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Eurocentrism and epistemic governance in the genealogy of international relations in Taiwan

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Abstract

Why does Taiwan remain marginal to International Relations (IR) theory despite its geopolitical salience? This article answers that question through a genealogical analysis of IR's formation in Taiwan. It argues that IR in Taiwan emerged not as an autonomous discipline, but as an apparatus of epistemic governance shaped by colonial rule, Cold War authoritarianism, and post-authoritarian academic restructuring. Across these three conjunctures, the field sought legitimacy through externally authorised standards, from imperial models of legal–political knowledge to US-centred security frameworks and Anglo-American publication metrics. Taiwan's IR, however, was not simply derivative. Its development also involved strategic appropriation, translation, and adaptation under unequal epistemic conditions. The article, therefore, reframes Taiwan not merely as an empirical case for existing theory but as a site from which the global hierarchies of disciplinary knowledge can be interrogated. In doing so, it contributes to debates on decolonising IR by showing how epistemic marginality is historically produced and institutionally reproduced, even where intellectual agency persists.

Keywords

international studies, Taiwan, knowledge production, genealogy, decolonial epistemology

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Introduction

Taiwan sits awkwardly within IR's global division of intellectual labour. It is frequently invoked in Anglophone liberal political science as a success story (Fell, 2012; Rigger, 1999, 2018), an exemplary non-Western democracy that appears to confirm the transportability of human rights, free markets, and the rule of law. Yet this framing is not politically

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innocent. As Bruce Cumings (1997) argues, the discourse of the 'Pacific Basin' cast Taiwan, alongside Japan, South Korea, and others, as a capitalist success story within a broader Cold War narrative of liberal modernity, so that its visibility came to depend not only on democratisation but also on the geopolitical and epistemic work that 'success' was made to perform. Precisely because this visibility is mediated through external frames of legibility, however, it does not confer epistemic centrality. While Taiwan's diplomatic marginality is widely recognised, its epistemic peripherality in IR knowledge production and agenda-setting remains equally pronounced. Taiwan is thus alternately celebrated as a showcase of Sinophone democratic modernity (Choi, 2020) and treated as evidence of disciplinary convergence with Anglophone standards (Ho and Kao, 2002).

This dual positioning generates a central paradox. Taiwan becomes legible as a 'success' insofar as it aligns with Anglophone benchmarks, while remaining epistemically peripheral in agenda-setting and theory production. The problem is not that these descriptions are wholly false, but that they are analytically comfortable; they treat 'success' as a self-evident outcome and leave the conditions that make it legible largely unexamined. As Shih Chih-yu (2007) argues, such narratives may also obscure the deeper political and epistemic dependencies through which Taiwan is rendered intelligible. This article starts from the opposite premise. What matters is how Taiwan's academic and political legitimacy has been made intelligible, by whom, and at what cost.

I conceptualise Eurocentrism here as an *institutional hierarchy* rather than a mere repertoire of attitudes. It is reproduced through the infrastructures that organise disciplinary authority: training routes, canon formation, methodological norms, publication regimes, and evaluation metrics (Kristensen, 2015; Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al., 2022). These infrastructures do not simply reflect a pre-existing global order; they enact it by defining what counts as theory, what counts as evidence, and what counts as 'international'. Put differently, Eurocentrism persists less by insisting that Europe is superior than by making certain venues, styles of argument, and forms of validation appear neutral and universal (Hobson, 2012). Contemporary inclusionary languages, whether articulated through Global IR (Acharya, 2014) or other similar broader pluralisation agendas, have expanded the field's self-description, but they often leave intact the institutional mechanisms that allocate recognition and prestige (Ersoy, 2023; Goyal, 2025). The Taiwanese case is therefore not a peripheral curiosity. It is a particularly sharp site for observing how recognition is managed in a discipline that speaks the language of universality while operating through stratified circuits of authority. This understanding also draws attention to Eurocentrism as a hierarchy that privileges particular models of modernity and converts them into seemingly universal standards of value and legitimacy (Bhambra, 2014; Chakrabarty, 2000).

Taiwan's modern political and academic trajectories were not formed in a vacuum. They have been shaped through layered domination and abrupt regime change: Japanese colonial rule (1895–1945), the Kuomintang (KMT) authoritarian state under Cold War conditions after 1949, and incorporation into a US-led liberal order (Chu and Lin, 2001; Rigger, 1999). These conjunctures mattered not only for state formation and identity politics but also for the governance of knowledge (Ho and Kao, 2002). Under the Japanese empire, education and expertise served colonial administration; during the Cold War, state-building and security imperatives privileged policy-relevant expertise aligned with anti-communist worldviews; and after democratisation, disciplinary prestige became increasingly tethered to metricised 'international recognition', that is, recognition adjudicated through Eurocentric standards of internationality and conferred on Western-centred

terms. The basic point is that the discipline's sense of what is 'proper' scholarship has repeatedly arrived in Taiwan as an external demand, sometimes imposed, sometimes embraced, often internalised, and has been woven into institutional routines that outlast any single political moment.

Taiwan's diplomatic marginalisation intensifies these dynamics. In a context where sovereignty is contested and international space is constrained, scholarly credibility easily becomes part of a broader economy of legitimacy. 'International' standing is not only a professional aspiration; it can function as a surrogate form of political recognition (Chen and Hsiao, 2021). This is one reason the West repeatedly appears as an aspirational political–epistemic community. At the same time, 'China' has recurrently been positioned as a constitutive Other against which Taiwan's modernity, sovereignty, and normative identity are staged (Ho, 2022; Liu, 2012). This West/self–China/Other architecture does not exhaust Taiwanese politics, but it is central to how Taiwan is made readable within dominant IR frameworks and to how Taiwanese IR has often organised its own claims to relevance.

