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The Innovation of a Chinese School of IR

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4 “You need to do something that the Westerners cannot understand” – The Innovation of a Chinese School of IR

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The conventional wisdom is that International Relations is an ‘American social science’ dominated by U.S. theories (Crawford and Jarvis, 2001; Hoffmann, 1977; Smith, 2000; Wæver, 1998). In recent years, however, Chinese scholars have begun debating whether and how a distinctly Chinese IR theory or school should be developed (Qin, 2007, 2009, 2011; Ren, 2008; Wang, 2007, 2009; Yan, 2008). In an academic world with growing exposure to online information and journals, increasing academic travel, exchange and conferences, it seems paradoxical that the Chinese IR community has taken a nativist turn. The Chinese attempt to deliberately produce a seemingly oxymoronic ‘national international theory’ is indeed a unique and puzzling case. The main puzzle of this chapter is thus how local and global influences interact in the innovation of a Chinese International Relations theory. It addresses the question put forward in the introduction of this volume: To what extent has globalisation forced China to innovate? The object of innovation in this case is a Chinese IR theory and the innovators primarily Chinese IR scholars at universities and think tanks.

The chapter argues that it is necessary to challenge the commonsensical link between external events in the subject matter (i.r.) and theorising (IR), in this case that the innovation of a Chinese IR theory is a natural product of globalisation, China’s geopolitical rise, its growing political ambitions and discontent with Western hegemony. As noted in the introductory chapter, there seems to be an assumption in IR that China’s interaction with the world will make it “more like us”. By taking a micro-sociological perspective on intellectual innovation, we argue that ‘globalisation’ is not an external force that determines and homogenises the way Chinese theory is constructed. Rather, we suggest that globalisation processes at the micro-level such as growing exposure to Western IR books and articles, educational exchange and interaction with Western colleagues at conferences, and the pressure for publishing in Western journals will not necessarily make Chinese IR “more like us”. On the contrary, we challenge the socialisation argument elaborated in the introduction by showing that growing interaction with the world, in the case of academic IR, may also lead to the emphasis, and even manufacture, of difference.

A sociological approach to intellectual innovation

As for the innovation theme of this volume, we abstain from defining ‘theory’ or ‘innovation’ in an absolute sense as this may prevent us from seeing theories we otherwise would (Acharya and Buzan, 2007). The definitional battles about theory—

what it is, who it is for, what its purpose is—are the objects of our analysis rather than something to be defined *a priori*. Contrary to the philosophy of science that conceives science as a thing and tries to define what ‘it’ is, we approach science sociologically: as the activities in which scientists partake and try to explain how ‘they’ work. In the sociological lens, new theories are understood by what they are designed to *do* rather than their content.

Instead of providing an absolute definition of theoretical innovation, we argue that it should be seen in relation to the intellectual attention space where it is put forward, locally and globally. Theoretical innovations are ideas that are *new* (creative) and *important* (relate to past debates). As the sociologist of science, Randall Collins, puts it: “ideas cannot be too new, whatever their creativeness [but] must also be important, that is, in relation to ongoing conversations of the intellectual community” (Collins, 1998: 31). Richard Whitley has also argued that scientific fields “reward intellectual innovation—only new knowledge is publishable—and yet contributions have to conform to collective standards and priorities if they are to be regarded as competent and scientific” (Whitley in Wæver, 1998: 716). For scholars to successfully promote their ideas as innovative, they need to effectively balance being original and recognisable. Innovation, in order to be *recognised* as such, must therefore contain both new and old elements in relation to the attention space in which they are put forward. According to this definition, the hybrid combination of different sources of knowledge—whether old and new, Western and Chinese, or local and global—is at the core of theoretical innovation.

This hybridity cannot be emphasised enough as it also brings the analysis beyond the traditional copy/construction dichotomy used to explain Chinese IR theorising. Some Chinese observers have argued that Chinese IR is still “between copying and constructing” (Wang, 2009) or between “theory-learning” and “theory-innovation” phases (Qin, 2009). However, this quasi-Marxist conception of history as a stage-like progress towards maturity and theoretical sophistication that benchmarks itself against Western standards, may lead to a constant disappointment, as there is still no purely Chinese theory devoid of Western elements. Following the sociological approach to innovation outlined above, the innovation of a Chinese IR theory will most likely entail copying in some sense, especially as IR theory is a notion developed in the West during the 20th century.

On the other hand, the Chinese attempt at constructing a local IR theory while at the same time trying to integrate China into the global IR family is original and innovative. In this sense the term innovation captures the tension between recognisability and originality and is well-suited to analyse the Chinese theoretical debates that are essentially about how to make a substantial contribution to (the already existing discipline of) IR that engages critically with existing perspectives, rather than inventing something radically new. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to explain why Chinese IR theorising takes the form of combining Western IR with (ancient) Chinese intellectual resources, and the focus is hybrids of local and global, particular and universal, Chinese and Western. Throughout the chapter, we employ interviews with more than 30 Chinese IR scholars to demonstrate how these hybrid combinations are made and how they are part of intellectual ‘moves’ (often against others) that aim to carve out attention space.

