



# Does the Development Discourse Learn from History?

ALBERT SANGHOON PARK\*

*University of Cambridge, UK*

**Summary.** — What is the nature and extent of historical awareness in the development discourse? Does the development discourse learn from history, including its own? Set in the contexts of aging development institutions and a changing geopolitical climate, this paper provides one account through a historiographical survey of 136 journal articles across 10 leading development journals. It uncovers a substantial body of works, which offer descriptive histories, derivative lessons, and historiographical critiques. Altogether, they evidence two modes in which the development discourse attempts to learn from history. The first lies in the proactive use of external histories as empirical evidence for a variety of development issues. This is the predominant mode exhibited in the survey. A second mode lies in the use of internal histories of the development discourse, itself. Here, the survey finds a number of noteworthy but largely disparate efforts. This suggests a relative dearth in historiographical self-consciousness for a narrow but influential segment of the development discourse. A number of consequences are considered, ultimately responding to the legitimacy, efficacy, and sustainability of development action. In sum, our survey finds that the mainstream development journal discourse is adept at learning from external histories, but not necessarily from its own. Evidence, however, suggests that it can. A case is made for why it must.  
© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Key words* — history, historiography, discourse analysis, theory, policy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

What is the nature and extent of historical awareness in the development discourse? Does the development discourse learn from history, or does it ignore the past to be, in George Santayana's words, 'condemned to repeat it' (Santayana, 1905, p. 284)? These questions carry particular significance in light of two present contexts. The first is a development enterprise (encompassing both theory and practice) that has marked 70 years in its post-World War history. As it now enters its eighth decade, it seems fitting to reflect upon the history of development—and upon development's own awareness of it.

The second context motivating this work is a geopolitical climate that is markedly different from the one in which the post-World War development enterprise was originally built. Old geopolitics of decolonization and the Cold War have been replaced by narratives on hegemony and rising powers. Further, the grand optimism and early hopes in development have been replaced by a more reserved sort of development buffeted in a sea of discontent. Recent years, in particular, speak volumes about such discontents—with globalization and elite cosmopolitanism, prolonged economic and humanitarian crises, and rising insecurities for countries both 'developing' and 'developed'. Changing operational contexts have, in turn, spurred calls for reform (e.g., Malloch-Brown, 2014; Weiss & Abdenur, 2014) and even wholesale abandonment (e.g., Escobar, 2011; Esteva, 2010; Sachs, 2010) of the development enterprise.

Altogether, these contexts raise serious concerns in regard to development's future. What will become of development? What should it be? How can it be changed? When faced with such uncertainties about the future, it is useful to reflect upon the past. How did we get here? Why are things done the way they are? What have we learned? It is with such questions in mind that this work delves into the history of development. It cannot provide a comprehensive answer, being limited in a number of aspects. Most tellingly, it comments only on the peer-reviewed English-language journal literature. The aim is thus to provide but a glimpse into the development discourse's

knowledge of the past. In light of the timeliness of such a work, however, even a brief glimpse may yet be a valuable one.

The remainder of this work proceeds as follows. Section two explains the study's methodology and associated limitations. Section three summarizes findings from our survey of the journal literature. Section four then discusses the broader significance of said findings. Finally, section five concludes with a summary and suggestions for future work.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The methods of this work borrow from intellectual history to examine how the development discourse engages with history, writ large. Namely, it engages in a form of discourse analysis that traces not a pre-determined school of thought or thinkers, but rather the broader flow of arguments across a number of arenas or sub-streams in development thought. The methods and underlying rationale are presented at length, below.

### (a) *Discourse analysis*

First of all, how are we to answer the question of whether the development discourse learns from history? Let us first begin with some groundwork: (1) what exactly do we mean by the *development discourse*, and (2) what exactly do we mean by *learning from history*?

For (1), we define the *development discourse* as the collective stream of ideas or thought engaging with development theory and practice. In this work, we focus on the academic discourse

\* This work was based out of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies, City University of New York; the Programme for the Study of International Governance, Graduate Institute, Geneva; and the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies, Seoul National University. In addition to these communities, the author would like to thank three anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback. Final revision accepted: February 12, 2017.

of development studies. This includes contributions from across the social sciences (e.g., anthropology, economics, geography, politics, sociology) and other allied disciplines (e.g., history, philosophy, gender studies, environmental studies). Further, we focus on this discourse as it manifests in written form. This allows us to subdivide the field into journals, books (e.g., monographs, edited volumes, textbooks), and the so-called gray literature (e.g., working papers, reports, conference proceedings, dissertations). This study focuses on journals, but for reasons that first require us to specify what we mean by ‘learning from history’.