To capture these processes, I adopt a genealogical approach inspired by Nietzsche and Foucault (Foucault, 2021; Nietzsche et al., 2007). Genealogy is *not* interested in producing a smooth narrative of intellectual progress. It looks for discontinuities, reversals, and the contingent conditions through which certain truths become established and certain standards become taken for granted. Applied to IR in Taiwan, genealogy directs attention away from whether scholars *choose* Eurocentrism and towards the institutional and political arrangements that normalise particular epistemic expectations. It asks how imported paradigms are made to appear methodologically self-evident, how evaluation practices stabilise hierarchies of worth, and how the boundary between 'theoretical' and 'case-based' work is policed. This is especially apposite for Taiwan because disciplinary trajectories have often been shaped less by endogenous theoretical dispute than by exogenous pressures: colonial governance, Cold War security alignment, and post-authoritarian audit cultures. It therefore enables Eurocentrism to be analysed not as a static prejudice, but as a historically rearticulated structure of authority.

The article proceeds in three stages to show that Taiwanese IR developed through successive regimes of externally authorised knowledge rather than as an autonomous field grounded in local experience. It begins with Japanese colonial rule, under which political–legal education was modern in form yet colonial in function, producing administrators rather than political subjects while also generating a broader field of intellectual formation. It then traces the Cold War reorganisation of higher education under KMT state-building and US security patronage, in which National Chengchi University (NCCU) and the Institute of International Relations (IIR) made IR a state-adjacent technology for organising knowledge about China, security, and international order, even as this dominant formation coexisted with Taiwan-born intellectual trajectories shaped by colonial education and transnational mobility. Finally, it examines the post-authoritarian era, when democratisation widened intellectual space without displacing dependence on Western-centred evaluative regimes. Across these stages, Eurocentrism was repeatedly reassembled through changing mediations and standards of legitimacy. The point, then, is not that Taiwan simply copied the West, but that colonial governance, authoritarian statecraft, and democratic self-fashioning all relied on externally anchored criteria to secure authority.

By excavating Taiwanese IR's layered formation, this article reframes 'normalisation' and 'internationalisation' as institutional effects sedimented through colonial mediation,

Cold War imperatives, and post-authoritarian regimes of evaluation. It argues that Taiwan's persistent positioning as an empirical referent, rather than an authorised site of concept-production, is not accidental but an artefact of how disciplinary recognition is organised. Taiwan is therefore not an exception to IR's global knowledge politics but a vantage point from which its routine operations become unusually visible. A Taiwan-centred critique of Eurocentrism, developed genealogically, does not simply add another case to the discipline; it shows how hierarchies of recognition are produced, maintained, and defended – and why, even amid declared pluralism, their underlying terms remain resistant to change. A more plural or pluriversal IR, therefore, requires not only the inclusion of Taiwan as a case but also a critique of the institutional criteria through which theory, authority, and internationality are unevenly allocated.

Colonial knowledge, selective modernity: The formation of legal–political education in Japanese Taiwan (1895–1945)

Under Japanese colonial rule after 1895, Taiwan was incorporated into a comprehensive imperial project that reorganised administration, the military, the economy, and, most relevant here, the education system (Wu, 1990). Its academic structure and modes of knowledge production thus entered a new phase, making Taiwan both a site of imperial experimentation and a peripheral node in the production of modern knowledge. Japanese colonial rule (1895–1945), therefore, constituted the foundational stage in the formation of Taiwan's modern academic system and epistemological order (Wu, 2020). Beyond administrative expansion and political control, the colonial state institutionalised legal–political knowledge through formal education as part of the epistemic legitimation of rule. Taiwan was conceived not merely as a site of resource extraction but as a 'southern frontier base' of empire, and the institutionalisation of legal–political knowledge formed a core component of the colonial governance apparatus (Wang, 2002: 5).

At the heart of this process was the establishment of *hōsei* education (legal–political 法政). This initiative served two purposes: reinforcing colonial governance and transmitting selected concepts from European modern political thought (Chen, 1996a, 1996b; Wang, 2019a, 2020). However, this transfer of knowledge was neither comprehensive nor ideologically neutral. While notions such as sovereignty, constitutionalism, the rule of law, and institutional governance were selectively introduced, fields such as diplomacy, international politics, and international law were systematically excluded (Wang, 2002: 29–31). This asymmetry reflected the imperial hierarchy of knowledge and profoundly shaped the postwar trajectories of political science and international relations as academic disciplines in Taiwan. In this context, the Department of Political Science at Taihoku Imperial University offers a critical vantage point for analysing how colonial *hōsei* education facilitated a form of *partial* modernisation (Wang, 2002: 6, 2020). What was institutionalised, then, was not 'modernity' in any general sense, but a selective and stratified version of it, one that authorised legal-rational governance while withholding the intellectual resources for autonomous political and international thinking.

The intellectual foundations of legal–political education in colonial Taiwan were closely tied to the modernisation reforms of Meiji Japan. Following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan embarked on a state-led modernisation project centred on legal and institutional reforms. The promulgation of the Meiji Constitution in 1889, modelled primarily after the Prussian constitutional tradition, established a centralised bureaucracy grounded in legal rationality. Legal scholars such as Inoue Kowashi and Hozumi Nobushige were

heavily influenced by German jurisprudence, particularly the theories of Rudolf von Gneist and Lorenz von Stein. This legal formalism emphasised the emperor as the source of sovereignty, the supremacy of codified law, and the rationalisation of public administration (Takii, 2007).

In the early stages of colonial rule, the Japanese government remained highly cautious about promoting legal education in Taiwan. As the constitutional scholar Ichimura Mitsue warned in 1910, the establishment of law schools in the colony could cultivate Taiwanese intellectuals who might adopt legalistic arguments against imperial authority, thereby undermining the legitimacy of colonial rule (Wang, 1999: 85–107, 167–168, 2002: 5). As a result, legal imports were initially confined to institutional mechanisms, such as the introduction of courts and codified civil and criminal laws, while local translation and appropriation of legal knowledge were deliberately obstructed.

By the 1920s, Japan's colonial policy shifted from 'special rule' to a model of *naichi enchō shugi* (内地延長, the extension of homeland systems to the colonies), involving the replication of Japanese institutions in Taiwan (Wang, 2019b; Wu, 1990). Against this backdrop, Taihoku Imperial University was established in 1928 (Chen, 1997: 30–31; Matsumoto and Kuai, 1960: 4–6; Wu, 2020), and its Faculty of Letters and Politics (文政學部) housed the only formal venue for higher *hōsei* education in the colony (Wang, 2002: 5–6). This development aligned with the imperial university system's function of serving governance needs while also aiming to absorb elite Taiwanese.