The chapter proceeds in four sections. The first section analyses the global influences on Chinese IR in the sense of import of Western, primarily American,

theories and ideals of science. The second section shows how the application of Western theory is no longer considered sufficient to become prominent but must be recombined with distinctive Chinese ideas. The third section shows how the concept of a 'school' may provide the hybrid of local and global that gives Chinese IR a place at the margins of mainstream IR. The fourth and final section discusses the question in the introduction of this volume: "What potential barriers to innovation can be identified in a given field?" The focus is on the prospect for international recognition of a Chinese IRT and whether it has the potential to make International Relations a more international discipline.

The Import(ance) of the American Social Science

In order to understand the recent drive to innovate a Chinese theory of IR, we need first to understand how global influences have shaped Chinese IR. Although contemporary Chinese IR scholars represent a plurality of perspectives, the common disciplinary history we are told is that modern Chinese IR was formed following China's opening and reform. The processes of opening and reforming starting in 1978 are significant as they allowed for an influx of Western, especially U.S., influences and ideas that changed how Chinese academics dealt with the study of the 'international'. One scholar, an assistant professor from Tsinghua, explains that Chinese IR today "is quite like in the U.S., we have realists, liberalists, and constructivists".¹ Another scholar, educated in physics, who only recently entered IR working on nuclear disarmament, explains how he has had to learn the basic vocabulary of Western IR theory in order to communicate with his colleagues:

I think all universities, professors at all universities they teach the Western theories, IR theories or that kind of thing. [and he continues] The reason I began to learn IR theory is because I needed to communicate with my colleagues and my students. That was the original reason. I did not feel that IR theories are so useful but I needed to understand what my colleagues are talking about so I spent some time to read IR theory, books, articles.²

In the eyes of this scholar, learning the theories of "realism, liberalism or whatever"³ were necessary to be able to communicate with his network.

A survey distributed among Chinese IR scholars largely confirms the relative dominance of Western IR in Chinese academia. When asking today's IR scholars to characterise themselves and their peers by theoretical approach, the most prominent streams mentioned are the three paradigms realism, liberalism, constructivism. Realism is by far the most prominent. Marxism accounts for a small percentage—the smallest when scholars characterise themselves.⁴

¹ Interview assistant professor, Tsinghua University, February 2010.

² Interview professor, Tsinghua University, March 2010.

³ Interview professor, Tsinghua University, March 2010.

⁴ In our survey distributed among 305 Chinese IR scholars at top universities in spring 2010 we asked Chinese IR scholars to characterize themselves and others. Question 9 'Which of the following best describes your approach to the study of IR?' only allows one answer, whereas question 15 'What percentage of Chinese IR scholars do you estimate is devoted to each of these paradigms today?' asks respondents to assign a percentage to all categories (realism, liberalism, constructivism, Marxism, English school, other, non-paradigmatic). Approximately 58 % of respondents characterized themselves as realist,

At a distance it might look like such Westernisation (or Americanisation) is simply an automatic product of globalisation. However, it is not ‘globalisation’ as an external force, but rather globalisation processes at the micro-level that explain the Westernisation of Chinese IR. It has been driven by social changes to the intellectual field, supported by specific changes in its material and organisational basis. Especially important in shaping and changing Chinese IR has been the personal linkages created between American and Chinese scholars, leading to the transferral of both U.S. theories and scientific ideals.

For example, the most prominent scholars in Chinese IR all have a special connection to the U.S.. Qin Yaqing and Yan Xuotong received their PhD’s there, whereas others held visiting scholarships in the U.S. (Wang Jisi, Wang Yizhou, Ni Shixiong). As one not-so-prominent scholar explains these scholars became important and defining figures in the development of the Chinese IR discipline:

Why do you think they became the most prominent?

Because they are the first generation of Chinese students who got a PhD from abroad. They went to America in the earliest years and they got their PhD and they master the English language and know a lot about the Western IR theories. Then they came back to China. So they belong to the first young generation of Chinese scholars who had experience in America and have the knowledge about the Western IR theory, especially American IR theory. So after they got their PhD degree they came back to China and became a faculty member and they became the leading IR scholars in China.⁵

Opening to the outside world, thus, allowed Chinese academics and students to travel to the U.S. on visiting scholarships or to achieve PhD degrees. Moreover U.S. scholars were invited to China, whereby new academic ideas were exchanged (Y. Zhang, 2003: 99-102). This occurred at a time when access and exposure to knowledge resources such as books, journals, conferences, and other scholars was still extremely limited. It provided the travelling scholars significant opportunities to return home with U.S. education, theoretical knowledge and the ability to attain a certain position in the intellectual community and influence it. Other observers also point this out (S. Zhao, 1997; Jianwei Wang, 2002). But it is not only the visiting scholarship or the degree that enabled these scholars to define and shape the discipline. It is also how connections they made to important figures in the field during their visits were utilised.

