English School – 'Chinese IR' engagements: order, harmony and the limits of elitism in Global IR.[1]

Introduction

This paper makes three particular claims about the ongoing interaction between the English school

(ES) of IR theory and 'Chinese IR'[2] within the wider programme associated with 'Global IR'.[3] Firstly,

this interaction is both emblematic of the value of a Global IR approach and in establishing

normative agendas as important in Global IR. Secondly, it explores a key limitation in the ES-Chinese

IR interaction arising from a shared focus on elite-level action, perception and priorities. Thirdly, it

shows how critical and decolonial elements of Global IR can have major analytical benefits. Whilst

focusing here on how a Global IR framework can illuminate specific ES-Chinese IR interaction, the

claim for the importance, even inescapability, of normative dimensions to theorising within a Global

IR approach applies beyond that specific interaction.

Section one contextualises the three specific claims, establishing the idea of a single Global IR

'project' as a misnomer. Instead, Global IR offers an agenda or approach that includes important

theoretical, conceptual, methodological and empirical resources for advancing IR as an academic

field. I draw on specific resources from this agenda to establish normative questions as important for

both my argument and for Global IR more generally.

Section two develops the first claim about the ES-Chinese IR interaction as a fruitful aspect of that

wider Global IR approach. Two distinct steps establish the effectiveness of the interaction to date,

[2] I use the term 'Chinese IR' reluctantly for brevity's sake. See below (p. 3-5) for a fuller discussion of my use of this problematic term.
[3] As now conventional I will use Global International Relations in this article, acknowledging the idea's origins in 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. 1, 2007.

but they also side-line normative issues. The first step shows ES theory's progress in analysing deep-rooted, long-run trends in the development of international society's primary institutions. These both constitute actors and regulate behaviours through establishing shared understandings of what counts as legitimate or appropriate behaviour within a broadly rule-governed society sharing a conception of the 'common good' of its members.[4] This work has greatly increased ES theory's ability to address regional differentiation in international society, including historically. Buzan's work on China, and key collaborative pieces, have brought these perspective into interactions with Chinese IR theorists since 2007. [5]

The second step considers these 'Chinese IR' interlocutors, who, whilst adopting some distinctive methodological approaches, important later in the paper,[6] take an approach sharing significant similarities with the ES. Both the focus on long-run historical analysis and the desire to explore ideas underpinning core institutions and norms explaining the character of international systems past and present, and which are shaping future constellations.[7] Concepts such as 'Tianxia' – all under heaven

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[4] Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: a Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977), Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, 'Introduction,' in Hedley Bull and Adam Watson eds. *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Barry Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), Barry Buzan and Laust Schouenborg, *Global International Society: A New Framework for Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[5] Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, "Why is There no Non-Western International Relations Theory?", 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. 1, 2017, Barry Buzan, "China in International Society: Is 'Peaceful Rise' Possible?," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics,* Vol. 3, No. 1, 2010, Barry Buzan, "China's Rise in English School Perspective," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific,* Vol. 18, No. 1, 2018, Barry Buzan and George Lawson, "China Through the Lens of Modernity," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics,* Vol. 13, No. 1, 2020, Jiangli Wang and Barry Buzan, "The English and Chinese Schools of International Relations: Comparisons and Lessons," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol.7, No. 1, 2014, Yongjin Zhang and Barry Buzan, "The Tributary System as International Society in Theory and Practice," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 5, No. 1, 2012.

[6] E.g. Yaqing Qin, "A Relational Theory of World Politics," *International Studies Review,* Vol. 18, No. 1, 2016, Yaqing Qin, *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[7] E.g. Amitav Acharya, "From Heaven to Earth: 'Cultural Idealism' and 'Moral Realism' as Chinese Contributions to Global International Relations," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics,* Vol. 12, No. 1, 2019, Xuetong Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, (trans Edmund Ryden), (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), Xuetong Yan, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

– and 'harmony' are influential, and suggest parallels with ES concepts of international and world society, and order.[8]

These initial similarities help identify how I use 'Chinese IR' in this paper. There is not a singular Chinese IR. Surveys of contributions to IR by China-based academics highlight analysis as substantially atheoretical.[9] Other discussions show the majority of the China-based IR community operating within major Western IR theories (realism, liberalism, constructivism), and frequently focused on policy.[10] Zheng places the majority of China's academic IR commentary within realist perspectives addressing China's core national interests and its relative power.[11] Quantitative methods and formal modelling drawing on US political science is also present.[12] Atheoretical and policy-focused work clearly does not address those similarities with the ES already identified, so is not considered here, as it cannot provide a basis for a meaningful comparative analysis as there is little, if any, common ground. Innovative work by China-based scholars within established Western IR theories or quantitative methodologies falls outside the aspects of a Global IR framework I engage, so is also set aside for my purposes. Work using Chinese history and drawing on philosophical and theoretical resources closely associated with China and the wider historic Sino-centric world, such as Confucianism and Daoism, provides my principal resource because it speaks most directly to issues of long-run history, dynamic social institutions and the character of order, including normative issues. That creates a basis for meaningful comparison and cross-fertilisation

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[8] E.g. June Teufel Dreyer, "The 'Tianxia Trope': will China Change the International System?," *Journal of Contemporary China,* Vol. 24, No. 1, 2015, Key-young Son, "Harmony, the Supremacy of Human Agency and East Asia's Mega-Discourses for Governance," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics,* Vol. 5, No. 1, 2012, Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought*.
[9] Jinghan Zeng, "Constructing a "New Type of Great Power Relations": the State of Debate in China (1998-2014)," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations,* Vol. 18, No. 1, 2016.
[10] Yong-Soo Eun, "Opening up the Debate Over 'Non-western' International Relations," *Politics,* Vol. 39, No. 1, 2018, p. 11.
[11] Chen Zheng, "China Debates the Non-Interference Principle," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics,* Vol. 9, No. 1, 2016.
[12] E.g. Fangyin Zhou, "Equilibrium Analysis of the Tributary System," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 4, No. 1, 2011, Yuan Yang, "Escape both the 'Thucydides Trap' and the 'Churchill Trap': Finding a Third Type of Great Power Relations under the Bipolar System," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 11, No. 1, 2018.

with ES theory. Much of the most prominent work in this area comes from Chinese scholars working within China, such as Qin,[13] Yan,[14] and Zhao,[15] with Qin in particular engaging ES theory.[16] A number of authors of Chinese and Western heritage, within and outside China, are contributing to what has become a two-way street of theory-development combining ES with Chinese historical and philosophical perspectives.[17] Additionally, Ling and Nordin utilise Chinese history and philosophy in their work and play a significant role in the paper, as they offer a more 'critical' stance that offers a potential, if incomplete, bridge to decolonial theorising.[18] The gender balance in this selection is decidedly skewed, reinforcing Blanchard and Lin's observations about women's under-representation in academic IR in China and specifically in approaches deploying Chinese philosophical traditions.[19]

Section three, and the second main claim, addresses the methodology of the ES and Chinese IR via a partially shared interpretivism. This re-engages ES normative debates, which help differentiate it from other IR social-structural theories and methodologies.

