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Article

Is There a Chinese School of IR Theory?

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Abstract

Is there a Chinese School of International Relations (IR) Theory? My answer to this question is ambivalent. Although a Chinese school of IR theory does not exist in the singular, it does exist in the plural. If "birds of a feather flock together," then the difference in approaches taken by Chinese scholars is as relevant as is the fact that the scholars are all Chinese. The Tsinghua School and moral realism share much with classical realism. Cultural relationalism also offers a distinctive Chinese approach as do *Gongsheng*/symbiotic and *tianxia* approaches. That said, Chinese IR scholarship shares with IR scholarship in America, Europe, and the rest of the world its firm anchor in the Newtonian mechanical worldview of the late 19th century. Natural sciences, such as quantum mechanics and scientific cosmology, meanwhile concluded long ago that Newtonianism offers an often practicable yet constricted view of the world. In contrast, the humanities operate with a worldview fully consonant with 20th century physics. It is the social sciences and the analysis of IR which continues to adhere to the mechanical worldview common in the late 19th century—in China and the rest of the world. In both "China" and "the West" IR, scholars are tapping their canes against the pavement, seeking to fathom what will happen next. If historians and semantic modelers are right, like the future, the past is never distant. Always open to reinterpretation, it is like the future—unpredictable.

Introduction

Even though there have been numerous attempts to answer this question one way or the other, the title of this paper is deliberately open-ended.[1] My answer is ambiguous. From one, largely unfamiliar, perspective, the answer is clearly negative. From another, more familiar vantage point, the answer is substantially positive. Part 1 of this paper establishes

This article is part of a special symposium "Dialogue with the Chinese School of IR Theory," published across two issues of the *Chinese Journal of International Politics* and guest edited by Peng Lu, Xiao Ren, Toni Erskine, and Stefano Guzzini.

[1] Yaqing Qin is arguing for the necessity of a Chinese school of IR, while Yan Xuetong is arguing against it. See Yaqing Qin, "Why Is There No Chinese International Relations Theory?" *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2007), pp. 313–40; Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, ed. Daniel A. Bell and Sun Zhe, translated by Edmund Ryden (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 252–60. Yiwei Wang and Xueqing Han argue that a distinctive Chinese School is possible only if built on a non-positivist epistemology. See Yiwei Wang and Xueqing Han, "Why There Is No Chinese IR Theory: A Cultural Perspective," in Yongjin Zhang and Teng-Chi Chang, eds., *Constructing a Chinese School of International Relations* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), pp. 52–67. Since interpretivist approaches are quite common in American and European IR research, this is an underspecified argument in favor of a Chinese School.

the ground for the positive answer, and Part 2 for the negative one. Part 3 concludes with a few general reflections.

Informed by a voluminous, and ever-growing, literature debating the pros and cons of a Chinese School of International Relations (IRs) theorizing,[2] I will at the outset simply agree with those who have insisted that China's scholars are quite properly concerned with questions that differ from those of scholars situated in or between other communities. Context matters. There is no tabula rasa. All analyses and all analysts bring different things to the table. Concurring with Chinese and Western scholars, I take for granted the fact that the questions moving China and Chinese scholars are distinctive.[3] But the answers Chinese scholars offer are not. Inflected by Chinese political experiences and sensibilities, they are, as I argue in this paper, often part of the general conversation of IR scholars around the world.[4]

I note at the outset that Yih-Jye Hwang and Kosuke Shimizu offer important warnings about the relative lack of interest that Chinese scholars have shown in a broad range of critical theories of IR, including feminism and postcolonialism.[5] Realist concepts of power, liberal notions of cosmopolitanism, and constructivist ideas of relationality may deepen Western concepts and approaches. But we should not forget that for E.H. Carr, the study of IRs was little more than "an ideology of control masking as a proper academic discipline"

[2] Feng Zhang, "Debating the 'Chinese Theory of International Relations': Toward a New Stage in China's International Studies," in Fred Dallmayr and Zhao Tingyang, eds., *Contemporary Chinese Political Thought: Debate and Perspectives* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), pp. 67–87; Feng Zhang, "The Rise of Chinese Exceptionalism in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2013), pp. 305–28; Yih-Jye Hwang, "Reappraising the Chinese School of International Relations: A Postcolonial Perspective," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (2021), pp. 311–30; Peng Lu, "Chinese IR Sino-centrism Tradition and Its Influence on the Chinese School Movement," *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2019), pp. 1–18; Chunman Zhang, "Review Essay: How to Merge Western Theories and Chinese Indigenous Theories to Study Chinese Politics," *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2017), pp. 283–94; Hun Joon Kim, "Will IR Theory with Chinese Characteristics Be a Powerful Alternative?," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2016), pp. 59–79; Astrid H. M. Nordin, *China's International Relations and Harmonious World: Time, Space and Multiplicity in World Politics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016); Jiangli Wang and Barry Buzan, "The English and Chinese Schools of International Relations: Comparisons and Lessons," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2014), pp. 1–46; Peter M. Kristensen and Ras T. Nielsen, "Constructing a Chinese International Relations Theory: A Sociological Approach to Intellectual Innovation," *International Political Sociology*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2013), pp. 19–40; William A. Callahan and Elena Barabantseva, eds., *China Orders the World: Normative Soft Power and Foreign Relations* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, "Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2007), pp. 287–312; Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, eds., *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and Beyond Asia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010); Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, "Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? Ten Years on," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2017), pp. 341–70; Xiao Ren, "Toward a Chinese School of International Relations," in Wang Gungwu and Zheng Yongnian, eds., *China and the New International Order* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 293–309; William A. Callahan, "China and the Globalisation of IR Theory: Discussion of Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 10, No. 26 (2001), pp. 75–88. Needless to say, major Chinese theorists such as Tang Shiping's noteworthy work on evolutionary theory and IR does not fall into any of the schools of thought discussed here. See Shiping Tang, *The Social Evolution of International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); *On Social Evolution: Phenomenon and Paradigm* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020).

[3] Xiao Ren, "Grown from Within: Building a Chinese School of International Relations," *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 33, No. 3–4 (2020), pp. 390, 392, 394–6; Mario Telò, "Building a Common Language in Pluralist International Relation Theories," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2020), pp. 457–8.

[4] See also Peter J. Katzenstein, "The Second Coming? Reflections on a Global Theory of International Relations," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2018), pp. 373–90.

[5] Hwang, "Reappraising the Chinese School of International Relations," pp. 311–30; Kosuke Shimizu, *The Kyoto School and International Relations: Non-Western Attempts for a New World Order* (New York: Routledge, 2022). In personal correspondence (8 June 2021), Alastair Johnston notes that the China Academic Journals database records about 5± articles in the early 2000s devoted to "feminist theory" and "international relations theory". It reached a trough shortly after 2012, and has started to increase in frequency in the last several years. The same basic pattern holds for "critical theory" and "international relations theory" which recently have averaged around 10–15 articles per year. Notably, the concept of "race" appears to be entirely missing in Chinese writings on international relations.

in English-speaking countries who run the world from positions of strength.[6] Neglecting critical approaches altogether may encourage an unconscious adoption of the ontological and discursive presuppositions of much of Western IR scholarship and thus preclude the possibility of thinking about more far-ranging changes in the theory and practice of IRs and global politics.[7] Admitting this does not preclude the possibility that in the process of adaptation, Chinese scholars are likely to alter received wisdom and conventional arguments, opening up new avenues for original theoretical ideas and empirical lines of inquiry.

I will look at the Chinese School from the vantage point of worldviews.[8] This concept has been largely neglected by IR theorizing in all parts of the world. In both its scientific and substantive aspects, it has been given new relevance in the midst of a global pandemic with uncertain outcomes. The pandemic was made possible, in the first place, by the profound political dysfunction of Chinese and American politics, made visible to all in Wuhan and New York, before spreading worldwide to devastating effect. IR theorists everywhere may need to develop new ideas to come to terms with the new challenges that await all of us.

The Positive Answer: Different Schools of Chinese IRs

Although Chinese schools of IR theory may not exist in the singular, they do exist in the plural. If "birds of a feather flock together," then the differences in approaches taken by Chinese scholars are as relevant for us as the fact that the scholars are all Chinese. The *Tsinghua School* and moral realism share much with classical realism. *Cultural relationalism* offers also a distinctive Chinese approach as do *Gongsheng/symbiotic* and *tianxia* approaches.

Tsinghua School and Moral Realism

Moral realism focuses on leadership, domestic regimes, and moral values and argues that a close connection exists between moral conduct and international influence.[9]

[6] Quoted in Hwang, "Reappraising the Chinese School of International Relations," p. 11.