Large parts of Chinese IR scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s were taken up by translation and introduction of Western IR theory (Qin, 2007: 316; Yiwei Wang, 2009: 106; Johnston, 2002: 35; Ren, 2008: 296). Several of the most prominent scholars identified in our survey (Wang Yizhou, Qin Yaqing, Ni Shixiong) are often praised as introducers of Western theories (Jisi Wang, 2002: 11; Y. Zhang, 2002, 2003: 102; Johnston, 2002: 35). For example, China’s leading constructivist Qin Yaqing has translated Wendt’s *Social Theory of International Politics*. Wang Jisi, a renowned policy scholar and realist provided the foreword to the Chinese edition of Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations* (Johnston, 2002). Translation might seem a straightforward task, which would hardly make anyone prominent, but this was not the case in Chinese IR in the years shortly after China’s opening. These years were characterised by poor

liberalist or constructivist, whereas only 5 % characterized themselves as Marxist. Similarly, a survey of Chinese journal articles finds the influence of American IRT “clearly discernible” (Qin, 2009: 194).

⁵ Interview professor, Peking University, March 2010.

language capabilities and little access to international publications. Thus, translations were a way for the few who had access through language and study abroad experience to expose the broader disciplinary community to Western theoretical ideas. It is worth noting in that context that now-prominent scholars such as Ni Shixiong and Qin Yaqing majored in English in their undergraduate education.⁶ At the time translation of the works of well-known mainstream scholars could lead to prominence in China. A conversation with a not-yet-prominent associate professor provides an interesting perspective on this:

If a Chinese scholar, a professor or associate professor or doctor, if he would like to become famous firstly he chooses a person who is famous in Western academia. And research and introduce him to the Chinese audience and translate his books into the Chinese language and then invites this professor to China to give lectures to the students. Then he becomes famous.[...]A Chinese scholar does not have his own theory so he has to research Western theory and introduce this theory into China. If he introduces a theory or a paradigm into Chinese academia he will become the representative of this school[...]Another who researches neorealism, he invites Robert Gilpin or Kenneth Waltz and translates Waltz' book into the Chinese language and then invites Waltz to China to give lecture. And then takes part in conferences. This person will become a member of neorealism.

Can you mention any examples of people who have done this?

I cannot mention it because if you publish it those persons will think he is famous based on those foreign scholars. But we have many younger scholars, they become famous by the way of this.⁷

According to this rather controversial representation prominent scholars are capable of utilising their international connections to do translation work. By “translation theorising” they attach their identity to theoretical ideas (neorealism, constructivism, etc.). Since China has not yet produced its own theories, the best alternative is to make friends with U.S. theorists. Western, particularly American, IR theories has thus become a very important intellectual capital that organises the academic community by providing identity-labels.

Building IR on an American foundation

The exchange of people, education and ideas has been supported by changes in the material and organisational base of Chinese IR, more specifically by a massive inflow of American investment. Since normalisation of diplomatic relations in the late 1970s American foundations and IR academies have invested heavily in IR and American studies in China (Y. Zhang, 2003)⁸ and IR was a particular focus for U.S.-China educational exchange from 1978-1984 (Lampton et al., 1986: 7).

The Ford, Asia, Luce, Rockefeller, Fulbright, and MacArthur Foundations and a wide number of other ‘culture exchange foundations’ have been significant in funding

⁶ This type of translation theorising is not unique to China, but has been noted in several other “periphery countries” (cf. Aydinli and Mathews 2009; Inoguchi 2009; Sariolghalam 2009).

⁷ Interview associate professor, Fudan University, March 2010.

⁸ Educational and scientific relations between the U.S. and China were carried out under ‘The Agreement on Cooperation in Science and Technology’ signed by Jimmy Carter and Deng Xiaoping July 1979 (Hayhoe 1989, 124).

the scholarly exchanges between U.S. and China.”⁹ Their scholarships brought the Chinese scholars to the U.S., which facilitated the import of U.S. theories. Early textbooks were based on such visiting scholarships to the U.S., and American foundations also financed the publication of the translated IR theory works in the 1980s and early 1990s (Zhang, 2003: 101-103).¹⁰ In addition to exchanges, the institutionalisation of networks between Chinese and U.S. associations promoted “the U.S.-based scholarship of IR and political science among Chinese scholars” (Zhang, 2003: 101). All this at a time when China had recently opened to outside ideas and scholars were intellectually hungry and very receptive. Moreover, funds for research and education were at a low, thus enhancing the impact of the American investment.

