



The *Zhongyong* Dialectic: A Bridge into the Relational World

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Abstract

Three tensions are said to exist in my relational theory, i.e. between ontology and behavior, between structure and process, and between substance and procedure. Underlying these tensions is a crucial question: How to identify the subject and object and understand the domination–subordination power relationship therein? These seeming inconsistencies appear if observed through a dualistic lens but may well disappear when viewed from the *zhongyong* dialectic, which, as an epistemological and methodological device, assumes no binary dichotomy in the first place. It believes in immanent relationality and dynamic transformability, holding that interaction based on difference rather than homogeneity generates healthy life and arguing that subject and object, structure and process, substance and procedure—all these categories constructed as dichotomous opposites are in fact mutually transformable as related parts of a whole. The evolution of global society, from international society of nation-states, to global society of humans, and to planetary society of all on earth (or beyond), clearly indicates the relational transformability across the ostensible subject–object divide. Power relations exist, but any unilateral exercise of power is ephemeral, for power over will not last, while power to will.

Introduction

Stefano Guzzini's critical comments, among the various discussions around my relational theory over the past few years,¹ go deeper into some fundamental questions concerning

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¹ Emilian Kavalski, *The Guanxi of Relational International Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018); Milja Kurki, “Relational Revolution and Relationality in IR: New Conversations,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 5 (2022), pp. 821–36; Peter Katzenstein, ed., *Uncertainty and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Ji Ling, “Lun guanxi zhuanxiang de bentilun zijue (On Ontological Consciousness of the Relational Turn),” *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 1 (2019), pp. 78–97; Chen Nanhui, “Wenhua chayi lilun pubianxing he zhongguo xuepai de fazhan (Reappraising Cultural Difference, Theoretical Universality, and the Development of Chinese International Relations Theory),” *Guoji Guancha (International Review)*, No. 5 (2023), pp. 109–35. Some comments are seen in empirical studies, such as Andrew Yeo and Kuyoun Chung, “A Relational Approach

ontology, epistemology, and practice.² I summarize them as the tensions between ontology and behavior, between structure and process, and between substance and procedure. Overall, it concerns a crucial question: How to identify the subject and object and understand the domination–subordination relationship therein?

The first, the ontology–behavior tension, points to the fact that my relational theory rests on the ontology of relational harmony, featured by immanent inclusivity and complementary difference. It “explains or understands events, outcomes, worldviews, beliefs, or other phenomena.” Clearly, Guzzini’s criticism is not about specific foreign policy (FP), but goes deeply into the inconsistency between the ontological position and FP behavior. As Guzzini has correctly pointed out, the relational theory has three core elements: It does not embrace strong relationalism against substantialism because entity and process are dialectically related; it places emphasis on immanency, arguing that the two terms of a pair are immanently inclusive; and, furthermore, immanent inclusivity means that the original state of all under heaven is harmony, for two interactive parts are in fact the two of one. Conflict necessarily exists, but is a deviation from the original state and therefore has less ontological significance.

These ontological assumptions challenge those implied in the mainstream international relation (IR) theories now dominant in the discipline.³ However, when the relational theory serves as an FP theory, it contradicts its ontological position, demonstrating an “ontology–behavior” tension that is reflected by an ontology valuing difference and a behavioral tendency favoring homogeneity of identity. It is clearly expressed by the argument that close relationship or homogeneity facilitates cooperation. The relational theory criticizes the effort to materialize homogeneity in mainstream theories, arguing that they try to “either eliminate or assimilate the difference to realize homogeneity.” But as an FP theory, especially when it discusses cooperation, it expresses a similar view on homogeneity, maintaining that homogeneousness expedites cooperation, reasoned by the argument that cooperation among homogeneous individuals is easier, such as among family members, friends, etc. That homogeneity facilitates cooperation is of little difference from much of the western social theory, and concerns an important understanding of difference and homogeneousness: hile the ontological position of the relational theory places emphasis on difference and mutual complementarity, it goes back to identity and homogeneity to explain real-world cooperation and conflict. Its behavioral explanation violates its own ontological stand.

The second is the structure–process tension. It is more about power, reflected mainly in the relational theory’s negligence of the importance and relevance of power structure. The relational theory emphasizes process at the expense of structure. Power is a key concept in politics. Material and non-material structural power constitutes a key factor that influences the behavior of an actor. The relational theory overemphasizes process and takes power as a mere interactive phenomenon, while in any polity and society, including the international system and community, structural power is too significant to be put aside. If only the interaction between actors is taken care of while the structure is left out of the discussion, the holder and exerciser of power will be nowhere to be found. Fundamentally speaking, discussion that neglects structural power practically deletes the subject of power. If power structure is missing and the positioning of an actor in the structure is unclear, the subject and object of power cannot be identified. In political analysis, it is imperative to define the

to Indo-Pacific Strategies: South Korea’s Role in a Networked Regional Architecture,” *Asian Politics & Policy*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2023), pp. 5–20; Van Jackson, “Relational Peace versus Pacific Primacy: Configuring US Strategy for Asia’s Regional Order,” *Asian Politics & Policy*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2023), pp. 141–52; Hidetaka Yoshimatsu, “Rationality and Relationality: A Socio-Cultural Perspective on Japan’s Strategy for Infrastructure Investment,” *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (2023), pp. 643–62.

² Stefano Guzzini, “Relationalism(s) Unpacked: Engaging Yaqing Qin’s Theory of World Politics,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2024), pp. 187–205.

³ The “mainstream IR theories” refer to neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism, and constructivism.

power holder and receiver. For example, who is *yin* and who is *yang*? Who decides who is *yin* and who is *yang*? Who exercises power and who is obedient to it? Who decides where the center of a relational circle is and who sits there? All these questions may be well related to power structure and structural power. In the relational theory, they are little discussed.