[7] On the surface, this lack of interest in critical theories of international relations extends to Marxism, as Justin Rosenberg argues, despite the work that scholars such as Liang Shou-De did in the 1980s. In its analytical version, Marxism is anathema to China's reigning state capitalist ideology. For that reason, it may not have a chance of establishing itself as part of the Chinese School of IR that focuses almost exclusively on two substantive world views and their theories (realism and liberalism) and one analytical one (constructivism). In negotiating various difficulties of dealing with imported theories, in subtle and subterranean ways, Marxism continues to have a strong effect on Chinese IR scholarship. Specialists will understand this better than I do and for that reason may choose not to write about it. See Justin Rosenberg, "Comments Prepared for the Western-Chinese IR Theorists Dialogue," Unpublished paper, 27 April 2021.

[8] Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *Uncertainty and Its Discontents: Worldviews in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

[9] The term "moral realism" was coined by Feng Zhang, but since then has been adopted by Yan Xuetong. See Zhang, "The Tsinghua Approach and the Inception of Chinese Theories of International Relations," pp. 73–102; Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*; "International Leadership and Norm Evolution," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2011), pp. 233–64; "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2014), pp. 153–84; "Political Leadership and Power Redistribution," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2016), pp. 1–26; *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019); "IR Moral Realism's Epistemology," *India Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (2020), pp. 338–42. Reviews include, among others, Jeremy T. Paltiel, "Constructing Global Order with Chinese Characteristics: Yan Xuetong and the Pre-Qin Response to International Anarchy," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (2011), pp. 375–403; William A. Callahan, "China and the Globalisation of IR Theory: Discussion of Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 10, No. 26 (2001), pp. 75–88; Linsay Cunningham-Cross, "Using the Past to (Re)write the Future: Yan Xuetong, Pre-Qin Thought and China's Rise to Power," *China Information*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2012), pp. 219–233; Linsay Cunningham-Cross and William A. Callahan, "Ancient Chinese Power, Modern Chinese Thought," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (2011), pp. 349–74; Ren, "Grown from Within," pp. 400–2; Lu, "Chinese IR Sino-centrism Tradition and Its Influence on the Chinese School Movement," pp. 9, 11; Telò, "Building a Common Language in Pluralist International Relation Theories," pp. 457–8, 459–60, 466–8; Amitav Acharya, "From Heaven to Earth: 'Cultural Idealism' and 'Moral Realism' as Chinese Contributions to Global International Relations," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2019), pp. 476–9; Niv Horesh, "In Search of the 'China Model': Historic Continuity vs. Imagined History in Yan

The international system is anarchic; states are primary actors and pursue their national interests; morality refers exclusively to governmental morality; and that morality is identical with internationally shared, universal moral codes.[10] Hence, moral realism takes its starting point not from any particular community, such as China, and leaves unresolved, as Toni Erskine argues, the obvious tension that exists between its grounding in both the national interest and in universal moral codes.[11] Jonathan Kirshner doubles down on this critical observation. He discusses at length the challenges, dilemmas, and paradoxes that classical realism, as the overarching theoretical tradition which encompasses moral realism, faces in dealing with morality and the national interest.[12] Acknowledging their debt to classical realism, it is thus not very surprising that Yan's writings make "political morality … a moving target, rather than a clearly defined value."[13]

This is no small matter. Yan focuses on the choice between humane and hegemonic authority and advises China to choose the former. Moral realism holds that the most fundamental cause in the shift of international power is the humanness of political leaders. Broader conceptions of soft power do not matter as much as the credibility, humanness, and morality of political leaders. Looking across contemporary world politics, authoritarian and tyrannical power is rising. Humane authority is a scarce commodity in a world populated by one-man decision-making in many of the major states exercising power with hypocrisy and cruelty.[14] The border separating traditional authoritarianism from contemporary totalitarianism is thin at the outset of the 21st century. This undermines the strategic credibility that Yan values as a resource for China's rise, undermines the capacity to far-reaching self-reform that is essential in a world experiencing profound change, and gives more play to systemic uncertainty that makes one-man rule a dangerous game of roulette. Then and now, in West and in East, Cincinnatus was and is a very rare breed. Yan insists that international public opinion polls are the only valid measure of a country's humane leadership.[15] Reflecting changes in the distribution of domestic power in China and the conduct of Chinese foreign policy, by that measure in recent years, China has had a very bad run, not only in the USA and Europe but also across many countries in East, Southeast, and South Asia.

This is not to deny the importance of moral realism in China's history. The historical studies of the Tsinghua School could provide some helpful clues. Yan Xuetong and his colleagues examine the history of the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States Period (770–222 BC) and the state of Qi, aspiring to hegemony during the collapse of the Zhou dynasty and the *Tianxia* model. Xunzi distinguished between three different rulers: oppressive and predatory, efficient and capable, and moral and wise. Chinese views on morality and violence in the pre-Qin period differed widely as did components of governmental morality, understood by Yan in instrumental, national and public terms. A rising power's regime that is efficient and capable can lead by example (through a process of demonstration-imitation rather than support-strengthening or punishment-maintenance) and narrow or eliminate the gap between itself and the primary power it wishes to displace by the pursuit of the values of fairness, justice, and civility. Other regimes apparently were less successful.

Xuetong's Thought," *China Report*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (2013), pp. 337–55; Zhang, "The Tsinghua Approach and the Inception of Chinese Theories of International Relations," pp. 73–102; Kai He, "A Realist's Ideal Pursuit," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2012), pp. 183–97; Shimizu, The Kyoto School and International Relations, Ch. 2.

[10] Yan, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*, pp. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 19, 24.

[11] Toni Erskine, "Western-Chinese IR Theorist Dialogue," Unpublished paper, 27 April 2021, pp. 8–9.

[12] Jonathan Kirshner, *An Unwritten Future: Realism and Uncertainty in World Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022), Ch. 4.

[13] Cunningham-Cross, "Using the Past to (Re)write the Future," p. 365.

[14] Cunningham-Cross is the most probing though not the only critics ones who object to the translation of *wang* as "humane authority" rather than the traditional, literal translation "kingly way." See Cunningham-Cross, "Using the Past to (Re)write the Future," pp. 349, 354–8, 360–3, 371–3.

[15] Yan, "IR Moral Realism's Epistemology," p. 339.

Moral realism is an interesting contribution to our understanding of classical realism as an enduring intellectual tradition in both West and East.[16] Realists come in many stripes and they disagree, typically strongly. The key concepts of moral realism are anathema to the structural realism of Kenneth Waltz and the offensive realism of John Mearsheimer, which have occupied most of the space in the theoretical IR debates in America for the last 40 or so years. Far from highlighting the importance of morality or purpose they ignore or expunge such concepts.

Classical realism offers an alternative that is less parsimonious but more useful than contemporary American theories of structural realism.[17] It has distinguished ancestors (Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Burke, and Clausewitz) and notable 20th century proponents (E.H. Carr, George F. Kennan, Hans Morgenthau, Raymond Aron, and Robert Gilpin). All classical realists take seriously the consequences of anarchy. All are attentive students of the changing dynamics of the balance of power *and*, contra structural realism, the content or purpose of power. Material interests matter but so does fear, status, honor, and morality. Regime type and national character are important, particularly as they interact with leadership. Interests are malleable and can shift as they are bound up by the perceived lessons of historical experience. For classical realists, the game of politics never stops. Conflict is endemic. Alliances shift. And war is always a possibility. Uncertainty is inescapable. This is a long list of factors which goes to show that classical realism wants to get the story right.[18] Moral realism is a distinctive contribution to classical realism. It holds that morality is relative and differs across time. Although it is *not*, as Yan correctly insists, an original Chinese theory, a Chinese articulation of moral realism makes a distinctive contribution to the canon of classical realism.

Yan builds his case based on ancient Chinese history and thought. This historical or contextual approach he shares with many other scholars in China and other parts of the world, including America. His reliance on ancient Chinese texts, however, is distinctive. Only a small number of IR scholars venture into the terrain of textual analysis, typically those who have been trained in political philosophy and the history of political thought. The relation between text and context is the core subject of the Cambridge School, often associated with the name or Quentin Skinner. It situates political texts as interventions in specific, historically defined, debates and conflicts over political and social arrangements. Skinner wrote pathbreaking books on Machiavelli and Hobbes two of the founding fathers of realism. It would be interesting to inquire into the degree to which Yan's protocols for approaching classical Chinese texts, viewed by the Tsinghua School as inert and applicable across millennia, can survive a critical engagement with those developed by the Cambridge School.[19] Reinhart Koselleck's dynamic conceptual history approach also appears to differ markedly from the static way the Tsinghua School deals with ancient Chinese texts. Lacking an explicit discussion of the relation between text and context why should the reader trust

[16] Toni Erskine argues that moral realism has also a lot in common with the "communitarian realism" that she has elaborated in her own writings during the last two decades. See Erskine, "Western-Chinese IR Theorist Dialogue." See also the critical implications for Yan's "moral realism" in the discussions of "harmonious realism" by Chih-yu Shih and Jiwu Yin and of "virtue ethics" by Kosuke Shimizu and Sei Noro. See Chih-yu Shih and Jiwu Yin, "Between Core National Interest and a Harmonious World: Reconciling Self-Role Conceptions in Chinese Foreign Policy," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2013), pp. 59–84; Kosuke Shimizu and Sei Noro, "An East Asian Approach to Temporality, Subjectivity and Ethics: Bringing Mahāyāna Buddhist Ontological Ethics of Nikon into International Relations," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2023), pp. 8–10.