U.S. foundations continue to provide generous funding for academies, elite universities, and research institutions.¹¹ The Ford Foundation still supports IR in China, and ‘state of the art’ studies on how it could be strengthened (e.g. Johnston, 2002; Jisi Wang, 2002; Shambaugh and Jisi Wang, 1984).¹² Institutional links are maintained and today the most prominent IR research institutions are led by U.S.-returned scholars.¹³ Consequently, these places have become the favourite stopping places for visiting U.S. scholars such as Waltz, Gilpin, Krasner, Nye, Keohane and recently Katzenstein, reinforcing the prominence of these institutions. To be sure, not all U.S. funding had the intended or unintended consequence of Americanising Chinese IR, but the immense academic flow of people and ideas between China and the U.S. compared to that between China and Europe or other regions is noteworthy. Whether by design or default, U.S. funding provides a material explanation why U.S. theories and scientism is prized in Chinese IR.

In terms of theory, if we stop our analysis here, it is tempting to conclude that IR, even in China, is an “American social science” (Hoffmann, 1977) much of which falls under the typical three paradigms of realism, liberalism and constructivism (cf. Qin, 2009: 188). However, as was stated in the introduction, Chinese IR has recently taken a nativist turn.

State of the art – the debate on building a Chinese IR theory

⁹ For a comprehensive list of Sino-U.S. exchange programs and foundation see the website ‘(U.S.- China Culture Exchange Foundation 2010).

¹⁰ Ni Shixiong’s visit at Harvard and Wang Yizhou’s Fulbright scholarship at Harvard are both examples of visit that resulted in (in their cases very popular) IR textbooks.

¹¹ The MacArthur Foundation recently awarded \$120,000 for the establishment of the English language journal *Chinese Journal of International Politics* at Tsinghua University’s Institute of International Studies and \$225,000 more in 2009, \$250,000 for the Arms Control Program at Tsinghua University, Peking University’s School of International Studies received \$150,000 for the International Security Program and \$1,400,000 for Centre for International & Strategic Studies (MacArthur Foundation 2010b, 2010a). Another example is the Ford Foundation’s recent support to establish a centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies at Zhejiang University.

¹² Johnston’s study is characteristic for this literature in its use of “American scholarship” as “a baseline against which Chinese IR can be compared.” (Johnston 2002: 3).

¹³ Zhang mentions the School of International Studies at Peking University, the School of International Relations and Public Affairs at Fudan University, the Institute of World Economy and Politics of CASS and adds the Institute of American Studies of CASS, the Institute for International Studies at Tsinghua University, and the China Foreign Affairs University (Zhang 2003: 102, 109). Most are still valid, although the current directors of Institute of American Studies at CASS and the dean of SIRPA at Fudan University have received their education at the London School of Economics in the United Kingdom.

Chinese IR scholars are turning towards an increasingly central opposition line in contemporary Chinese IR—the debate on building Chinese IR theory.

If you should describe the field of IR in China at the moment, what are the most prevalent ideas?

In terms of what?

Theorising I guess.

The most notable debate in recent years has been whether we need a Chinese school of IR and there are several articles published in the *World Economics and Politics*. You must have read them already, so that is the most prominent development. The other trend, I think somewhat related, is the attempt to recover ancient Chinese thoughts or practices in international relations.¹⁴

This quote is one of many where Chinese scholars represent the theoretical debate about how to develop a Chinese IR theory as the state of the art.¹⁵ Scholars are turning to local resources, especially ancient Chinese philosophy, and are debating how a Chinese theory could be built. This idea is not new. It was originally a project driven by old generation Marxist theorists, by some labelled ‘scientific socialists’ (Hayhoe, 1993), who termed it ‘building IR theory with Chinese characteristics’ (Liang, 1997). Now the project has been taken over by the young generation of scholars, but it has changed connotation from characteristics to school, from isolation to integration, and from scientific socialism to social scientism. In fact, young generation Chinese IR scholars hesitate to identify themselves with the old generation scholars, whose concepts of “Marxist theory of International Relations or the IR theory with Chinese characteristics” are considered “too politicised”.¹⁶ They, the young generation, do not practice this kind of politicised science, but political or social science. A young associate professor from Peking University applies the young-old dichotomy in this sense:

The old generation of professors are trained in Marxism, they do not know Hans Morgenthau, they do not know what structural realism is. We learned by ourselves. Today we can teach this to our students.¹⁷

Consider also how Qin Yaqing, one of the leading Chinese theorists who strongly promotes the idea of a ‘Chinese school’, reacts when his current work is compared to the ‘characteristics’ debate.

How would you explain that there has been this debate on ‘building IR with Chinese characteristics’?

I have never used this term. Because I believe once you set up a school it must have some universal application value. I try to avoid it, simply I use ‘a Chinese school’ to indicate that it is part of the whole International Relations theory family.¹⁸

¹⁴ Interview assistant professor, Tsinghua University, February 2010.

¹⁵ Our survey conducted among 305 Chinese IR scholars at top universities in the spring of 2010 also supports these claims.