The criticism of the relational theory's emphasis on process over structure indicates a tension between structure and process in terms of power exercise, resulting in the absence of vertical domination in the theory, especially the tacit power of the powerful. Exclusive emphasis on the process that includes relational power makes it unable to define and identify the holder or the subject of power, therefore blurring the line between the power exerciser and receiver as well as their different role identities and even their meanings in a power structure. Only if the structure of power is clearly defined, do the subject and object simultaneously become clear. In explaining the behavior of an actor, the power structure defines, authorizes, and legitimizes the respective roles of actors therein, making the latter accept and play a given role even without resentment. For example, the hierarchical father-son structure defines and determines the roles of the father and the son, and the position of the father-figure in the structure enables him to give order while the son's is to obey. It is also true of a patriarchal society that structures the identities of the male and female. If the structure should be left out of the picture, the embedded positional power is missing and the implicit vertical power, the power to control from above in polity and society, is overlooked.

The substance-procedure tension is the third one. It is particularly apparent when the relational theory serves as an FP theory. The most significant substance in FP strategy, for example, is universal values, while friendly relationship is largely a procedural factor. The relational theory as an FP theory turns almost completely to relation and harmony, while neglecting values as the substance. The "open process," which is a key concept of the relational theory, is one that must be preconditioned by common moral values rather than merely relational circles. Confucian values do not equal Confucian rationality. In a nation's FP, upholding values and making friends are both needed, but it is necessary to make clear which is more substantial and which is more procedural, or a clear distinction should be drawn between the means and the end. If there is no firm foundation of common values, the substance has been deleted, leaving the procedure drifting aloof. Thus, the Confucian relationality alone does not establish and maintain an open process; rather it may establish and maintain only a relational process, a social web, which by definition is closed rather than open, with little substance at all.

In sum, Guzzini has pointed out that the ontology-behavior, structure-process, and substance-procedure tensions are embedded in the relational theory. Since his comments are more philosophical than instrumental, going deep into some fundamental issues concerning worldviews ontologically and epistemologically, a meaningful engagement with Guzzini's criticism requires a response going beyond the superficial and specific. An appropriate way is perhaps a reflective understanding of the *zhongyong* dialectic, which serves, epistemologically and methodologically, as an analytical and observatory corner-stone of my relational theory. I will, therefore, start my responses by clarifying and re-reading the *zhongyong* dialectic.

The Zhongyong Dialectic

The relational theory assumes a relational ontology, arguing that the world is of and by relations. When we no longer take atomic entities as the primary constitutive units, the *zhongyong* dialectic provides an epistemological and methodological bridge that leads us into this relational universe.

As Guzzini has pointed out, a social theory faces great challenges when it tries to realize the inner consistency especially among its various roles, for instance, as an ontological standpoint, an explanatory theory, and an FP strategy. It is doubtless that the relational

theory has its inner tensions. Besides what Guzzini has pointed out, there must be other tensions and inconsistencies. However, my relational theory differs in some important ways from relationalism developed in the west.⁴ The key difference is rooted in the *zhongyong* dialectic, a basic way of observing and understanding the universe deeply embedded in the Chinese cultural traditions and a worldview based on long-time practice.⁵ It is a most important bridge that connects the ontological position on the one hand and the epistemological and methodological approaches on the other. If we do not have a deeper understanding of the *zhongyong* dialectic and take a more structuralist way of thinking, then it is hard to understand the inner logic of the relational theory and to see its effects when used as an observatory and policy theory.

I discussed the *zhongyong* dialectic elsewhere.⁶ However, due to its critical importance to my theory, it is necessary to give a brief account with some new reflections here. The *zhongyong* dialectic contains three distinct features. First, it presumes no fixed subject and denies any binary structure. *Yin* and *yang* are the two parts of the one system, together constituting the existence of a complete life. The two parts are symmetric in positioning and reflexive in relation. They constitute a life, complementing each other to generate and sustain the life. Literally, *yang* refers to the south of a hill or the north of a river facing more the sun, and therefore represents often the masculine principle. On the other hand, *yin* means the north of a hill, not facing the sun, and presents the feminine principle. The natural analogy is the sun and moon, and the male and female. But the key lies in the fact that without one the other does not exist. It is not to say that *yang* dominates while *yin* subordinates, for each depends on the other for existence. To some extent, Confucianism takes *yang* as the more significant in life, for it is a doctrine that encourages people to make ever greater achievements in this world, while Daoism values *yin* especially, believing that the seemingly weak are in fact stronger. This idea goes throughout *Daodejing* (*Book of Dao*), and perhaps more in *Zhuangzi* (especially the chapter of “Equality of Things” thereof), which argues that all on earth are equal.⁷ Overall, *yin* and *yang* are of equal importance because each depends on the other for life.

Fundamentally speaking, the *zhongyong* dialectic maintains that *yin* and *yang* constitute, maintain, and generate life only if they are co-existent and complementary. Life is the art of *yin* and *yang* living harmoniously together, rather than their struggle for a superior and dominant position. Both are subjects and, at the same time, both objects. To some extent, the *zhongyong* dialectic tells a “no-subject” story, for it refuses to define definitely who is the subject and who the object. This overall uncertainty is a key to understanding the *zhongyong* dialectic or what I have termed “immanent transformability.” The earth and heaven are usually taken respectively as *yin* and *yang*, but who is the subject? They are merely two parts of the universe, coming together to make it a complete cosmologic life. Similarly, the father- and mother-figures are inseparable. They are two of the one, each consisting half of a life system. Therefore, by the *zhongyong* dialectic, the Concert of Father and Mother is not only possible but also inevitable, while the Concert of Fathers is out of the question, for the *zhongyong* dialectic does not envisage an independently and self-organized Father.

⁴ Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, “Relations before States: Substance, Process and the Study of World Politics,” *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1999), pp. 291–332. Also see Astrid Nordin, et al., “Towards Global Relational Theorizing: A Dialogue between Sinophone and Anglophone Scholarship on Relationalism,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 5 (2019), pp. 570–81.

⁵ Pang Pu, “Zhongyong pingyi (An Analysis of Zhongyong),” *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue* (*Social Sciences in China*), No. 1 (1980), pp. 75–100; Tu Weiming, *An Insight of Chung-yung (Zhongyong)* (Beijing: People’s Press, 2008).

⁶ Yaqing Qin, *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁷ Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing—Making Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003).

Second, *yin* and *yang* are intra-active.⁸ It means that they are interactive as two parts of one system, for the two co-exist and are the two sides of one thing. Such mutuality cannot be taken as interaction in its usual sense, that is, between two discrete and self-maintaining entities. Such active mutuality is of life, for life, and for generating new life, and therefore the two parts are life for each other.