The Department of Politics followed the imperial university model, employing the 'chair system' (*kōza-sei*), whereby each chair, led by a professor, formed a distinct intellectual lineage. Of the 10 chairs in the department, 7 were in legal studies, with the remainder in political science and economics (Wang, 2002: 29–31). The curriculum largely focused on textual interpretation of legal codes and institutional logic, with the heaviest emphasis on civil and administrative law, reflecting a pedagogical orientation geared towards bureaucratic training rather than political critique or theoretical debate (Lin, 2020; Wang, 2002: 31). Textbooks were predominantly authored by leading Japanese scholars. The language of instruction was exclusively Japanese, and faculty were almost entirely recruited from the metropole (Wang, 2002: 61–63).

This instructional system reflected Japan's distinctive understanding of 'modernisation' since the Meiji era, one that prioritised legal modernity grounded in administrative rationality and institutional governance, rather than civic participation, democratic politics, or ideological pluralism (Matsumoto and Kuai, 1960: 3; Wu, 1990: 179). Within this context, the original plan to establish Taihoku Imperial University as a comprehensive university envisaged its humanities and social sciences faculty as the *Bunpō Gakubu* (文法學部, Faculty of Letters and Law), but it was ultimately instituted under the title *Bunsei Gakubu* (文政學部, Faculty of Letters and Politics). This change reflected Governor-General Izawa Takio's conception of a practically oriented *hōka* (law division, 法科), which was not meant to train legal professionals such as attorneys, but rather to cultivate administrative personnel. This design was consistent with the prewar Japanese view of law and politics as a unified field (*hōsei ikka* 法政合一), where many students pursued education in law with the primary aim of entering the civil bureaucracy (Wang, 2002: 6).

The knowledge system institutionalised through *hōsei* education was marked by high levels of selectivity and exclusion. Political science and economics courses were relatively sparse and rarely engaged with critical theory. The field of political science was largely suppressed, and despite a few politically oriented courses by professors like Hori

Toyohiko and Akinaga Hajime at Taihoku Imperial University, no local academic community had developed (Wang, 2002: 31). More strikingly, the department was virtually silent on international law, foreign policy, and global affairs. Although an elective course on international law was briefly offered in the 1930s, it never became part of the core curriculum (Wang, 2002: 30). This institutional exclusion reflected the knowledge logic of imperial rule. It is also noteworthy that prewar Japanese political science lacked a clear disciplinary delineation of international relations. It was not until the postwar period, under the influence of American social sciences, that international relations emerged as an independent academic field in Japan (Nakamura, 2025). In this sense, the curricular design of Taihoku Imperial University's Department of Political Science reflected both the selective repression of colonial education and the broader neglect or delay of international relations as a subfield within the Japanese academic system itself.

The department's establishment and operation under Japanese colonial rule also involved explicit racial mechanisms of exclusion. Between 1928 and 1945, the department admitted a total of 394 students, of whom only 41 were Taiwanese, less than 10% (Wang, 2002: 93). This low admission rate reflected the structural barriers embedded in the system, which effectively limited access to legal–political knowledge for most Taiwanese. These exclusionary mechanisms intensified during the late 1930s as war mobilisation led to a surge in Japanese enrolments and a decline in Taiwanese representation. Japanese students also enjoyed greater access to academic and administrative resources, mentorship, and career advancement opportunities, reinforcing the racial monopoly over knowledge and power (Chen, 1997: 30–31; Tsurumi, 1999: 216; Wang, 2002: 93–94). Most Taiwanese students admitted came from upper or upper-middle-class families.

Although the initial purpose of legal–political education at Taihoku Imperial University was to reinforce colonial governance and depoliticise colonial intellectuals through technocratic instruction, the transmission of colonial knowledge was never unidirectional. From the late 1910s through the 1920s, Taiwanese intellectuals trained in law and politics, whether in Japan or at Taihoku Imperial University, began participating in public affairs, cultural movements, and political advocacy. The formation of the Taiwan Cultural Association in 1921 exemplified this shift. Many of its members, including Chiang Wei-shui, Lin Hsien-tang, Tsai Pei-huo, and so on, were trained in Japanese legal institutions and were familiar with modern political concepts (Wang, 2002: 115–117). This localised reappropriation of colonial concepts demonstrates that terms such as sovereignty, rule of law, and constitutionalism, though monopolised and instrumentalised within the imperial structure, could simultaneously serve as structural materials for political thinking and action by the colonised.

A concrete illustration is Lin Hsien-tang's mobilisation of constitutionalist idioms through the Taiwan Cultural Association and the petition campaigns directed at the Japanese Diet (Ching, 2001). Rather than rejecting imported constitutional vocabulary, Lin and his associates redeployed it as a constrained but consequential repertoire of claim-making, foregrounding representation, legality, and the contradictions of 'proper' constitutional order under colonial rule. In this sense, constitutionalism operated in a double register: a technique of governance within *hōsei* education, and a grammar of critique beyond it (Chen, 2014; Wang and Chou, 2010). The petitions thus show how colonial concepts could be refunctioned into limited forms of political subjectivation, even as the imperial state sought to contain them. In the framework of postcolonial theory, such knowledge circulation represents neither simply top–down

transmission from 'imperial centre to colonial periphery', but rather a contested political–cultural struggle marked by appropriation, reinterpretation, and resistance (Bhabha, 1994; Chakrabarty, 2000).

This ambivalence is important: colonial subjects did not passively absorb modern concepts, yet their capacity to repurpose them remained conditioned by an epistemic structure that defined the legitimate vocabulary of politics in externally anchored terms. This wider field of colonial intellectual formation is also important for the subsequent argument of the article. The colonial order did not only produce a bureaucratic template later redirected by Cold War institutions; it also helped shape Taiwan-born intellectual trajectories that would not be fully reducible to any single postwar institutional lineage.