¹⁶ Interview professor, Peking University, March 2010.

¹⁷ Interview associate professor, Peking University, March 2010.

¹⁸ Interview professor Qin Yaqing, China Foreign Affairs University, March 2010.

Another scholar, a young associate professor from Peking University, explains the main difference between the ‘characteristics’ debate and the contemporary one.

We have introduced almost all theories of the Western tradition into China and we still have a debate about the theory with Chinese characteristics. It is still going on but the connotation and the form have both changed. So in the 1990s when I came to Beida [ed. Peking University], the discussion was a debate mainly happening between some intellectuals who were trained in China and those scholars coming from overseas. Those scholars who were trained in China tended to support theory with Chinese characteristics. But to some extent their stance was not so supported by the whole Chinese academia. For instance, professor Liang Shoude who was the major representative of the Chinese characteristics school was the dean of our school. Those people are usually much older than those scholars from overseas who were very young. But of course after about 15 years professor Qin Yaqing or professor Wang Yizhou were not so young again. But at that time they were very young.[...]But after 15 years if we talk about this debate, now the connotation has changed much. Now professor Qin Yaqing has become the major representative of the Chinese school. Of course there are some differences between a Chinese school and a theory with Chinese characteristics[...]if we talk about Zhongguo tese, theory with Chinese characteristics, that is very strong. It is very very strong. So if you say Chinese characteristics that means our theory should be very very different from Western theories.[...]But in this field, in the International Relations discipline, if we talk about a Chinese school actually it is a very very moderate expression. So Chinese school means we are not going to put forward an independent theory, we just want to provide some Chinese thoughts, provide some Chinese concepts.¹⁹

For more than two decades, Chinese scholars have debated how to put different ideas and elements into the construction of a Chinese theory. But the Chinese IRT project is not unchanged. This presentation shows that theorising a Chinese IRT is a contested project, but nevertheless has been transferred from old generation Marxists to today’s prominent scholars (exemplified by Qin Yaqing) in a more Western-oriented version. The generational opposition towards politicised Marxists stressing *Chinese characteristics* is important to understand in order to explain the—somewhat paradoxical—revival of a Chinese theory project by its young opponents more than a decade later. The recent *Chinese school* project stresses scientism and integration into global IR over Marxism and isolation.

Walking on two legs

We should walk on two legs, not just one leg, two legs. Western and Chinese.

But in the beginning you walked on one leg?

I believe for about ten years. [laughing] With two legs I feel that I walk in a more stable way.

Professor Ni Shixiong

Thus, the Chinese innovational drive is neither a product of Westernisation and globalisation nor Sinicisation and localisation only, but rather a hybridisation of Western and Chinese knowledge resources. This hybridity is exemplified by considering the biographical shift of some prominent scholars. Professor Ni Shixiong, who is cited above, gained a reputation by introducing Western theories recently co-

¹⁹ Interview associate professor, Peking University, March 2010

authored a “sister book” on contemporary Chinese IRT. After having been “preoccupied” with introducing Western theories in 1980s and 1990s he has faced the structural pressure of the attention space and started to do research on Chinese thinking about international relations, to walk on two legs. Another example is Qin Yaqing, known as China’s leading constructivist and one of the country’s leading IR scholars, who has also become the main proponent of a Chinese school. As he described it in an interview, “I move the middle way. I think we need to absorb the very good things from Western IR theory, which I think I am quite familiar with and also we need to combine Chinese ideas that are valuable of all Chinese ideas.”²⁰ Yan Xuetong, another leading scholar known as China’s leading neorealist, is leading a team of researchers to theorise ancient Chinese thoughts in IR (see Yan, 2011).

These are but a few examples of prominent scholars who have renewed their position in order to keep it. Mastering Western theories is no longer considered sufficient for doing so. Instead the hybridisation of Western social science and ancient Chinese philosophy, i.e. walking on two legs, is viewed as a viable way of doing this. Consider also how another scholar at Renmin University answers the question why some Chinese scholars get famous: “He has, Qin Yaqing has very important training of Western education and after he returned to China he integrated the Chinese practice and teaching and research so he knows Chinese traditional culture very deeply, so he knows the Chinese and Western International Relations.”²¹

In order to maintain a prominent position in the Chinese academic attention space both Chinese and Western ideas should be mastered. Or, as another professor puts it, “I should say in Chinese academic circles we have two authorities; one is the Chinese ancient ideas and the Western modern ideas. They enjoy a parallel position...It sounds like we have two kinds of shoes and we have gotten used to it.”²² Pure applications of Western theory are no longer considered sufficient, but on the other hand this does not necessarily result in the production of a radically different Chinese IR theory. A Western theory with a Chinese interpretation can also be original as a professor and dean at Renmin University puts it: “Generally speaking Chinese scholars of foreign policy will continue to learn and observe the mature IR theories already existing for a long time. But of course, none of the use or application could be a purely original interpretation. Chinese understanding, Chinese interpretation must be attached to it.”²³ His argument relies on a distinction between theory application and originality. As an intellectual move, it constructs neither “translation theorising” nor “theory application” as enough to be original and instead opens up a space for “homegrown theorising” (cf. Aydinli and Mathews, 2009). This change is no great loss for Western IR theories like neorealism or constructivism, but it may be a loss for those Chinese scholars who have achieved prominence based on these theories. Therefore, they have also turned to Chinese ideas—walking on two legs.