[17] Kirshner, *An Unwritten Future*.

[18] Structural realism cannot do so. Kirshner shows that it is a wrong-headed application of oligopoly theory to politics that yields indeterminate results. See Kirshner, *An Unwritten Future*, Ch. 2. Furthermore, it is often overlooked that in his book on sovereignty, one of the most prominent realists, Stephen Krasner, made the ruler and not states or the international system the decisive actor. See Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[19] Duncan Bell, "What Is Liberalism?" *Political Theory*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (2014), pp. 682–715.

Yan's interpretation of these complex and contentious texts?[20] Yan is not unaware of some of these problems. Political power, he observes, is a modern term that in the ancient period was covered by terms such as virtue, benevolence, the Way, justice, law, worthies and sages.[21] Given the conceptual abyss that separates then from now, it is asking a lot, and perhaps too much, of Yan's readers to have them believe that smatterings of textual references that are drawn from contested sources dating back millennia and that are open to very different interpretations have anything to say to the radically different conceptual terrain of modern China and contemporary international politics.

Admittedly, the grounds of translatability are full of nettles. For example, Yan points out that traditional Chinese thinking offers a different understanding of the concept of hegemony than mainstream Western IR theory.[22] Thus, building on different typologies of hegemony within traditional Chinese thought may, for Yan, shed light on the rise and fall of the USA in contemporary world politics. But the translation difficulties of the concept of hegemony and humane authority are formidable. For Yan hegemony is a style of leadership that is opposed to wise power and a benevolent foreign policy. And it is true that in both English and Italian diction the concept of hegemony does not speak to the issue of wisdom and benevolence. But hegemony is opposed to mere domination or brute force. From this starting point, Telò connects the Tsinghua School to Gramsci and many strands of theorizing in other parts of the world.[23] In both East and West, productive theorizing is not necessarily historically accurate. Lacking interpretive consensus among historians and theorists, Yan is not concerned with the "real meaning" of ancient texts. He mines them for what they can tell us about "abstract human society."[24]

Finally, the Tsinghua School, it should be admitted frankly, has a clear political purpose. Yan is a highly creative, ideational entrepreneur who is intent on reshaping various Chinese intellectual traditions and wishes to influence contemporary Chinese foreign policy. This requires veering not too far away from the traditional realist script. Yan's moral realism encompasses also a stark view of power politics reflecting realist insights and value judgements. To abandon reliance on military force is immoral and amounts to national suicide that is antithetical to humane authority leadership. And competition between the leading power and the rising challenger must be zero-sum.[25]

It was close to that during the height of the Cuban missile crisis. With the world on the brink of nuclear war, on 23 October 1962, Serhii Plokhy now tells us based on new evidence, the enraged strongman of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, "was yelling, cursing and issuing an avalanche of contradictory orders."[26] Just as many kings before them, some of the most important leaders of the 20th century failed to provide Confucian-style moral leadership. Instead, they stole, incarcerated, and killed because they failed to restrain

[20] Cunningham-Cross and Callahan, "Ancient Chinese Power, Modern Chinese Thought," pp. 352–3.

[21] Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 115.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 258.

[23] Telò, "Building a Common Language in Pluralist International Relation Theories," pp. 470–82. In personal communication (8/6/21), Alastair Johnston writes that originally, in the Zhou period, the meaning of hegemony may have been closer to Gramsci's. A hegemon was a powerful feudal state that acted as a conduit between the Son of Heaven and small states. It was a big brother, both disciplining and protecting weaker states. "It was not, originally, the 'hegemon' of the 'kingly way' versus the 'way of the hegemon,' as it is now understood and used." The original idea of the hegemon may thus have been closer to the characterization of the contemporary English and Italian concepts.

[24] Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, pp. 155–6. See also Cunningham-Cross and Callahan, "Ancient Chinese Power, Modern Chinese Thought," pp. 366–8, 371–4.

[25] The assumption of zero-sum conflict follows from Yan's Newtonian assumption of international politics as a closed system. Yan, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*, pp. 66, 72. Cunningham-Cross and Callahan, "Ancient Chinese Power, Modern Chinese Thought," pp. 368–70.

[26] James Rosen, "The Big Red Gamble," *The Wall Street Journal*, 20 April 2021, p. A15, reviewing Serhii Plokhy, *Nuclear Folly* (New York: Norton, 2021).

themselves. This often led to vast calamities for humanity and at times for themselves.[27] Whether leaders ruling some of the world's main states in the 21st century will be able to do any better remains a very open question.

That said, the idea of moral realism is very much in line with contemporary philosophy of science that regards models as semantic (rather than syntactical) instruments in the creation of theories and knowledge.[28] Models are make-believe stories not abstract, axiomatic constructs. As in child-play, the story requires an authorial structure to become believable. Yan Xuetong has considerably more authorial structures behind him than does Ole Wæver of the Copenhagen School. In this view of models, the "what-if" of story-telling trumps the "if-then" of Newton's scientific laws. This approach to models and theories is thoroughly familiar to Post-Newtonian scholars in quantum physics and scientific cosmology. And it is increasingly accepted by formal modelers in the social sciences, including in IR. It undercuts, however, Yan's Newtonian belief in the universality of scientific laws which he invokes repeatedly against the possibility of a Chinese School or IR.

In short, the Tsinghua School is a creative and original contribution to various theoretical approaches, debates, and intellectual movements, such as classical realism, the Cambridge School and translation theory, conceptual history, and Post-Newtonian semantic approaches to models. How it will stack up when critically examined by any or all of them does not matter here. For me, the engagement with other approaches and intellectual currents is a tribute to rather than criticism of the work done at Tsinghua. As scholars, we are birds flocking together in the pursuit of knowledge. We are not schools of fish keeping apart as separate groups. And the quality of our scholarship depends on how much we can learn from and teach each other. My brief analysis of moral realism supports this conclusion.

Yaqing Qin, Chih-yu Shi, and Cultural Relationalism

Yaqing Qin was central to start the discussion of a Chinese School of IR. Resonating with the epistemology of some critical theories of IR, his relational theory is a signal achievement and an important critique of individualist, rationalist, and materialist mainstream IR theories, specifically realism, liberal institutionalism, constructivism, and the English School.[29] Qin defines culture as "the way of life of a people who share a lot in terms of behaviors, values, beliefs, and perspectives without consciously knowing them… [A] cultural community is a group of people bound by background knowledge."[30] Culture and civilization are resources for theoretical innovation.[31] Besides relationalism has his theory's major key, the minor key

[27] Chih-yu Shih, "Re-Worlding China: Notorious Tianxia, Critical Relationality," *E-International*, 2 September 2020, https://www.e-ir.info/2020/09/02/re-worlding-china-notorious-tianxia-critical-relationality/.

[28] Kevin A. Clarke and David M. Primo, *A Model Discipline: Political Science and the Logic of Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 52–77.

[29] Qin, "Why Is There no Chinese International Relations Theory?" pp. 313–40; Yaqing Qin, "Relationality and Processual Construction: Bringing Chinese Ideas into International Relations Theory," *Social Sciences in China*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (2009), pp. 5–20; "Development of International Relations Theory in China: Progress through Debates," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2011), pp. 231–57; "Rule, Rules, and Relations: Toward a Synthetic Approach to Governance," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2011), pp. 117–45; "Continuity through Change: Background Knowledge and China's International Strategy," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2014), pp. 285–314; *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Yaqing Qin and Astrid H. M. Nordin, "Relationality and Rationality in Confucian and Western Traditions of Thought," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 5 (2019), pp. 601–14; Ren, "Grown from Within," pp. 399–400; Lu, "Chinese IR Sino-centrism Tradition and Its Influence on the Chinese School Movement," pp. 9–10; Telò, "Building a Common Language in Pluralist International Relation Theories," pp. 458, 460–6; Amitav Acharya, "From Heaven to Earth: 'Cultural Idealism' and 'Moral Realism' as Chinese Contributions to Global International Relations," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2019), pp. 472–4; Shimizu, *The Kyoto School and International Relations*, Ch. 2. This discussion builds on Katzenstein, ed., *Uncertainty and Its Discontents*, Ch. 1.