Following Japan's defeat in 1945 and Taiwan's 'retrocession' to the Republic of China (ROC), Taihoku Imperial University was reorganised as National Taiwan University (NTU). The Faculty of Letters and Politics was reorganised into two separate faculties: the Faculty of Letters and the Faculty of Law. The original disciplines of literature, history, and philosophy were each established as independent departments under the Faculty of Letters. The original discipline of politics was incorporated into the Faculty of Law, which, in accordance with the existing chair system, was further divided into three departments: Law, Political Science, and Economics. While symbolising a shift in sovereignty, this institutional transformation largely preserved the structural and epistemic legacy of Japanese colonial rule (Tseng, 1997). Legal and political education remained technocratic and depoliticised.

NTU's Department of Political Science, founded in 1947, initially struggled to build a disciplinary foundation in the absence of a local academic community and following the repatriation of Japanese faculty (Wang, 2002: 8–12). By the 1960s and 1970s, political science at NTU expanded with graduate and doctoral programmes. However, its academic orientation remained shaped by Cold War geopolitics and authoritarian rule. The ROC state refunctionalised colonial-era legal formalism and depoliticised pedagogy to serve regime legitimation and anti-communist nation-building. US aid promoted modernisation theory and behaviouralism (Wang, 2019c), but rather than replacing the colonial legacy, it layered Cold War ideology onto an inherited technocratic framework (Wang, 2002: 117). This created a hybrid knowledge regime, simultaneously professionalised and politically constrained, that institutionalised political science and international relations without fully localising them. Crucially, the institutional form of *hōsei* education, that is, legal formalism, bureaucratic orientation, and depoliticised pedagogy, provided a ready-made template that the postwar state could preserve, rename, and redirect. This refunctionalised inheritance supplied organisational routines and trained elites for the subsequent Cold War project of epistemic governance, smoothing the passage from imperial technocracy to authoritarian statecraft.

In short, Japan's colonial rule over Taiwan from 1895 to 1945 not only restructured political and social institutions but also profoundly shaped the foundations of modern academic and epistemological systems on the island. The institutionalisation of legal–political education, particularly through the establishment and operation of the Department of Politics at Taihoku Imperial University, functioned as a key mechanism for governance, knowledge reproduction, and the cultivation of intermediary elites. This colonial knowledge regime was marked by a dual logic of 'selective modernity' and 'technocratic modernisation'. On one hand, it introduced the formal trappings of legal-rational governance; on the other, it deliberately depoliticised education, excluded critical and international perspectives, and maintained rigid controls over access to knowledge. These

features not only reflected the imperial hierarchy between centre and periphery but also structured the asymmetrical development of political science and international relations in postwar Taiwan.

Epistemic governance and state-building: The institutionalisation of IR in Cold War Taiwan

The development of IR and political science in Cold War Taiwan emerged from the intersection of Cold War geopolitics, authoritarian state-building, and colonial epistemic legacies from Japanese rule. Republican-era scholars who arrived with the Nationalist government brought with them traditions of statecraft and public international law cultivated at institutions such as Peking University and Tsinghua University (Ma, 1975).[1] Yet once relocated to Taiwan, these traditions were reorganised within a new political context. The institutionalisation of IR and political science became a state-driven project of 'knowledge governance' (Li, 2007): the production and circulation of knowledge were systematically aligned with the strategic needs of the KMT regime (Chu et al., 2011). Academic institutions were mobilised to construct a knowledge order that would consolidate domestic rule and enhance international legitimacy.

A paradigmatic case is NCCU and the IIR. Both demonstrate how higher education was used to institutionalise and control knowledge production, transforming it into a tool of ideological integration, elite reproduction, and foreign-policy legitimation. These efforts formed part of the KMT's broader attempt to reconstruct its governing apparatus and ideological authority after its 1949 retreat to Taiwan and the ensuing geopolitical isolation.

NCCU's roots lie in the Central Party Affairs School (中央黨務學校), founded in Nanjing in 1927 and closely tied to Sun Yat-sen's three-stage theory of nation-building: military rule, tutelage, and constitutional government. For the KMT leadership, political cadre training could not be left to ordinary universities; it required a dedicated institution. After the Northern Expedition and the formal start of the tutelage period, the school was expanded and renamed the Central School of Political Affairs (中央政務學校) in 1928, envisioned as a training base for modern state-building (National Chengchi University History Compilation Committee, 1989). When Japan surrendered in 1945, the KMT declared that China had entered the constitutional phase and that all talent should serve the state. The Central School was therefore reorganised under the Ministry of Education as National Chengchi University (National Chengchi University History Compilation Committee, 1989).

From the outset, NCCU bore the formal characteristics of a university but remained deeply entangled with the KMT regime. Its founding mission was explicitly linked to national revolution, state construction, and modernisation, and its academic units were designed around the party's political programmes. Under the Central Party Affairs School, the curriculum focused on training party functionaries. Under the Central School of Political Affairs, departments in political science, diplomacy, finance, local self-governance, and socioeconomics aimed to produce specialists for administration, public finance, and state enterprises (National Chengchi University History Compilation Committee, 1989; Zhang, 2017). After the loss of the mainland in 1949, the university ceased operating there.

In 1954, NCCU was re-established in Taiwan on the recommendation of Education Minister Chang Chi-yun, who framed its reopening as essential to training political and

administrative elites for state-building and the eventual recovery of the mainland (National Chengchi University History Compilation Committee, 1989: 217). The university initially reopened with four graduate institutes: political science, education, journalism, and diplomacy, with former Tsinghua Professor Pu Hsueh-feng appointed to lead political science (Pu, 1983). Drawing heavily on prewar Tsinghua's curricular and institutional model, NCCU provided a key foundation for postwar political science in Taiwan (Huang, 2016a). Its reopening, therefore, marked not simply the restoration of a university, but a broader Cold War reconfiguration of knowledge and power (Huang, 2016a; Zhang, 2016).