This can be interpreted as the structural pressure of the intellectual attention space forcing intellectuals to be innovative. For scholars to achieve or retain attention space they have to present their ideas as *new*—i.e. create new ideas or reconfigure old ones in new ways. But ideas cannot be too new, whatever their creativeness, they must be *important* in relation to ongoing conversations (Collins, 1998: 31). We argue that this

²⁰ Interview professor Qin Yaqing, China Foreign Affairs University, March 2010.

²¹ Interview professor, Renmin University, March 2010.

²² Interview with professor, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, March 2010

²³ Interview with professor, Renmin University, March 2010.

provides a plausible explanation for the innovational dynamic of combining two cultural capitals (Chinese thoughts and experience with Western social science theories) and relating them to past debates (developing IR with Chinese characteristics). As we have argued at length elsewhere, the opposition and debate internally among Chinese IR scholars to a large extent explains why the drive to develop Chinese theory occurs and we will focus here on the interplay with global influences (Kristensen and Nielsen, 2010).

A Contender for Global Attention

The idea of a local IR theory is paradoxically not local, but influenced by international role models such as the English School and the Copenhagen school. The fact that Chinese IR scholars have considered the English School an “IR theory with English characteristics” which is different from American theories (Zhang, 2003: 95-96) makes its *form* a source of inspiration. As several others have stressed, the import of the English school to China raised the question if there could be an English school, why not a Chinese school? (Ren, 2008: 297; Wang, 2009: 110). Consider how an associate professor we interviewed in Shanghai makes a similar move:

We Chinese try to argue that we need to have a Chinese school because we have a British school or a Copenhagen school. So why do we not have a Chinese school? So some Chinese try to argue this and also I think it is a good thing for us because Chinese foreign policy is quite different sometimes from the Western countries'. The European countries or America, they have a very good theory to explain their foreign behaviour and foreign relations. But their theories sometimes cannot explain Chinese behaviour, Chinese foreign policy and we Chinese try to have a better understanding and better explanations about our own foreign policy.²⁴

This move questions the content of the English and Copenhagen School based on their inability to explain “our” foreign policy but keeps the school formula as an inspiration for a Chinese school. Besides, the label ‘school’ could also be viewed as a specific strategy to carve out a global position for a Chinese IRT. School signifies a non-competitor to the major theories that define the discipline. As Wæver argues, “the main theories that are seen as constituting the core debates at the centre of the discipline (i.e. leading circles in the U.S.) are *not* referred to as ‘schools’” (Wæver, 2004). But the label school still allows an independent existence. Usually mainstream IR labels are coined by opponents (Wæver, 1998: 715), but here the logic is turned into a prescriptive formula: Combining geography (country or city) with the school label may be a preemptive move to achieve some level of recognition by mainstream IR—at least as “something they do in China.”

The Chinese innovational drive should thus be seen in the dynamic of local and global academic attention spaces. Theorising Chineseness in IR should both be interpreted as a defensive intellectual strategy to renew one’s position in the national academic attention space where the application of Western IR theory alone does not confer the prominence it once did, but also as an offensive strategy to contend for global attention. A conversation with an associate professor at Peking University sheds light on the “contender” move:

²⁴ Interview with associate professor, Fudan University, March 2010.

But you cannot think of other reasons why scholars like Yan Xuetong start to dig into ancient thought?

Yan Xuetong mentioned a very practical reason. He said ‘For Chinese scholars, if you are doing research with American style theory you cannot surpass those American scholars. Because all these theories are rooted in Western culture. So you can only follow up, you cannot surpass that. So if you want to do a real achievement, you need to do something that the Westerners cannot understand.’ [laughing] So Confucius is a good thing.²⁵

This indicates how cultural difference can serve a very practical purpose, namely attract global attention. Qin Yaqing, a prominent scholar and leading proponent of a Chinese school, also presents a very practical reason why *guanxi* (relations) became a core concept in his theorising efforts:

In 2005 my focus began to fall on one thing, I asked many foreigners ‘if you come to China what are the first ten words that come up to your mind?’ Many of them mentioned *guanxi*, relations. And you go back to Confucius, Confucius’ moral argument rests on the management, not of individuals, but of relations. The five key relationships are the most important thing in Confucianism. So I think, for three to four centuries in Europe basically, of course you could go back to the renaissance but basically you could go back to the Enlightenment, rationality became the dominant word, if we choose one word that forms the foundation of social sciences *and* natural sciences. I think the counterpart in Chinese society, not natural science but social science, is relationality.²⁶

By asking foreigners what is most stereotypically Chinese, a very different theoretical core is created. Not Truth, but distinctiveness in the eyes of “many foreigners” drove this scholar to innovate. This attests to the fact that cultural difference, or even exoticism, is useful in the intercultural scholarly encounter. Positioning Chinese relationality as the opposite of Western rationality, this scholar challenges the philosophical core of all Western thinking.