This dialectical logic can be extended to all on earth, for example, people and people, people and nature, and so on. When Wang Yangming, an ancient Chinese philosopher, argued that all on earth have conscience, he stressed “all,” including not only animals and plants but also stones and tiles.⁹ The conscience of all is equal, human conscience included. Furthermore, all on earth are in fact one, articulating life for each other and complementing each other for a better or new life. From this perspective, the *zhongyong* dialectic goes beyond humanism. It takes care of all on earth and perhaps beyond the earth as we see.

Third, *yin* and *yang* are mutually transformable. A key word of *zhongyong* is “becoming” rather than “being” and there is neither a fixed *yin* nor a fixed *yang*. Who decides which is *yin* and which is *yang*? Who draws the line between them? Which force is dominating? All these issues are seen as natural phenomena in fluid relations and ongoing processes. Any artificial lines between and rigid definition of *yin* and *yang* are futile. Zhuangzi’s butterfly dream makes this point clear.¹⁰ It is generally understood that the waking state, or the subject-situation, is *yang* while the sleeping state, or the object-situation, is *yin*. But with Zhuangzi, he becomes the butterfly as the butterfly becomes him. Then he asks who is Zhuangzhou (Zhuangzi) and who is the butterfly? Or who is the subject and who is the object? Both are, and neither is. The subject and object situations are transformable and are mutually becoming. All seemingly dichotomous forces, such as fortune and misfortune, friend and foe, strength and weakness, are mutually transformable. At a particular point of time and space, we may observe a kind of structure, a power structure, for example, but it is transformable with the process that goes with it. In fact, such a worldview is really hard to understand from the perspectives of dualism or structuralism, for which, it is indispensable to have a clearly constructed frame where the subject and object are unmistakably defined and the different categories are independently interpreted. Co-existence, immanency, and mutual transformability, however, take new looks through the *zhongyong* dialectic.

Using this logic, we may well see structure and process as a pair that interact with and transform toward each other. All structures are configurations at a particular point of time and space and such a configuration, once being formed, is beginning to change toward another process. Structure and process are immanent and mutually transformable. Furthermore, in any relational process, *yin* in one relational situation is *yang* in another, and vice versa.

The Father-figure is imposed and fixed, following the essentialist way, in an artificially constructed power structure. It is not natural but man-imposed and therefore it goes against the core principle of the *zhongyong* dialectic. Day is *yang* and night *yin*, but day is becoming night and night day. It is a process of becoming rather than an essentialist day or night. The *zhongyong* dialectic, therefore, is fundamentally anti-essentialist, never believing that there is a fossilized, fixed structure, whatever it be. The independent structure, the self-standing father, the imposed father-position in the structure, and the power effect thereof—all these strong structural elements are unconceivable from the perspective of the *zhongyong* dialectic.

The relational theory takes the *zhongyong* dialectic as its epistemological and methodological device mainly because it provides a bridge between its worldview-oriented ontology

⁸ Chuang-Tze (Zhuangzi), *A New Selected Translation with an Expression of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang*, trans. Feng Yulan (Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2012).

⁹ Wang Yangming, *Chuanxi lu (Wang Yangming’s Teachings)* (Beijing: Beijing Shidai Huawen Shuju, 2014).

¹⁰ See “Equality of Things” in *Zhuangzi*.

and its observation-based explanation. In other words, if we should separate the ontological position of the relational theory from its explanative effectiveness and practical consideration without turning to the *zhongyong* dialectic as a bridge for understanding and interpretation, it is easy to see tensions and contradictions, very often in a formal logical and structuralist way, appear. As Richard Nisbett explains his comparative mother-daughter experiment between a group of Chinese and a group of American students, contradictions clearly identified by the latter with certainty seem quite natural and reasonable by the former.¹¹ Taking a *zhongyong* perspective and thinking that way, we may see many of the tensions disappear. This is why we need the *zhongyong* dialectic to discuss the relational ontology.

Immanency

Immanency, or immanently inclusivity, is a key to understanding the *zhongyong* dialectic. Since the term “immanency” may be interpreted and understood in various ways, it is necessary to clarify it in the first place. Guzzini has correctly pointed out that the relational theory has two core concepts, i.e. inclusivity and processuality, and argued that harmony is not something new and exclusively oriental. Social theory of recognition and other western social theories have also discussed harmony as an important concept. G. A. Cohen’s Jazz Band model, for example, maintains that “each player seeks his own fulfilment as a musician” and is “basically interested in his own fulfilment, and not in that of the band as a whole,” but at the same time cooperates with others in her group so that beautiful music can be made by the group as a whole.

It is true that harmony is meaningful in any culture and, to some extent, expresses a good wish people everywhere would like to have. Social theory of recognition as well as other social theories values harmony. It is, however, important to clarify a question related to worldviews: What is the original state of the universe after all, harmony and cooperation, or struggle and competition? The ontological significance lies in the answer to this question. While it is undeniable that harmony and struggle may co-exist, but which has ontological priority?

In much of the IR literature, we tend to see a particular emphasis on competition and struggle, especially when international anarchy is introduced and often serves as the first push of IRs. That war is the continuation of politics, as Karl Von Clausewitz believes, implies that war is an inseparable part of politics; social Darwinism argues that the more competitive win; and Hobbesian international theorists compare the international system to a jungle where all fight against all. For mainstream IR theories, realism, needless to say, is most straightforward, seeing it compatible in important respects to a jungle. Even theories that lay much more emphasis on cooperation recognize the inevitable conflict in anarchy. Neoliberal institutionalism first accepts the inevitability of conflict in the international system and then tries to solve the puzzle why relations between states could have been cooperative but turn out conflictual. Its research was initially limited to relations among developed democracies.¹² That under anarchy conflict is fundamental among atomic individuals has become a prior assumption from which much research starts. This assumption, following consciously or unconsciously the Newtonian worldview, takes self-organized and discretely independent atoms as the basic units of society, international society included.

