

Rethinking Chinese Perspective on World Order

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【한글요약】

국제정치에서 중국의 역할이 증가함에 따라 중국과 동아시아의 역사와 경험을 바탕으로 한 새로운 국제정치이론의 창출이 가능한지에 대한 논의가 활성화되고 있다. 중국을 중심으로 하는 새로운 국제정치이론의 형성 가능성을 논의하는 학자들의 대부분은 중국의 사상과 역사에 지대한 영향을 행사해 온 유교논리에서 그 가능성을 타진하고 있다. 하지만 유교사상과의 접목을 통해 국제정치를 설명하고 있는 입장의 대부분은 중국이 지니고 있는 특수성에 대한 지나친 강조로 인해 국제정치이론이 지녀야 할 보편성과 일반성의 원칙에서 벗어나는 오류를 범하고 있다. 이러한 관점에 기반해 본 논문은 국제정치 이론으로서 유교사상이 가지고 있는 잠재성과 함축적 의미를 살펴보고, 이러한 접근법이 지니고 있는 문제점을 지적한 후 국제정치이론의 전반적인 맥락에서 중국적 특성의 강조를 통해 국제정치를 설명하려는 논의들의 의미를 고찰하고 있다.

주제어 : 중국, 유교사상, 중국 중심의 국제정치이론, 중국적 특성

I. A Chinese International Relations Theory: Hows and Whys

The world has changed a great deal in recent times. Ten years into the 21st century, twenty years from the end of the Cold War, all eyes are now turned to China. Moving from the periphery of international relations in terms of research interest and the number of headlines, China is at the present, without any doubt, the greatest theme of our time. The world is trying to learn as fast and as much as possible about this, at least from a non Chinese perspective, newest player in the international arena. Who

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are they, what do they want, how will their rise shape the future these are just a few of many questions that puzzle scholars and politicians alike. With China's sudden re emergence, decision makers around the globe are faced with a new actor, even potential adversary, one they know almost nothing about. While we are trying to learn about China, the Chinese themselves are in the process of displaying their views and their agenda for all to see. This process still has a long way to go, due to the many decades of China's isolation from global world affairs, but one thing is sure - China is a tangible power house, one that differs in many ways from the previous ones, so it is of the uttermost importance that we fully comprehend China's perceptions and motives. In order to understand China, we must first observe its behavior, secondly we must comprehend how it sees itself in the world and why. With that goal in mind and international relations as our field of study, we must inspect the Chinese position on the matter, specifically their take on what can be characterized as a Chinese international relations theory.

Before any mention on how one could construct a Chinese international relations theory (CIRT in further mentioning), the first question one must answer is, why do we need a CIRT. Acharya and Buzan have raised some of the more important questions on this matter in their valuable contribution on the study of non Western IR theories¹⁾: Western claims of universal understanding, Western international relations theories' hegemonic status (in the Gramscian sense), soft theory and sub-systemic (area studies) exceptionalism, secular interests masked as universal theory, technical problems like language barriers and reception issues, the (cultural, political, institutional) inhibition of international relations theories development, the problem of catching up with the West, problems with defining "non Western" IRT, to name a few.

The West has conquered the world, that is a historic certainty that no one can refute. What it failed to do with the sword, it achieved by the pen: through power came the notion of cultural as well as military superiority, in other words as the West expanded politically so did it expand culturally. While the West lost much of its territorial and political control, its cultural and institutional legacy is lasting. With this in mind, Acharya and Buzan rightfully ask the question: "If Western international

1) Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, "Why Is There No Non Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction", *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* Volume 7 (2007) 287 - 312.

relations theory is hegemonic because it is right, then there is little scope for non Western contributions. But if it is dominant because it rode on the back of Western power, then there is both room and reason to develop a “non Western voice.” There is truth in their claim that the erosion of Western power calls for a non Western source to put new ideas on the table, but the legacies of Western domination seem too powerful to be challenged fundamentally, at least in the foreseeable future. The domination of Western thought has and will outlast any territorial or political Western realm by far. The West has changed and is still changing the world to such an extent that it’s not only impossible to refute most Western theories in international relations (because Western history, to a certain extent, became world history) but it will be also very difficult to distinguish Western from non Western elements because of this interconnection.

One must set the stage right in order to identify the problems and, if lucky, find the answers to this puzzle. One dilemma produced by the West’s self confident belief in universal accuracy is, as mentioned before, the problem of exceptional area studies that produce sub-systemic “soft theories.” Looking from the systematic level, area studies and soft theories do seem weak, primarily because a science theory is inclined to explain at a systematic, absolute level. The problem with mainstream international relations theorists accepting these soft (area) theories is twofold. First, it is debatable if any of the major theories ever fully captured the true essence of international relations or do they just explain one element while disregarding all the rest (this is a problem with all social sciences), so some scholars might be hesitant to value a soft (area) approach which has little general explanatory strength. There is also the question whether they are truly universally applicable, even in today’s highly westernized world. This is a part of a general problem which Western ideas and values now face more than ever, particularly in non Western circles. If they are universally applicable, is it a result of their universal nature or is it a product of Western dominance as a historical process. We will leave this question unanswered at the moment and focus on the second problem. The problem of international relations theories is that they not only face a geographical and cultural problem but also a temporal one. As time goes by, the world changes and so do our values and perceptions, today’s world is not the complete “dog eat dog” anarchy realists would like us