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[13] E.g. Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*.

[14] E.g. Xuetong Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought*.

[15] E.g. Tingyang Zhao, "A Political World Philosophy in terms of All-under-heaven (Tian-xia)," *Diogenes,* Vol. 56, No. 1, 2009.

[16] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, pp. 6-100.

[17] Barry Buzan, 'China in International Society: Is 'Peaceful Rise' Possible?.', Barry Buzan, 'China's Rise.', Xiaoming Zhang, "China in the Conception of International Society: the English School's Engagements with China," *Review of International Studies,* Vol. 37, No. 1, 2011, Yongjin Zhang and Barry Buzan, 'The Tributary System as International Society.', Yongjin Zhang, "The Idea of Order in Ancient Chinese Political Thought: a Wightian Exploration," *International Affairs,* Vol. 90, No. 1, 2014, Yongjin Zhang, 'Worlding China 1500-1800,' in Tim Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit eds. *The Globalization of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[18] E.g. L. H. M. Ling, "Journeys Beyond the West: World Orders and a 7th Century Buddhist Monk," *Review of International Studies,* Vol. 36, No. 1, 2010, L. H. M. Ling, "Worlds Beyond Westphalia: Daoist Dialectics and the 'China Threat'," *Review of International Studies,* Vol. 39, No. 1, 2013, L. H. M. Ling, *The Dao of World Politics: Towards a Post-Westphalian, Worldist International Relations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), L. H. M. Ling, "Three-ness: Healing World Politics with Epistemic Compassion," *Politics,* Vol. 39, No. 1, 2019, Astrid H. M. Nordin, "Futures Beyond 'the West'? Autoimmunity in China's Harmonious World," *Review of International Studies,* Vol. 42, No. 1, 2016, Astrid H. M. Nordin and Graham M. Smith, "Relating Self and Other in Chinese and Western Thought," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs,* Vol. 32, No. 1, 2019, Linus Hagström and Astrid H. M. Nordin, "China's "Politics of Harmony" and the Quest for Soft Power in International Politics," *International Studies Review,* Vol. 22, No. 1, 2020.

[19] Eric M. Blanchard and Shuang Lin, "Gender and Non-Western "Global" IR: Where Are the Women in Chinese International Relations Theory?," *International Studies Review* Vol. 18, No. 1, 2016.

From here I identify and develop parallels in Chinese IR – where similarities between concepts such as 'rites' and 'norms' are noted, and claims about the 'relational' character of Chinese IR connects to interpretivism. [20] Relationality is also prominent in decolonial theory, pointing to methodological linkages to this aspect of the wider Global IR agenda.[21] Emphasis on 'virtuous' leadership in Chinese IR reinforces normative connections, with the moral virtue of state leaders logically necessitating interpretive analysis of how leaders understand the situation and circumstances in which they act, and the goals they aim to achieve.[22] ES interest in assessing the strength, weakness and dynamics of a current international society shares commonalities with Chinese analyses of how the value of social 'harmony' is advanced 'with difference'.[23] Normative questions are hence also embedded in Chinese IR's methodology.

However, both ES and Chinese IR principally focus on elite-level discourse as an unwritten methodological assumption, with limited exceptions.[24] The challenge from critical aspects of Global IR starts to bite: neither social-structural or interpretive elements of the similarities between ES and Chinese IR theory offer insight into experiences and perspectives of those marginalised within international society. Both theories' normative perspective is seriously constrained as a result. This is a not a necessary result of ES or Chinese IR methodologies, and both the interpretivism they share

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[20] Astrid H. M. Nordin, *et al.*, "Towards Global Relational Theorizing: a Dialogue between Sinophone and Anglophone Scholarship on Relationalism," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs,* Vol. 32, No. 1, 2019, Yaqing Qin, 'A Relational Theory of World Politics', Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, 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. 1, 2019.

[21] E.g. Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, pp. 15-102.

[22] Xuetong Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought*, Yan, 'Chinese Values vs. Liberalism.', Xuetong Yan, *Leadership*.

[23] Astrid H. M. Nordin, "Futures beyond 'the West'?", pp. 162-171.

[24] E.g. L. H. M. Ling, 'Journeys Beyond the West.', L. H. M. Ling and Astrid H. M. Nordin, "On Relations and Relationality: a Conversation with Friends," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs,* Vol. 32, No. 1, 2019, Astrid Nordin and Lisa Richaud, "Subverting Official Language and Discourse in China? Type River Crab for Harmony," *China Information,* Vol. 28, No. 1, 2014, John Williams, *Ethics, Diversity and World Politics: Saving Pluralism From Itself?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

and the relationality promoted as key to Chinese IR can be turned to this purpose. Doing so will enhance both ES and Chinese IR theorising, and their potential contribution to Global IR.

The final section sets out the third claim, demonstrating how analysing methodological bases of ES and Chinese IR underlying their analytical similarities lays foundations for innovative engagement on normative questions both recognise. Placing critical and normative dimensions of ES-Chinese IR interactions at the forefront of analysis shows how this specific Global IR interaction can move beyond apparent similarities in analytical approach, foci and outcomes, to contest deep-rooted methodological questions and develop a distinctive normative agenda.

Global IR

Amitav Acharya's 2013 International Studies Association Presidential established a six-point Global IR agenda: recognising the diversity of human experience; interest in world history; subsuming, not replacing, existing IR theory and methods; integrating regional/area studies; eschewing claims to exceptional status for particular perspectives; and, theorizing beyond material power.[25] Global IR is a multi-faceted, diverse agenda, not a singular 'project', and this paper addresses a specific interaction within that agenda.

Rejecting a 'diffusionist' account of international history is shared widely across Global IR.[26] 'Diffusionist' accounts portray the important ideas, inventions, institutions and so on characterising

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[25] Amitav Acharya, "Global International Relations and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies," *International Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 58, No. 1, 2014, p. 649, see also Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at its Centenary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 286 for a similar seven-point list.

[26] E.g. Pinar Bilgin, "How to Remedy Eurocentrism in IR? A Complement and a Challenge for The Global Transformation," *International Theory,* Vol. 8, No. 1, 2016, Andrew Phillips, "Global IR Meets Global History: Sovereignty, Modernity, and the International System's Expansion in the Indian Ocean Region," *International Studies Review,* Vol. 18, No. 1, 2016, David L. Blaney and Arlene B. Tickner, "Worlding, Ontological Politics and the Possibility of a Decolonial IR," *Millennium,* Vol. 45, No. 1, 2017, Tim Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit eds., *The Globalization of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), Zeynep Gülşah Çapan, "Writing International Relations from the Invisible Side of the Abyssal Line," *Review of International Studies,* Vol. 43, No. 1, 2017, Taesuh Cha, "Competing Visions of a Postmodern World order: the Philadelphian System Versus the Tianxia System," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs,* Vol. 31, No. 1, 2018, Yong-Soo Eun,

the contemporary world as emerging, pristine and unique, in Europe sometime between the middle

of the fifteenth century and the start of the twentieth. The only exceptions were somehow

recovered during this period from their genesis in classical Europe between the start of the fifth

century BCE and the middle of the first century CE. These were then diffused via European expansion

to replace pre-existing ideas, inventions and so on in the rest of the world. Henry Ford reputedly

described history as 'bunk'. *This* history, at least, is certainly bunk, as Hobson, Pella and Phillips,

amongst many others, establish in analyses of the historical development of international politics in

