p. 27). Similarly, Mattern's (2004) landmark book *Ordering International Politics* shows us the quintessence of how language-power nexus has had an impact on international identity and order. Through an empirical examination of the Suez Crisis in 1956, Mattern explores how Anglo-American identity was fastened and, therefore, international order was maintained through the use of "representational force." In sum, she argues that "fastening identity through representational force forces order back upon disorder" (Mattern, 2004, p. 70).

Some scholars are influenced heavily by the Habermasian critical theory. Particularly noteworthy is Risse's (2000) work, which suggests the "logic of arguing" as a distinct and new mode of social interaction. Risse distinguishes three logics of social action—a logic of consequentialism rooted in rational choice theory, a logic of appropriateness emphasized by social constructivists, and a logic of arguing developed from the insights of the German-speaking IR community. According to him,

> Arguing implies that actors try to challenge the validity claims inherent in any causal or normative statement and to seek a communicative consensus about their understanding of a situation as well as justifications for the principles and norms guiding their action. . . Argumentative and deliberative behavior is as goal oriented as strategic interaction, but the goal is not to attain one's fixed preferences, but to seek a reasoned consensus. Actors' interests, preferences, and the perceptions of the situation are no longer fixed, but subject to discursive challenges. Where argumentative rationality prevails, actors do not seek to maximize or to satisfy their given interests and preferences, but to challenge and to justify the validity claims inherent in them—and they are prepared to change their views of the world or even their interests in light of the better argument. (Risse, 2000, p. 7)

Therefore, for Risse (2000), "arguing and deliberating about the validity claims" are innate in "any communicative statement about identities, interests, and the state of the world" (p. 33). Risse illustrates in his empirical case study the role and power of argument in the processes of domestic

implementation of international human rights norms. Similarly, as already examined in the section above, Checkel's (2005) work on socializing role of institutions in Europe and the role of "talking" in such process can be also understood in the same context. In his another study on constructivist compliance studies, Checkel (2001) tries to puzzle out the following question: "why do actors comply with social norms?" Through the case study of state compliance with citizenship norm in Germany and Ukraine, he suggests that norm compliance can be explicated by a process encompassing both rationalist instrumental choice and constructivist social learning (Checkel, 2001). Acknowledging the validity of rationalist approach to norm compliance studies, Checkel also points out that actors sometimes comply with norms "by learning new interests through non-instrumental" (Checkel, 2001, p. 564).

Constructivism and Foreign Policy Analysis

In recent years, there have been scholarly endeavors to bridge constructivist perspective to the study of foreign policy analysis. According to Houghton (2007), foreign policy analysis had been treated as "free-floating enterprise," which is not logically connected to a realist or liberalist paradigm in the field of IR. He, however, suggests that a dialogue with constructivist approaches—especially the cognitive psychological approach to the study of foreign policy decision-making—can be one of the most promising logical bases, which connect them.

Asserting that conventional approaches to foreign policy are optimized to answer the question of "why particular decisions and actions were made" but are not appropriate to examine the "how the subjects, objects, and interpretive dispositions were socially constructed such that certain practices were made possible" question (In short, the "how-possible" question), Doty (1993, p. 298) also proposed the post-positivist critical approaches to foreign policy analysis can resolve that problem. In this regard, she suggests the discourse analytical method to address this issue that assumes reality as a linguistic construction and puts forward a critical analysis of how foreign policy practices—especially the distinction between "us" and "them"—are socially constructed.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Constructivist Approaches

At the general level, it is widely recognized that constructivism is strong, precisely where other approaches are generally weak, and vice versa. In relation to rival approaches, such as realism and liberalism, the comparative advantage of constructivism—as examined in the second chapter—can be summed up straightforwardly as (a) contrary to realists, social constructivists in IR provides an alternative understanding that "norms and ideas also constitute power and interests," that is, politics is not just material, but is truly social (Price, 2006, p. 255). In other words, norms are not merely confined to regulative or restrictive roles, but possess productive and constitutive effects as well (Price, 2006); also, (b) added values of constructivism would be its emphasis on the "ontological reality of intersubjective knowledge" and on the "epistemological and methodological implications of this reality" (Adler, 1997, p. 323).

On the contrary, there are some weaknesses in this approach as well. Hopf (1998) in this context, points out that constructivism "does not specify the existence, let alone precise nature of its main causal/constitutive elements: identities, norms, values and social structure" (p. 189). In addition, constructivism invites some degree of criticism often assumed as inherent weakness, which can be labeled as "selection bias." According to Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), one of the consistent complaints about constructivism made by competitor theorists has been its exclusive focus on good and nice norms such as human rights, environment protection, climate change, women's right, and many others even after constructivism was acknowledged as a legitimate research approach in IR. In other words, this bias toward admirable norms has caused less attention to be paid toward xenophobic nationalism, racism, and the spread of homophobia and so forth, which have nonetheless become an important research theme of our time.

Conclusion

In this article, I have sought to illuminate how constructivist approach has evolved as a mainstream IR within a short period of time. To be specific, I navigated core tenets of constructivism in terms of its ontology, epistemology, and methodology, respectively. I also explored the growing body of constructivist empirical research and ensuing theoretical refinement as well as the strengths and weaknesses of a constructivist approach. Through these discussions, it would not be an exaggeration to say that constructivism has hugely contributed to the development of the study of IR as well, providing novel insights and distinct ways of understanding of social and international reality with its own added value—by focusing on the role of ideas, identity, and norms in shaping state preferences and world politics. According to the *Ivory Tower Survey* conducted by *Foreign Policy*, IR scholars with an attachment to the constructivist approach (22%) outnumbered either the liberal (21%) or realist (16%) camp for the first time in the year 2011.[1] "From prospect to prosperity" might be the best indication of the evolution and the development of constructivist approach over the past two decades in IR.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Note

1. Available at https://www.wm.edu/offices/itpir/_documents/trip/ivory_tower_survey_2012.pdf

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