believe. We must also take into account the Coxian timeless warning about particular interests masked as universal theories. If social and especially political science and international relations as a part of it, truly is only a mechanism, means to an end of a particular agenda, that is a discussion better left to theory of social sciences. If we hold this to be true, than the non Western voices are sure to support the seemingly, easily justifiable claim that Western international relations theories are most definitely, as any other particular interest, aimed primarily to keep Western dominance, like the Chinese often do. Than the decline of Western power should as Acharya and Buzan argue, provide us with alternative theories and interpretations about international relations. The most likely candidate to challenge the West, in all areas, is China. China's growth does not challenge the West just in material terms, China is by far the largest non Western society in the world with a long, continuous civilization with a distinctly rich culture, so it represents a challenger in ideas and values as well. With its deep cultural heritage China stands at the front of non Western challengers, but since we are at the very beginning of that process, We must turn back to the aspect of Western cultural hegemony.

If social science (and international relations as part of it) is nothing more than power games between rising and falling powers (as history has shown us, some might argue) than we might get an alternative perspective soon. But if the West has indeed uncovered some fundamental elements already it does not matter if they are Western or non Western, they benefit all. The implications of technical and institutional issues (inhibition) regarding the absence of a CIRT has been properly addressed by many scholars²⁾, but there is another problem. As mentioned earlier, Western cultural hegemony combined with temporal issues (meaning that we are at the beginning of any significant input by non Western sources, including China) does indeed hinder reception of non Western contributions to the study of international relations. Time will erase complications of technical nature such as language barriers and availability, but there is always problem of acceptance to a, possibly arrogant, Western audience.

2) Qin Yaqing, "Why Is There No Chinese International Relations Theory?". *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* Volume 7 (2007), p. 315; Yongjin Zhang, "International Relations Theory in China Today: The State of the Field", *The China Journal*, No. 47 (2002), pp. 101-108; Song Xinning, "Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics", *Journal of Contemporary China* (2001), 10(26), 61-74, p. 69-72.

The Western audience might be reluctant to accept new interpretations whether because they believe they already have all the answers or because of the previously mentioned soft, sub-systemic approach which can challenge general universal theories. This is why it is important for China to develop its own services and media for distributing its own views on matters of international relations. Even if the Westerners are sceptical, they are sure to take heed, especially as China's position in the world gets stronger.

Lastly, we must further reflect on the issue of the difficulty of defining a Western or non Western theory, mentioned thoroughly by Acharya and Buzan. As globalization continues, the acceptance of Western education will be greater than ever before so drawing the line between a truly Western and a non Western contribution will be even harder. This issue has been dealt with by Chinese scholars³⁾ who also pointed out the path CIRT building must take.⁴⁾ In the case of a CIRT, drawing the line between a truly Chinese, non Western and a Western theory seems impossible therefore futile. American international relations theories are particularly strong in China, so separation is very difficult at the present, next to impossible, on the other hand China's official reliance on socialism as an identity marker says it all. The tenets of Marxism Leninism represent a genuinely Western discourse and any official separation from it in China is, at the time, highly improbable. Ranging from the official Marxist tag all the way to the huge American input in the study of international relations, China's international relations "kitchen" has been influenced by Western ideas to the core.

With this out of the way, we'd like to focus on China's case and the possibility of creating a CIRT. One of the reasons why Chinese scholars yearn for a CIRT is because, regardless of whether their reasoning is cultural or political, they feel that China is exceptional thus it needs a specific IR theory. There are several problems with this approach.

3) Qin Yaqing, "Why is there no Chinese International Relations theory?": Yongjin Zhang, "International Relations Theory in China Today: The State of the Field", p. 107; Song Xinning, "Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics", p. 62.

4) Qin Yaqing, "Why is there no Chinese International Relations theory?"

II. Looking at the World through Chinese Eyes: An Analysis of CIRT Development

Leaving aside the question of whether mainstream (Western) international relations theories are correct or not, another question poses itself: why do Chinese scholars believe that a CIRT is needed? It is quite obvious that they do,⁵⁾ but where does this come from? Whether these views come from the notion of China's cultural particularness⁶⁾ or its past, the so called "100 years of humiliation" period which begs for a Chinese opinion or the more recent Marxist Leninist period, the notion that a international relations theory with Chinese characteristics is needed, poses an ambiguous foundation to base any international relations theory.

Before we continue do evaluate possible sources of a CIRT, first we must carefully reflect on these problems. The existing literature is quite specific⁷⁾ on why was this notion put on the table, but the dangers of this approach are many. Not only will the idea of China's uniqueness hamper further academic progress,⁸⁾ it will further alienate future Chinese generations, not only scholars. The trend to propagate "Chinese characteristics" is not new, it did not begin with the CCP or "socialism with Chinese characteristics", China has a long past of separating itself from others. Whether the reasons for Chinese insistence for specificity lie in history i.e. the defeats in the 19th century that cost China its great power status or China's historical reliance on the belief that it is the center of civilization and thus specific in relations to others, this Sinocentric path is building walls rather than pushing China toward a cosmopolitan future.

What China faces, and has faced in the last 200 years is quite specific in world history. As Western power spread its influence around the world, traditional societies and values were shattered, but China's case, as can be seen even today, was by far, the most sensitive one, resulting in wave of self victimization and bitter historical

5) Yongjin Zhang, "International Relations Theory in China Today: The State of the Field".