East Asia, Africa and South Asia respectively.[27]

The 'long nineteenth century' is particularly influential.[28] Buzan and Lawson's, 'The Global

Transformation' offers a systematic and theoretically-informed account, exploring how interaction

between innovations in theory and practice around bureaucracy, economics, and technology

transformed power dynamics, creating imperialism as we usually think of it, and a culture in which

diffusionist accounts could be rooted.[29] More 'critical' Global IR approaches also retell the history IR

typically provides. For example, the idea of 'modernity', rooted in the European Renaissance and

Enlightenment and globalised via post-1500 European expansion is central to Mignolo's decolonial

critique of Western social science.[30] Unpicking diffusionist historical and historiographical

assumptions critiques fundamental ideas about understanding and theorising the social world. The

historical and historiographical terrain of Global IR is keenly contested.[31]

"Beyond 'the West/non-West Divide' in IR: How to Ensure Dialogue as Mutual Learning," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics,* Vol. 11, No. 1, 2018, Peter J Katzenstein, "The Second Coming? Reflections on a Global Theory of International Relations," *The Chinese Journal of International Relations,* Vol. 11, No. 1, 2018, Eun Yong-Soo, "Global IR through dialogue," *The Pacific Review,* Vol. 32, No. 1, 2019.

[27] John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), John Anthony Pella, "World society, international society and the colonization of Africa," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs,* Vol. 28, No. 1, 2015, Andrew Phillips, 'Global IR Meets Global History'

[28] C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004).

[29] Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation*.

[30] Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, pp. 135-210.

[31] E.g. Patricia Owens, "International Historical What?," *International Theory,* Vol. 8, No. 1, 2016, Zeynep Gülşah Çapan, "Writing International Relations.", Julian Go, "'Civilization' and its Subalterns," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2017.

'Area Studies' is far more than a repository of knowledge (often produced by those from within Global South regions) for outside, usually Western, theorists to exploit as 'raw material'. A wide range of factors marginalise IR theory in the global South and theorists from the Global South in IR. Global IR throws this situation into relief and asks how it may be addressed via theorising from and with the diversity of human experience and rejecting exceptionalist claims about the unique value of certain forms or methods of theorising.[32] Again, decolonial contributions, such as Walsh's work on praxis stressingthe importance of indigenous communities' leading role in decolonial thought through practice take this Global IR reference point further.[33] Santos describes 'rearguard intellectuals' learning from and with activists drawn from marginalised communities.[34]

Non-exceptionalism invites decolonial challenges to even the broadened, world historical perspective emerging from macro-historical accounts of the development and operation of international systems. Concepts such as the 'pluriverse' stress that appeals to a singular ontological reality are incompatible with non-exceptionalism that requires engaging on equal terms very different cosmologies from those within Western philosophical traditions.[35] Epistemologically predetermining dialogic outcomes in favour of Western IR theory must be avoided, and open-

[32] Amitav Acharya, "Global IR and Regional Worlds," p. 651, Amitav Acharya, "'Theorising the international relations of Asia: necessity or indulgence?' Some reflections," *The Pacific Review,* Vol. 30, No. 1, 2017.
[33] Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, pp. 15-50.
[34] Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, pp. 3-17.
[35] David L. Blaney and Arlene B. Tickner, "Worlding, Ontological Politics and the Possibility of a Decolonial IR", John M. Hobson and Alina Sajed, "Navigating Beyond the Eurofetishist Frontier of Critical IR Theory: Exploring the Complex Landscapes of Non-Western Agency," *International Studies Review,* Vol. 19, No. 1, 2017, Kimberly Hutchings, "Decolonizing Global Ethics: Thinking with the Pluriverse," *Ethics & International Affairs,* Vol. 33, No. 1, 2019, Cristina Yumie Aoki Inoue, "Worlding the Study of Global Environmental Politics in the Anthropocene: Indigenous Voices from the Amazon," *Global Environmental Politics,* Vol. 18, No. 1, 2018, L. H. M. Ling, "Three-ness: Healing world politics with epistemic compassion," *Politics,* Vol. 39, No. 1, 2019, Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South.*

mindedness to unfamiliar conceptualisations of basic categories such as agency and knowledge is one of the intellectual delights of Global IR.[36]

Non-Western, post-colonial and de-colonial moves stress deep-rooted violence stemming from Western epistemologies and the necessity of both confronting the consequences of that violence and searching for different ways of thinking in politics. Mignolo, Blaney and Tickner and Ling, amongst others, stress ontological challenges arising from embedded ways of understanding what it is for IR to be IR and how this creates patterns and practices of politics that privilege confrontation, contestation and dominance that, again, puts violence at the core of the discipline as well as at the core of the practice of international relations.[37]

Bringing together established Western IR theory with post- and de-colonial theories that see Western constructs as inimical, even antithetical, to perspectives and communities Global IR should champion, is a tall order. I return to this in section 4. However, I have established that the idea, or ideal, of *a* (singular) Global IR theory 'project' is sloganistic. The common ground of world history and area studies sustains not just diversity but active contestation in foundational issues of ontology, epistemology and methodology. That reinforces the need for careful, specific and suitably modest contributions to understanding where and how Global IR theory can make an analytical difference. That is the purpose and goal in moving to looking at how the ES and Chinese IR interaction has developed.

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[36] E.g. Yong-Soo Eun, "Opening up the debate over 'non-western' international relations," *Politics,* Vol. 39, No. 1, 2018, Inoue, "Worlding Global Environmental Politics."
[37] David L. Blaney and Arlene B. Tickner, 'Worlding, Ontological Politics and the Possibility of a Decolonial IR.', Ling, 'Three-ness.', Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, pp. 177-192.

The English School meets 'Chinese IR' theory

This section summarises engagement between ES and Chinese IR, showing shared interest in similar phenomena – relatively stable and patterned relations amongst political units within an international system – and discussing similar issues to explore those phenomena – the interaction of material and ideational elements of a socially structured but dynamic and developing system. Both engage ideas most familiarly described by the ES concept of 'international society'. I proceed in two steps. Firstly, summarising core ES responses to developing Global IR, principally via Buzan's leading work, and its 'modernist social science' methodology.[38] The second step looks at Chinese IR theorising as an interlocutor for and with ES theory, showing significant common ground and potential, explored in a growing body of work with scholars operating within both Western and Chinese academic contexts.[39]

Locating ES theory in Global IR seems straightforward. An interest in long-run history is a common feature of ES work for sixty years.[40] The key ES conceptual innovation, 'international society', is classically defined as, 'exist[ing] when a group of sates, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.'[41] Bull and Watson refined this, adding the importance of dialogue and consent in the formation of rules and institutions, and the specific common interest amongst society members in

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[38] Mark Bevir and Ian Hall, "The English School and the Classical Approach: Between Modernism and Interpretivism," *Journal of International Political Theory,* Vol. 16, No. 1, 2020.

