

# International Relations Theories: How to Bring about a More Inclusive International System?

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## **Introduction**

Who is running the international system? Attempting to answer this question one can easily conclude with 'West'. Nevertheless, yet a more important question would be 'why?' Since the invention of International Relations theories and school of thoughts the western ideologies dominated and shaped international system. Therefore, the idea of universalism indicates more or less western universalism. Because, it leaves out the rest of world in terms of their distinctiveness of culture, ideology and perception. Another question to pose is; why recently scholars have shown interest to explore the absence of non-western thoughts in the arena of IR? Some attribute the recent interest to China's rise, and weather China changes the international system once it rises and challenges the current world order. Further, covering this phenomenon brings with it various topics for discussion. If one is to consider non-western thoughts while studying IR then the world order might indeed look quite different. For example, eastern values tend to bring more Confucian values or 'All Under Heaven Mandate', those values are quite different from western values. A growing number of scholars assert IR should be more inclusive, as some key leading powers are absent in the current International school of thoughts. This debate has its pro's and con's. Some scholars find it unnecessary to create more school of thoughts. To elaborate, if Asian thoughts are to be included in IRT it is expected it will be based on confusion thoughts. The paper is divided into paragraphs where articles related to Chinese IRT are raised, reviews and assessed. The first section sheds light on how the current international system that is based on western ideologies have left out the rest of the world. Later, it brings to light women in China and their stance in the intellectual sphere in the rising China. Finally, the paper illustrates what kind of ideology China bring, it focuses on the idea of *Tianxia*, or all under heaven rule.

## **The Absence of Eastern theories in Current International System**

In <sup>1</sup>Johnston's article *What (If Anything) Does East Asia Tell Us about International Relations Theory?* The author asserts scholars in Europe and America in particular have excluded East Asia in the studies while presenting International theories. This has created a gap in the international theories and it causes 'considerable costs to scholarship from being unwilling or unable to delve into local knowledge'. While many scholars tend to agree that East Asia has a major power in the world yet little research has been done in this regard compared to studies on Europe and America. Further, Johnston lays out several grounds for discussion, they are; 'structural theories about rising power and conflict; the formation, functioning, and effects of institutions; and historical memory and conflict'. According to structural theories, once a state or region rises to power it aggressively dominates other weaker states to impose its ideology and set the rules. In turn those weaker states resort to strengthening military power as a means of balance of power against the stronger one. Considering this approach many scholars have expressed anxiety over China's rise, predicting the rise to bring with it conflict similar to the European rise in the past. On the contrary, this has not been the case with 'China's Rise', China has been rising rapidly yet it has shown no interest to dominate the world ideologically, neither has it challenged the current world order. In addition, neighboring countries of China, the weaker states, have not attempted to balance the change of power through strengthening military. Instead of balance of power, East Asian countries have responded very differently to China's rise. Instead of military advancement they try to bind China through institutional involvement and 'soft balancing'. Those East Asian countries avoid military advancement, one reason would be 'historical memories',

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<sup>1</sup> Alastair Johnston, *What (If Anything) Does East Asia Tell Us About International Relations Theory?* (Department of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2012)

China has been a rather soft hierarchy, and another reason would be those countries find balancing of power too costly.

This is a crucial point the author raises, the fact that East Asian countries differ than the rest, in terms of rising to power and how they behave when they are strong compared to the rest.