6) Marc Mancall, "The Persistence of Tradition in Chinese Foreign Policy", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 349, (1963), p. 16.

7) Song Xinning, "Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics", p. 68.

8) *Ibid.*, p. 69.

nationalism.⁹⁾ When the Western powers, led by Great Britain, defeated the Qing Empire, they didn't only destroy the tribute system, they did something far more lasting and overreaching: their actions initiated China's ongoing questioning of itself, its identity while at the same time questioning everything from the West. We can only wonder how the Chinese felt during the 1840s, given their traditional view of the world where China was the center of the civilized world with universal claims to authority. The impact of this clash of civilizations is a topic best left to sinologists and historians, the focus here is on the everlasting consequences this had on China's perceptions, especially in international relations.

The legacy of China's defeat shaped its discourse, till today. No country or society can escape its past, but China is truly an exceptional case. The aftermath can still be seen in today's Chinese thinking which is using the legacy of Western imperialism for education and domestic propaganda on an unprecedented scale.¹⁰⁾ While many countries and peoples have been defeated and ravaged by imperialism and war, there is hardly a country or society that can match China's victim mentality, clinging to its "glorious" past while at the same time lamenting about its defeat and antagonizing the "barbarians" around it, especially the West. Far from it that the West does not deserve this criticism, however the problem lies not in criticizing the West but in China's identity crisis. Other non Western societies' dealing with Western ideas and concepts is still one of the most discussed topics of today (the Arab/Muslim world being one of the best examples). China's history is too, a story of a clash with Western ideas and values. From Confucianism and empire to republicanism, from republicanism to communism, China imported a lot of concepts from the West, but the West never seemed to fully satisfy China.

Aside from misperception of international relations theory serving as a tool for foreign policy interpretation, Chinese scholars want to contribute to the field of international relations because of China's specific culture, history and development path.

9) William A. Callahan, "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism", *Alternatives* 29:2, (2004), pp. 199-218; Xiao Gongqin, "Superficial, Arrogant Nationalism", *China Security*, Vol. 5 No. 3, (2009), pp. 53-58.

10) Zheng Wang, "National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China", *International Studies Quarterly*, (2008) 52, pp. 783-806; Randall Peerenboom, "China stands up: 100 years of humiliation sovereignty concerns, and resistance to foreign pressure on PRC courts", *Emory International Law Review*, Vol. 24, Issue 2 (2010).

which, as they see it, makes a specific, Chinese, international relations theory feasible. As Song Xinning mentions,¹¹⁾ a IR theory with Chinese characteristics is mainly a political and ideological term, not a scientific one by academic terms and might tend to separate Chinese scholarship from the international community of IR studies. However, in his response to Song Xinning's article, William Callahan warns Chinese scholars against an uncritical embrace of realism and Western scientism which can condemn China to a viscous cycle of repeating "the Western game."¹²⁾ So what is our best choice of action?

Since the aim of this paper is to analyze possible Chinese inputs into international relations theory creation, we propose to answer Acharya and Buzan's question¹³⁾ of what can constitute a non Western, in this case a Chinese, IR theory, at least for the sake of this paper. Regardless of origin, training and methods, a CIRT (as viewed by Chinese traditional perceptions) must contain elements of distinct Chinese thinking, tradition and experiences. We base this on the overall flavor of Chinese theory building which always, to a certain degree, includes elements of Chinese culture, a theory with Chinese characteristics if you will. Every society must look back at its culture and traditions for inspiration, China is not an exception, furthermore it is very unlikely that Chinese scholars will abolish this format anytime soon. In regard to this topic, we are not at a liberty to denounce it, but rather to simply analyze this approach.

This seems to point to a distinctly Chinese person, because who can understand "Chineseness" but a Chinese. Secondly, there is the possibility of the Chinese themselves, rejecting a Chinese sounding theory if written by a Westerner, but that is just a dilemma that can not be answered now. But than again, we seem to be trapped. As Chinese scholar Song Xinnian warns us, stressing Chinese characteristics is more or less ideology oriented. But then we must ask ourselves, what kind of ideology? A simple observation would just take us back to Cox and his warning about theories always serving someone's purpose, but the problem is much, much deeper. Song Xinnian is right when he assumes that

11) Song Xinning, "Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics", p. 68.

12) William A. Callahan: "Chinese Visions of World Order: Post hegemonic or a New Hegemony?", *International Studies Review* (2008) 10, pp. 749 - 761.

13) Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, "Why Is There No Non Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction".

just like “socialism with Chinese characteristics” a similar IR “with Chinese characteristics” would just serve to justify and explain China’s outlooks on foreign policy at the time (like Mao’s Three worlds theory), but again, how can we expect the Chinese to ignore their salient traditions. They are carved so deep in the Chinese identity, any scenarios where they are not included into theory building are most unlikely.