For (2), we adopt a rather minimalist stance on *learning from history*. ‘Learning’ in a discourse could be evidenced in any number of ways, from the gradual accumulation and refinement of some store of knowledge to the drastic paradigm shifts in scientific revolutions and overturned worldviews. Here, we adopt a bare and open-ended conception of learning in asking how and to what extent the development discourse derives knowledge from history, writ large. Beyond this, we find little need to ascribe to any one particular mode of learning; for doing so, in a way, defeats the very purpose of this present exercise.

Having specified our aims, we now return to explaining our choice in (1) to focus on journal articles. To be explicit, journal articles are hardly chosen here to be representative of the development discourse in its entirety. However, journal articles offer two key benefits when investigating how development learns from history.

First, journal articles enable a level of temporal-spatial resolution for our survey that is difficult to achieve with the book-format literature. The latter entails comparatively large commitments of time and energy, which carry disadvantages in terms timely and comprehensive representation. The obvious drawback here is the exclusion of a sizeable body of historical works. Examples include Arndt (1989), Jolly, Emmerij, Ghai, and Lapeyre (2004), Leys (1996), Meier (2004), Pieterse (2010), Preston (1999), Rapley (1997), Rist (2014), and Ziai (2015). These sources warrant a separate study of their own, but journal articles prove more optimal for an initial survey. That said, these very same advantages could also be attributed to the gray literature, as well. It is here, however, that the journal literature’s second benefit comes to the fore.

Second, journal articles allow us to note the relative influence of certain arguments in the broader politics of development thought. This stems from the academic journal’s key role in mediating development knowledge. That is, academic journals entail distinct (but frequently overlapping) sub-streams or sub-discourses in terms of the sociology and politics of knowledge. This is rendered by the selection or curation process of each journal’s editorial staff and peer-review community, which in turn imparts published articles with an implicit measure of value or recognition. This process is further

reinforced by the key role of journal publications—particularly journal impact factors and article citations—when it comes to academic hiring and promotion. Ultimately, this dissemination and competition of ideas across what Collins (2009) refers to as a ‘limited attention space’ also come to influence the very ideas that matter in the realm of development policy and practice. This legitimacy and influence is where our *comparatively* unregulated gray literature falls short. This is not to say, however, that such literature has not been influential (e.g., the UN Brundtland Report on sustainable development), and entails yet another limitation to this study.

Finally, when it comes to methodological limitations, it must also be pointed out that this study can only speak of the English-language development discourse. Little can be said of the ideas and debates occupying other development discourses (e.g., Spanish, French, German, Korean); nor of the international flow of ideas and the political relations to be observed between them. With that said, the English-language discourse is hardly exclusive to Anglo-American views. As a de facto *lingua franca*, many ‘foreign’ (e.g., non-Anglophone, non-Western) perspectives are to be found. Indeed, foreign-language monographs are often translated and abridged into journal articles for wider dissemination in the English-language discourse. This possibly adds another benefit to surveying journal articles over books. Nevertheless, while the English-language development discourse may be *relatively* inclusive, it is not held to be representative of the global development discourse, on the whole. Consequently, some level of Anglo-American bias is to be expected.

#### (b) Data selection

The basic approach for gathering survey data was to compile journal articles with some variant of the term ‘history’ (e.g., ‘historic’, ‘historical’, ‘histories’, ‘historiography’) in the title and/or keywords. This was conducted using a wildcard search term (‘histor\*’), but required—due to pure volume—further culling of search results. Given the aim of this work to identify representative or, alternatively, predominant ways in which history has been used in the development discourse, a second selection criterion was introduced: journal impact factors.

Journal impact factors were referenced from the latest Journal Citation Reports© Social Sciences Edition, published annually by Thomson Reuters (2016). Journals were then retrieved from the category of ‘Planning and Development’ and filtered to remove journals focused on planning, as opposed to development (e.g., urban planning, management science, public administration).<sup>1</sup> Out of the remaining journals, the top 10 were selected based on highest 5-year impact factors (encompassing 2011–15; see Table 1).

Table 1. Survey panel of ten top development journals (by 5-year impact factor)

5-Year Impact Factor (2011–15)	Journal Title	First Issue
3.102	World Development	1973
2.268	Sustainable Development	1993
2.251	Development and Change	1970
2.075	World Bank Research Observer	1986
2.057	World Bank Economic Review	1986
1.638	Economic Development and Cultural Change	1952
1.381	Third World Quarterly	1979
1.253	Journal of Development Studies	1964
1.245	Studies in Comparative International Development	1965
1.178	Progress in Development Studies	2001

Source: 2015 Journal Citation Reports® Social Science Edition (Thomson Reuters, 2016).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5105047>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5105047>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)