### **Universality of International Relations**

It is the western institutions who dominate and set the agenda of international system. Non-western world has been seen mainly studied upon as interesting case studies. One might wonder how this became a reality. Why the world took this turn? For western to dominate the rest, ideologically. The main causes appear to be economic, political and cultural settings in the developing world. To mention some 'scarce resources, political interference, and lack of freedom expression' these have deeply affected the course of International Relations Theories development in non-western countries. As a result, a global IR is required to bring more harmony. Global IR refers to an international system that is inclusive, not in a sense of one fit all type of universalism but one that does not leave out others. A pluralist universalism, a universalism that recognizes and respects diversity. In addition, it is 'grounded on world history' instead of only Europe or US history. Global IR composes of experiences and history of not only major actors but of all the different parts of the world.<sup>2</sup> Acharya and Buzan find it vital for non-western IRT to develop so that the universalism of international system becomes vivid. Since West and East are different in their approaches in many aspects it is likely that they respond to crisis, power change, and

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<sup>2</sup> Acharya Amitav. *Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds* (International Studies Quarterly, 58, 647–659 2014, 2014)

developments quite differently. Therefore, taking them into account while studying IRT is significant.

Acharya and Buzan point out another difference between western and non-western approach to international system and how they dominate. Western believes in hard power, historically they intervened most of the countries for trade purpose and imposed their rules and ideologies. On the other hand, nonwestern countries such as India and China opened trade routes and ‘trade flourished without direct intervention of a hegemonic power.’

### **IR theory absence in East Asia**

Does exclusion of some of the major powers in IR cause gaps in International Theories? <sup>3</sup>Johnston claims that this would not have been the case if the different powers were similar in responding to conflict, balance of power and political and economic advancement. Nonetheless, since different actors have a unique response to those phenomenon, excluding some in the IR theories might indeed cause some gaps in the study.

The author tries to argue if it is necessary to have more of IR theories or is it enough to bring some features of those regions thoughts into the discipline of IR. Some argue instead of creating new school of thoughts which might bring with it more problems to the world it is better to look at how non-western experienced have been embodied into. <sup>4</sup>Cheng critically looks at those projects attempting to create eastern school of thoughts in order to make those voices heard and make IR more universal and inclusive. However, those projects, according to Cheng are doing the same as the current hegemonic powers; it ‘re-inscribes the hegemonic logics of Western IRT’

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<sup>3</sup> Alastair Johnston (2012).

<sup>4</sup> Ching-Chang Chen, *The absence of non-western IR theory in Asia reconsidered* (College of Asia Pacific Studies, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, 1-1 Jumonjibaru, Beppu-shi, Oita-ken 874-8577, 2010)

therefore those non-western IRT are more of a 'derivative discourse' than an independent one, those school of thoughts are producing two opposite worlds of 'West' versus 'East', and this does not contribute to universality of IR.

To elaborate, the reason why Asian IRT have not developed is 'not because western have found all the answers, or because it is hidden from the public eye due to language differences, but rather the Gramscian hegemonic status of western IRT discourages theoretical formulation by others'. That is the difficulty late comers' face, because western have already set the stage and written the play. Further, even when those IR school of thoughts emerge they have 'nativism' features, it encourages and imposes its values and views, and this is opposite to the idea of 'universalism'. In addition, while studying those themes it is easy to go back to Gramsci's thoughts on who produces knowledge and how this knowledge is legitimized. This takes us back to the very basic question of 'hegemony'. Looking at how capitalism took over the world one knows in order to legitimize knowledge one has to control the minds through repetition and making the rest believe this particular idea is indeed the best available idea and the best option.

### **Where are the women in Chinese IR?**

When Chinese scholars attempt to contribute and form a school of thought in terms of IR they go back to Confucianism, and bring the talk of how the harmony Confucianism brings to world order. In other words it is said that Confucianism "supplies the foundation for Chinese Exceptionalism". The main argument is that Confucianism deals with power not with coercion but with harmony and inclusion, one that supports world peace, consistent development, and prosperity and solved international problems through multilateralism and diplomacy. Through Confucianism 'questions of world order, in particular the centrality of hierarchical relations

between emperor and subject, husband and wife, and parent and child, and the<sup>5</sup> “acceptance of one’s ‘assigned’ role in the social order”. Confucian thought goes back to Han Dynasty, a form of social mobilization through harmony and assigned order according to a hierarchy, this thought has taken over political sphere both domestic and international politics. Those ideologies might be relevant in some angle’s but it leaves out an important part of the game; women’s voice. Even though there may be a Chinese IRT school but criticisms are loud concerning women’s participation. Women seem to be entirely absent in forming those theories. Criticism of Confucian thought claim this ideology is a “masculine enterprise”. In this sense women’s voice is unheard. Therefore, Chinese IR appears to be inadequate, unlike western theories, western ideologies appear to be more robust and unified.