Serving as nothing more than foreign policy justification, international relations studies were not fully developed in China before recent times, but since the improvement by the end of the 1980s, what can we draw from contemporary China’s most visible imprint Marxist Leninist traditions? If theory is produced in China and must stay in line with the PRC’s nominal socialist character or the CCP guidelines, than what can a scholar do? A closer look at the development of such “theories” reveals that not only do they seem “out of date”, they cancel each other out. Any division between the capitalist and socialist camps is in the history books, just like Mao’s Three worlds theory. Other than naming socialism as the end and development as the means in domestic policy, Marxism Leninism holds little nucleus value to forming a CIRT. Then again, Marxism Leninism isn’t a Chinese concept at all, Maoism could be one, for the sake of the argument, but is not of no consequence today. This whole premise might be based on the idea that China, as the last big remaining, officially, socialist power in the world which embraced Marx’s teachings, could launch a Marxist Leninist, a genuinely Western theory, albeit one with a Chinese twist. China abandoned its revolutionary foreign policy ages ago, stopped financing leftist groups around the globe, as well as using its old imperialist Leninist core periphery rhetoric to describe the world around it. Deng Xiaoping’s stance not to pick up the flag of socialism, now 20 years old, illustrates this point quite well. China did not continue the socialist fight after the USSR collapsed nor did it continue to use Marxist rhetoric as part of its foreign policy, so if one is to stay in line with the official doctrine, Marxism Leninism hardly seems like the way to go. China has, quite the contrary, increased its interaction with the core, “1st world”, namely the US and has adopted an economic development policy based on working with the West. On the other hand, Chinese scholars who choose to produce international relations theories based on Marxism, similar to, let’s say

world system theory will not be hailed as pioneers who developed a CIRT. Evidence speaks of another trend, one that is not linked with Marxism Leninism, just the opposite. Even though it was, at first, criticized by the CCP as nothing more than a ruling class coercive system from a decadent past, Confucianism now seems to be the beacon Chinese scholars and policy makers cling to.

Ⅲ. Confucius Reborn: Drawing Inspiration from Ancient Concepts

Before immersing into the issues of using traditional Chinese teachings that might serve as the core for a potential CIRT, we must, again, turn back to the beginning of this debate the Chineseness of it all. Insisting on using distinct Chinese elements to produce a valid international relations theory has not only been discarded by some Chinese scholars (like Song Xinning), but, as expected, by Western scholars as well.¹⁴⁾ This debate isn't going to be settled easily, in the meantime it seems that more and more scholars are swayed by Confucianism. Based on past experiences from China, where official foreign policy and foreign policy interpretation served as a basis to form works of international relations, the Confucianist hype might prove to be stronger with time.

The one prevailing thought that seems to be present in all Chinese minds, after a century and a half of experimenting (with more or less success) with all sorts of Western ideas is the idea of China's specificity. Of course, one might argue that after thousands of years of continuity, a society (especially a non Western one) can not just transform and ignore its centuries old identity and legacy, but there is more than just pure identity. The re emergence of these "old China" concepts, can not be looked from some ahistorical perspective. After years of "natural development", China's path was first disrupted by the West, then later by Japan, only to be found in the middle of yet another world struggle after World War 2. Meanwhile, China was trying to cope with the changes and entered a period of self questioning. Never sure which path to take, Chinese society went through a couple of grand scale transformations throughout the last century, every crisis along the way sparking yet another crisis of identity.

14) Yongjin Zhang: "International Relations Theory in China Today: The State of the Field", p. 104.

After the world wide fall of communism, it is only logical that China turns back to its past for inspiration, and that affects international relations as well. This historical cycle leads us back to the previously mentioned resentment toward the West. This combination of re discovering its true identity combined with a strong hostility toward Western intrusion (especially after Tiananmen and now in recent times, described as new attempts to contain China)¹⁵⁾ represents the basis of Chinese scholars' urge to develop a CIRT based upon traditional Chinese characteristics.

In international relations terms, the current American academic hegemony serves as the target for criticism of the West, not only because of China's anti Western posture, but because of America's specific role of being a superpower and the most important factor in China's relations with the outside world (Taiwan, Japan, human rights, etc.) As one Chinese scholar¹⁶⁾ put it: "It is not exaggerated to say that international relations theory has become the symbol of America's hegemony and one of the public products offered by America as the means to maintain its hegemony. The international relations theory in America always tries to demonstrate the legitimacy, rationality and matching objectives of the hegemony of the United States. I once put forward the assumption that why there is no international relations theory revolution. The fact that there is no revolution but debates in international relations theory is due to the conservative nature of international relations theory and its catering to the legitimacy of America's hegemony."

The Chinese goal of producing a CIRT is not just about facing US academic hegemony, it is about speaking China's mind in an era where China is more powerful than ever before. In order to legitimize and rationalize its ascension China must, as all great powers before it had to, find an underpinning. While this all adds fuel to the Coxian power games argument, one can hardly deny the fact that as China grows, the world is getting more input from Beijing. Although China's voice is finally getting through, on the back of its immense growth, it is surprising how Confucianism and the so called "Asian values" are being used more often than not. China goes back to ancient times for inspiration not only because it "ran out" of foreign concepts, but more importantly, because these "ancient China concepts" serve as an internal, as well

15) China Daily, 11 October 2010.

16) Yiwei Wang, "On National Identity of International Relations Theories: A Chinese Perspective", Journal of International Relations, No.1, 2007, p. 7.

as an external legitimacy claim. On the domestic plan China is simply playing the “the (Tang dynasty) glory days will come again” theme which serves as a base for the legitimacy of the CCP, while on the external plan it is trying to separate China’s rise from the previous power’s imperialist empire building upward trajectory.