[39] E.g. Xiaoming Zhang, "China in the Conception of International Society", Xiaoming Zhang, "A Rising China and the Normative Changes in International Society," *East Asia,* Vol. 28, No. 1, 2011, Yongjin Zhang and Barry Buzan, "The Tributary System as International Society", Shogo Suzuki, "Journey to the West: China Debates Its 'Great Power' Identity," *Millennium,* Vol. 42, No. 1, 2014, Jiangli Wang and Barry Buzan, "English and Chinese Schools."

[40] E.g. Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977), Hedley Bull and Adam Watson eds., *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), Adam Watson, *Hegemony and History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: a comparative historical analysis* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

[41] Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 13.

preserving the society's existence.[42] The concept is deliberately constructed to be dynamic, shaped by changing historical interplay amongst its constituent units and institutions.

Eurocentric diffusionism in ES history is well-established, triggering substantial corrective work over the past 20 years.[43] Illustratively, Buzan and Little locate ES concepts within a world historical context crossing millennia.[44] Edward Keene began to redress ES neglect of slavery, colonialism and empire, showing the violence, brutality and racism of international society's expansion.[45] Ian Clark's trilogy on legitimacy, hegemony and the vulnerable in international society are examples of historical sensitivity informing ES framing and conceptualisation.[46] Dunne and Reus-Smit have led a wholesale effort at correcting Bull and Watson's diffusionism.[47] ES concepts such as 'the standard of civilisation' enable analysis of European expansion's erasure of the validity of regionally-focused cultural difference in international society.[48] ES theory's broadened historical narrative gives far greater consideration to two-way interactions between European international society and pre-existing, and often far more sophisticated and powerful, regional international societies centred on China and the Islamic world.[49] This helps understand historical and contemporary regional dynamics

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[42] Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, 'Introduction,' p. 1.

[43] John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 214-234.

[44] Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[45] Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[46] Ian Clark, *Legitimacy in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Ian Clark, *Hegemony in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Ian Clark, *The Vulnerable in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[47] Tim Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit, "The Globalization of International Society".

[48] E.g. Gerrit Gong, *The Standard of Civilization in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), Xiaoming Zhang, "China in the conception of international society.", Jacinta O'Hagan, "The Role of of Civilization in the Globalization of International Society," in Dunne and Reus-Smit eds. *The Globalization of International Society*, Jacinta O'Hagan, "Shape shifting: Civilizational discourse and the analysis of cross-cultural interaction in the constitution of international society," *Journal of International Political Theory,* Vol. 16, No. 2, 2020, Yongjin Zhang, "The Standard of 'Civilisation' Redux: Towards the Expansion of International Society 3.0?," *Millennium,* Vol. 42, No. 1, 2014.

[49] Andrew Phillips, "International Systems,".

within a theory better attuned to regional differentiation and that does not unquestioningly assume Euro-Atlantic practice as the standard for judgement.[50]

Buzan has led development of a macro-level ES approach encompassing world historical development of international society/ies and regional diversity, providing analysis of the current dynamics strengthening and weakening international society.[51] Understanding institutions as 'relatively fundamental and durable practices that are more evolved than designed',[52] is necessarily open to different historical experiences. The issue of common cultural or civilizational origins of such institutions has been an important theme in ES theory for decades, pioneered by Martin Wight.[53] Buzan and Schouenborg connects this issue to the relative stability and durability of a particular instantiation of international society.[54] Whilst 'order' as a concept long central to ES thinking[55] remains prominent in the Buzan-led version of ES theorising, it is more narrowly used. This set aside the question of the normative character, and especially of the relative ethical merits, of different cultural or civilizational bases for particular international societies, and their associated institutions. Exploring how macro-level social, technological, political and economic change have shaped the institutions of international society should not be immune to normative assessment. However, the different modes of theory necessary for these two forms of assessment, Buzan argues, are separable and best handled by differing specialisations within ES theory.[56]

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[50] Barry Buzan and Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez eds., *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), John Anthony Pella, "World Society, International Society and the Colonization of Africa", Andrew Phillips, 'Global IR Meets Global History.'

[51] Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society?*, Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation*, Buzan and Schouenborg, *Global International Society*.

[52] Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society?*, p. 167.

[53] Martin Wight, 'Western Values in International Relations,' in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight eds. *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966), Martin Wight, *Systems of States*, pp. 33-34, 143.

[54] Barry Buzan and Laust Schouenborg, *Global International Society*, pp. 39-70.

[55] Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society*.

[56] Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society?*, pp. 1-2, 228-229, Barry Buzan and Laust Schouenborg, *Global International Society*, p. 10, for critique see John Williams, "Structure, Norms and Normative Theory in a Re-Defined English School: Accepting Buzan's Challenge," *Review of International Studies,* Vol. 37, No. 1, 2011.

Turning to the second step, leading Chinese IR theorists' engagement with Chinese philosophical traditions and history offers parallels with developments in ES theorising. Long-run history and a focus on the dynamics of social-systemic level of analysis echoes ES moves. Alongside pre-Qin history of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods,[57] the Tributary System's history is highly influential.[58]

For almost 500 years until the mid-nineteenth century, tribute was owed to China's Emperor as the central player in the system and in recognition of the cultural leadership and moral authority exercised by the emperor as 'the son of heaven'.[59] Tribute-paying states enjoyed autonomy comparable to modern understandings of sovereignty over internal affairs and in relations with states other than China. In relations with China, Chinese authority held sway. At nadirs of Chinese imperial power, rites of tribute were maintained, but the emperor, too, paid tribute to others within the system.[60] Cultural hierarchy in the Tributary system had different effects to its role in the expansion and operation of European international society.[61] Hegemony and suzerainty as ways of thinking about hierarchical international systems do not effectively capture this sort of system.[62] The Tributary System's limits in managing change operated differently from Western hierarchies,[63] yet

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[57] E.g. Xuetong Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought*, cf. Yuan Yang, "Escape Both the 'Thucydides Trap' and the 'Churchill Trap', pp. 218-226.

[58] E.g. David C. Kang, "Hierarchy and Legitimacy in International Systems: The Tribute System in Early Modern East Asia," *Security Studies,* Vol. 19, No. 1, 2010, Fangyin Zhou, "Equilibrium Analysis of the Tributary System," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics,* Vol. 4, No. 1, 2011, Nianshen Song, "'Tributary' from a Multilateral and Multilayered Perspective," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics,* Vol. 5, No. 1, 2012, Brantly Womack, "Asymmetry and China's Tributary System," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics,* Vol. 5, No. 1, 2012.

[59] There is considerable debate over the duration of the Tributary System. Fangyin Zhou "Equilibrium Analysis", p. 149 describes it as 'extending over several thousand years', Xiaoming Zhang "China in the conception of international society", p. 768 identifies 'about two thousand years'. I follow Yongjin Zhang and Barry Buzan "The Tributary System as International Society".

[60] Nianshen Song, "'Tributary' from a Multilateral and Multilayered Perspective," pp. 175-178.

[61] David C. Kang, "Hierarchy and Legitimacy in International Systems."