Observing Confucian, despite its many features which shows it can contribute greatly to the international relations school, yet one drawback of the concept is in history it has excluded women. This drawback raises questions regarding women rights and participation in the rising China. Can the All under heaven reinvent and evolve to current world need? Since historically Confucian considered <sup>6</sup>women as subhuman, created to serve men. In marriage women are seen as men’s possession “It was the coming of Confucianism that the marriage system became the severe bondage of women and that the cult of feminine chastity became an obsession with men”. Hence it is easy to agree with the author regarding questioning women intellectuals and their participation in forming international relations theory in China.

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<sup>5</sup> Eric M. Blanchard Shuang Lin. *Gender and Non-Western “Global” IR: Where Are the Women in Chinese International Relations Theory* (International Studies Review 18, 48–61, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

## An International Relations with Chinese Characteristics

Hung Jen Wang's article *Being Uniquely Universal: building Chinese international relations theory* brings to light the idea of Chinese school of IR. The author's core argument is<sup>7</sup> how Chinese scholars carefully attempt to align Western and Chinese ideology on how international relations should work to introduce a new form of IR school. His argument is illustrated in four main points; first, the importance Chinese scholars have come to actualize on introducing an independent Chinese IR study. When it comes to Chinese IR, Chinese scholars are divided into two groups; one who are more conservative versus a group who call for modernity. The former fears of Chinese identity extinction, and the later focuses on modernity and building Chinese 'intellectual identity'. However, their fundamental idea is the same; both are looking for a solid Chinese identity in the international relations and a specific image that presents China graciously. Hence, it is evident that a self-identity to be made is the most vital element in producing a Chinese IR school.<sup>8</sup> "Specifically, assessments of the philosophical and theoretical implications of IR theory with Chinese characteristics begin with the establishment of a self-identity based on China's cultural traditions, foreign policy practices, and post-1949 experiences, as well as the consumption of Western theories and China's Marxist perspectives on international politics" most of those Chinese characteristics tend to reflect to Chinese history and tradition, such as the mandate of heaven or *All Under Heaven* rule. Chinese scholars prefer to conceptualize those historical features and blend them with modern realities, this way build a unique Chinese IR school. Intellectuals highlight the importance of subjectivity, efforts to be as autonomous as possible, self-determining, 'self-regulating and free subject in post-Mao China'. Autonomous here refers to

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<sup>7</sup> Hung-Jen Wang. *Being uniquely universal: Building Chinese International Relations Theory*. (Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 , 2013)

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*

Chinese struggle to be free from outside epistemology and bring their own, uniquely and independent of outside influence. Second point is; with the rise of china since 1990s, Chinese scholars are concerned with how to present China's image to the world. The importance of presenting 'the great nation' includes how the country's participation in the international arena is a mix of 'self-awareness of a distinct culture IR history imposed by others' according to Tang Guanghong a country's foreign policy and strategies do not depend on how the country perceives the world but how the world perceives the country.

With the changes of China's power in the world Chinese scholars feel responsible to play a more critical role in expressing the county's will, rights and demands. Nevertheless, Chinese scholars are unwilling to pose a revolutionary image of China to the world, their attempts are limited to being a peaceful and responsible state. This is to avoid criticisms from the west, mainly because according to western IR theories a rising power comes with a hegemonic idea that poses a threat to world stability. Nevertheless, Chinese scholars attempt to erase this image by going back to their history and culture and prove that their 'nature' is not revolutionary or violent but it is a soft rise and that their history has proven this 'fact'. With the growing concern from West Chinese scholars tend to act responsibly with China's intentions in the world stage.