[30] Qin, *A Relational Theory of World Politics*, p. 41.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 54–5.

is crystallization. Qin's theory is built around the importance of background, a core Newtonian construct. Culture and civilization for Qin are the crystallized background knowledge of worldviews and the theories and models they spawn. And that background knowledge, and the shared practices it generates, for him makes harmony rather than conflict the default in international life. Relations are inclusive not exclusive, and complementary not competitive.[32] Contrasting it with the "ontological individualism" of mainstream IR,[33] Qin's relational theory is self-consciously grounded in a Chinese worldview. And that worldview incorporates crystallization and cultural essences.[34]

For Qin, scholars based in different cultures (such "Chinese" and "Western") develop different social theories of how the world works.[35] While at times, Qin is aware that East and West are co-evolving together and with changing identities, more often his formulations suggest culturally and civilizationally fixed and exceptional identities.[36] The disadvantage of this formulation, as many critics have pointed out, is that, like Huntington's, it flirts with a reification of cultural or civilization complexes. According to Qin, a deep relationality that is hard-wired over thousands of years into the Chinese polity's culture, fostering cooperation, harmony, and consent in its foreign and international policy and politics. But Chinese history also comprises the Warring States period, the Yuan, Manchu and Qin conquests, and the revolutionary upheavals of the 19th and 20th centuries. Then China was a patchwork quilt of provinces, at times ruled over by outsiders such as the Manchu and Mongol dynasties. Geographic peripheries and minority groups helped maintain the core and provided it with important military, symbolic, and governance infrastructures, and infusing the center with new ideas and practices. Such a rendering of Chinese history sits uncomfortably with Qin's essentialized and thus substantialist view of China.[37]

Qin's concept of relationality differs from the Westphalian model in that the maintenance of strong and viable relationships makes actors sacrifice maximizing individual gain in the interest of investing in the relationship over the long-term, a well-known practice and not only in the world of East Asian business contracting. But Qin's understanding of relationality is embedded in the Westphalian nation-state system with its rich symbolic dimensions. For example, the "Middle East" as a fixture in Anglo-American and Western diplomacy, since the late 19th century, from the perspective of Beijing is called "West Asia." This difference in collective imaginaries is politically consequential. In contrast to Qin's Confucian notion of embedded relationality, Buddhist conceptions of the same concept (*engi*) resemble some critical theories of IR in focusing on the primacy of relationships from which actor identities emerge. In game theoretic terms, actor identities are not stipulated at the outset but emerge from playing the game.[38]

This may be one reason why civilizational complexes are not unified and should not be treated as unified objects of analysis. To view them as such neglects the internal

[32] Qin argues that practice theorists like Adler and Pouliot, with whom he agrees on many things, limit their notion of communities of practice with shared background knowledge too severely to those that form around specific groups (such as activists, diplomats, and epistemic communities) operating in bounded issue areas (such as national security, the environment or the economy). See *Ibid*., pp. 36–7.

[33] *Ibid*., p. 75.

[34] Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press; Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011); Michael Slote, A Sentimentalist Theory of the Mind (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 85–6.

[35] Qin, *A Relational Theory of World Politics*, p. 204.

[36] Ibid., pp. 175, 59. Zhang, "The Rise of Chinese Exceptionalism in International Relations".

[37] Michael Barnett, "A Global Reformation? Global International Relations and Global History," paper delivered at the 2021 Annual Meetings of the International Studies Association, April 6–9, 2021; Shimizu and Noro, "An East Asian Approach to Temporality, Subjectivity and Ethics," pp. 8–10.

[38] Kosuke Shimizu, "Buddhist Temporality and the Question of Plurality: A Critical Investigation into the Pluralist Discourse," paper presented at the 2019 Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, Toronto, 2019, pp. 5–9.

contestations, external encounters, and engagements between civilizational complexes.[39] Civilizations are not about consensus and agreement. They are about conflict and like town hall meetings spawn vigorous debates. Furthermore, his relational approach will sound quite familiar to many sociological approaches common in American and European social science. They too take the relationship as the fundamental unit of analysis, as do sociologically and historically inclined IR scholars. And like Qin, American and European theorists of power have for many decades worked not only with structural and agentic but also with relational approaches which, however, lack the recurrent reputational, rather than legitimacy, affirmation that the strong need in their relation with the weak in Chinese *guanxi* understanding.[40]

In his relational theory, Qin is a humanist. His approach specifically concerns relations between humans.[41] The Confucian and Daoist philosophies Qin draws on understand relations between humans to be the foundation of social theory and ethics. Importantly, "state actors" are treated as humans and, apparently, as unitary actors. This is not to deny an unmistakable post-Newtonian element in Qin's theory. Relationality is its theoretical hard core. Actorhood is embedded in relations that generate processes as the ontologically most significant aspects of politics. Apart from relationality, individual rationality does not play an important role. Properly balanced, rationality and relationality create a healthy synthesis for theoretical and practical purposes.

Qin's focus on human relations puts human agency at the center of relationalism. He does not believe that relations should be seen as prior to actors. Instead, relations and actors are co-constitutive of one another: actors are defined by their relations, and for him relations are always between human actors. In this way, actors and relations are "processual simultaneities."[42] This encompassing and web-like relationality contrasts with the individual relationality of the different logics of consequences, appropriateness, arguing, practicality, and habit.[43]

The agency implicit in the relations between human actors is important for harmony and balance, key concepts in Qin's approach. He argues that "human agency provides the sufficient condition for harmony … When both the self and the other have learned through education and self-cultivation how to behave appropriately, their behavior is neither too aggressive nor too humble. … As a result, the relationship between the self and the other is harmonious and society is harmonious, too."[44] Culture, harmony, balance, and human agency are indelibly linked in the production of social orders.

In his treatment of dialectics, Qin leans toward processualism and articulates a relational post-Newtonian worldview. He argues that Western notions of dialectics, typically relied on by both substantialist and relational approaches, are fundamentally different from "*zhongyong* dialectics" in Confucian and Daoist thought.[45] While Western notions

[39] Barnett, "A Global Reformation?"; Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *Civilizations in World Politics: Plural and Pluralist Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2010); *Sinicization and the Rise of China: Civilizational Processes beyond East and West* (New York: Routledge, 2012); *Anglo-America and Its Discontents: Civilizational Identities beyond West and East* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

[40] Qin, *A Relational Theory of World Politics*, p. 288; Peter J. Katzenstein and Lucia Seybert, eds., *Protean Power: Exploring the Uncertain and Unexpected in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Emilian Kavalski, *The Guanxi of Relational International Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

[41] Qin, *A Relational Theory of World Politics*, p. 112.

[42] *Ibid*., p. 117.

[43] *Ibid*., p. 236.

[44] Ibid., p. 193.

[45] *Ibid*., pp. 169–92. This is not an instance of Confucian or Daoist exceptionalism. For example, in his discussion of the Haitian revolution Shilliam speaks of "Vodou's investment in the cosmological conceit of seminal relationality rather than fidelity towards the principle of categorical segregation embraced by colonial science." See Robbie Shilliam, "Race and Revolution at Bwa Kayiman," *Millennium*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2017), pp. 269–92.

of dialectics—drawn mainly from Hegel—emphasize difference, conflict, and irreconcilability, *zhongyong* dialectics are based on harmony and "immanent" relationships between polarities.[46] In Qin's understanding of a dialectical relationship, each pole is inclusive of its opposite; they are both "always engaged with each other in the process of becoming the other."[47] The social world is thus marked by harmony or balance between different poles. Qin's eclecticism works along the substantialist–relationalist continuum.

While the crystallization of background knowledge into cultural essences creates some tension in his argument, Qin's relationalism makes him a theorist who would be open to post-Newtonianism. In his approach, worldviews inform scientific perspectives both directly and indirectly. Conversely and less strongly, scientific perspectives can occasionally have a small impact on worldviews. Both are co-evolving, competing, or complementary ways of understanding or engaging the world. Since Newtonian concepts are baked into our conventional language, Qin's anthropocentrism takes for granted absolute dimensions of time and space as a background into which political actors are placed. Analysis is conducted at a distance. In contrast, post-Newtonianism denies the existence of any background; and time and space are active processes of becoming that shape both politics and political analysis.

As for Qin, for Chih-yu Shih relationships precede the state as a matter of ontological assumption. However, Shih's work does not flirt with any form of cultural essentialism.[48] For Shih relations are processes of mutual constitution that reproduce imagined resemblance as actors self-identify with others to varying degrees. Chinese relationalism draws on Confucianism. Other Asian variants are informed by Buddhism.[49] In all of these self-restraint and bilateralism matter. They are not instances of Chinese exceptionalism; they can also be found in East Asia and Asia more generally. And even though tendencies for self-restraint and bilateralism can be found even in "the West," generally speaking different cultural sources make Asian states reluctant participants in the interventionism that characterizes multilateral regime building. Relationality echoes mainstream realist and liberal approaches in two ways. The self-identity that is central to create imagined resemblance with others quietly accepts the self–other distinction that is central to mainstream approaches. Furthermore, relationalism concurs with mainstream approaches that relations have an effect on the formation of self-identities, while insisting that these identities are not teleological, unilateral, or convergent.[50] Chinese and Western relationalism cannot help but "resort to discursive essentialism." Despite these concurrences, mainstream IR focuses on power first and relations second. Chinese IR reverses the order: relations first, power second.[51]

Shih applies his relational theory to a variety of international issues. Confucian multilateralism, for example, is compatible with exceptionalism because it emerges prior to any sense of exceptionalism.[52] On the highly controversial issue of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, for example, China's grand strategy traditionally was informed more by the urge of maintaining stable relationships with the USA than its core national interest of national

[46] Qin, *A Relational Theory of World Politics*, p. 174.