Yet the Japanese colonial legacy of this period persisted not only institutionally but also through Taiwan-born intellectual trajectories not fully subsumed by the postwar KMT party–state. Liao Wen-kuei, educated in Japan and Nanjing and later trained at the University of Chicago, exemplifies such a trajectory across imperial, Republican, and transnational intellectual fields (Wu, 1999; Wu and Wu, 2021). Rather than being absorbed into the dominant KMT/NCCU nexus, he represented an alternative formation shaped by colonial education and cross-regional mobility. Even so, such alternatives remained within Eurocentric modernity, insofar as their languages of legitimacy and political order continued to be articulated through asymmetrical and externally authorised categories.

Within this dominant institutional trajectory, the creation of the Department of Diplomacy at NCCU further reflected the regime's need for internationally oriented strategic expertise, a priority that soon extended beyond the university and contributed to the rise of the Institute of International Relations as a major foreign-policy think tank and hub of Cold War knowledge production tied to US–Taiwan security cooperation. Viewed within this institutional lineage, the IIR's evolution exemplifies how the authoritarian state instrumentalised academic and para-academic institutions for epistemic governance. Its precursor, the Policy Research Office (政策研究室), founded in 1953, was embedded in the Presidential Office (of the ROC) and personally supervised by Chiang Ching-kuo (Chen, 2016a, 2016b; Liu, 2013a, 2013b, 2014b). As a highly centralised intelligence and advisory organ, it monitored developments in the People's Republic of China (PRC), the global communist movement, and shifting international alignments. Liu (2013a, 2013b) and Chen (2016a, 2016b) show that the Office had a dual mandate: to generate actionable intelligence for national security strategy and to construct a curated knowledge regime for external propaganda and internal legitimation.

Unlike conventional intelligence agencies, the Office deliberately adopted academic forms. To obscure its surveillance function and make its output palatable to foreign audiences, it operated publicly as the 'International Relations Research Society' (國際關係研究會). Its internal structure resembled that of a think tank, with divisions for the Soviet Union, the PRC, the United States, the UN, Japan, South Korea, and Europe (Chen, 2016a, 2016b; Liu, 2013b, 2014b). In 1961, amid mounting diplomatic marginalisation as the PRC expanded its presence in UN bodies, the Office was formally reconstituted as the Institute of International Relations and placed under the Ministry of Education, an administrative move that further blurred the boundary between scholarly inquiry and state security (Liu, 2014a, 2014b; National Chengchi University History Compilation Committee, 1989). Although formally affiliated with NCCU, the IIR's relationship to the university in its early years was largely nominal. Organisationally and financially, it remained embedded in the party–state security apparatus, with funding drawn primarily from state budgets, especially the National Security Bureau (Chen, 2016a, 2016b; Liu, 2013b, 2014b).

This transformation did not end the IIR's intelligence role, but recast it in a more legitimate academic form. Its journals, notably *Issues & Studies* and *Communist Banditry Monthly*, evolved from confidential bulletins into semi-public bilingual outlets aimed at Western scholars and policymakers. The English launch of *Issues & Studies* in 1964 formed part of Chiang Kai-shek's effort to project Taiwan's voice in China studies. Edited largely by researchers with military backgrounds, these journals sat at the intersection of intelligence, propaganda, and scholarship. Yet the IIR's early intellectual orientation was not simply an extension of American-style social science. Many émigré scholars who came to Taiwan with the KMT retained their own agendas and at times explicitly resisted American methodology, understanding international politics largely through the Chinese Civil War and the study of Chinese communism (Chen, 2016a, 2016b; Liu, 2013a, 2013b). At the same time, Taiwan-born intellectuals also engaged China outside the KMT's academic-security apparatus. Parris Chang is illustrative here: shaped by a Taiwanese background and American academic training, his work on Chinese politics and, later, cross-Strait and international issues followed a different trajectory (Chang, 1975, 1990).

The IIR's role in epistemic governance intensified in the mid-1960s as the KMT recalibrated its diplomacy in response to growing international recognition of the PRC (Liu, 2013a, 2013b). Against the backdrop of Sino–Soviet tensions, the failures of the Great Leap Forward and domestic crises in China, Chiang Kai-shek perceived a strategic opening for Taiwan to reassert its claim to represent 'China'. This strategy depended not only on military preparedness but also on informational advantage. Through covert networks, the IIR maintained channels of access to mainland intelligence and sought to position itself as the world's premier centre for authoritative analysis on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP; Liu, 2013a, 2013b).

A key dimension of this strategy was the cultivation of transnational scholarly networks. In 1970, under Wu Juncai, the IIR launched the China Mainland Symposium, which attracted leading American China specialists such as Allen Whiting, Michael Oksenberg, Robert Scalapino, and C. Martin Wilbur (Chen, 2014, 2016a, 2016b; Kou, 2014). These conferences were carefully orchestrated; foreign participants were given selective access to archival materials, confidential reports, and interviews with defected mainland officials. Such controlled disclosure created epistemic asymmetry, positioning the IIR, and by extension the ROC, as an indispensable interlocutor for Western scholars seeking to understand Chinese politics (Chen, 2016a, 2016b).

This strategy dovetailed with the broader architecture of US Cold War knowledge diplomacy (Liu, 2013a, 2013b). Organisations such as the Ford Foundation, the Fulbright Program, the Asia Foundation, and the US Information Agency sponsored exchanges and training programmes that introduced behavioural social science and realism-based IR theory into Taiwan's academic landscape (Arnove, 1980; Parmar, 2014). Globally, these programmes aimed to cultivate rational, liberal, pro-Western elites who could stabilise the developing world. In Taiwan, they resulted in institutional investments in NCCU and the IIR, nurturing a localised American-style IR that prioritised empirical research, strategic rationality, and the state as the primary unit of analysis.

The KMT skilfully exploited this epistemic convergence. By adopting US IR methodologies and discourse while representing the PRC as an ideologically deviant actor, Taiwanese scholars could simultaneously integrate into global academia and reinforce the regime's legitimacy. IIR outputs, including conferences, academic exchanges, and journal publications, served as vehicles of soft power and symbolic sovereignty. Through such 'knowledge diplomacy', Taiwan contested Beijing's claim to represent 'China' not

only through official diplomacy but also by competing to dominate the epistemic field of China studies.