Further, a number of scholars who are reluctant to present china as a great nation argue that the concept for great nation should not be only a status gained for national growth and international performances, but more important than that is to plant this idea among the Chinese civilians. The average citizen's conscious of 'great nation' shall be achieved, when awareness among people rises this is when China has truly achieved the status of 'great nation'. This awareness is about Chinese people conscious about the country's responsibilities and obligations, this way they can 'exert some form of rational control over China's behaviors, reducing the effects of objective

factors such as power as defined in realist-oriented Western IR theory.’ This is the most important point raised by the author, because indeed in order to change a nation, change must start from the grassroots, and from people’s mind set, that is the only true change that can happen. However, bringing this into existent requires the country’s intellectuals to consistently produce works, and raise awareness among the people until the shift of mindset has taken place.

Third point, for Chinese scholars it is more essential to present their ‘rights’ than power. However, western scholars disagree, especially the realist scholars tend to harshly oppose any idea that claims countries are not willing to expand their power and exert influence. Therefore, Chinese scholars have struggled with this argument, they put a lot of effort to be free from those judgments by bringing about their own view on international relations and remain autonomous. Nevertheless, Morgenthau as a western scholar defines anything outside realist version of international relations as subjective, self-opinionated and irrelevant. Yet Chinese scholars firmly support their stand by arguing that there a difference between a call for rights and a call for power. A call for rights cannot be expanded, it can only be fought for and maintained. Those rights are unique to each nation, all nations without exception have them. This search for autonomy has deepened as the author puts; “Liang Shoude and other Chinese scholars are motivated to find an equal, independent, and autonomous position for China in this multipolar world; that is, viewing the pursuit of China’s ‘individual character and diversity’ as more important than discovering laws that govern interactions among nation-states.” This is a crucial argument the author raises, how Chinese scholars try to fight judgements and what seems to be inevitable to western scholars. For example, western scholars attempting to claim that what they think of power is inevitable and universal, however Chinese scholars are arguing against such universality, one cannot be certain which

argument is true but intellectually this proves China's willingness to break free from the chains of western ideologies.

Fourth point emphasizes how Chinese scholars tend to still bind Chinese IR theories with its communists implications. As communism opposes the idea of hegemony, therefore to them hegemony is a negative trait of a powerful country. Along with communism traits, Chinese scholars see themselves as peace-loving and a developing country. Because of those Chinese scholars think hegemony is not compatible with their view of the world and their 'rights' as a great nation; *daiguo*. Further, Chinese scholars tend to avoid to bringing western IR theories into their own, mainly because western ideologies face the strongest criticism from their own government leaders. Still Chinese opening up to the world in terms of its international relations theories is regarded with much cynicism; that China has 'hidden intentions and other agendas' behind the velvet gloves they have other aims. Therefore, the author concludes that Chinese scholar's ideas on hegemony so far remains 'fixated'.

According to the four characteristics of Chinese IR scholarly efforts described above, "IR theory with Chinese characteristics is less an attempt to create a new set of universal laws than one of subjective self-examination for accessing perceptions of a rising China." One last point the author raises is whether Chinese IR studies are universally applicable theories, the author argues that they cannot be universal since they have more Chinese characteristic than being pure theories that can be applied everywhere in the globe.