As Randall Collins argues in his global theory of intellectual change, “When there is ‘room’ for a new position in the intellectual field, ambitious thinkers will search for those elements in the available corpus of materials that will maximally contradict the existing prominent positions” (Collins, 1989: 134). Confucianism and the concept of *guanxi* were useful to the abovementioned Chinese scholar. Confucianism and other ancient thoughts are theorised in IR because of their utility to gain attention locally and globally. Intellectual life is about making a difference. Confucianism contributes with a distinct and positively defined Chinese content rather than exclusively negating the West. Confucius can be deployed to provide a theoretical anchorage that defines what China *is* rather than what it is *not*.

The contender move represents a transition from the resigned marginality of ‘IR with Chinese characteristics’ towards marginal participation by developing a ‘Chinese school’. The tendency for Chinese IR scholars to import ancient Chinese ideas and classical works into the IR discipline should also be seen in the local academic context, as a way of attaching something Chinese to IR. But in the context of global attention, the argument here is that if cultural scholarship can produce global attention it may feed back into local prominence. Developing a Chinese school that achieves global *attention*,

²⁵ Interview associate professor, Peking University, March 2010.

²⁶ Interview professor Qin Yaqing, China Foreign Affairs University, March 2010.

whether as criticism, praise, or repressive tolerance, may translate into local prominence. This leads us to the final section on the prospect for global recognition of Chinese innovations in IR.

China and Global IR

The attempt to construct a Chinese school of IR is a product of global and local influences. It should be understood in the light of the import of the American IR discipline, its theories and methodologies, which allows Chinese scholars to speak back to the core discipline in the language of ‘theory’ *and* not least to make moves beyond existing theories. At the same time, the development and maturity of a local academic space specialised in IR has gradually rewarded Chinese intellectual resources, which have become *comme il faut* to remain or become a prominent scholar. To put it in the language of the globalisation and innovation theme, Chinese scholars are now trying to present an innovative Chinese product to the global discipline. By reversing the process, the hope is that a Chinese theory’s “non-European and non-Western perspective may eventually contribute to making IR more of an international discipline than it is now” (Zhang, 2002: 108). A product that is neither “like us” nor radically different. Chinese IR theorising both differs from and resembles the global-Western discipline by combining ancient Chinese resources with Western IR.

Indeed, the project of doing “something the Westerners do not understand” suggests that some scholars use essentialism and radical difference to obtain international recognition. The very idea of constructing a Chinese school seems to promise radical alterity. But, as argued above, even the idea of using the location+school formula to obtain recognition is inspired by other non-U.S. theories (English and Copenhagen Schools). So why not use a similar strategy for Chinese IR to become recognised? One problem may be that usually critics, not creators, coin theory labels, and the international IR community has not yet baptised the Chinese school or theory. Another obstacle to recognition is that the concern with the ‘brand name’ will degenerate into academic identity politics and distract attention from theoretical issues. The construction of *the* Chinese school may turn out problematic if it is monopolised by a certain perspective that expounds romantic nationalism and reifies a closed Chinese culture rather than opening up space for various Chinese perspectives. By appealing to culture and civilisation, one risks giving rise to “nativism which reifies conceptual borders of self and other.” (Callahan, 2001: 84). As Gayatri Spivak has warned, a strategic essentialism that establishes a collective category of the subaltern can be self-defeating because it forces homogeneity on the subaltern. The construction of one ‘Chinese school’ risks forcing homogeneity on a heterogenous group of people in its search to become recognised in the hegemonic Western IR discourse. In that sense, it does look a lot like “a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak, 1996: 214). The problem is how then to speak for those whose voices cannot be heard, those who are written out of the dominant theoretical narrative in IR? How to speak difference to the hegemonic IR discourse, except perhaps as native informants? A Chinese school runs the risk of becoming “subaltern speak” that fails to reach a dialogic level—to establish a relationship between speaker and listener—but becomes a Chinese school for Chinese researchers, and perhaps a few sinologists. Thus, drawing explicitly on culture could also be seen as a nationalisation

rather than internationalisation of IR. In this argument, nationalising IR may lead to a more fragmented, rather than international, discipline. Indeed, to retain a somewhat integrated discipline IR scholars should at a minimum share a basic vocabulary.