[62] Xiaoming Zhang, "China in the conception of international society," pp. 768-769.

[63] E.g. Brantly Womack, "Asymmetry and China's Tributary System," pp. 44-45.

opportunities to deploy and refine ES tools are clear.[64] Common Confucian cultural inheritance is

important to how the Tributary System operated and sustained itself, even during periods of

Imperial Chinese weakness.[65] The notion of 'harmony with difference' to capture continuity and

change in a China-centric, historically dynamic system that engaged with a welter of different social

systems, is influential in contemporary Chinese academic and policy debates.[66]

As ES scholars have reconsidered how contemporary international society emerged and operates,

Chinese scholars also see lessons for the present in the past. For example, Yan's discussions of pre-

Qin philosophy identifies implications for contemporary Chinese foreign policy and ambitions for

China's leadership role in international society.[67] He emphasises 'harmony' as the distinctive

characteristic of the Chinese regional system at its best,[68] echoing the role of 'order' as a 'prior

value' or necessary precondition for the attainment of 'justice' in some ES theory.[69] Zhao seemingly

concurs: 'In a very Chinese way, politics aims at a good society of peaceful "order" … which is the

first condition of any possible happiness of each and all, and at keeping a society from the "disorder"

… that destroys all possibilities of individual happiness.'[70] Yan emphasises the relations virtuous

leaders both create through leadership and can expect from others through the hierarchical

structures of 'humane governance'.[71] His work on structural change is historically engaged and

considers issues of norms, values and the basis for understanding when and how power transitions

occur.[72]

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[64] Yongjin Zhang and Barry Buzan, "The Tributary System as International Society."
[65] David C. Kang, 'Hierarchy and Legitimacy in International Systems', Yongjin Zhang and Barry Buzan, "The Tributary System as International Society."
[66] Astrid H. M. Nordin, 'Futures Beyond the West.'
[67] Xuetong Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought*, pp. 21-69, Yan, *Leadership*.
[68] Xuetong Yan, "Chinese Values vs. Liberalism."
[69] E.g. John Williams, "Order and Society," in Richard Little and John Williams eds. *The Anarchical Society in a Globalized World* (Basingdtoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
[70] Tingyang Zhao, "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept 'All-under-Heaven' (Tian-xia)," *Social Identities,* Vol. 12, No. 1, 2006, p. 33.
[71] Xuetong Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought*, Yan, "Chinese Values vs. Liberalism."
[72] Xuetong Yan, *Leadership*.

As with criticism of Eurocentric diffusionist history, historical selectivity and historiographical choices in these prominent accounts of a China-centric international system must be critically assessed.[73] For example, Kwan argues China's relations with Steppe nomads outside the cultural 'Sinic zone', was more of two-way street than often claimed, reflecting a key critique of diffusionist European history.[74] Dreyer summarises multiple critiques of modern accounts of Tianxia and the notion of harmony under the benign leadership of an ostensibly culturally constant China.[75] Nordin stresses the limited space for diversity that does not conform to elite-defined claims about harmony, and the assimilationist tendencies of the concept.[76] Zhang notes the philosophical contestation in pre-Qin Chinese political thought and the pivotal role played by a mythologised past of ancient Chinese harmonious rule.[77] Callahan sees in Chinese intellectuals' and government officials' revived interest in concepts such as Tianxia and the Tribute System exceptionalist tendencies Acharya warns against.[78] Chu sees serious contradictions in analyses of Tianxia, particularly by Zhao, creating a 'Sinocentric subject' that risks replicating the ethnocentrism of Western discourses and consequent loss of critical historical perspective.[79] Chang argues Zhao produces a 'chinoiserie' account of Tianxia, rather than one that fully appreciates the subtlety, complexity and contestation of the concept.[80]

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[73] E.g. June Teufel Dreyer, "The 'Tianxia Trope'", Astrid H. M. Nordin, "Futures Beyond the West," pp. 168-174, Amitav Acharya, "From Heaven to Earth," pp. 486-488, Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations*, pp. 247-248, 307.

[74] Alan Shiu Cheung Kwan, "Hierarchy, status and international society: China and the steppe nomads," *European Journal of International Relations,* Vol. 22, No. 1, 2016.

[75] June Teufel Dreyer, "The 'Tianxia Trope'," pp. 1019-1025.

[76] Astrid H. M. Nordin, "Futures Beyond the West," pp. 165-168.

[77] Yongjin Zhang, "The Idea of Order."

[78] William A. Callahan, "Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-hegemonic or a New Hegemony?," *International Studies Review,* Vol. 10, No. 1, 2008, William A. Callahan, "Sino-speak: Chinese Exceptionalism and the Politics of History," *The Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 71, No. 1, 2012, Amitav Acharya, *Constructing Global Order: Agency and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), See also Nianshen Song, "'Tributary' from a Multilateral and Multilayered Perspective," pp. 162-164.

[79] Sinan Chu, "Whither Chinese IR? The Sinocentric Subject and the Paradox of Tianxia-ism," *International Theory*, Online First, doi. 10.1017/S1752971920000214

[80] Chishen Chang, "Tianxia System on a Snail's Horns," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies,* Vol. 12, No. 1, 2011.

This brief survey of the analytical foci of ES and Chinese IR establishes common ground in their historically informed approach to understanding socially and materially constituted patterned behaviour amongst groups of states that shares a sense of common good, arising from a culturally connected conception of the nature of international relations. Both are also overwhelmingly focused on elite behaviour and understandings within that common ground. Consequently, the normative dimension of their analysis typically marginalises non-elite perspectives. Ling has invoked everyday practices around food and medicine as practices extending well beyond elites as important components of a Daoist dialectical analysis, and Nordin and Richaud have used conventional comparative politics tools to consider Chinese students' resistance to intensive state monitoring of their on-line activity.[81] But these are exceptions. This pervasive elitism is in no small part the result of their methodologies, which strongly favour elite perspectives, even when they move away from the social-structural 'modernist social science' and open space for interpretivist analytical modes, including engaging relational analysis.

Methodology and the inescapability of normative issues

This section moves the argument to the methodologies underpinning focus on elite-level politics. This brings interpretivism into play, an important part of past ES theorising which is being refined in contemporary work,[82] and 'relationality', which Qin puts at the heart of Chinese contributions to IR theorising.[83] This enables comparison between the two to move beyond explanations for long-run social structural change and opens a path to more fully engage normative issues. By showing how ES and Chinese IR's methodologies require normative engagement, I deepen and complicate their relationship to Global IR's critical and decolonial dimensions, discussed in the paper's final section.

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[81] L. H. M. Ling, "Journeys Beyond the West", Astrid Nordin and Lisa Richaud, "Subverting Official Language."
[82] Mark Bevir and Ian Hall, "Interpreting the English school."
[83] Yaqing Qin, "Rule, Rules, and Relations: Towards a Synthetic Approach to Governance," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics,* Vol. 4, No. 1, 2011, Yaqing Qin, 'A Relational Theory of World Politics.', Yaqing Qin, "A Multiverse of Knowledge: Cultures and IR Theories," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics,* Vol. 11, No. 1, 2018, Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, Yaqing Qin and Astrid H. M. Nordin, "Relationality and rationality."