[47] *Ibid*., p. 175.

[48] Chih-yu Shih et al., *China and International Theory: The Balance of Relationships* (London: Routledge, 2019); Chiung-Chiu Huang and Chih-Yu Shih, *Harmonious Intervention: China's Quest for Relational Security* (Ashgate: Burlington, VT, 2014), pp. 1–49; Chih-yu Shih, "Bound to Relate: Retheorizing International Order through Chinese Culture of Power," in Huiyun Feng and Kai He, eds., *China's Challenges and International Order Transition: Beyond the "Thucydides Trap"* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020), pp. 182–201.

[49] Shimizu and Noro, "An East Asian Approach to Temporality, Subjectivity and Ethics," pp. 1–19; "Political Healing and Mahāyāna Buddhist Medicine: A Critical Engagement with Contemporary International Relations," *Third World Quarterly*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1891878.

[50] Chih-yu Shih et al., "Confronting China in an Asymmetric Relationship: The Case of Peace Efficacy in Taiwan," *The China Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2019), pp. 57–87.

[51] Chih-yu Shih, "The Missions of Relational IR and the Chinese Relational IR," Western-Chinese IR Theories Dialogue, 27 April 2021, pp. 2–3.

[52] Chih-yu Shih, "A Relational Analysis of Exceptionalism: The Expansion and Coexistence of Confucian Multilateralism," Unpublished paper, NTU, Political Science Department, 2021.

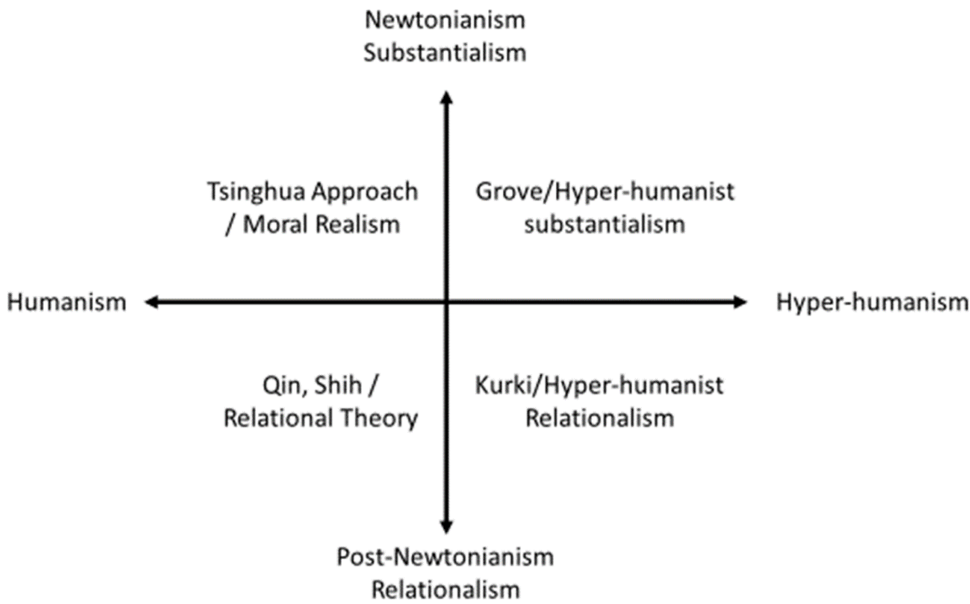

Fig. 1. Worldviews and IR Theories

unification.[53] Valuing relationships more highly than core interests explains why China's grand strategy often evades consistent dictates. In contrast to the USA, China's foreign policy is relationship–rather than identity-based. It does not seek to enforce a self-centered and universally applied sense of order. Bilateral negotiations and improvised solutions to concrete problems serve the purpose of providing China with a measure of ontological security grounded in stable relationships rather than episodic policy victories. Role playing as a responsible rather than rising power committed to maintaining ongoing relationships is more important than rule making.[54] China's approach to global governance more generally is reactive rather than proactive, problem-solving rather than goal-driven, and more committed to inclusive rather than rule enforcing leadership.[55] And relationalism offers insights into some paradoxical aspects of international politics. When relational coupling is recognized by both as constitutive of their identities, smaller and weaker powers like Taiwan may sometimes be able to take on bigger and stronger ones like China.[56]

Gongsheng/Symbiotic and Tianxia Approaches

Two important Chinese approaches span the substantialist and relational quadrants on the left-hand side of Figure 1. Philosophically, the *gongsheng*/symbiotic approach is deeply indebted to 19th century biology and normative theory.[57] In the hands of Xiao Ren and his Shanghai-based colleagues, it has been developed primarily for the analysis of the evolution

[53] Whether this continues to be true now and in the coming years remains to be seen.

[54] Chiung-Chiu Huang and Chih-Yu Shih, "China's Quest for Grand Strategy: Power, National Interest, or Relational Security?" *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2015), pp. 1–3.

[55] Chih-yu Shih and Chiung-Chiu Huang, "Preaching Self-Responsibility: The Chinese Style of Global Governance," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 22, No. 80 (2013), pp. 351–65; Chih-yu Shih, "Relations and Balances: Self-restraint and Democratic Governability under Confucianism," *Pacific Focus*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2014), pp. 351–73.

[56] Shih et al., "Confronting China in an Asymmetric Relationship," pp. 57–87.

[57] Ren, "Grown from Within," pp. 405–7; Yong-Soo Eun, "Beyond 'the West/non-West Divide' in IR: How to Ensure Dialogue as Mutual Learning," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2018), pp. 442–9.

from *guanxi* to *gongsheng* and the historical exploration of East Asian regional developments. Difference and diversity are two key concepts for this group of scholars. For them, pluralism and plurality mark social and political life at all levels and in all corners of the world—reflected in multiple traditions, civilizations, cultures, religions, values, habits, and customs. Multiplicity is and will remain the fundamental basis of world politics. As unavoidable byproduct of internal developments, differences within and between polities exist and will persist. This, however, does not eliminate the possibility of amicable coexistence and joint development and advancement. Autonomous action enriched by mutual learning can lead to progress based on the principle of equality. As a global governance approach, *gongsheng* is normative and aspirational rather than empirical. It hopes for a world in which nobody seeks to maximize interest and power, and all contribute to common problems while respecting each other's autonomy.[58] All actors have their appropriate place guaranteeing an orderly existence for all.

Gongsheng/symbiotic writings could, but do not, cross-over into the domain of para-humanism, understood here as "along with" and "beyond" humanism. Para-humanism incorporates cosmo-centric and eco-centric approaches that seek to move beyond anthropocentrism For example, Eduardo Kohn, among others, advocates an anthropology that stretches "beyond the human" and explores representations that go beyond conventional linguistic or symbolic forms.[59] Similarly, a German forester and global bestselling author, Peter Wohlleben, describes forests as systems of complex interdependence among trees that share a resilient, communal life.[60] In this view, the forest is a site for the comfort offered by slow evolutionary change. Below a soft-floor, fungal bodies feed trees and extend themselves in skeins that bind roots, nurture organisms, and offer a collaborative meshed net.[61] Feeling and thinking forests live relationally.

Instead of developing this line of thought, *gongsheng*/symbiotic writings make their signal contribution in their historical work.[62] They insist, correctly, that tracking the origin of international relations to the Peloponnesian War or the demands of managing the British Empire, as American and British scholars tend to do, is more than a bit parochial. After all humankind emerged from Africa, site of about two dozen civilizations. Over time, it evolved and multiplied in world's various regions and civilizations. These different regions and civilizations have their own logic and need to be understood on their own terms. East Asia forms a long-standing symbiotic system between large and small states and strong and weak ones. It has evolved into a regionwide order that has lasted for thousands of years. Fairbank's work on the "Chinese world order" has been helpful for writings informed by the *gongsheng* perspective, which have improved it by adding greater specificity, for example, to the analysis of the tribute system as an integral and general part of East Asia's regional order. The tribute system is not a one-sided affair of pilgrimage and tribute. It is a system needed by both the strong and the weak. This explains its longevity. It persisted not as a system solely centered on China. Other regional centers, such as Japan and Vietnam,

[58] It is noteworthy that in the English language material available to me, the *gongsheng* approach has not taken on social identity theory and its robust finding that the creation of a harmonious in-group identity almost without exception requires the denigration of an outgroup or a latent threat perception.