One scholar’s work in this field is quite representable. David Kang’s work¹⁷⁾ on the stability and relative peaceful nature of the pre 19th century East Asian system is a different take on the international system of East Asia. Arguing that we’re getting Asia wrong and that the “international” system of East Asia was far more stable and peaceful, Kang might have stumbled upon something that explains China’s past experience. Kang argues that the “East Asian international relations emphasized formal hierarchy among nations while allowing considerable informal equality. This system was materially based and was reinforced through centuries of cultural practice. With China as the dominant state and the peripheral states as secondary states or “vassals,” as long as hierarchy was observed there was little need for interstate war.” By using this system of formal hierarchy, Kang juxtaposes it to Western tradition, characterized by “formal equality between nation states, informal hierarchy, and almost constant interstate conflict.” While Kang seems to capture the essence of East Asian stability before the Opium War, his theory has many problems, like not mentioning China’s constant inner rebellions and constant warfare with the Mongols and other Central Asian nomads throughout the half millenia period he mentions, but that is of lesser importance at present and can be easily imbedded into the logic of Mongols and others not being in the tribute system in the first place. What is of importance here is that Kang’s theory represents a new outlook on East Asia and China, using precisely its ancient history. Limits of time and space prohibit us into going into a detailed analysis of the terminology Kang used, by Acharya and Buzan’s standards of using Western tools to explain non Western scenarios, but regardless of the tools he used Kang’s work leads us to look at international relations of East Asia from a geographical and, more importantly, a temporal perspective.

Kang’s theory is quite good in explaining what nominal Western theory can not: the

17) David Kang, *China rising: Peace, power, and order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

East Asian tribute system. This reasoning might sound inspirational, but contemporary East Asia has changed a lot since those times as have the actors in it. East Asia is a region very much divided, with questionable reliance on Confucianism to begin with. While Kang's theory serves as a good explanation of East Asia's pre-Western intrusion past, what significant insights does it hold for the region's future? Kang focuses on the signs China uses to signal its growing power, but are China's neighbours really seeing China as an benign opportunity and not a threat?

In Kang's work, two important elements can be read: the notion of harmony and thus hierarchy and stability and the notion of non-expansion of China, meaning that is China not interfering in other people's business, two elements contemporary Chinese scholars and policy makers love to quote. The problem with this theory is geographical, temporal and thus political. The root of the geographical problem lies in the fact that while China is a constant factor for other East Asian states who, as Kang argues, accommodate China because of its size and power, this is not a factor to other states in the system, especially as you move away from East Asia. Kang's recipe for a peaceful and stable East Asia, based on China's size is not necessarily a recipe for the world. Even if we, for the sake of the argument, interpret China's neighbours' implied non-balancing nature not only as purely material but also psychological, can that be said for the rest of the world? Kang's theory, even though it seems valid at first glance, seems limited by its small scope. Hierarchy based on "harmony" might have worked before the Treaty of Nanjing (1842), but holds little promise for today, at least in Kang's non-coercive explanation. Kang's theory is limited by its scope and in a way limits possible CIRTs based on the old notion of China's hierarchy through harmony. The second issue can be summed up by the question: why didn't China go abroad? (which is also quite debatable since China's borders have increased significantly before and since the founding of the empire, especially during the reign of the Yuan dynasty and the later Qing dynasty). China's self-imposed self-reliance and non-expansive stance is based on the fact that China was a large agricultural society with vast territories and little need or incentive to expand (due to Confucianist doctrine which favored agriculture, but not commerce). Can the same be said of today's China? China is not only the 2nd largest consumer of oil, it is the leading consumer of coal and

steel.¹⁸⁾ Furthermore, development and the thirst for new energy and resource sources is pushing China outside of its borders, out of its region, so the previous argument of China being informal and non intrusive because of constraints of its cultural, Confucianism fueled identity is also highly debatable. To conclude, what country in East Asia, let alone the world would accept China at the top, either because of moral virtue or traditional sense of hierarchy. It is still questionable whether all of East Asia accepted China at all, or was this limited only to areas where China could exercise heavy influence. Kang's work represents a valuable addition to the field, especially since it is a Western contribution and places a high value on norms, particularly Confucianism. His work presents the opposite to the famous paradigm "will Europe's past be Asia's future", but rather than reassuring us of history not repeating, Kang asks us to put faith in ancient tautologies that seem out of date. Kang's work does not give Confucianism new strength, it explains the East Asian order before the Western intrusion to a certain level, but other than that it does not provide scholars working on a CIRT with a strong base nor does it provide comfort to a world already sceptical about the nature of China's rapid rise.

IV. Can Confucianism Provide the Answer?

The underline is that China's past behavior can do little to explain or predict modern China's behavior let alone to form an international relations theory with regional or world scope. First, one must look to China's immediate surroundings, what can be said of China's neighbours. Some of them, like Japan, can hardly be mentioned as the states who see China at the center, if they ever did. China's South East neighbours do not embrace "the big brother" nor do they welcome a strong China in their region, quite the contrary.¹⁹⁾ China's muscle flexing and the reactions to it show us how China's place at the top is not granted nor guaranteed. If anything, China's economic growth might be welcomed as an opportunity, but Beijing's continued realist reliance on military strength is alienating neighbours from being confident in Beijing's intentions. Another issue is China's insistence on bilateral relations. If

18) U.S. Energy Information Administration, Annual Energy Review, 19 August 2010.

19) Reuters, "Analysis: SE Asia wary of China as sea claim disputes intensify", 12 June 2011.

China's foreign policy and any pursuing CIRT are based on others conforming to China's peaceful intentions, than both are in serious problems.