ES interpretivism contextualises actors' aims, intentions and ambitions as they grapple with the issues of their day, including how they understand those issues in the context of deep-rooted and long-term dynamics. Historical and historiographical analyses highlight how interpretivism makes choices about historical representation that have analytical and normative effects.[84]

In Jackson's terms, interpretivism explains how actors 'go on' within a specific social setting, identifying challenges and the sorts of questions it is possible ask within a social milieu.[85] Wilson's argument for 'grounded theory' is an important instance of an ES interpretivist move, bringing historical and anthropological methods to bear on decision-making that takes seriously the perspectives, perceptions and intentions of the people involved.[86] Navari stresses the social conditioning effect on actors' choices, echoing a structurationist approach critical to Wendt's methodology that also influence Buzan's social structural move.[87] The methodological distinction between modernist social science and interpretivism is not, therefore, a hard divide within ES theory. They enable complementary, but distinctive, analyses that better access different elements of common problems. Navari straddles these approaches, deploying 'telic' practice to explore behaviour within institutions as guided activities that seek to achieve a shared goal.[88]

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[84] E.g. William Bain, "The English School and the Activity of Being an Historian," in Cornelia Navari ed. *Theorising International Society*, Molly Cochran, "Charting the Ethics of the English School: What "Good" is There in a Middle-Ground Ethics?," *International Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 53, No. 1, 2009, Peter Wilson, "The English School Meets the Chicago School: The Case for a Grounded Theory of International Institutions," *International Studies Review,* Vol. 14, No. 1, 2012, Richard Devetak and Emily Tannock, "Imperial Rivalry and the First Global War," in Tim Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit eds. *The Globalization of International Society,* Mark Bevir and Ian Hall, "The English School and the Classical Approach", Daniel M. Green, "The Nineteenth Century Liberal Tradition and the English School Historical Narrative," *Journal of International Political Theory,* Vol. 16, No. 2, 2020.
[85] Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, "The Dangers of Interpretation: C.A.W. Manning and the "Going Concern" of Iinternational Society," *Journal of International Political Theory,* Vol. 16, No. 2, 2020.
[86] Peter Wilson, "The English School Meets the Chicago School."
[87] Cornelia Navari, "Agents Versus Structures in English School Theory: Is Co-Constitution the Answer?," *Journal of International Political Theory,* Vol. 16, No. 2, 2020.
[88] Cornelia Navari, "The Concept of Practice in the English School," *European Journal of International Relations,* Vol. 17, No. 1, 2010.

Jackson and Nexon describe Chinese scholars' accounts of relational methodology as somewhat at odds with 'Anglophone' approaches.[89] That is important, but less so here because ES interpretivism shares these peculiarities. Chinese relationality focuses on,

> … "the modalities of relations" … an underlying focus on relations as the "stuff" of identity, power and prestige, … [where] the arguments concern the normative and practical implications of different *kinds* [emphasis in original] of relationships and relationality. … [W]hat it particularly reminds us of is the notion of a "repertoire": a stock of scripts and performances through which actors make claims on one another.[90]

This echoes Womack's argument that 'habit' was a crucial factor in the Tributary System's stability, something he links to an ES account.[91] Bevir and Hall describe interpretivist ES methods as, '…explaining social behaviour by reference to the meanings actions have for socially situated agents',[92] which is close to Qin's understanding of relationality, which is influenced by *habitus* concepts derived from Bourdieu and Emirbayer's relational sociology and Nexon and Jackson's work on relational theory in IR.[93] Furthermore, Qin's summary of relational governance appears very close to the ES concept of 'common good', crucial to the definition of an international society:

> [R]elational governance [is] a process of negotiating socio-political arrangements that manage complex relationships in a community to produce order so that members behave in a reciprocal and cooperative fashion with mutual trust evolved over a shared understanding of social norms and human morality.[94]

Qin does not speak for all Chinese IR scholars, of course. Yan portrays ancient Chinese philosophical accounts of 'rites' as comparable to contemporary understandings of norms, picking up the linkage with neo-liberal institutionalism.[95] That approach is more in tune with the modernist social science of Buzan-led ES formulations. Yan's most recent work focuses on leadership as the key variable explaining how rising powers surpass established hegemons, linking to power transition theory and

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[89] Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, 'Reclaiming the Social.'
[90] Ibid. p. 596.
[91] Brantly Womack, "Asymmetry and China's Tributary System," p. 50.
[92] Mark Bevir and Ian Hall, "The English School and the Classical Approach," p. 2.
[93] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, pp. 109-113.
[94] Yaqing Qin, 'Rule, Rules, and Relations,' p. 133.
[95] Xuetong Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought*, pp. 93-94.

developing a distinctive account of 'moral realism' promoting a human governance heavily influenced by classical Chinese philosophy.[96] Ling uses Daoism to argue for forms of interaction across ways of thinking and acting in international politics that develops relationality differently to Qin.[97]

Whilst existing ES-Chinese IR engagement highlights common analytical foci, this establishes significant methodological similarities and overlaps. When it comes to which experiences and perspectives we interpret, both Chinese IR and ES are principally concerned with political, economic and social elites. Heads of state, government ministers, diplomats, senior military figures, CEOs and Secretaries General dominate interest. Callahan criticises ES theory on these grounds,[98] and Williams has argued ES theory must create more space for non-elite perspectives and experiences.[99] Yet, throughout the ES texts cited already and other benchmark contributions, elite level accounts dominate.[100] A similar picture exists amongst influential Chinese IR scholars. For Yan exemplary leadership is expressly hierarchical, with a well-managed class hierarchy key for the humane governance that represents the only way to secure 'all under heaven'.[101] Qin defends hierarchy as a necessary component of Confucian social order rooted in a distinct moral metaphysics.[102] For Qin and Nordin, diplomats and academics are the sorts of communities of knowledge we should examine.[103] Son associates 'harmony' with a political elite achieving a superior level of political subjectivity, qualifying it to act as, 'the ultimate weaver and harmonizer of different groups and

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[96] Xuetong Yan, *Leadership*.
[97] L. H. M. Ling, 'Three-ness.', L. H. M. Ling, 'Worlds Beyond the West.', L. H. M. Ling and Astrid H. M. Nordin, 'On Relations and Relationality.'
[98] William A. Callahan, "Nationalising International Theory: Race, Class and the English School," *Global Society,* Vol. 18, No. 1, 2004.
[99] John Williams, *Ethics, Diversity and World Politics*.
[100] E.g. Robert H. Jackson, *The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Andrew Hurrell, *On Global Order: Power, Values and the Constitution of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[101] Xetong Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought*, pp. 95-99.
[102] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, p. 342.
[103] Yaqing Qin and Astrid H. M. Nordin, 'Relationality and rationality,' pp. 603-604.

interests.'[104] In contrast Nordin notes critically the elite-level perspective dominating discussions of 'harmony' and, with Hagström, discusses the risks that relational accounts of Chinese 'soft power' may succumb to morbidities inherent in Western accounts, whilst still offering a way of avoiding them.[105] Non-elites do not get much of a look in either way. This is not methodologically mandated – an interpretivism of the marginalised is not ruled out – but it is rarely questioned. I return to this in the final section.