It is quite a common phenomenon that much social theory takes this presumption, identifying clearly an independent, discrete entity as a point of departure. It is perhaps possible

¹¹ Richard E. Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently...and Why* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

¹² Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

to make an “I-in-we” argument, but it is quite illogical to make an “I-in-you” one. Cohen’s jazz band is a typical example of the former, but the latter is unthinkable. The *yin-yang* interaction in the relational theory differs. It is not interaction between two atomic entities, but interaction between two parts that constitute one life system. Immanency thus expresses the idea that nothing is discretely independent in the universe and any two terms in a pair are the two sides of one thing. In other words, forces in interaction are never self-standing and ever co-organizing. Heaven and earth, male and female, day and night, and strength and weakness, all follow the same principle of interaction. The two parts are mutually existing, articulating, and transforming, for life and for new life. This is the idea of “I-in-you,” or the idea of inclusive immanency.

It is perhaps more appropriate to use the concept of “immanent interaction” or “intra-action”¹³ to discuss the dynamic relationship between *yin* and *yang*. While interaction refers to the situation between two independent actors, two atoms or atomic states, intra-action takes place between two parts of one life system, *yin* and *yang*, like two entangled quanta. The key difference lies in the fact that intra-action involves two non-independent, mutually entangled parts of one system. It tells a different story about relations between two forces as well as relations among many. It is not to argue which worldview, atomic or relational, is correct, for each has been deeply rooted in long and repeated practices. Rather, it introduces a different worldview for understanding and interpreting.

Many IR theories tend to discuss interaction in the first sense, i.e. interaction between two independent, sovereign entities. The modern state as well as the state system in fact was constructed following this worldview.¹⁴ I term it individual rationalism, a typical example of which is the game theory. The two players in the prisoners’ dilemma are first assumed as self-standing and self-conscious individuals and the interaction between them is one between two independent entities, each with prior self-interest. The modern sense of the state is exactly like this. On the other hand, the dynamic relations between *yin* and *yang* indicate an intra-action, for they are mere two parts of one thing. A self-organizing entity continues to exist once the other one is gone, and perhaps even lives better, but *yin* cannot exist without *yang* and vice versa. Losing one means losing both. Intra-action produces energy for the need of a life to exist, continue, and prosper.

Following this logic, we may have a reconsideration of causality. Intra-action between immanent parts does not present the causality the Newtonian science tries to find, for no such causality is sure to be there for the rational mind to reveal. In the sense of classic science, causality is a fundamental law in the universe and, furthermore, cause comes always before effect in temporal terms. But in intra-action, since the two parts are considered immanent and inclusive of each other, it is hard to say which is the cause and which the effect. Rather they change simultaneously, no matter how far they are physically separate. Thus, the Chinese may well believe that the two constitute a process of reciprocal causation: Both serve as cause as well as effect. For example, when we discuss structure and process, arguments that structure goes before process or the other way round take an implicit assumption that one is the cause while the other the effect, or to some extent, one is the subject while the other the object. Here again we come across the subject–object dichotomy.

¹³ As Wendt discusses it, the concept of intra-action is used, “since who we become through measurements on each other is internal to our shared relationships—our entanglements—rather than something that happened outside them.” Alexander Wendt, *Quantum Mind and Social Science: Unifying Physical and Social Ontology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 172–3.

¹⁴ Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). She discusses the different paths taken in China and Europe. The Warring and Spring and Autumn periods in Chinese history are similar to the pre-Westphalian situation in Europe, but the later developments differ dramatically. While the former became a unified empire, the latter saw the establishment of the Westphalian international system with sovereign states as its units. It is argued that Chinese believe in the “Grand Unification,” reflecting a worldview that takes oneness as a natural phenomenon in both the human and natural worlds.

In the relational theory I, following the *zhongyong* dialectic, negate the argument that relations go before actors, for relations as a process are both a process of generating and one of being generated. The same goes with the actor. Therefore, relations and actors are simultaneously constituted. I have used the sea and drop of seawater to metaphorize their relations. It is a key element in the *zhongyong* dialectic, believing that all in the universe are of one, inclusively immanent and mutually constitutive. It is also true of structure and process. Some argue that process comes before structure, like the assumption that relations come before states. It implies that the process takes the priority.¹⁵ Others argue that a structure is the emergent configuration in process. This argument implies that process “causes” structure, though perhaps not in the Newtonian linear way,¹⁶ and therefore does not go with the *zhongyong* dialectic, which would maintain that process and structure are mutually constitutive and neither comes first.

This may be similar to the logic of quantum entanglement. In a quantum system, its parts are entangled and change simultaneously no matter how far they are physically apart, as the non-locality principle shows. In other words, this system is one and all parts in it represent the features of the system. The parts are engaged in intra-action, or parts of one life system mutualize each other. Their entangled relations dynamize their existence, energy, and change in co-evolution. They represent the attributes and properties of the very quantum system. In such intra-actions, not only the event that occurs first may influence the following event, but the latter may also influence the former. The classical causality principle gets lost here as experiments have proved again and again this interesting phenomenon that Einstein calls suspiciously “spooky actions at a distance.” It is true, even it goes against both Newtonianism and the common sense.

Therefore, immanency as a natural characteristic of the relational ontology and harmony thereof is not a mere question of cooperation and coordination between an individual player and the group she is in. It refers rather to the original state of the universe, for the parts that constitute the whole co-exist and co-evolve as complementary principles of a life, conditioning and conditioned on each other. Harmony between them thus is natural and enjoys ontological priority. It is not to say that conflict does not exist. In the case that a person suffers from cancer, it may be seen as a conflict or non-cooperation between the cells rather than believing that malign cells emerge to struggle against benign ones. Refusal to cooperate by the former leads to disharmony in the life system.¹⁷ Disharmony may cause death, which means the end of the life. But such conflict would be a deviation from the normal state of life and bringing the non-cooperative cells to cooperation is perhaps a way that could be better and more effective than to kill them, no matter what methods, surgery, chemotherapy, or radiotherapy, are used for the killing.

In IRs, it concerns one of the fundamental questions, i.e. cooperation and conflict. Much of the mainstream IR theory tends to argue that conflict is inevitable under anarchy. It is therefore reasonable to say that conflict is socially normal and may even be a driving force for historical progress and human evolution. The theory of social evolution maintains, to some extent, that competition pushes the human forward and mainstream IR theories presume in various degrees that conflict is ontologically more significant. The relational theory, on the other hand, changes interaction into intra-action, thus turning actors from independently discrete self-organizers to related and entangled ones in a life system and thus making conflict resolvable in the first place as well as in the final analysis. If harmony is defined as maximum cooperation as I did in my book, then intra-action, by definition, enables cooperation to be easier and more significant.