Traditional Chinese notions of creating harmony in the region through moral virtue and China being the center under Heaven have no practical meaning today, except as political or educational slogans, they don't even form solid foreign policy. China is a modern state, one which is developing faster than any other in the world, to explain its incentives and predict its actions based on its traditional imperial pre 1842 experiences seems inadvisable, to say the least. When it comes to putting a face of China's foreign policy, the "ancient China" card might seem somewhat plausible, but as for CIRT building, improbable.

Another problem with using Confucianism as the basis for a CIRT comes from its dubious explanatory strength. Confucianism is said to favor non aggression, harmony, peace, stability and order. Notions of Confucianism's peaceful nature have often been promoted on many fronts by the Chinese, but have they truly been accepted? What every sinologist discovers, sooner or later, is the fact that China never utilized its full potential and expanded in the world while the West was still preoccupied with fighting others and itself. One of the explanations, if not the most popular one, is because of the tenets of Confucianism. Confucianism is said to favor culture over war, agriculture and artisans over commerce and army, so it seems that China's path was determined by it. No one can argue against the fact that China had a historic opportunity to do what the West did, long before Columbus set out of Sevilla, but chose not to. The reasons for choosing such a path are many and most debatable, but Confucianism seems as the strongest, because it represented the leading ideology behind China's grand strategy. Contemporary Chinese sources, naturally, never fail to mention this, peaceful nature of Confucianism. The intention here is not so much to question the peaceful nature of Confucianism, but to question its dependability. In his article on Confucian culture and the use of force in Song China, Yuan kang Wang, used the period of Song China, a period in Chinese history most prominent for its embrace and development of Confucianist values. In fact, it is in this very period that Neo Confucianism came to be. Testing the hypothesis that Chinese Confucian culture produced a fundamentally different experience than that of the West, Yuan kang Wang examines a series of conflicts between the Song dynasty and the Khitan dominated Liao empire that

encompassed present day Manchuria and northern China. He concludes that, even though the influence of Confucian doctrine was at its peak in China at the time, China's actions were no different than ones in the West. Its actions were driven by the anarchic structure of the system and dictated by structural realism. In his conclusion he states: "The evidence presented in this case study strongly indicates that Confucian pacifism has not had much influence on the Song Dynasty's security policy. Although Confucian ideology dominated the imperial bureaucracy, Chinese strategic behavior has been consistent with structural realist expectations: Considerations of the balance of power—not cultural aversion to warfare—dominated the decisions to use force. Even when the Song decided not to use force, the decision making process revealed a high degree of offensive motives mediated by a keen sensitivity to relative capabilities. Although non use of force was sometimes cloaked in the language of Confucian pacifism or anti militarism, this in general reflected a pragmatic thinking based on the consideration of logistical or economic obstacles."²⁰⁾ Even though he concludes that there is no need for a CIRT, we should not make such hasty judgements, but rather observe that Confucianism, for all its pacifism, was limited by power considerations, hence its value for forming an international relations theory based on non coercion soft power is very low.

This takes us to the second big issue with using traditional Chinese recipes - the problem of practically applying Chinese traditional views of the world based on Tianxia (天下) "all under Heaven". Looking back at the original concept embodied in the tribute system, one finds this system, as Kang and others do, as very stable and relatively peaceful. But that was more than a century and a half ago. How can this idea be applied today? One contemporary answer comes from a Chinese philosopher named Zhao Tingyang. In his book, called "The Tianxia system" Zhao sees the world as a "failed world." This is because the world is based on the nation states and the three levels of "individual community nation state." In order to set the world in order, the world must resemble a structure composed of "Tianxia state family." Zhao judges democracy as an

20) Yuan kang Wang, "The Case against Chinese Exceptionalism: Confucian Culture and the Use of Force", Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (APSA) in Boston, 28-31 August 2008, p. 44.

“erroneous” way of determining the people’s will: “Because ‘the masses always make the wrong choices’, Zhao reasons that the people’s general will needs to be determined by a ‘careful observation of social trends’. These ‘careful and sincere observations’, Zhao tells us, ‘can better detect the truth and come to a better reflection of public choice than do democratic elections’. Since the masses are easily misled, only the elite can think through the world and have a ‘view from everywhere’. Moreover, since ‘most people do not really know what is best for them, but that the elite do, so the elite ought genuinely to decide for the people.”²¹⁾ To summarize, in Zhao’s view of how the world should look like based on ancient Chinese traditions, we are to be governed by a Confucian Leninist elite whose judgement is to be based, not on freedom but order. Even though this is primarily a work of political philosophy, it is obvious that, if implemented into a valid international relations theory (or foreign policy), resistance and conflicts are sure to follow. Zhao’s notions of order might be primarily focused, as William Callahan²²⁾ observes, for domestic politics, but the theory’s scope pierces the borders of nation states (namely China) and represents a vision of world order. If such a view ever becomes part of an CIRT, the voices shouting of a China threat will be many and they will be loud. Zhao’s work does represent a slight warning for the future. If China’s view of the world, when it does decide to challenge the status quo, is indeed based on Zhao’s vision, it stands in direct contrast to today’s notion of individuality, freedom and democracy, values that to most of the world, still represent an ideal type if not political reality. While discussions of future politics is a topic best left alone, any CIRT that shares Zhao’s view of how to implement traditional Confucian values of order, will seem like a vision of order through empire, because it is very doubtful that today’s world is willing to accept China as the moral center let alone such a vision of order based on hierarchy with China on top. If this path serves as a basis of Confucian structured CIRTs, it will be in stark contrast with today’s “peaceful rise” rhetoric and will further alienate Chinese international relations research, no to mention the country

21) William A. Callahan, *Tianxia, Empire and the World: Soft Power and China’s Foreign Policy Discourse in the 21st Century*, BICC working paper series, No. 1, May 2007, p. 8.