Institutionally, this strategy was consolidated with the establishment of the Graduate Institute of East Asian Studies at NCCU in 1968. Conceived as a pipeline for cadres trained in strategic studies, communist ideology, and regional affairs, the Institute embedded a research agenda that was academically credible yet closely aligned with KMT priorities. Its curriculum focused on CCP studies, comparative communism, and anti-communist strategy and was often taught by former intelligence officers turned academics (Chu, 2015; Wu and Wang, 2019). Together, NCCU and the IIR created a self-reproducing epistemic ecosystem in which the boundaries between academic knowledge and state ideology were structurally erased.

The IIR's strategic centrality, however, began to erode in the 1970s. The normalisation of US–PRC relations after Nixon's 1972 visit, combined with Beijing's gradual opening to foreign researchers, undermined Taiwan's monopoly over China-related intelligence (Chen, 2016a, 2016b). As Western scholars gained direct access to the PRC, the IIR's privileged position weakened. Democratisation in the late 1980s further generated pressure to depoliticise academic institutions and dismantle mechanisms of authoritarian epistemic control. In 1996, the IIR was fully absorbed into NCCU's academic structure, transitioning from a semi-autonomous state apparatus to a conventional academic institute with reduced political significance (Chen, 2016a, 2016b).

Taken together, the IIR shows that the Cold War was not only a geopolitical confrontation but also an epistemic project enacted through knowledge diplomacy (Moriguchi et al., 2022). As a hybrid institution linking intelligence, propaganda, and scholarship, it turned knowledge production into an instrument of authoritarian rule, international legitimation, and ideological consolidation. Backed by American aid and Cold War knowledge networks, it aligned with dominant US paradigms, helped position the ROC within global China studies, and normalised state-centred understandings of China, cross-Strait relations, and regional security through its journals, conferences, and institutional ties with NCCU. Yet this hegemonic, pro-American knowledge infrastructure neither exhausted the postwar Taiwanese intellectual field nor disappeared with democratisation; its assumptions and networks were rearticulated rather than dismantled. In this sense, Eurocentrism persisted not simply as Western influence, but as a historically rearticulated hierarchy of modernity through which legitimate knowledge, political order, and international relevance continued to be externally authorised.

The paradox of localisation: Democratisation, westernisation, and the knowledge hierarchies of IR in post-authoritarian Taiwan

Since the lifting of martial law in 1987, Taiwan has undergone far-reaching transformations in its political institutions, identity formation, and higher education. Democratisation dismantled the KMT's one-party regime, expanded civil liberties and academic freedom, and enabled more open engagement with Taiwan's own history and culture. Closely tied to this process, localisation re-centred Taiwan as the primary political and cultural subject, while de-Sinicisation more explicitly challenged the China-centred narratives through which the KMT had legitimised its rule (Chu and Lin, 2001; Ho, 2022; Lynch, 2002; Makeham and Xiao, 2005; Rigger, 1999). Although analytically distinct, these processes were historically intertwined and together reshaped national consciousness and the

conditions of knowledge production, especially in the social sciences and humanities (Shiau, 2000; Wu, 2002).

These changes in the political environment also reshaped the field of political science. As political liberalisation widened discursive space and reconfigured state–society relations, scholarship moved beyond anti-communism and regime survival to focus increasingly on democratic consolidation, constitutional reform, identity politics, electoral behaviour, social movements, and cross-Strait relations (Chen, 2022; Chu and Lin, 2001; Hsiao and Fell, 2018; Rigger, 2003, 2018). Closely tied to localisation, this shift foregrounded Taiwan's distinct historical trajectory and political subjectivity. The change is clearly visible in major edited volumes by Wu Yu-shan and colleagues and in the Institute of Political Science at Academia Sinica's field reviews, where the emphasis moves from authoritarian control and anti-communist security to democracy, governance, public policy, identity, and cross-Strait relations under democratic rule (Institute of Political Science at Academia Sinica, 2023; Wu et al., 2013; Wu and Ho, 2000).

IR underwent a parallel but more externally oriented reconfiguration. In the post-authoritarian era, research moved beyond rigid Cold War framings of US–China rivalry to address Taiwan's diplomatic constraints and adaptive strategies more directly (Kastner, 2018). As formal recognition became harder to sustain, scholars turned to issues such as flexible diplomacy, substantive participation, non-governmental organisation (NGO) diplomacy, soft power, and identity politics, widening the field from US–Taiwan relations to cross-Strait dynamics, East Asian regional politics, and Taiwan's contested place in the Asia-Pacific (Chen, 2002; Hsiao and Hsiao, 2011; Huang, 2016b; Liu, 2012; Wu et al., 2013; Wu and Ho, 2000). Yet these new agendas largely remained framed by mainstream post-Cold War Western liberal concerns, that is, visibility, participation, legitimacy, democracy, and international recognition, rather than displacing them. Diversification, in other words, did not dissolve Eurocentrism as an institutional hierarchy; it reappeared through new criteria of scholarly legitimacy, international visibility, and externally validated relevance.

These shifts in research agendas were underpinned by far-reaching structural changes in higher education. Democratisation and localisation coincided with the rapid expansion and restructuring of Taiwan's university system (Law, 2003). Educational reforms in the mid-1990s, including the 1994 Basic Education Law and the 1996 amendment to the University Act, triggered a dramatic increase in the number of universities, from fewer than 30 in the early 1990s to over 150 by the early 2000s (Chou, 2015; Chou and Wang, 2012). Within this enlarged system, many institutions created new departments and graduate programmes in political science, IR, diplomacy, and area studies. The elevation of the NCCU Department of Diplomacy into the College of International Affairs in 2001 symbolised the consolidation of IR as an autonomous field. Similar developments at Tamkang University and other institutions reflected a wider pattern of sustained investment in IR-related teaching and research.