Interpretivism and the common good component of both order in ES theory and harmony in Chinese IR puts normative issues squarely in play for both approaches, and gives means for analysing those concepts and debates. Global IR mandates scepticism about abstract claims to universality for ethical ideas about international politics, and ES work has consistently considered the extent to which common cultural or civilizational origins are necessary for an international society, grounding the common good that members recognise and shaping the actors and institutions they constitute. 'Going on', to recall Jackson's phrase,[106] in international society requires awareness of, and at least some degree of acceptance of, these culturally shaped rules. Critiques of ES (and other 'Western' IR theory) stresses that claims and assumptions about 'reality', 'science' and nature' reflect deep-rooted cultural perspectives.[107]

This cultural/civilizational issue is prominent in how Chinese IR develops its relational methodology and deploys the specific heritage of classical Chinese thought. Ling's account of the Yin-Yang nature

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[104] Key-young Son, 'Harmony, Agency, Discourse,' p. 409.
[105] Astrid H. M. Nordin, 'Futures Beyond the West,' pp. 163-170, Linus Hagström and Astrid H. M. Nordin, 'China's "Politics of Harmony".'
[106] Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Dangers of Interpretation.'
[107] E.g. John M. Hobson, *Eurocentric Conception*.

of Daoist dialectics[108] shares Qin's emphasis on relationality as the basic ontological condition of

international relations from a Chinese/Confucian perspective:[109]

> The relational theory rests on the fundamental assumption: The world is a universe of relatedness. … [A]t the metaphysical level such a Confucian world is visualized as composed of continuing events and ongoing relations rather than substantial objects and discrete entities. … [W]ithout relations nothing would happen and the world would be a non-world.[110]

Qin challenges what he sees as foundational ontological claims in Western science and social

science, including mainstream US international relations, about the independent and prior existence

of objects, which include corporate agents such as states, and the consequent assumption of the

prior status of self-interest.[111] Zhao concurs, 'Chinese ontology [is] the *ontology of relations*, instead

of the Western *ontology of things*. [Emphasis in original]'[112] Within his relational Confucian

approach, Qin argues, 'Self-existence is simultaneously co-existence … and self-interest always

shares with other-interest as well as with collective interest. … [I]t is about coexistence, co-identity

and co-interest.'[113] Ling affirms: 'No categorical 'black box' can survive in dialectical thought. All is

subject to examination because all comes from dynamic interactions with others, whether positive

or negative. … Daoism views all things, especially polarities, as the product of ongoing processes of

mutuality.'[114]

This mandates a distinctive methodology. . Qin and Ling develop a Yin-Yang perspective via a

zhongyong dialectical form, contrasted to the Hegelian dialectical tradition in Western social and

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[108] Shannon Brincat and L. H. M. Ling, "Dialectics for IR: Hegel and the Dao," *Globalizations,* Vol. 11, No. 1, 2014, L. H. M. Ling, *The Dao of World Politics*, L. H. M. Ling, 'Worlds Beyond the West.'
[109] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, pp. 107-130.
[110] Ibid. pp. 107-108.
[111] Ibid. pp. 108, 121-122.
[112] Tingyang Zhao, 'Rethinking Empire,' p. 33.
[113] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, pp. 121-122.
[114] L. H. M. Ling, 'Worlds Beyond the West,' p. 559.

political theory.[115]This emphasises the existence of each position within the other[116] and the

harmonious whole that can be created through emergence of an 'appropriate middle' reflecting the

immanence of each oppositional stance within the other and how a harmonious outcome is

attainable through correct dialectical reasoning and with the open-minded engagement of

interlocutors.[117] This is always dynamic, as the circumstances of relationality shift and the partners in

the dialectic learn and develop. It is a process of becoming, rather than one of definitive

outcomes.[118] The 'both/and' shorthand stresses the essentially co-existing nature of ethical ideas

within a social whole.

Whilst Yan's approach to 'moral realism' does not explicitly draw on traditional Chinese philosophy

to develop a methodology, he develops a tension between ostensibly universal moral codes and

historical periods, noting how universality is not immutability, and that assessing moral action is

about instrumentality and a balance of judgement that may include immoral as well as moral

elements in any particular action.[119] A balance between deep historical process and culturally

constructed standards of judgement are present. Achieving a harmonious balance requires virtuous

rulers capable of managing these competing dynamics to achieve 'humane governance'.

Whilst important not to overload similarities, appeals to the 'middle ground' and ideas of 'balance'

are emblematic of ES accounts of international society as sitting between international system and

world society, and that the characteristic mode of analysis of international society – rationalism –

sits between realism and revolutionism, with all three dynamics in continuous interplay.[120] Whilst

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[115] Ibid., Shannon Brincat and L. H. M. Ling, 'Dialectics for IR.', L. H. M. Ling, *The Dao of World Politics*, Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, pp. 152-194.

[116] See also L. H. M. Ling, 'Three-ness.'

[117] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, p. 178.

[118] Ibid. p. 175.

[119] Xuetong Yan, *Leadership*, pp. 5-11.

[120] Martin Wight, *International Theory: the Three Traditions* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991).

casting ES methods as dialectical is stretching the analogy too far, the role of cultural resources implemented via a 'repertoire' of scripts and performances in both Chinese IR and ES methods is consistent. The question of who 'writes' those scripts thus emerges, with elites whose participation in international relations dominates the analytical focus of research typically emerging as the answer. Ling, as perhaps the most optimistic writer, nevertheless acknowledges that in relations between China and the US, whilst Daoist dialectics can show a way out of the 'China threat', the obstacles in terms of the positions and approaches taken by the leading figures in the debate are formidable.[121] Yang draws on Chinese history to suggest 'co-ruling' as a way to avoid the worst outcomes of a 'rising China' thesis the foregrounds confrontation, but here, too, the stress is on elites.[122] There is, however, nothing inherent in interpretivism as a methodology that means neither ES theory nor Chinese IR *must* retain this elite focus. That they do is open to challenge and question, leading to the final section identifying how more aspects of Global IR's broad perspective can establish a future research agenda that will benefit ES theory and Chinese IR.

Expanding the normative agenda: beyond elites and towards the decolonial.

If ES-Chinese IR interactions represent one aspect of a diverse Global IR agenda, using world history to re-examine dominant diffusionist accounts of how international societies develop, the types of societies that can exist, and how civilizational commonalities within those societies shape institutions, this section looks at how another dimension of Global IR can contribute to further enriching this engagement. Having identified important methodological commonalities in ES-Chinese IR approaches, methodological aspects of Global IR can bring important critical perspective to bear.

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[121] L. H. M. Ling, 'Worlds Beyond the West.'
[122] Yuan Yang, 'Escape both the 'Thucydides Trap' and the 'Churchill Trap'.'

