

Record of Doctoral Dissertation Screening

Name	CHADHA Astha
Degree Type	Doctor of Philosophy in Asia Pacific Studies
Degree No.	Dr. A No. 115
Date of Award	September 20, 2023
Requirements for Degree Conferral	Persons who comply to the Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University Degree Regulations Article 13 Section 1
	Degree Regulations Article 4 Section 1
Title of Dissertation	Exegesis in International Relations Theory: Examining faith and politics through a neo-classical realist analysis of South Asia
Examiners (Affiliation)	1. SATO Yoichiro, Ph.D.; Professor, Graduate School of Asia Pacific Studies, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (Supervisor)
	2. VYAS Utpal, Ph.D.; Professor, Graduate School of Asia Pacific Studies, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (Internal Examiner)
	3. Chintamani Mahapatra; Former Pro-Vice Chancellor & Professor, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (External Examiner)

**Summary of
Dissertation
Contents**

The biggest challenge religion poses in the international relations discipline (IR) and global politics is its unobtrusive presence, its unobservable processes, and its indiscernible effects on global politics, which manifests only as outcomes rather than causes of those noticeable outcomes. Another challenge, the study of religion in international relations discipline has been explaining how and why states, as rational actors, make decisions that seem under-explained by the practical theoretical frameworks of the discipline. Also noteworthy is the way IR (theoretical) literature has defined and considered religion: caged in certain dimensions and constrained to specific roles. This research aims to address the challenge and propose a possible way to incorporate religion into international relations theory. The dissertation, after categorizing existing literature into three main trends, critically analyzes seminal works within each of the categories to highlight the gaps in the existing literature on religion as a factor in IR theory and international relations in general. The dissertation mainly raises two broad research questions:

How can religion (exegesis) be factored in IR theory and international relations?

How has religion impacted and shaped South Asian international relations?

To answer these questions, the research proposes the concept of exegesis and defines it as an “interpretation of religion as a historical discourse” instead of a spiritual or supernatural/metaphysical discourse. The dissertation argues that the operationalization of religion through exegesis in the framework of Neoclassical Realism (NCR) not only provides an explanation of what religion (potentially) does in the international system but also demonstrates a way to define, characterize and do history in IR, particularly NCR. Through the case study of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in South Asia, the dissertation attempts to explain how exegesis affects state identity, memory, and official history, that in turn has the potential to alter state behavior as well as characterize inter-state relations. The dissertation conducts three analyses and makes three key conclusions about the impact of religion (exegesis) in state policy and inter-state-relations. First, by examining contested histories and state narratives through school textbooks, the research argues that exegesis has an impact on contested memories and religion-based national identities, that lead to conflicting official histories in South Asia despite shared past. Second, the research examines the religion-secularism dyad and argues that the partitions of British India into India, Pakistan, (and later) Bangladesh provided a fertile ground for seeking ontological security through distinct identities, mainly based on religion. Exegesis revealed that the reason for the religious definition of secularism (distinct from Western secularism) in these nations was an incomplete historical process of establishing post-colonial modern states. Third, the research examines the foreign policies of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. It argues that in foreign policy, religion (through exegesis) operates distinctly in two ways:

	<p>implicitly as ‘religion in foreign policy’ towards peacebuilding and cooperative efforts, and explicitly as ‘religious foreign policy’ to assert religious identity and disagreements with neighbors.</p>
<p>Summary of Dissertation Screening Results</p>	<p>Astha's dissertation critically examines the way the scholarship of international relations has neglected or poorly addressed the role of religion. Her extensive review of relevant literature on the subjects of religion, religion in IR, and IR theories was effectively synthesized into important academic debates on how we ought to understand the role of religion(s) in international relations. The debates she generated in her dissertation is significant both theoretically and practically. Policy relevance of the issue (especially in the South Asian context) is aptly demonstrated throughout her dissertation.</p> <p>The dissertation also makes an original empirical examination of history textbooks in three South Asian countries. The ways religions are used in narrating history are intertwined material interests of the states and are conscious decisions of the leaders at a given time. The way Astha's dissertation conducted an analysis of the textbooks will guide future research on conflicts in South Asia as well as in other regions.</p> <p>Astha's "critical" research nonetheless effectively engages a mainstream theory of international relations—neo-classical realism. Unlike most constructivist scholars, who place too much emphasis on "ideas" and "values" as independent variables at the cost of neglecting analysis of material interests, Astha's dissertation rightly pays attention to a reciprocal nature of the relationship between national history discourse and material interests. The way religion(s) are treated in national constitutions (embodiment of each statehood) is analyzed in the contexts of material interests that prevailed at the creation of each state (India and Pakistan's separate independence from UK, Bangladesh' split from Pakistan).</p> <p>The quality of writing of this thesis is very high. Organization and grammar were of good quality at the first submission, only requiring “Minor Revisions,” and was further polished up during the revision.</p>

<p>Summary of Examination Results or confirmation of Academic Skills</p>	<p>The committee unanimously recommends passing Astha Chadha's dissertation with an "Outstanding" recognition.</p> <p>Astha has been an exceptional graduate student in GSA for the last five years. She has completed her master's degree with an honorable performance and has moved into the doctoral program. As a doctoral student, Astha has quickly moved into publish academic journal articles and book chapters from internationally reputable outlets. She has undertaken a research fellowship with a highly reputable think tank, Pacific Forum, despite the pandemic and the associated impossibility of travel. Part of her dissertation was published in an academic journal already, as were other writings on Indo-Pacific themes she wrote separately. I have seen past doctoral students publishing a book chapter or even a journal article sometimes, but not in an internationally reputable journal. They were almost always co-authored with other professor(s). Astha's relevant article (from her dissertation) was single-authored. This gives an external validation to the quality of Astha's dissertation.</p> <p>As a whole, this dissertation has a high potential to make an academic monograph to be published from a reputable university press. Her next six months as an RCAPS research fellow (under Center for Democracy Promotion) before undertaking a full-time teaching job from April 2024 would give time to work on this endeavor. In conclusion, the three examiners unanimously agreed to recommend Astha's dissertation for an "Outstanding" recognition.</p>
---	---