A new generation of scholars played a central role in redefining the intellectual contours of political science and IR in Taiwan. From the late 1980s through the early 2000s, many academics obtained doctoral training abroad, especially in the United States (Wu et al., 2013; Wu and Ho, 2000). They returned with methodological skills, disciplinary specialisation, and transnational academic networks that contributed to the modernisation and internationalisation of the field (Hsiao and Ho, 2010). In subsequent years, a growing number of faculty members received doctoral degrees from Europe and Australia, further diversifying theoretical orientations and research interests (Kastner, 2018). The

post-authoritarian period thus became a moment not only of thematic diversification but also of institutional consolidation and intellectual renewal, shaped by democratisation, localisation, and the circulation of globally trained scholars (Lin and Huang, 2021).

These structural and generational shifts underpinned a marked increase in IR-related academic output. Over the past two decades, Taiwanese scholars have regularly published IR research in journals indexed by the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and the Taiwan Social Sciences Citation Index (TSSCI), signalling rising research productivity and deeper engagement with global academic practices (Ho and Kao, 2002; Lohaus and Wemheuer-Vogelaar, 2021). A relatively stable publishing infrastructure has supported this growth: several core Taiwanese journals, such as *Issues and Studies* (in both English and Chinese versions), have long provided platforms for IR scholarship, publishing consistently and accepting submissions in both Chinese and English. They have nurtured a bilingual academic community and facilitated the circulation of Taiwanese scholarship within Taiwan, across the Chinese-speaking world, and increasingly in international forums.

A key turning point in this trajectory came in 2002, when several Taiwanese journals and research outputs were formally included in the SSCI. This milestone reflected sustained policy efforts by the National Science Council (NSC), later reorganised as the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), which had prioritised internationalisation since the 1990s (Huang, 2009). To enhance Taiwan's visibility and competitiveness in the global social sciences, the NSC introduced measures such as grant schemes tied to SSCI publication (Chou and Chan, 2016), monetary incentives for faculty publications, and support for English-language writing and editing. These initiatives encouraged international engagement but also reshaped domestic academic evaluation, increasingly privileging English-language publications and SSCI-indexed research as core markers of academic merit. Although these dynamics can no longer be understood simply as the direct extension of a single state policy, the evaluative logic built around international indexing has remained deeply embedded in university institutions. What persists, therefore, is less a formal rule than a wider regime in which SSCI-style metrics function as convenient proxies for academic worth in hiring, promotion, and research evaluation (Chou, 2014; Chou et al., 2013).

Despite institutional growth and topical diversification, the theoretical core of Taiwan's IR scholarship remains anchored in mainstream paradigms. The proliferation of graduate programmes and the return of foreign-trained scholars broadened the scope of inquiry, yet neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism, and constructivism have retained epistemological primacy in both teaching and research, especially as institutions align with US-centred IR traditions (Chen, 2011; Ho and Kao, 2002; Lin, 2010). These paradigms structure curricula, inform textbook selection, and shape standards of scholarly evaluation. Leading universities such as NTU and NCCU model their IR programmes on American counterparts and rely heavily on widely used Western textbooks, such as *International Politics*, *World Politics*, and *Global Politics*, as foundational teaching materials (Ho and Kao, 2002; Liu, 2016). The institutionalisation of IR in Taiwan has therefore been characterised by a persistent dependence on US-style academic norms and intellectual frameworks.

Methodologically, Taiwan's IR scholarship largely follows the behaviouralist and positivist traditions dominant in American political science (Ho and Kao, 2002). Hypothesis-testing models, variable operationalisation, and quantitative statistical analysis prevail, backed by strong rhetorical commitments to neutrality, replicability, and generalisability

(Wu, 2018). While these approaches claim scientific rigour, they often abstract from historical context, power asymmetries, and locally situated experiences. This tendency towards depoliticised and technocratic knowledge production reflects what Tickner and Blaney (2012) call the 'myth of scientific neutrality', which in practice reinforces the hegemony of particular paradigms and marginalises alternative ways of knowing (Acharya and Buzan, 2019; Jackson, 2011; Smith, 2000; Wæver, 1998). The post-authoritarian period, therefore, did not transcend Eurocentrism as an institutional hierarchy; it reconstituted it through methodological norms, continuing to privilege externally sanctioned models of modernity and a moral order rooted in Western modernity.

Since the early 2000s, critical approaches have made gradual but limited inroads into Taiwan's IR community (e.g. Mo, 2001). Through interdisciplinary collaborations and the work of scholars trained in Europe and elsewhere, postcolonial theory, feminist IR, critical security studies, and global justice have introduced critiques of Westphalian sovereignty, highlighted informal and subaltern agency, and initiated decolonial epistemologies. These perspectives, however, remain peripheral, largely confined to graduate seminars, electives, and interdisciplinary programmes, with modest visibility in mainstream journals, conferences, and core curricula. Some scholars, notably Shih Chih-yu (2022), develop alternative epistemologies grounded in non-Western narratives and practices, while others draw on postcolonial critique, East Asian intellectual traditions, and decolonial methodologies. Global initiatives such as 'Asia as Method' (Chen, 2010) and 'Relational Theory' (Huang and Shih, 2014; Shih, 2019) have attracted growing interest but face structural and institutional barriers that limit their broader impact on Taiwanese IR.

The result is a hybrid, paradoxical configuration. Democratisation, localisation, and higher-education expansion have enabled thematic diversification, greater political autonomy, and deeper engagement with global academic networks. Yet the field remains situated within a global knowledge hierarchy dominated by Anglo-American centres, and its theoretical core still leans heavily on mainstream Western paradigms. Although 'localisation' is widely invoked, most work is framed by neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism, and constructivism, and the sharp rise in publication output has not been matched by comparable advances in theory-building or methodological innovation (Wu, 2018). Local case studies typically serve as empirical tests or illustrations of pre-existing Western theories rather than as bases for contextually grounded theorising, so localisation often operates more as a rhetorical gesture than a substantive epistemic shift, amounting to a localised Westernisation in which local contexts confirm rather than unsettle external theories, thereby constraining epistemic pluralism and the emergence of indigenous perspectives (Acharya and Buzan, 2019; Hoffmann, 1977; Smith, 2000; Wæver, 1998).