¹⁵ Jackson and Nexon, “Relations before States.”

¹⁶ Yaqing Qin, “Zhishiguan chongjian yu guojiguanxi lilun de fazhan jinlu (Reconstruction of Scientific Outlooks and Evolution of IR Theories),” *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue (Social Sciences in China)*, No. 9 (2022), pp. 143–6.

¹⁷ Robert Axelrod, David E. Axelrod, and Kenneth J. Pienta, “Evolution of Cooperation among Tumor Cells,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, Vol. 103, No. 36 (2006), pp. 13474–9.

This points to the relational theory as an observatory theory. It is true that harmony is defined as maximum cooperation, but harmony in the sense of the *zhongyong* dialectic does not imply homogeneity. On the contrary, harmony is based on difference, diversity, or heterogeneity. A life system is made of differences, and parts of it, *yin* and *yang*, differ obviously from each other. Because they differ, they complement; because they complement, they make and maintain a healthy life and generate new life. Harmony therefore rests on difference rather than homogeneity.

My relational theory argues that intimacy makes cooperation easier. It is here that a misunderstanding tends to occur when intimacy is identified with homogeneity. Intimacy refers to the relationship between two or more actors, and it never implies that the two actors are identical or similar in properties and attributes. *Yin* and *yang*, no matter whether it is considered physiologically, naturally, or in other respects, are very different, but they are intimate. In the 1980s, the relations between China and the USA were often described as the honeymoon period, but the two countries were clearly different.

Taking close relations as homogeneous identity is quite misleading. That intimate relationship facilitates cooperation does not imply that homogeneity conditions harmony. Due perhaps to some misunderstanding,¹⁸ the relational theory's hypothesis about behavior that the more intimate the actors are, the easier they are to cooperate may be taken as the more homogeneous they are, the more cooperative they tend to be. Intimacy is not homogeneity and does not imply homogeneity. The democratic peace theory implies such homogeneity, and to some extent Wendtian constructivism does. But the relational theory does not. As an observatory theory, it sees difference as the basis for cooperation because it makes complementation possible and diversity as a most important condition for harmony because energetic life exists in diversity. Furthermore, the relational theory does not agree with radical evolutionary view which believes that competition and struggle constitute the driving force for progress. Rather, more similarly with theorists of cooperative evolution, it believes that cooperation is the driving force for human evolution and progress.¹⁹ In this line, good politics means artful management of relations so that all co-live and co-evolve well.

Intimacy in relations means that actors, people or things, have friendly and close relations among them, for example, between humans, between states, and between the human and the natural worlds. The relational theory does argue that if an intimate relationship develops between them, their cooperation becomes easier. Intimacy does not mean homogeneity and homogeneity does not sustain a healthy life. We are now paying much more attention to our relations with nature, believing that a more friendly relationship with nature helps both. It does not mean that we are the same with nature and everyone knows the difference. The fact that we advocate nature-friendliness is an expression of establishing and maintaining more intimate relations with nature. It is impossible to make nature like the human. If one should try to do so, disasters would follow.

Confucius says that the virtuous are friendly to each other though they are different while the mean are hostile to each other though they are similar. Intimate and friendly relations exist not because of homogeneity, but in spite of it. The argument that friendship should be brought back to IRs perhaps recognizes that friendship is a normal phenomenon in human society but is neglected for long, overshadowed by anarchy, power struggle, and strategic rivalry. The reality is that in international society diversity and difference exist and cannot and should not be deleted. How to find a way for different actors and players to co-exist and co-evolve is what IRs should carefully think about, for real world politics is not to encourage

¹⁸ For example, the sentence that "Good relations can be established and maintained only among homogeneous actors who show similar behaviour, similar beliefs, or similar way of thinking" on page 228 means to point out a common assumption of influential IR theories, i.e. homogeneity facilitates good relations. It is an argument that exactly violates the *zhongyong* dialectic. With *zhongyong*, good relations can be developed and maintained among actors who are not homogeneous in identity. See Qin, *A Relational Theory of World Politics*, pp. 226–31.

¹⁹ Martin Nowack, "Five Rules for the Evolution of Cooperation," *Science*, Vol. 314, No. 5805 (2006), pp. 1560–3.

rivalry and struggle, but to develop the ability to realize cooperation and harmonious co-existence. For this, the relational theory differs in one respect, that is, it believes that conflict is not ontological significant while harmony is.²⁰ In the final analysis, therefore, conflict is resolvable.

The Subject

The *zhongyong* dialectic does not envisage a fixed subject. It therefore never presumes a subject–object binary structure. A conspicuous tradition of the western philosophy, more often than not, defines the subject clearly and draws a sharp line between the subject and object, constructing an unambiguous dichotomy. Under this binary structure, the relationship between the subject and object is also clearly defined, that is, the subject dominates: It is the giver, the initiator, and the active force. It also fits into the means-end dichotomy, which the rational man pursues. The subject–object boundary prevents the latter from becoming the former unless a revolution occurs and reverses their positions. Furthermore, the subject decides. For example, the west decides which is the west and which the east. It is also true that the subject decides what is knowledge in IRs as well as in other fields. Underlying this is the dichotomous frame which informs the way of thinking. Moreover, it is a kind of deterministic standpoint and assumes certainty for the subject–object structure as well as their respective roles thereof.

Think about the power structure. A subject-dominant theory needs to identify a subject and structuralists tend to take the structure as the personified subject, for it impacts and shapes the behavior of actors within. The material structures of Waltz and Wallerstein are explicit examples, as well as the non-material power structures of, to some extent, Foucault and Gramsci. A political theory with little space for power structure and actors' positions in it would lose its subject and therefore power has no holder and exerciser. The relational theory, with its stress on interaction among actors, as critics say, misses the structure as a key factor when power is discussed. Then who is the subject? Who is favorably positioned in the structure to gain power from it and who is subjected to it? All these questions concern the subject issue: Without a clear subject, whether it is the structure itself or the favorably positioned thereof, it is hard to make sense of the actors' behavior. The position decides who is the power exerciser and receiver, just as the father and son in a patriarchal society where the power of the father is given by the social structure, clear-cut, and self-evident. Negligence of the power structure means the negligence of the embedded structural power and the “vertical control” by the structure.