In the attempt to manufacture a marketable product, Chinese IR scholars have been conscious about the pitfalls of essentialism and that is one reason why Western-Chinese hybrids rather than radical Chineseness seems a more prevalent formula. Hybrids between social scientific methodology and something distinctly Chinese yield the most prominence in today's IR in China. The hybrid character of 'Chinese theorising' should be seen in the light of Chinese scholars' quest for recognition in both national and international attention spaces. Chinese IR scholars are involved in self-reflection over how to balance their uniqueness and simultaneously be recognised by the global (U.S.) community. The adoption of U.S. scientific methodology spiced up with a Chinese exoticism "the Westerners cannot understand" is considered a prerequisite for global recognition in the imaginary of many of the Chinese scholars we have interviewed. The recipe may sound simple: Take some exotic Chinese context, add scientific methodology, stir, and serve the 'Chinese School' for an American audience. This may be a Faustian bargain, however, and for a number of reasons.

The Chinese theorising efforts may simply be too focused on the U.S. market. It is obvious that in an 'American social science', a Chinese scholar who seeks international standing cannot ignore the U.S.. If market share in the U.S. is the sole criterion of success, prospects seem dire. There could be other ways to recognition. So far, few Americans have waved their flags in the debate on Chinese IR. One who has, does not have "confidence in the generalisability of the results when Chinese international relations scholars state that the core theoretical problem of the Chinese school should be 'China's peaceful rise'" and argues that it misses "the point of what is normally called theory", that is, "value-neutral terms that carry across time and space for comparative purposes" (Snyder, 2008: 4-5). Deriving a theory from China's rise would indeed be parochial. But are the existing theories not generalised primarily from Atlantic experiences and thus parochial themselves? It may be true that a Chinese school must abstract experiences to applicability elsewhere to become recognised in IR. IR scholars in Brazil should be able to take the Chinese school approach. Nevertheless, the American critic exemplifies that despite more than 30 years of studies confirming the parochialism of the American behavioral-scientific (Hoffmann, 1977; Alker and Biersteker, 1984; Holsti, 1985), rationalist (Wæver, 1998), and positivist (Smith, 2000) approach to IR, a potential Chinese school is likely to be judged according to such criteria by U.S. peers. It is unclear whether many Americans will pay attention to a Chinese school. Of course, it is possible that American IR will be more receptive to non-U.S. voices as U.S. political and economic predominance falters. But as "Americans tend only to read other Americans." (Biersteker, 2009: 319), the chances of being read are probably better elsewhere. This is not to argue for less contact with the U.S. discipline, but for a broadening of audiences and exchanges with the non-U.S. world and its criteria for scholarly recognition.

One could argue that other parts of the global market for IR is more open for a debate about a *Chinese* school, especially in the light of the "cultural turn" in the IR core (Valbjørn, 2008). To these audiences, a hybrid Chinese school that is "almost the same but not quite" (Bilgin, 2008) might deliver the much-desired diversity in what critical Western scholars have called an 'American', 'dividing' and 'not-so-international' discipline (Hoffmann, 1977; Holsti, 1985; Wæver, 1998)? This hybridity

might create a global dialogue between Western and peripheral non-Western IR communities. Hybridity in the sense of acknowledging different geocultural epistemologies and the situatedness of knowledge and experience can indeed be productive for such a dialogue. A caveat about hybrids of Western and Chinese thinking is necessary. A recombination of local and global resources may seem an attractive and productive way to counter Western hegemony but is not necessarily devoid of power relationships. Hybrids write, to borrow Tickner and Wæver's terms, "'away from" and "back to" the center in terms that cannot originate independently of the relationship to the latter. Nor can they be the same." (Tickner and Wæver, 2009: 7). The question is whether a Chinese IR theory can circumvent its Western heritage without always referring back to the West? Can it liberate itself from the negative, the non-Western, from alterity, difference and otherness?

What may seem like radical non-Western moves beyond the West rely on a Western vocabulary. The irony of claims to native authenticity is that their very expression is inauthentic as they are a product of contact with the West. In order to be considered *relevant*, Chinese theories, as any other contenders for intellectual attention, are staged in terms set by the existing knowledge. Revealing a lacuna in Western IR is a necessary dimension of this dynamic. In their move of instating Chineseness, even 'nativists' borrow from non-native sources. Chineseness and exoticism should also be interpreted as an intellectual strategy to stage one's knowledge as *new*. Differences and opposition lines are key ingredients in intellectual life. It is important also to interpret statements that "You need to do something that the Westerners cannot understand" in this perspective where cultural differences become much less fixed and immutable. One should keep in mind that a Chinese school, which may seem ethnocentric and nationalist, could also be seen as "frankly ethnocentric" (Rorty, 1991: 168). Rather than developing a universal (anti-ethnocentric) theory, it is professedly aware of its geocultural bias (anti-anti-ethnocentric). Thus, the emergence of multiple voices, a Chinese school being only one, may reveal the parochialism of Western IR and hopefully produce more theoretical reflexivity.

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