This pattern mirrors the core–periphery structure of global knowledge production (Demeter, 2020): Taiwanese IR, like much non-Western scholarship, occupies a peripheral position, with theoretical innovation concentrated in Anglo-American institutions and East Asian or Global South scholars cast mainly as 'area experts' or 'case providers', expected to apply or test imported paradigms rather than develop theories from local histories and experiences (Aydinli and Erpul, 2022; Sullivan, 2011). Epistemic dependency is reinforced by policies that, after SSCI inclusion, made SSCI articles the key metric for hiring, promotion, performance review, and MOST funding. This created a bifurcated environment that, on one hand, facilitated participation in networks such as ISA and APSA and raised Taiwan's global profile, but on the other, strongly discouraged locally grounded, Chinese-language, historical, or critical work. As English-language

output became equated with academic excellence, Chinese-language journals were marginalised and now struggle to attract submissions, despite their long-standing role in sustaining a bilingual scholarly community and indigenous research agendas.

At the same time, lingering Cold War legacies further entrench this pattern. Persistent pro-American orientations, anti-China sentiment, and a hybrid Taiwanese identity that selectively incorporates Japanese colonial legacies and Western academic values complicate efforts at epistemic decolonisation (He, 2014; Ling et al., 2010). Becoming 'Western' in academic terms is not only a strategy for career advancement but also a symbolic distancing from Chinese identity and from non-Western knowledge traditions more broadly (Shih, 2022). Consequently, Western theories retain conceptual dominance, local journals struggle, and critical or alternative frameworks remain systematically marginalised, even as democratisation and localisation outwardly suggest an increasingly pluralistic intellectual landscape.

Conclusion

This article argues that the development of IR in Taiwan is better understood as a history of epistemic governance than as a linear process of disciplinary maturation. Across Japanese colonialism, Cold War authoritarianism, and democratisation, disciplinary 'normality' has been produced through institutional structures that privilege Anglo-American paradigms and normalise Eurocentric standards. In Gramscian terms, this reflects the hegemonic naturalisation of professional criteria and 'international' legitimacy (Gramsci, 1971); in Foucauldian terms, it operates through routines of power/knowledge that define valid expertise and authorised speech (Foucault, 1977). Taiwan's status as a non-Western 'model student' in global IR, therefore, reflects not only achievement, but also the hierarchical conditions under which recognition is granted. What changes across these periods are the mediating authorities and institutional forms through which recognition is organised; what persists is the recurrent subordination of legitimate knowledge to externally authorised standards of method, theory, and modernity.

At the same time, this genealogy shows that Taiwanese IR was never a passive recipient of Eurocentric knowledge. Even under structurally unequal conditions, actors in Taiwan exercised agency through selective appropriation, strategic translation, and contextual adaptation. During the Japanese colonial period, modern political and legal knowledge mediated through Japan could be mobilised to widen political participation and claims to representation. During the Cold War, US-centred paradigms were not simply imposed, but selectively institutionalised to sustain regime legitimacy, diplomatic survival, and international positioning. This applied not only to dominant institutions, but also to Taiwan-born intellectual trajectories that were never fully subsumed within the state-centred epistemic order of the Cold War. After democratisation, dominant frameworks remained tied to local struggles over identity, sovereignty, and international recognition, but these struggles still operated largely within the hegemonic ideological horizons of the post-Cold War West. Taiwan, therefore, did not simply reproduce external paradigms; rather, its engagement with them unfolded through an ongoing dialectic of domination and resistance, echoing Foucault's argument that modern power, even when articulated through the language of life and emancipation, can produce new modalities of domination (Foucault, 1980).

This distinction matters because the persistence of Eurocentric disciplinary standards does not indicate an absence of critique or creativity in Taiwanese IR. Rather, it reveals

how institutional arrangements condition what counts as visible, legible, and legitimate knowledge. Alternative and dissenting lines of inquiry have long existed, but they have often remained marginal within evaluative systems that privilege established journals, citation regimes, and dominant theoretical grammars. The problem, then, is less one of individual disposition than of the institutional organisation of epistemic authority.

For that reason, any meaningful decolonising move in Taiwanese IR cannot be reduced to adding local cases to existing canons or increasing representation within unchanged circuits of validation (Capan, 2017; Chen, 2011). What is required, at least in part, is a reorientation in how IR reads, teaches, and evaluates knowledge. One practical and intellectually productive approach is Edward Said's method of contrapuntal reading (Bilgin, 2016; Said, 1993): reading dominant texts and canonical theories with sustained attention both to what they foreground and to what they silence, and to the co-presence of imperial histories within universalist claims. Applied to Taiwanese IR, contrapuntal reading treats canonical theories not as neutral toolkits awaiting localisation, but as historically situated artefacts that must be read alongside Taiwan's layered colonial past, Cold War entanglements, and the everyday politics of contested recognition.

Such an approach invites a different set of questions: what assumptions about sovereignty, violence, dependency, and hierarchy are built into 'normal' IR concepts, and what alternative problematics become visible when Taiwan is read not as an illustrative case but as a site of theory-generating historical experience? This does not require disengagement from mainstream IR. Rather, it calls for a transformed engagement, one that creates space for multilingual scholarship, broadens evaluative criteria beyond SSCI-centred metrics, and fosters transregional intellectual conversations in which Taiwan appears not merely as an object to be explained, but as a location from which IR's epistemic boundaries can be critically rethought. To do so, however, requires recognising that the central problem is not simply Western influence in the abstract, but the institutional hierarchy through which some forms of knowledge continue to count as international, theoretical, and authoritative while others remain marked as local, empirical, or supplementary.

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Informed consent statement

Informed consent was not applicable to this study.

Note

1. During the Republican era (1912–1949), political science in China emerged as a modern discipline tied to nation-building, as universities such as Peking and Tsinghua founded departments that gradually shifted from Japanese and continental European models to US-inspired approaches, supported by overseas returnees, new curricula, associations, and journals. Despite ideological divergences, scholars shared the goal of providing intellectual tools for China's modernisation, making the field a site where Western theories were transplanted and Chinese political traditions reinterpreted (Chu et al., 2011; Feng, 2019; Jin and Li, 2019; Sun, 2005).

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