In the final analysis, any discussion of power, no matter whether it is at the level of actors or of structures, must have a subject, who possesses and exercises power. At the same time, a subject must have an object who is not able to exercise power but only subjected to the power. If the power exerciser is an individual, a state for example, it is able to control the object, making the latter do what the former prefers.²¹ If it is a structure, it is either an impersonal exerciser or a role identity enabled and sustained by the impersonal power structure such as the father figure. It is the impersonal power structure or a structure-sustained role identity that serves as the subject subjugating the power receiver, or the object.

²⁰ It by no means forecloses conflict in international politics as well as in human societies. In fact, the issue under discussion here is not whether conflict is foreclosed, but whether it is resolvable eventually. Conflict is a common phenomenon and appears from time to time. By the *zhongyong* dialectic, progress in a life process is to resolve conflict through harmonization. That is why it is called the dialectic of harmonization, a process of overcoming conflict toward harmony. Since it believes that harmony is more ontological significant, conflict, as deviation from the normal as well as the natural, is solvable in the final analysis. See Cheng Chung-ying, “Towards Constructing a Dialectics of Harmonization: Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 33, No. S1 (2006), pp. 25–59.

²¹ Robert Dhal, “The Concept of Power,” *Behavioral Science*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1957), pp. 201–15.

Power structure is able to define the subject and object thereof and may often exercise power in a Foucaultian way, that is, it is omnipresent, a watching prison without a single blind spot. And it is permissive, like a ghost haunting the whole society to make the object obey, and often obey willingly and without even knowing about the power over herself, let alone questioning its legitimacy.²² The subject, therefore, is able to exercise such omnipotent power, making the object do what the structural power prefers. The object seldom rebels, for she takes for granted the legitimacy of the power and the reasonableness of exercising such power. Accordingly, she accepts the order as well as her own fate arranged by the power structure. It is the “tacit, vertical control.”

So far, we may see two levels of power relations. The first is interpersonal, or between the individual power exerciser and receiver. It is most thoroughly discussed in classic IR literature and relative power has always been a major consideration by strategists. In this exerciser–receiver dichotomy, the more powerful tends to be the subject to influence, while the less powerful is the object to be ordered about. The former is able to control, do whatever he prefers, no matter how he exercises his power, in a hard and coercive or a soft and cooptive way. In today’s world, states continue to work hard to gain, maintain, and increase their own power, as Morgenthau said decades ago. To a large extent, it pursues the ability to coerce, command, and control. The second level is structural, showing the structure–agent power relations. It goes beyond the agential power and focuses on the structure as power producer.²³ The subject of power is an impersonal structure or a structure-sustained individual actor. There are two dimensions at this level. The first is that the meaning and intension of the power structure is imposed on but internalized by actors in it, who in turn accept the reasonableness of the structure. Therefore, acceptance of the power structure as well as its inherent meaning is the only thing they rationally do. They obey and never ask why. This is similar to what Checkel calls normative suasion when he discussed the socialization in Europe.²⁴ The second is about the positioning in the structure. It is not about the permissive power in the structure itself, but the power given to a particular individual actor by his positioning in the structure. In a patriarchal society, for example, the position that the male gets gives him the power over the female. It is true of a monarchy where the king enjoys supreme power over his subjects. It is therefore important to take seriously such structural power in society, international society included.

The *zhongyong* dialectic, however, is a way of thinking for ever-changing processes and therefore a worldview of uncertainty, contingency, and indeterminacy. It does not define a fixed subject and, rather, believes that the subject and object are in constant change toward each other. Furthermore, the co-change is natural, needing neither human effort (such as radical revolutions) nor transcendental design. Since the binary way of thinking and therefore the dichotomous structure has not been a dominant theme in the traditional Chinese worldview, who is the subject or object has not been a question. Rather, they are the two parts in and of one life, intra-acting with and changing toward each other. They are mutually complementary and co-evolving into new life. If we do use the terms of subject and object, then *yin* and *yang* are both subjects and objects, each becoming the other under some conditions. The subject there and then may become the object here and now, and vice versa. By the same token, the power exerciser there and then may become the power taker here and now. Laozi’s philosophy that things develop in opposite direction and Zhuangzi’s argument that dreams and realities are inseparably entangled and mutually transformable express such subject–object indeterminacy.

²² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* (London: Penguin, 1991).

²³ Stefano Guzzini, *Power, Realism, and Constructivism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 7–8.

²⁴ Checkel discusses three phases of norm internalization, i.e. strategic calculation, role playing, and normative suasion. Normative suasion can be seen as the perfect internalization of norms. See Jeffrey Checkel, “International Institutions and Socialization in Europe: Introduction and Framework,” *International Organization*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (2005), pp. 801–26.

Also, we may consider power at two levels. At the first level, power exerciser and taker are the two terms of *yin* and *yang* as described in the *zhongyong* dialectic. They are two inclusively immanent parts of one life, each complementing the other during the life process. By this logic, the subject and object are two equal and mutually inclusive parts, intra-acting with and transforming toward each other. At a particular temporal and spatial moment, one may be dominant and play the subject role, only to find itself becoming the other. Their identities are therefore indetermined: the subject is becoming the object and vice versa. It is true of a power relationship, in which the power exerciser or the subject and the power taker or the object are transformable, becoming each other in an empowering process.