[59] Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 8–10, 224–5.

[60] Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate—Discoveries from a Secret World* (Vancouver: Greystone, 2017). Suzanne Simard's scientific work supports the same perspective with experiments that raise the question whether plants possess some kind of sentience or agency that might be interpreted as either collaborative or a form of reciprocal exploitation. See Susan Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering how the Forest is Wired for Intelligence and Healing* (New York: Knopf, 2021).

[61] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. viii, 4.

[62] Xiao Ren, "A *Gongsheng*/Symbiotic Theory of International Relations: A Non-Western Manifesto," unpublished paper, April 2021.

developed their own tribute systems. In short, tribute relations, captured by both substantialist and relational categories, helped constitute a region-wide community practice of a consensual resource exchange in a loose, symbiotic structure facilitating non-interference and non-aggression. The outcome of that regional evolution was an astonishing degree of peacefulness of East Asia over many centuries as David Kang has argued.[63] In its substantive focus, the *gongsheng*/symbiotic approach shows considerable affinity with Karl Deutsch's similarly motivated but differently executed studies of security communities in the North Atlantic.[64]

Other scholars have helped contribute to the persuasiveness of *gongsheng*/symbiotic writings through their historical scholarship. In ways that are theoretically rigorous, empirically rich and deeply illuminating Zhang Feng and Ji-Young Lee, for example, have enriched our understanding of Chinese and East Asian politics under the Ming and Qing dynasties.[65] Diplomacy by tribute was a defining practice in the relations knitting together China, Korea, Japan, and the Mongols. Those relations were not driven simply by domination and instrumental calculations. The smaller states often outmaneuvered China and in many ways were critical for China's hegemony (understood as wise rule) and the evolution of East Asia's regional order. For Zhang, instrumental and affective motivations shape a relationalism that is at the core of the Confucian worldview. For Lee, it is the domestic politics of smaller states. Their books, as well as Kang's and Deutsch's scholarship, show a close affinity with the historical analysis of *gongshen*/symbiotic theory.

In contrast to the *gongsheng*/symbiotic approach, *tianxia* ("all under heaven") is genuinely Chinese, and a more explicitly normative and philosophical approach to world ordering.[66] This concept refers to the Earth under the sky, the general will of all peoples in the world, and is heartfelt more than cognitive. Zhao Tingyang's revival of this ancient Chinese world order concept offers an original contribution to and enrichment of philosophical discussions of a normative global order. It offers a framework for incorporating disparate political, geographical, and cultural elements of world politics. As an ideal, it charts a course toward an all-encompassing, harmonious, peaceful *tianxia* order extending seamlessly from local to global while maintaining enriching differences. Harmonious cooperation rather than hegemony, understood in the Chinese meaning as domination, is its aim.[67] *Tianxia* is about world, rather than state-building. Its ontology is not dichotomous but holistic

[63] David Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

[64] Karl W. Deutsch et al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

[65] Feng Zhang, *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015); Ji-Young Lee, *China's Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Katzenstein, "The Second Coming?" pp. 8–9.

[66] Tingyang Zhao, "A Political World Philosophy In Terms of All-under-Heaven (Tian-xia)," *Diogenes*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (2009), pp. 5–18; "The Ontology of Coexistence from Cogito to Facio," *Diogenes*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (2012), pp. 27–36; "All-Under-Heaven and Methodological Relationism: An Old Story and New World Peace," in Fred Dallmayr and Zhao Tingyang, eds., *Contemporary Chinese Political Thought: Debates and Perspectives* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2012), pp. 46–66; *Redefining a Philosophy for World Governance* (New York: Palgrave, 2018); "All-under-Heaven (*tianxia*): Between Idealism and Realism," *Journal of Global Ethics*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2021), pp. 26–41; Shih, "Bound to Relate," pp. 182–201; Ren, "Grown from Within," pp. 402–5; Amitav Acharya, "From Heaven to Earth," pp. 474–5; Xin Xu, "One China, Two Worlds: Taiwan and China's Quest for Identity and Security," in Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *Sinicization and the Rise of China: Civilizational Processes beyond East and West* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 69–70; Taesuh Cha, "Competing Visions of a Post-modern World Order: The Philadelphia System versus the Tianxia System," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 31, No. 5 (2018), pp. 392–414; Sinan Chu, "Whither Chinese IR? The Sinocentric Subject and the Paradox of Tianxia-ism," *International Theory*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2022), pp. 1–31; Shimizu, *The Kyoto School and International Relations*, Ch. 2; Xiao Ouyang, "'Tianxia' and 'Renlei mingyun gongtongti': A Revival of Cosmopolitanism in a Chinese Cultural Disguise?" *Journal of Global Ethics*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2021), pp. 1–10.

[67] Feng Zhang, "The Tianxia System: World Order in a Chinese Utopia," *China Heritage Quarterly*, No. 21 (2010), http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/tien-hsia.php?searchterm=021_utopia.inc&issue=021.

thinking. As a philosophical precept often honored in its breach, everyone is sharing all-under-heaven and nobody is excluded. Relationality is its main constitutive part. Specifically, in relational rationality existence presupposes coexistence. Universal interest thus trumps national interest. The Confucian concept *ren* means that existence is defined only in relation to others rather than individual existence. This signifies a relational rationality that is deeper than individual rationality.[68]

In Chinese history, *tianxia* was formulated with the rise of the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE), the displacement of the Shang, and the need to control a number of other tribes. It was devised to maintain the symbolic legitimacy of the Zhou and manage a stable international system. After the decline of the Zhou dynasty and the degeneration of *tianxia* into anarchy during the Spring and Autumn periods and The Warring States period, the concept was elaborated further during the Qin and Han dynasties. It has remained intellectually relevant for more than 2000 years of Chinese history. *Tianxia* that exists above and beyond China and all other states. Inclusivity through conversion rather than conquest is its most distinctive trait. It is a second-best world order, not guaranteeing happiness and contentedness for all, but holding forth the possibility rather than inevitability of peace, security, and coexistence.

Different parts of Chinese history lend themselves to tianxia-inspired interpretations of a more inclusive, compound multi-governance system which, unavoidably, was also built on harsh forms of rule, and the marginalization and silencing of Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese voices. As is true of the Western worldview of state and empire, equality and hierarchy, the Chinese *tianxia* worldview is rooted in distinctive historical experiences. To the extent that it is not subscribing unambiguously to the Westphalian system, today China's *tianxia* exists as philosophical world order concept above and beyond China and all other states. Inclusivity through conversion rather than conquest is its most distinctive trait. It is a second-best world order, not guaranteeing happiness and contentedness for all, but holding forth the possibility rather than inevitability of peace, security, and coexistence. But it is difficult to see how a system of personalistic dictatorship at home could be aligned with such a world order. Something has to give. And by the looks of it this is not going to be China's domestic political arrangements. *Tianxia* philosophy will likely remain just that—a novel world-order concept rather than an actionable foreign policy doctrine.

That said, it offers, today, a different vision than the Westphalian system that China has come to accept, and it issues an invitation to rethink China's role in and responsibility for contemporary world politics. The expanding scope of Chinese grand strategy in recent decades is reflected in various doctrines that contrast the violence inherent in the Westphalian state system with China's putatively peaceful civilization. A selective interpretation of the past that mixes facts and fiction highlights China's particular position in the international system and its aspiration for a larger international leadership role. State-controlled media in particular have stressed the affinity between China's current doctrines—from Hu Jintao's "Harmonious World" to Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream"—and ancient philosophy, expressing the hope that Chinese civilization will usher in a post-Western set of global governance arrangements and *tianxia*-inspired world order models.[69] New Qing history, for example, discusses a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, hybrid confederacy as one such possibility.[70] But the historical and logical case for New Tianxia-ism is open to challenges. William Callahan, for example, examines critically the concept of *tianxia* and its proclivity

[68] Zhao, *Redefining a Philosophy for World Governance*; "Can this Ancient Chinese Philosophy Save Us from Global Chaos?" *The World Post*, 7 February 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/theworldpost/wp/2018/02/07/tianxia/.

[69] Cha, "Competing Visions of a Post-modern World Order," pp. 402–7; Takashi Shiraishi, *Maritime Asia vs. Continental Asia: National Strategies in a Region of Change* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2021), pp. 87–8.