22) William A. Callahan, “Chinese Visions of World Order: Post hegemonic or a New Hegemony? ”, *International Studies Review* (2008) 10, p. 750.

itself.

One other instance where Confucianism was hailed as an East Asian reality which is in stark contrast with the rational choice individualism of the West was in economics, to be more precise the rapid economic development of China. The argument is that Confucian ethics based on *guanxi* were paternal, warm and favored cooperation instead of coercion. This argument would indeed favor Confucianism as a soft power beacon, particularly in East Asia, but again we must question this logic as well as its praxis. In their valuable contribution to the study of Confucian practice, Anita Chan and Zhu Xiaoyang have put this seemingly benevolent nature to the test and the results, just like in the case of Confucianism's alleged pacificism, proved to be disappointing. In their conclusion they "believe that the treatment of labor should be an integral part of all studies of business management. Once this is taken into account, the Chinese business practices that have commonly been depicted as nurturable by exponents of the 'Confucian business characteristics' school will instead be seen to be disciplinarian, as evidenced by our empirical findings. The regime of labor control that is found in various degrees among ethnic Chinese managers in different parts of Asia is just a variant of the disciplinary labor regime that emerged in England and other European countries during the period of the Industrial Revolution. The difference today is that ethnic Chinese managers and owners sometimes employ an obfuscating rhetorical patina of 'Confucian values' to overlay their rigid control over workers."²³⁾

From a strategic perspective Confucianism can not be counted on to deliver the consolation it is expected to, particularly concerning the peaceful rise theory. In terms of foreign policy, China's attempt to cover its international ventures by Confucius has failed to deliver the desired effect so what is there left for a CIRT. Regarding the political aspect, we seem to be faced with an option of conforming to China as the center either peacefully swayed by its cultural power and morality, or by force if necessary.

23) Anita Chan and Zhu Xiaoyang, "Disciplinary labor regimes in Chinese factories", *Critical Asian Studies*, 35:4 (2003), pp. 559-584.

V. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to analyze Confucian CIRT elements and shed new light on their applicability based on two criteria: applicability on a large scale and in contemporary times. Throughout the paper, examples were given and have been analyzed in hopes of providing much needed substance to build an international relations theory using Confucianism.

CIRTs based on China's past are of doubtful utility, as long as they ignore the changed rules of the game. One can not just ignore or disregard cultural and historical elements, but one does have to be in touch with reality. In the first section of the paper, efforts were made to re-evaluate some of the questions regarding the necessity of producing a CIRT, later we tried to sum up the factors that force scholars (the ones who can actually produce a CIRT based on Chinese way of thinking and/or Chinese experience) to use Chinese elements to produce a CIRT. Lastly, we must explain and justify why traditional Chinese elements make bad international relations theory material. Keep in mind that this is based on the presumption that China is not a revisionist power and that its goal is indeed to peacefully face the world and take its place among the great powers and peoples of the world. Without that assumption, this paper would serve no purpose and all efforts to truly understand and evaluate Chinese international relations thinking would be lost. China would be "praised" by realists and would, in a way, betray itself, its alleged peaceful foundations and identity. This assumption actually serves the argument presented here. As China is the last in a long line of rising powers, it not only faces a world that is quite different than the one previous powers were facing, a world that is getting smaller and smaller via rapid globalization, full of interdependence and nuclear deterrence, it can learn from their mistakes, avoid repeating them and (to a certain extent, we must not be naive, great powers will always be great powers) prove to be a responsible great power. At least that's what Chinese voices are always trying to say.

First, we must go back to scope. The problem with using traditional Chinese views for constructing a CIRT, as Kang has shown us, is their limited scope in relation to their peace factor. China might be as a regional natural hegemon, but can it be a world natural hegemon? America's geographical advantage can not be underestimated,

for example. Without serious expansion, Kang's notion of China's size is lost outside of East Asia, especially since China is historically a land power. Secondly, Kang's argument is insightful when explaining China's past as a system different than Western sovereignty, but has no true implications for the present in political terms. The last two centuries, especially the Cold War, dismantled any notions of political hierarchy revolving around China (like in Confucian times) and China de iure rejects any notion of asymmetry of hegemony. Furthermore, the problems of constructing a CIRT directly based on the Tianxia concept are multiple. The West destroyed the old system so China replaced the Tianxia system with the system of Guojia the nation state. If we are to base our CIRT on the present status quo, the Tianxia system looks like either like an empire through hegemony or some kind of supranational system, both of which China rejects as its policy or political theory. However, there is another dilemma. If the Chinese view is irretrievably linked with order and hierarchy, one (for example American unipolar/hegemonic stability theorists) could say that today's world is quite hierarchical. The United States serve as China, the center, and if everyone knows their place, the system is stable and peaceful. It is doubtful any CIRT would share this view, even though it sounds quite Confucianist and orderly.

