merit academic investigation, and which methods should be accepted as scientific. In fact, the structures responsible for academic validation can also contribute to reproducing existing epistemic hierarchies.

Emphasizing the need to reconsider the dominant historical narrative, Dehghani Firoozabadi referred to the concept of "provincializing Europe" and stated: "According to this concept, Europe must relinquish the exceptional and universal position it has constructed for itself and be studied as one of the world's regions and historical experiences. This perspective does not mean denying Europe's achievements; rather, it emphasizes the need to examine the continent's developments in connection with its historical interactions with, and influences from, other regions of the world."

He nevertheless warned that criticism of Eurocentrism should not lead to the emergence of a simplistic dichotomy between the West and the non-West since the criticism of Eurocentrism may still employ the same intellectual tools and frameworks that are themselves products of European intellectual traditions. Therefore, the objective should not be to replace one hegemony with another, but to create the conditions for reconsidering the standards and frameworks governing knowledge production.

Epistemic decolonization requires reassessment of definitions, methods

Elaborating on the concept of epistemic decolonization, Dehghani Firoozabadi stressed that decolonization does not merely mean adding non-Western theories and perspectives to existing frameworks; rather, the frameworks, assumptions, and criteria that determine what constitutes valid knowledge and what qualifies as a desirable theory must themselves be questioned.

"If we merely add several non-Western theories to the existing body of theories while continuing to use the same dominant criteria and frameworks as the basis for validation, no fundamental change has taken place. Epistemic decolonization requires a reassessment of the definitions of knowledge and theory, the methods of acquiring knowledge, and the ways in which international relations are studied." The professor of international relations referred to the potential of non-Western thinkers' ideas to generate new concepts in the discipline, citing Farabi, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Khaldun, and Rumi as examples of intellectual sources worthy of examination. He emphasized that the ontological and epistemological potential of these ideas must be examined for the purpose of conceptualization in international relations. For example, Rumi's philosophical foundations and ideas can be utilized to formulate new questions and concepts in this field.

Dehghani Firoozabadi, too, emphasized that an indigenous theory should not be equated with a theory produced merely within a particular country or geographical region. A researcher in the West may present a theory grounded in the philosophy, history, and experience of Iranian society, while a researcher in Iran may, conversely, produce a thoroughly Western-centric theory. Therefore, what matters is the epistemological content and theoretical foundations of a theory, not merely the geographical location of its production.

He subsequently distinguished between three interpretations of non-Western theorizing: first, universalizing non-Western approaches and theories within existing frameworks; second, studying the issues and problems of the Global South through prevailing theories and metatheories; and third, replacing existing approaches and theories with non-Western theoretical frameworks and foundations.

In his view, the first two approaches can be useful starting points, but they do not, in themselves, constitute the production of indigenous theory since they may ultimately lead to the endorsement and reinforcement of dominant theories.

Global South must become active theorists: *Researcher*



ANNA PARINI/FOREIGN POLICY

By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

The 5th National and 4th International Conference on Regional Studies, themed "Iran and the Global South: Rethinking the Emerging Global Order," will be held on February 3, 2027, at the Faculty of Law and Political Science of the University of Tehran, Iran. The conference will take place amid developments in the international system and the emergence of new powers, which have made the need to reassess prevailing theories of international relations and pay greater attention to the role of Global South countries more pronounced than ever. *(The Global South, also referred to as "the South", is a term used in transnational and postcolonial studies to refer to what is sometimes called the Third World.)*

Against this backdrop, questions have arisen concerning the possibility of developing theories independent of Western-centric approaches, the contribution of different civilizations and regions to the production of knowledge in international relations, and Iran's position in this process. In an exclusive interview with Iran Daily, Parham Pourramezan, the executive secretary of the conference and a researcher in political affairs, outlined the event's main themes and discussed the importance of strengthening theoretical development in the Global South and the need to formulate theories suited to the particular characteristics of societies such as Iran.



Parham Pourramezan

IRAN DAILY: What are the main themes of the 5th National and 4th International Conference on Regional Studies, and what issues will be addressed in this edition?