The second level refers to the structural level where the power structure impacts the agent therein. As often observed, it reflects structural power and the position in the structure that enjoys a structure-favored edge in power. In any given tempo-spatial point it is perhaps the power easier to observe. One tends to take the apparent structure at this particular point as perpetual. According to the *zhongyong* dialectic, however, power structure as the power exerciser and actors as the power taker are mutually constitutive and serve as the two sides of one system. The power structure and actors therein constitute together this life system. For any system, if it wants to continue its life and generate new life, a mutually empowering relationship between the structure and the agent is indispensable. In other words, a power structure can last if and only if it empowers the actor. In reality, we see numerous forms of power that control, coerce, and deprive the so-called objects of life. We thus tend to define power as such. But to understand lasting power, we need to redefine power and reframe the power concept. Lasting and sustainable power is the power that empowers the other, no matter whether it is in the form of individual or structural power. Accordingly, any power form that controls and deprives is short-lived as a deviation from the fundamental stand of the *zhongyong* dialectic and therefore has little ontological significance, even though they exist and can be conspicuously observed. In this line, a lasting power structure means one in which the structure and the actor therein are mutually empowering, or, in other words, they are both the transformable subject and object. Thus, even discussing structural power, we can also imagine the actor as a subject, empowering the structure as it is empowered by the structure.

The second dimension is the structure–process one. It is too a dialectical existence, mutually generating and empowering. Fluid process, under certain conditions, may enable relatively stable structure to emerge, which at the moment of its formation is becoming process. The *zhongyong* dialectic is not to reify a conflictual dichotomy and not to take the elimination of the other as its objective. Rather it is for mutual complementation and transformation through mutual empowerment.

A structure emerged under certain conditions, even if it looks like a substantial entity, is in fact in a process of transformation. Tribes, city-states, and nation-states are taken as entities, configuring as various forces are entangling with and working on one another. After all they are temporal, taking a form of an entity or a structure. The nation-state is taken as the leading actor in the international system, but both the state and the inter-state system, mutually constitutive, have only a history of some 400 years. The power structure in international society or the international system, no matter whether it is the hegemonic system and balance of power marked by hard power, or ideational structures marked by leading ideologies, such as mercantilism, social Darwinism, or realpolitik, may well be dissolving in the longer process of historical development, working to make new structures to emerge.

Structuralists tend to focus on structures and their effects on agents. Waltz's deterministic structuralism pays attention only to the distribution of power in the international system, believing it an invisible hand determining the behavior of the state-agent; Wallerstein's structuralism points to the economic structure in the international system, positing that the distribution of wealth defines the core, semi-core, and peripheral relations and determines

the fate of actors in each; and Wendt's structural constructivism leads to a particular interest in the distribution of ideas reflected by international norms at the systemic level, arguing that norms not only regulate behavior but also constitute identity. In a more general sense, Gramsci's cultural hegemony also discusses the persistence of invisible structural power and its effects.

The vertical power, as a strong control and coercive power from above, is a typical form of structural power. It is both the structure that is the subject of power or the position of an individual actor in the structure that endows him with power. The structure or the structure-favored individual is the subject exercising power. Such a structural representation must assume at the same time a dichotomous binary, a structure that contains two opposites, a subject and an object. The former subjugates while the latter is subjected. Such a way of thinking, however, neglects the fact that any structure is in a process of change and transformation toward a new process of existence and transformation. No structure is fixed and perpetual, and therefore any structure is indetermined and contingent. Material structures may dissolve and ideational ones thaw. A structure may disappear in the transformation toward a new process, which enables new structures to emerge and reconfigure. The patriarchal society is gone and a hegemonic international structure may be over. During the process of going and coming, new societies may well emerge, such as one with more equality between the male and female, between the more and less powerful, and among the myriad things. Structure and process are mutually transformative and transformable, each providing the condition for the other and neither is determinative with certainty.

Take global governance as an example. Even during our life time, we can at least see three interrelated concepts, i.e. international governance, global governance, and planetary governance. From international to global and then to planet, the most important change is the change of the subject underpinned by the changing subject-object relationship. Along with it comes the change of the object. Who governs and whom is governed: It is an open question rather than a definite answer.

International governance prioritizes the state, taking it as the subject of governance. It is the state that governs. The governance refers to interstate or international governance, with states as the leading actor in the international system. From Westphalia, through Vienna, and Versailles, up to the League of Nations and the United Nations, all followed the similar line of thinking. Its principle is that states govern and its practice tends to be that the more powerful govern. The subject has always been clear. Global governance differs from international governance in the fact that the former expands the subject to include states and non-state actors. In both theory and practice while states continue to be highly important with its privilege of sovereignty, non-state actors and even individuals have been playing an increasingly important role, active in framing issues, setting agendas, and influencing state decisions. It is not an exaggeration to say that they are indispensable in global governance. They, as states, are also the subject of governance.

Planetary governance witnesses a further expansion of the subjectivity. No matter whether in international or global governance, the human is definitely the subject. Although advanced ideas and practices in global governance argue that nature is a friend and require that the human should treat nature as a friend, the subject is still the human. The human govern, quite often, condescendingly in relation to nature. The enlightenment spirits tell that the human is the superior species while the non-human constitutes the other, a non-conscious, inferior object to be governed. Planetary governance expands the subject of governance to all on earth. It raises fundamental questions: Is the humankind the only subject of governance? Is it the humankind that has the exclusive power to govern and should govern this way? Is nature the object of governance and subjected to human governance? The negative answers to all these questions give planetary governance a new face: In governance all are equal partners. All are governors as well as the governed.

It is clear that the concept of governance as well as the practice has been changing with the subject ever expanding and the subject–object divide ever obscuring. Human-centrism that used to be the rational consideration faces great challenges today. Going beyond the straitjacket of the human-as-subject narrative to hyper-humanism means that all on earth are subjects as well as objects at the same time. In fact, this process is more like one to blur the line between the subject and object, to indicate a theme of ever-changing subjectivity, and to make all both power exercisers and takers. It may even further expand, going beyond the earth and the universe to the multi-planet, multiverse infinity.