China has the monopoly on all things Confucian, meanwhile Confucianism is being promoted domestically and internationally with the aim of providing legitimacy for the ruling party by creating a sense of harmony in society. However, if China wants to become that center, it has to face a set of powerful democratic adversaries who are weary of its rhetoric and quite critical of China's boastful self description. If an international relations theory is to be any good it must be have universal explanatory qualities and China's Confucian past seems to have nothing new to offer for the present or future international relations prospects. If the incentive to build an international relations theory is problem solving (not just explaining the past) than clinging to China's past seems to offer little to no solution except conflict or more ambiguity which would alienate China further and cause conflict. China faces a world which is shaped by the West's victory, whether it likes it or not. Democracy, individual freedom and liberalism is what China faces. Using tools like Zhao's order through elite rule offers little to build upon. We wouldn't go so far, as many Western scholars do, and say that there is no room for a CIRT based on "Chineseness", the intention of this paper is to help speed up the process, so to speak, to help leave behind concepts

that have limited or no utility. Concepts like “Harmonious world”²⁴⁾ serve only as names for China’s foreign policy and have no concrete link to China’s past other than in name. This new revival of Confucianism is just the last in a series of official state doctrines made to provide legitimacy for the CCP and aimed to provide the Chinese society with a sense of purpose. The harmonious world doctrine represents, in best Confucian tradition, an extension of the harmonious society domestic policy. It even goes so far as to label every policy harmonious.²⁵⁾ The question here is not whether this new neo-Confucianism serves as a new legitimacy tool for domestic purposes, it is quite obvious it does, but what reassurances does it provide for the world? Recent developments in East Asia (as demonstrated by the recent tensions over the Diaoyu islands, as well as the long standing South China Sea issue which is rapidly intensifying) clearly show, that China’s reliance on Confucianism as a theory that, at least in rhetoric, supports China’s peaceful rise is not providing the results it was supposed to. China’s recent diplomatic posture was quite confrontational, sensitive and sometimes aggressive with a strong ‘you’re either with us or against us’ feel. This behavior certainly doesn’t help China to achieve its foreign policy goals non-confrontational and further dampens the value of its Confucian rhetoric in foreign policy and CIRT building.

In the end, like its predecessor, the United States, China is also trying to use the “exceptionalism” card. Confucianism and harmony sound like the American notion of it being an exceptional power, one not based on empire. China will, like the US did before it, need to face reality and face the same criticism like all great powers do. As a rising great power, China will not be able to cling on to its old Marxist developing traditions, like non-intervention, so what future is there for Confucianism?

What we need is a CIRT, from China, coming from the Chinese, defining a Chinese perspective, but with contemporary political reality in mind (like multi-polarity²⁶⁾ to name one example), not wishful thinking based on long gone

24) Fredrik Fällman, “Useful Opium? ‘Adapted religion’ and ‘harmony’ in contemporary China”, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 19: 67, p. 967.

25) “Hu Makes 4-point Proposal for Building Harmonious World” Chinese Government’s Official Web Portal, 16 September 2005.

26) People’s Daily, “Defender of a harmonious ocean” 23 April 2009; Brantly Womack, “Asymmetry Theory and China’s Concept of Multipolarity”, *Journal of Contemporary China* (2004), 13(39), pp. 351 - 366.

times. While Confucianism is useful for domestic issues like providing the Chinese people with a sense of pride, especially since the cultural devastation during the Cultural revolution or providing the party with legitimacy points, its CIRT or foreign policy potential is quite weak and should not be taken for granted. After all, Confucianism puts China at the centre, so what is there for the rest of us? Can Confucianism provide a CIRT that is universally beneficial or is it just China's international relations/diplomatic wishful thinking.

Some conflicts are unavoidable, especially in academic circles, but the continuation of using concepts like hierarchy through order (in the Chinese sense) is bound to set the China threat alarm on high alert. On the other hand, continued reliance on Confucianism as its ambiguous foreign policy, and any future CIRT for that matter, will also give power to the China threat voices who will rightfully paint China as a pragmatist actor that has no higher goal other than self advancement whatever the cost while Confucianism will be rightfully branded as a sinocentric empty rhetoric aimed at hiding China's real intentions.

If Confucianism does indeed hold the nucleus for building a CIRT, the task seems impossible, at least in the present. It takes years to develop a school of international relations, specially if your nucleus is a cultural, sinocentric ideology. This article isn't set on closing doors on this issue, but tries to point out to the many problems a Confucianism based CIRT faces. Instead of blindly holding on to the concept of a glorious past that will come again where it was the undisputed moral ruler, China needs to face reality and look to the world of today. Any CIRT that follows must do the same.

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《Abstract》

Rethinking Chinese Perspective on World Order

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Much has been said about the absence of a Chinese school of international theory and the reasons behind it. Many scholars have tackled this issue, trying not only to find the reasons why a Chinese school of international relations has not yet emerged but what possible sources could such a school draw for inspiration. This attempt to paint international relations with “Chinese characteristics” is part of a wider, familiar phenomenon where China presents itself as an entity whose history and identity is unique and quite different from others, especially the Western powers. In this quest for exclusivity, China claims to be different on a number of issues, none more important than international relations as its rise is viewed with much anxiety and suspicion. This paper will particularly focus on the nowadays well known notion of Confucianism which is often used as a catalyst to explain much about China as well as East Asia in general. The second aim of this paper is to define and point out the many problems a Confucianist approach to international relations theories will face. Lastly, this paper questions the very notion of Confucianism being a source of any contemporary insight for international relations theory or practice.

Key Words: Contemporary China, Confucianism, Chinese international relations theory, Chinese characteristics

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