[70] Andrew Phillips, "Contesting the Confucian Peace: Civilization, Barbarism, and International Hierarchy in East Asia," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (2018), pp. 740–64.

for confronting the problem of "otherness" through conversion or conquest rather than conversation or negotiation. Callahan argues that All-under-heaven would represent little more than an updated version of hierarchical governance by a newly empowered China. (Offering his own criticisms of Zhao's work, Feng Zhang argues that Callahan is misreading it).[71] For Callahan, *tianxia's* universal dialogue model for a multi-civilizational world without a center maybe attractive in the abstract; but it is not original. And any nativist or nationalist argument for New Tianxa-ism as overcoming the rupture in China's sense of self, occasioned by its 19th century encounter with Western imperialism, though it may be important for China, is likely to be irrelevant for other countries.[72]

Zhao Tingyang's revival of this ancient Chinese world order concept offers an original contribution to and enrichment of philosophical discussions of a normative global order. It offers a framework for incorporating disparate political, geographical and cultural elements of world politics. As an ideal it charts a course toward an all-encompassing, harmonious, peaceful *tianxia* order extending seamlessly from local to global while maintaining enriching differences. Harmonious cooperation rather than hegemony, understood in the Chinese meaning as domination, is its aim.[73] *Tianxia* is about world- rather than state-building. Relationality is its main constitutive part.

At a minimum, *tianxia* offers a different vision than the Westphalian system that China has come to accept, and it issues an invitation to rethink China's role in and responsibility for contemporary world politics. For Chih-yu Shih *tianxia* is an idea for mobilizing soft power in the global order while structuring the agenda of international politics. It achieves order by reconciling differences—or marginalizing, relativizing and camouflaging them. It offers soft power to both sides of a relation and a "romantic and yet credible metaphysical imagination." It can be a welcome alternative to the imaginary of an anarchic system of states or a discursive device in support of China's bid for regional or global hegemony.[74] Informed by pre-Qin Confucian thought, Shih lifts *tianxia* theorizing out of its specific Chinese context and articulates an abstract form of total relationality that balances freedom with control in both an idealistic or "autonomous" and a governed or "hegemonic" version.[75] An acceptable equilibrium is not guaranteed in either version. It may of course be possible when a hegemonic actor, be it king or dictator, exerts the most difficult of all powers to exercise—the power of self-control. But this is a very high bar. As Xiao Ren writes "since power corrupts, power has to be constrained … An unconstrained impulse could lead to a disastrous outcome."[76]

The Negative Answer: Scientific and Substantive Worldviews, Substantialism/Relationalism and Humanism/Para-humanism[77]

We can distinguish between scientific and substantive worldviews.[78] Both offer global overviews evident in relatively constant, repetitive habits of beliefs, and emotions that

[71] William A. Callahan, "Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-hegemonic or a New Hegemony?" *International Studies Review*, Vol. 10, No.4 (2008), pp. 749–61; Shijun Tong, "Chinese Thought and Dialogical Universalism," in Gerald Delanty, ed., *Europe and Asia Beyond East and West* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 305–15; Zhang, "The Tianxia System: World Order in a Chinese Utopia".

[72] Chu, "Whither Chinese IR?," pp. 9–15.

[73] Zhang, "The Tianxia System: World Order in a Chinese Utopia".

[74] Shih, "Bound to Relate," pp. 183–4, 193–9; Chih-yu Shih, "The Missions of Relational IR and the Chinese Relational IR," Western-Chinese IR Theories Dialogue, 27 April 2021.

[75] Shih, "Bound to Relate," pp. 185–93; Chih-yu Shih, "Re-Worlding China".

[76] Ren, "A *Gongsheng*/Symbiotic Theory of International Relations".

[77] This section draws on material developed at greater length in Katzenstein, ed., Uncertainty and Its Discontents, Ch. 1.

[78] Katzenstein, ed., *Uncertainty and Its Discontents*; Tamara A. Trownsell, et al., "Differing about Difference: Relational IR from around the World," *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2020), pp. 25–64.

mediate the relations between individuals or groups and the world. Newtonianism and post-Newtonianism is the first of two dimensions depicted in Figure 1 below.

Chinese IR scholarship shares with IR scholarship in USA, Europe, and the rest of the world its firm anchor in the Newtonian categories of the late 19th century. Natural sciences, such as quantum mechanics and scientific cosmology, meanwhile concluded long ago that Newtonianism offers an often practicable yet fundamentally wrong-headed view of the world. They developed a post-Newtonian worldview to explain the invisible, subatomic world. Quantum mechanics does not seek to attack or defend Newtonianism in general. It focuses instead on which elements of a closed Newtonian system can be usefully incorporated into a broader view of a universe that is undeniably open. The determinism and certainty of Newton's macro world, softened by the laws of probability, has been replaced by the indeterminism and uncertainty of the microworld of quantum physics. Newtonian and quantum physics are examples of different scientific worldviews. The humanities operate with a worldview fully consonant with 20th century physics. It is the social sciences and the analysis of IR which continues to adhere to the mechanical worldview common in the late 19th century.[79]

Students of world politics have discussed their worldviews in the language of "paradigm." Putting aside substantive paradigms like realism and liberalism, invoking Thomas Kuhn, they have debated scientific paradigms in terms of substantialism and relationalism. In Newtonianism, substantial entities like individual objects or persons exist with their internal characteristics prior to interacting with other entities. Social entities are aggregates of individuals. Substantialism thus takes pre-given entities as the starting point and imbues them with properties and agency. Strong versions assume that individual choices are driven by objective or intersubjective features of the world. Both rational choice and some norm-based approaches view individual human action as the elementary unit of social life. Substantialism expresses a Newtonian worldview. Atoms are the smallest entities. They constitute the physical world. In strict analogy, independent social entities, individuals or groups, are the building blocks of the social and political world.

Post-Newtonianism concerns itself with relational processes. Rescher emphasizes processes as prior (and irreducible) to substances. He ties a process-oriented view of the world to quantum physics, which suggests that "at the microlevel, what was usually deemed a physical *thing*, a stably perduring object, is itself no more than a statistical pattern – a stability wave in a surging sea of process."[80] Rescher regards the shift away from atom to particle in the understanding of the physical world analogous to the shift from substantialism to relationalism in the social world.

In short, in "China" as in the "West," whatever these categories may mean, students of world politics have relied on paradigms as the core constructs to debate their views of the world. With rare exceptions, their approaches express a deeply ingrained Newtonian worldview.[81] What John Ruggie observed almost 30 years ago for American IR, holds today for all variants of the Chinese School of IR: they are reposed in a "deep Newtonian slumber."[82]

[79] The Gulbenkian Commission, *Open the Social Sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

[80] Nicholas Rescher, *Process Metaphysics: An Introduction to Process Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 98, emphasis in the original.

[81] For some notable exceptions, see Alexander Wendt, *Quantum Mind and Social Science: Unifying Physical and Social Ontology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); "Why IR Scholars Should Care about Quantum Theory: Part I. Uncomfortable Facts and Burdens of Proof," *International Theory*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2022), pp. 119–29; "Why IR Scholars Should Care about Quantum Theory: Part II. Critics in the PITs," *International Theory*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2022), pp. 193–209; and Laura Zanotti, *Ontological Entanglements, Agency and Ethics in International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2018).

[82] John Gerard Ruggie, "Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations," *International Organization*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (1993), p. 170.

The second dimension in Figure 1 distinguishes between humanism and para-humanism. The concept of worldview, understood substantively, is tied indelibly to the names of two iconic humanists, Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Weber. Both were committed to empirical investigations of intellectual and social history. Both tried to find regularities in human affairs, eschewing metaphysical certainties. For Dilthey, historical processes are grounded in a feeling for and an attitude toward life as expressed in religious, artistic, and philosophical worldviews. Max Weber focuses on the tensions introduced by modern capitalism into the civilizational legacies of the past, studying specifically the relationship between ideas and the structure of social action. Different in their intellectual focus, temperament and method, both grappled with the issue of historical relativism—Dilthey retrospectively, by highlighting human self-analyses in history as acts of creativity; Weber prospectively, by inquiring into social necessities in history that increasingly came to circumscribe human existence.