Therefore, according to the *zhongyong* dialectic, the ideal and ultimate goal of power is co-empowerment. Any unilateral exercise of power is thus of little ontological significance without lasting legitimacy, though practically seen everywhere. If the two terms in a processual mutuality constitute a life system, they are intra-active so that the life is maintained, able to generate new life through complementation and co-empowerment. During this process, the two are transforming toward each other and their identity as the subject and object are changeable and changing. A power exerciser, no matter whether it is an individual or a structure, will die out if it tries to be always the power exerciser and make the other do whatever it prefers, coercively, co-optimely, or both. The identities of power exerciser and taker are in a continuous process of transformation. Co-empowerment between individuals and between structure and agent is a precondition for both to exist and last. Power over cannot last and power to will. Haugaard's concept of "good power" expresses a similar idea and so does the new thinking about human–nature relations in planetary governance thoughts and practices.²⁵

Similarly, substance and procedure within the framework of the *zhongyong* dialectic is a couplet that co-exist and complement. It is impossible to discuss the substantial without the procedural and vice versa. The legal tradition in the west generally draws a clear line between them and makes their distinction as unambiguous as possible. Behind this demarcation is the way of thinking backgrounded by an irreconcilable binarity. The substantial is made the subject while the procedural the object, and the existence and practice of the latter are to serve the purpose of the former. The *zhongyong* dialectic, on the other hand, does not make such a clear line. It takes the substantial and procedural as two sides of one thing, sustaining each other and transformable toward each other. No substantial things can stand alone without procedure, and the seemingly mere procedural may well be decisive in practical decision-making processes.

Let us take the "comfort-level" norm of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as an example. If we should distinguish between the substantial and procedural in a binary way, it goes to the category of the procedural, seeming to be some means to reach certain goals. In practice, however, it is more respected than any other formal and substantial rules and serves as "the rule of rules."²⁶ In a practical decision-making situation, it is the first rule to obey. Even if a substantial issue has been discussed and deliberated over and over again, it will be shelved if one participant feels "uncomfortable." Even if the so-called substantial goal, important as it is, fails to achieve, the comfort-level norm must be strictly followed. The ASEAN is highly flexible, the key word for it is resilience, and its resilience is well maintained as an invisible power thanks to, to a large extent, this procedural rule of comfort level. It keeps the ASEAN cooperative process unbroken, the ultimate goal of this diverse regional organization. It is procedural and at the same time it is substantial. It combines the means and the end.

²⁵ Mark Haugaard, "Rethinking the Four Dimensions of Power: Domination and Empowerment," *Journal of Political Power*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2012), pp. 33–54.

²⁶ Yaqing Qin, "Transnational Governance and Multiple Multilateralisms," in Thomas Meyer, Jose Luis de Sales Marques, and Mario Telò, eds., *Regionalism and Multilateralism: Politics, Economics, Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 87–108.

It is true that the “spoiler” issue may rise. The comfort-level norm in practice “risks making either everyone dependent on a spoiler or assumes that everyone will have to consent at some point in time.” In the ASEAN situation, this either-or proposition is not true. The comfort-level norm is for every member, who is not assumed as a spoiler but as one that is unable to agree for some reason. The real underlying consideration is that everyone may have something she feels awkward to disclose rather than she intends to do spoiling. Neither is the assumption that everyone will have to consent at some point in time. ASEAN practices indicate that a shelved proposal or motion may be pigeonholed indefinitely, for to achieve that immediate but perhaps disruptive decision is not what they eventually pursue. More often than not, they will keep the cooperative process going and move to other issues that are easier to cooperate in complete consensus. Between keeping the cooperative process alive and shelving a motion (even forever), they prefer and choose the former. Even if the dissenter is an intentional spoiler, a generous tit-for-tat strategy seems perhaps better than a straightforward one.

Conclusion

The discussion above has shown that a clear dichotomous delineation between the subject and the object constitutes a consistent theme in Guzzini’s criticism. Who is *yin* and who is *yang*? Who decides who is *yin* or *yang*? All these questions point to a worldview that every event contains a subject–object dichotomy and domination–subordination structure. The ontology–behavior, subject–object, and substance–procedure tensions are all reflective of this theme.

A clear subject–object demarcation is a conspicuous tradition in western philosophy, clarifying the categories, defining the subject and object, and making clear their respective identities, positions, roles, and attributes. It is useful, but at the same time it artificially constructs a binary structure, where there are the dominator and the dominated, the regulator and the regulated, and the strong and the weak. Furthermore, it has developed a worldview that sees through this binary frame. The ontological and behavioral, the powerful and powerless, the substantial and procedural—all correspond to the subject–object framework. One may take it for granted that constructing such a binary structure not only describes a real structure in society but also facilitates meaningful social analysis. Its utility has been demonstrated especially in the modernizing process over the past centuries.

The *zhongyong* dialectic, however, does not see the world this way. It does not make a clear subject–object delineation, for it does not have a tradition that follows a binary way of thinking. It takes as equal the two forces related to and interact immanently with each other, for they together make a life and neither exists without the other. They are different and as such they are complementary. Thus, the *zhongyong* dialectic sustains an ontology that does not assume a fixed subject and provides an epistemology that sees the subject and object in a constant process of transforming toward each other. Any way of thinking that assumes, seeks, or constructs a narrative of deterministic certainty goes against the logic of the *zhongyong* dialectic; any analysis with the presupposition of inevitability does not fit into the everchanging theme of the *zhongyong* dialectic; and any binary structure that determines the essence of its units as well as that of the structure itself fails the life envisaged by the *zhongyong* dialectic. It believes that the material and ideational are of, in, and for one, always in a dialectical relationship inseparable and mutually transformable. A worldview or analytical framework that separates them finds little place in the *zhongyong* tradition.

The *zhongyong* dialectic is a worldview that has been born and developed from practice and over time. It is an epistemological and methodological approach that helps people understand and interpret. Different cultures and civilizations may have different worldviews, which in turn enable people to see and comprehend the world and the self in it. The

zhongyong dialectic in the relational theory represents such a worldview and, at the same time, it is one of the many in the world.

Worldviews are formed in long-time practices largely within the habitat where their practice can reach. Furthermore, they are ever-developing and changing. There is no reason to argue which is superior and each reveals a perspective to understand all on and beyond earth. The *zhongyong* dialectic is the intellectual sediment of the Chinese culture accumulated in long practice. It shares something with and also differs from other worldviews, telling us one of the ways to observe, know, and interpret our world and the worlds beyond. It is in the first place about relations and because this is well expected to be part of common human knowledge. Moreover, since there are many worldviews, co-existing in the world, and developing along with time, they tend to meet and communicate. Their communication enables co-inspiration, complementarity, and co-evolution, thus helping the building of common knowledge for and beyond the humankind. It is perhaps the chief *raison d'être* for this relational theory.

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