POURRAMEZAN: The principal themes of this edition of the conference include conceptual and theoretical issues concerning the Global South; developments in the international system and the Global South; the international economic order and the Global South; historical, civilizational, and cultural issues concerning the Global South; media, communications, and public opinion in relation to the Global South; and a special panel on Iran and the Global South. Complete information about the conference and its themes is available at icrs.ut.ac.ir. The conference is being organized by the Regional Studies Department of the Faculty of Law and Political Science at the University of Tehran, in cooperation with the Iranian Regional Studies Association. To date, numerous researchers and academics from various countries have submitted their paper abstracts to the conference secretariat. Following the peer-review process and the selection of papers presenting novel ideas and fresh perspectives, these works will be presented on the day of the conference.

Which countries and regions have submitted papers or abstracts for participation in the conference so far?

At this stage, we have received abstracts from Southeast Asian countries, Latin America, the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the member states of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). We hope that, as this process continues, we will witness broader participation by researchers and the presentation of papers from different regions of the world.

Why did you select the Global South and the reconsideration of the world order as the theme for this edition? What is the significance of this subject in the current international relations landscape?

In recent years, a new interpretation of the nature of power dynamics in international relations has been taking shape, within which the Global South has attracted attention as an emerging concept and a constellation of potential future actors on the world stage. For this reason, we also sought to place this subject at the center of the conference's agenda. Our objective is not merely to strengthen and promote the idea of the Global South, but also to bring it into the realm of criticism and critical theories, thereby creating the conditions for the emergence of new perspectives. Indeed, this concept must transcend the level of general discourse and undergo theoretical and academic examination and assessment.

It appears that greater attention is being devoted to this subject in different parts of the world, including among BRICS member states. Admittedly, certain individuals are currently engaged in theoretical work in this field on an isolated basis, but it remains unclear to what extent these efforts can lead to the emergence of a coherent and influential idea. We must wait and follow future developments to assess the outcome of this process.



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (bottom 2nd-L) poses hand in hand with BRICS Members, Partners and Outreach invitees during a group picture at the 17th BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on July 7, 2025.
ANI

> Our objective is not merely to strengthen and promote the idea of the Global South, but also to bring it into the realm of criticism and critical theories, thereby creating the conditions for the emergence of new perspectives. Indeed, this concept must transcend the level of general discourse and undergo theoretical and academic examination and assessment.

Are prevailing theories of international relations predominantly products of Western and European thought? To what extent have other civilizations and regions of the world contributed to the development of theories in this field?

Theories associated with the Global South have largely emerged from approaches that differ from Western strategic theories, and, in some cases, they also exhibit slogan-driven tendencies. These two movements are inherently in conceptual conflict with one another, and their differences can be examined from the perspectives of ontology, epistemology, research methodology, and other approaches within international relations. Ultimately, studying the dialectic between these two movements can provide a basis for more precise assessment and conclusions.

What I observe as a researcher in international affairs is the decline of Western international relations; however, we have yet to witness the rise and consolidation of Eastern international relations. This movement has largely remained passive, although signs of dynamism and growth are now becoming apparent. This passivity has multiple causes, but it appears that Eastern international relations is emerging, and we can expect it to bring about positive developments in the future.

How decisive is the role of power in the formation and expansion of theories of international relations? Has the limited political and economic power of Global South countries caused their theories to receive less attention?

Power is one of the most important factors in the formation and structure of the discipline of international relations. One of the principal reasons Global South societies have failed to attain their rightful position in this field is that they have never been effectively represented within the mainstream structures of power. These societies have largely occupied the position of actors upon whom power is exercised; in other words, they have been influenced by power relations rather than being able to play an active role in shaping and exercising power themselves. This has caused them to encounter numerous difficulties in various fields and prevented them from adequately articulating and establishing their perspectives and theories at the international level.

What consequences could the promotion of Western-centric theories in Global South societies, including Iran, entail? How can these societies benefit from Western academic achievements while developing theories suited to their indigenous conditions and particular characteristics?

It cannot be said that all aspects of adopting prevailing theories of international relations, which are predominantly Western, are necessarily problematic. However, strengthening theoretical approaches associated with the Global South could offer an important advantage: enhancing societies' capacity for indigenous theorizing.

We must move toward a position in which we can develop theories suited to the conditions and particular characteristics of our own society; theories specifically tailored to Iranian society and capable of explaining its realities, characteristics, and needs. This is of considerable importance and can help strengthen society and its academic standing in the field of international relations.