## Will China Change the International System

Dreyer in his article *The Tianxia Trope' will china change the international system?*<sup>9</sup> *Tianxia* is an eastern pre modern international system where all states agree to obey a set of rules in harmony and peace. The rules are about how the international system should function. In this system states are set out according to a hierarchical order, the most powerful rules and others conform. While the Westphalian idea claims that all states are equally sovereign, the *Tianxia* recognizes existing inequality between states. In this system, all the other states submit to one hegemonic state, led by an emperor who's recognized as 'son of heaven.' The rules are supposedly from heaven therefore recognizes as 'all under heaven' rule. In this system even those whose culture is different from the dominant state still they would conform to their rules, their culture and recognize its superiority. In the past this included nomads and other various cultures. Confucianism was the one that used to rule the world. Therefore one can refer to China not an emerging empire but re-emerging. This form of rule was undermined by Westphalia. At the start of 18<sup>th</sup> century a new rule was set out in the world, the Westphalian rule took over the international system by force; superior technology and weapons. The Westphalia's state claimed that states are equally sovereign, a state has a defined territory and population where they live free from outside influence. Nonetheless, this model is criticized for becoming a 'ruinous capitalist competition, rivalries between and among states, and constant confrontation' further in this system there is no supra national organization or state that can make rules for all. Leaving the world in a Hobbesian state of anarchy. Now with China reemerging as powerful state Chinese intellectuals realized communist ideology is no longer a viable option for ruling, especially after Mao Zedong's death

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<sup>9</sup> June Teufel Dreyer. *The 'Tianxia Trope': will China change the international system?* (Journal of Contemporary China, 2015).

and Deng Xiaoping's economic modification. After this Chinese intellectuals starts to 're-traditionalize' in which they attempt to turn to their roots and ideologies of Confucianism and base the country's emerging image on their ancient paradigms. Since 1999 a great number of Confucian schools have started opening in China and overseas, where they teach Confucianism to support socialism with Chinese characteristics. Those schools operate in 104 countries, the main aim seems to be to enhance appreciation to PRC's soft power at the same time to mitigate the fears of China's rise.

To elaborate, the concept of *Tianxia* is about Great Harmony, *Datong*. The scholars believe that if China grows stronger it will have no problem with its Asian neighboring countries, because those countries know of China's way of ruling based on history and therefore would prefer a strong China to a weak one. 'these countries will continue undoubtedly incorporate aspects of its model to their own development, while continuing to integrate their own economies with the PRC's.' however these say nothing about those countries future actions and intentions.

Some claim that the current Chinese state rule can be linked to *Tianxia* as the country's rule is seeking for great harmony, and is referred to as the Chinese dream. Some see Chinese military dominance as great harmony. Therefore one can conclude that Chinese dream is compatible with American dream. They both seek to dominate the world, and *Tainxia* is more used as a reaction against Western hegemony and its drawbacks and deficiencies as a hegemon. Later, in Taiwan's *Want China Times*, the author claimed; 'it is increasingly clear that humanity has to find an alternative to the US model, such as that being pursued by China. Which gives importance to stability, harmony, and equal wealth. With further improvement and institutionalization, the model may be adopted by other nations, extending China's influence in the world to the realm of ideology and justice, rather than just material strength.' *Tianxa* was known previously existed among Shang

and Zhou dynasties, and both of them portrayed themselves as the being in the middle of the world. While each had their own lifestyle and civilization. They considered themselves as the middle empire based on three notions of divinity; ‘supremacy *shangdi*, heaven *tian*, and the ancestor’s *zuxian*.’ The king was the connecting source between the heaven and earth. In Wang’s words, Cosmo-geography was a state where ‘there were no clear cut differences between the realistic and the imaginary, leading to the concept of a symbolic empire imagined by ritual’. Later an element was added to this Cosmo-geography. Previously *Tianxia* was known only to China and China did not know about the rest of the world until much later when Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci arrived to the Ming court, Ricci mastered the language of court and was referred to as a civilized man. He talked about other civilization to the king, and the king asked him to draw maps for him, as respect to the dynasty Ricci drew China in the middle, as a middle kingdom. This is when ‘*Tianxia* met the world’. As the word ‘world’ did not exist in China until 19<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout time, Chinese scholars attempted to extend the ideology of all under heaven to the entire world and claimed that *Tianxia* is ‘far beyond the Sinitic world’