Para-humanism offers a different worldview that goes "beyond" humanism.[83] It describes "the 'more-than-human' character of human existence."[84] Conceptualizing the cosmos as an evolving set of processes and relations characterize the field of scientific cosmology. Crucially, it argues that our scientific theories and models are not representations of the universe but integral parts of its evolution. Para-humanism includes the natural world in its animate and inanimate life forms. The human is a messy medley, and the non-human is more than background. Para-humanism does not reject humanism altogether far from it. But it rejects those elements of humanism that regard the human species as somehow exceptional or unique and distinct from the rest of nature. Haraway, for example, argues that the universe consists of collectively produced systems rather than self-regulating ones.[85] Humans, as COVID-19 has reminded us, are not self-contained but are an inseparable part of others existing within (bacteria and viruses) and around them (plants, animals, and other humans). Extending this perspective, Laura Zanotti follows Karen Barad's lead by taking "quantum ontologies" as the starting point for her analysis of a strong version of relationalism.[86] While giving relations rather than substances a primary ontological status, this goes beyond other relational approaches in positing a specific relationship between human and non-human aspects of the world. Agency is not a free-floating means for humans to enact their control over the world. Instead, agency is distributed and caught up in complex entanglements.[87]

Scientific cosmology studies unfolding processes and relations in the cosmos, including the ideas, beliefs, and theories about the cosmos. Contrary to Newtonianism's view of the world as a closed system, scientific cosmology views the world as an open system. Relational cosmology is a wholistic critique of a Newtonianism which seeks to break all systems down

[83] Cudworth and Hobden invoke "posthumanism". See Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden, *The Emancipatory Project of Posthumanism* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 5, 7. Ferrando's discussion of the many overlapping and contradictory strands and meanings of posthumanism, transhumanism, antihumanism, metahumanism and new materialisms have made me choose para-humanism for purpose of this discussion. It shares with much of Ferrando's discussion the insistence on dismantling strict dualisms including between matter and language as in Barad's version of new materialism and between humans, animals and technology as in Haraway's cyborgs. See Francesca Ferrando, "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations," *Existenz*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2013), pp. 26–32; Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991). See also Debashish Banerji and Makarand R. Paranjape, eds., *Critical Posthumanism and Planetary Futures* (New York: Springer, 2016).

[84] Milja Kurki, *International Relations in a Relational Universe* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 115–6, 124–6, 134–5.

[85] Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (London: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 33.

[86] Zanotti, *Ontological Entanglements, Agency and Ethics in International Relations*, pp. 4, 57–8; Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.

[87] Sturt A. Kauffman, *Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science, Reason, and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), pp. 23–46.

into their component parts. Contra Newton, space is not a flat background condition with coordinates filled by thing-like objects, such as particles or planets, which move according to the logic of universal laws of motion, subject to human codification and control. Even though relativity and quantum theories have shown background-independent theorizing to be plainly wrong, Lee Smolin suspects that many scientists still hope to gain access to eternally valid laws of the universe. They may have lost confidence in Newton's laws but not in the idea of laws. Mathematics is a powerful tool in this endeavor of finding the universal and eternal. But the problem with mathematics is that it looks at things in the universe from the outside, as if things were moving against a neutral background that simply does not exist. Smolin argues that a single, open, and causally highly complex cosmos comprises the universe, and that nothing exists beyond it. The universe is what it has evolved into being, specifically networks of relationships in time. The relationships that have evolved in the universe cannot be explained by scientific laws any more than they can be explained by religious entities. We are all in and of the universe—and not in or of anything else.[88]

The two dimensions of Newtonian and post-Newtonian and humanist and para-humanist worldviews create a grid for summarizing different types of IR theorizing. All too often, people use various interpretations of common sense to distinguish between the physicality of the real world and the social constitution of the human world, separating clearly the two dimensions of Newtonianism and post-Newtonianism and humanism and para-humanism. Most such interpretations pre-suppose an actor-independent reality in which the observer can be placed at a distance from the world. In short, common sense implicitly reflects a Newtonian worldview. But as Rovelli argues, most modern sciences acknowledge that the physical world is not what it appears to be.[89] Since physics is undeniably a product of human thought and culture, this commonsensical view is mistaken, and the two dimensions in Figure 1 are not necessarily orthogonal. Instead, they capture the epistemological commitments of four different world*views*.

Presented here as a heuristic device, Figure 1 summarizes schematically the four worldviews that typically inform the analysis of world politics: a "humanist substantialism" that focuses on discrete individuals, groups, states, and objects and a "para-humanist relationalism" that emphasizes entangling processes. Humanist substantialism (as in the Tsinghua Approach's elaboration of moral realism) foregrounds individuals or things operating in a world of certainty or risk, para-humanist relationalism (as in Kurki's engagement with scientific cosmology) entangling processes unfolding under conditions of uncertainty.[90] Figure 1 also yields two other worldviews: humanist relationalism (as in Yaqing Qin's and Chih-yu Shih's relational theory) and para-humanist substantialism (as in Grove's human and non-human encounters and deep relational processes).[91] In contrast to Yaqing Qin, Chih-yu Shih's formulation of relationalism, at least potentially, cuts across the two boxes of the bottom half of Figure 1. It leaves open the possibility that relationality may have a para-humanist component to it. For Shih, materiality is always part of the ecological settings that human action cannot avoid as it remains subject to its limiting effects on human choice.[92]

Although Figure 1 presents dichotomies, it would be a mistake to conclude prematurely that the four worldviews are clearly distinct, placed in different quadrants and evolving in

[88] Lee Smolin, *The Life of the Cosmos* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); *Three Roads to Quantum Gravity* (London: Phoenix, 2000); *Time Reborn: From the Crisis in Physics to the Future of the Universe* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013); Roberto Mangabeira Unger and Lee Smolin, *The Singular Universe and the Reality of Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[89] Carlo Rovelli, *Reality is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017).

[90] Milja Kurki, "Relationality, Post-Newtonian IR and Worldviews," in Katzenstein, ed., *Uncertainty and Its Discontents*, pp. 97–123.

[91] Jairus Grove, "The President as Mascot: Relations All the Way Down," in Katzenstein, ed., *Uncertainty and Its Discontents*, pp. 124–45.

[92] Shi, personal email communication, 04/30/21.

separate silos. They are not. Instead, worldviews are often fluid and can blend into one another. *Gongsheng*/symbiotic and *Tianxia* theories, for example, span both the quadrants of the left-hand side of Figure 1. In short, Chinese IR scholars share with their American and European colleagues a humanist Newtonian (and, to date, only potentially post-Newtonian) worldview. This explains why I argue here that there exists no distinctive Chinese School of IR theorizing.

Conclusion

I close with four remarks. First, it follows from this paper's Part 1 that the differences between Chinese and American IR theories are relatively minor and from Part 2 that Chinese IR theory has developed several original contributions. While there is little to hold Chinese scholarship back from venturing into para-humanist territory in the future, at this point in history, it has not done so. I have argued here that the commonalities deserve attention. Chinese and Western IR theory tend to express a Newtonian and humanist world view and show much less interest in post-Newtonianism, and even less in para-humanism. Both fit well into the classical realist and sociological constructivist-practice theorizing that is common coinage for IR theories everywhere. Living through a horrific, though relatively benign, pandemic, we should welcome the, to me, obvious fact that our theoretical lenses need to be broadened to encompass a different scientific worldview that incorporates post-Newtonianism and para-humanism into our vision. This might have the benefit of opening up IR, in both China and America, to new ways of conceptualizing the massive ecological and health problems posed by a world that incorporates humans as an integral part but is not fully controlled by them.

Second, the affirmation of dualism rather than monism in our understanding of the sciences that Ren, Quin, and others insist on will be much harder to defend once we broaden our understanding of the natural sciences. Dilthey and Weber articulated the dualistic argument that made a sharp distinction between Newtonian natural science and the social sciences and humanities. Twentieth-century scientific debates as well as the practices of the natural sciences, at a minimum, make the case for monism worth reconsidering. If we are all in this world and in nothing else, and if we are not gazing at it from a distance, then the case for monism is greatly enhanced. An update in our understanding of the practices of natural sciences, furthermore, brings into focus, once again, questions of religion.[93]

Third, all over the world in politically repressive regimes, IRs scholarship is inevitably operating under serious political constraints.[94] The theorists know this first hand as they navigate an often excruciatingly difficult terrain. Their readers know it too, including those who have the luxury of reflecting and commenting at a safe distance. What unites author and reader is an unspoken understanding that connects them all over the world and across the ages. Not everything that scholars think can be written or said aloud. Some important parts of various arguments discussed in this paper remain implicit. They appear between the lines on the printed page, an invisible meeting ground where bonds of collegiality and friendship are often forged and quietly reinforced.

Finally, despite our theoretical sophistication, in both "China" and "the West", we are all tapping our cane against the pavement, seeking to fathom what will happen next. In the case of the pandemic, information and knowledge are not irrelevant of course. But "a small set of moral intuitions forms the foundations upon which complex moral worldviews are constructed."[95] This is one of the reasons why we live in an era of heightened uncertainty.

[93] Katzenstein, ed., *Uncertainty and Its Discontents*, Ch. 10.

[94] Barry Buzan, "The 'Chinese School': An Outsider Perspective," Unpublished paper, August 2021.

[95] Sabrina Tavernise, "Vaccine Skepticism Was Viewed as a Knowledge Problem. It's Actually About Gut Beliefs," *The New York Times*, 29 April 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/29/us/vaccine-skepticism-beliefs.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage.

It makes the hard Newtonianism of deterministic laws and the soft Newtonianism of risk-based reasoning a less useful navigational tool for both Chinese IR scholars seeking guidance in the distant past and American IR scholars searching the past for new data. If historians and semantic modelers are right, the past is never distant. Always open to reinterpretation, it is like the future—unpredictable.

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