To elaborate, the *Tianxia* notion faded in China’s public discourse after the communist party took over. When Mao Zedong split from Soviet Union, he was recognized as a leading person who will make the idea universally applicable, the Sini-centric communist movement that would lead the world. However this dream also faded and again scholars tried to reform and bring new ideas to rule. One of them was Zhou Tingyang’s notion, he linked the 3000 year old idea of *Tianxia* with Emmanuel Kant’s notion of ‘perpetual peace’ that we must all ‘internalize the concept of ‘worldness’ the author criticize Tingyang’s concept by claiming that he is also like west, trying to come up with a solution to the world problems by creating a world governance for the wellbeing of all people. “Until that is done we will continue to be misled by such American made illusions

as the ‘clash of civilization’, ‘rouge states’, failed states’. Rather than failed states Zhao sees a failed world.’

Can China’s *Tianxia* be applied to the world? The author’s stance in answering this question is cynical, the author finds *Tianxia* a myth that is impossible to implement. He claims that Chinese politicians internally do not practice *Tianxia* even though they preach the idea to the world. As it is evident China has joined UN which supports sovereign states. In a public speech China’s president supported territorial integrity and sovereignty of states. Basically the Chinese politicians will bring on the *Tianxia* when it suits their interest and when threatened they go back to existing ideas and rules of state sovereignty. On other notes the author attempts to illustrate if *Tianxia* can also adapt to changing circumstances as Westphalia’s sovereignty has, and he confirms that it is possible. As Chinese scholars try to blend *Tianxia* with current political realities. Nevertheless, *Tianxia* is about great harmony, yet China has shown great environmental deterioration due to industries, also the gap between rich and poor is quite visible. This said, yet many countries do support the idea, mainly due to China’s economic prosperity and the advantage a number of countries get by economic relations with China. Therefore, many are likely to prefer China’s rise and prosperity and would rather avoid discontentment with Beijing. ‘Weather willingly or reluctantly, amid grumbling about a Middle Kingdom mentality, they may accept PRC’s suzerainty’.

Even though china has attempted to assure neighboring countries that China’s rise is not dangerous to their wellbeing, those attempts are visible in China’s generous foreign relations, and emphasizing on its soft power, yet concerns remain within those countries. Because, in this fast paced technological world information can travel across oceans, China’s human rights abused does not go unnoticed, especially death of individuals who raised their voice against the government.

Those ‘undermine the image of a country worthy of emulation’. To elaborate, internationally China has acted more like hard realism than a caring hegemon. Especially in the case of south china seas, also in 2010 former Chinese ministry of foreign affairs told an ASEAN gathering that ‘China was a big country and they should understand that they are small countries. And in 2012 Beijing’s political responsibility included ‘persuading ASEAN host country Cambodia to keep the issue of contested South China Sea territories off the association’s agenda.’ The author concludes by claiming that all dominant states shall be feared, because ‘Who will watch the watchman?’

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the main article of the paper was to critically review China’s stance in the current international Relations studies. By reviewing articles concerned with the gap in the current IR literature due to excluding some key world players. Later, it showed how women’s voice are barely heard in Chinese politics and IR studies in particular and therefore the concept needs to evolve in order to fit with the current world’s requirements and be wholly inclusive. In the final section the paper focused on what kind of ideology will China bring with its rise to the world? China with its rich civilization is not likely to follow Western ideologies, even though in some instances they have conformed to the rules of west, such as joining UN and at times supporting Westphalia’s sovereign states ideology. Yet there is no doubt they can participate greatly into the study of international relations. Further, the main focus of Chinese intellectuals are on how to harmonize the current world order with their ideology of Confucianism. They emphasize on their peaceful nature and their willingness to help other countries rise however, at times they have acted very differently especially in the current South China Sea case.

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