Whilst Hobson and Sajed reject as 'Eurofetishism' critical IR theory's interest in ethical ideals such as emancipation,[123] a great deal of Global IR writing is motivated in no small part by an emancipatory normativity in foregrounding non-Western histories, epistemologies, ontologies and agencies. That reflects the origins of many of the intellectual movements driving Global IR in postcolonial and critical theory, and versions of social theory that share roots in Marx. This mandates goals of: revealing power structures; challenging dominant social, political and economic structures; and, exploring how thought and action interact to create progressive social change. Those goals require to overcoming Marx's Eurocentrism,[124] and open-minded engagement with non-Western histories, theories and concepts, including some that challenge fundamental ideas in Western philosophies of knowledge, such as subject:object dualism. [125] Acharya's ambition that a Global IR will be characterised by, 'pluralistic universalism (one that does not impose any particular idea or approach on others, but respects diversity while seeking common ground)'[126] retains a normative edge through its commitment to theorising beyond material power.

A Global IR perspective on the interaction between ES and leading Chinese IR accounts of order therefore needs to look at how methodologies such as relationality might be used to compare the 'stuff' of 'identity, power and prestige' and the '"repertoires" of scripts and performances'[127] of relations amongst elites. Dominant ES accounts are rightly criticised for neglecting the experiences of huge numbers of people in relation to key institutions such as war[128] and for reflecting class and

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[123] John M. Hobson and Alina Sajed, 'Navigating Beyond the Eurofetishist Frontier.'

[124] John M. Hobson, *Eurocentric Conception*, pp. 52-58.

[125] E.g. Yaqing Qin, 'Rule, Rules, and Relations.', L. H. M. Ling, *The Dao of World Politics*, Deepshikha Shahi and Gennaro Ascione, "Rethinking the Absence of Post-Western International Relations Theory in India: 'Advaitic Monism' as an Alternative Epistemological Resource," *European Journal of International Relations,* Vol. 22, No. 1, 2016.

[126] Amitav Acharya, "Advancing global IR: Challenges, contentions, and contributions," *International Studies Review,* Vol. 18, No. 1, 2016, p. 5 fn.2.

[127] Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, 'Reclaiming the Social,' p. 596.

[128] E.g. John Williams, *Ethics, Diversity and World Politics*, pp. 146-147.

empire hierarchies,[129] so we must consider selectivity in the historical account of Chinese history and philosophy. Dreyer, for example, points up how the Chinese Communist Party's portrayal of the 'China Dream' and China's role in creating global 'harmony' invokes the same Confucius it once burned in effigy as a symbol of feudalist exploitation.[130] This contrasts sharply with Yan's observation that '… citations of ancient Chinese sayings are now a prerequisite for Chinese leaders' policy speeches.'[131]

The interpretivist methodological opening to normative issues is the best place to start this critical engagement. With most critical and decolonial theory already focused on the violent and exclusionary dynamics of Western traditions of thought underpinning ES theory,[132] and the distinctiveness of the Chinese and Confucian accounts being central to leading Chinese IR work, exploring relational methodology offers the most fertile ground. Chinese IR's acknowledged substantial contributions to Global IR reinforce its place as an ideal starting point.[133]

Relationality's claim for coexistence, co-identity and co-interest as an ontological condition rests on a two-fold account of knowledge production. Relationally constituted humans relate within an episteme that is culturally distinctive. Social theory through which humans know themselves, one-another and the world necessarily reflects what Qin calls 'background knowledge'.[134] This is the deep-rooted, rich 'geo-cultural' framework that constitutes actors and establishes possible knowledge forms and knowledge production practices leading to 'representational knowledge'.[135] This knowledge consciously aims to explain the world we live in, its institutions and processes, and

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[129] E.g. William A. Callahan, "Nationalising International Theory."
[130] June Teufel Dreyer, "The 'Tianxia Trope'," p. 1017.
[131] Xuetong Yan, *Leadership*, p. 136.
[132] Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, pp. 135-210.
[133] Amitav Acharya, "From Heaven to Earth."
[134] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, pp. 3-4, 13-24, 42-45, 54-74.
[135] Ibid.pp. 201-204.

to help formulate policies and actions to respond to the world. It cannot be separated from prior

background knowledge.[136]

For Jackson and Nexon, the associated risk of cultural determinism can be mitigated via (Western)

philosophy of knowledge.[137] This is important in ES interpretivist accounts drawing on concepts such

as 'grounded theory' and a self-aware historiography to locate knowledge with a view to creating

openings to other knowledge forms.[138] The kind of technical background knowledge represented by

a Western philosophy of knowledge is less restrictive than geocultural knowledge, such as post-

Enlightenment European liberalism, or Confucianism. As Qin and Nordin stress, '(Geo)culturally

nurtured background knowledge is typically … thicker, steadier and more spontaneous than *any* [my

emphasis] professionally and technically formed background knowledge.'[139] We cannot escape that

(geo)cultural framing because it is 'more natural'.[140] Ling avoids naturalising this claim, but instead

notes that Chinese language creates a very different relationship to an 'object' that emphasises

encounters with it, rather than something essential about it, and that this crosses over into political

strategies and is an embedded feature of Daoist dialectics.[141] How the effects of these linguistically

rooted distinctions in our relationship to reality might be overcome is unaddressed.

Qin's approach to relational IR ultimately essentialises background knowledge. '[A] scholar

immersed in a certain community of practice and shaped by the background knowledge thereof

would find it near impossible to produce representational knowledge that was absolutely alien to

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[136] Ibid. p. 43.
[137] Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, 'Reclaiming the Social.'
[138] Peter Wilson, 'The English School Meets the Chicago School', William Bain, 'The English School and the Activity of Being an Historian.'
[139] Yaqing Qin and Astrid H. M. Nordin, "Relationality and Rationality," p. 604.
[140] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, p. 40.
[141] Shannon Brincat and L. H. M. Ling, "Dialectics for IR," p. 675.

such background knowledge'.[142] There will always be a fundamental mismatch in how, for example,

'Confucians' consciously 'see' the world and how 'Westerners' do, with those categories risking

being historically static, irrespective of their interaction over centuries, as discussed in world history.

For example, discussing 'rationality' as the metaphysical component of the 'hardcore' of Western

post-Enlightenment theorising across natural and social sciences, Qin argues:

> It is basically impossible that such an idea would have been produced within the Chinese culture despite the fact that the Chinese civilization has an unbroken history of thousands of years, for it [rationality] is of less significance within the structure of the background knowledge of the Chinese culture and therefore it seems to be off their menu.[143]

As such, 'the perfect universality [of Western social theory] is no more than a pipe dream'.[144] This,

though, is a straw man. Rejecting exceptionalist claims of incommensurability/impenetrability, but

without insisting that the only valid outcome is a 'theory from nowhere' is a basic necessity of Global

IR, recalling Acharya's principles of reflecting diversity and subsuming, not replacing, existing IR

theory and methods.[145] The bases for engagement, discussion, mutual learning and developing

common understandings across plural socio-cultural and historical experience, including those linked

to race, class, indigeneity and sexuality, as well as 'geo-cultural', is a basic ambition for Global IR.

Qin wants to keep the door to cross-geocultural interaction open when he identifies three things a

'truly' or 'genuinely' Global IR is not – marked by a gatekeeping psychology to exclude 'other'

approaches; culturally hierarchical; and politicised.[146] But any claim to define 'true' and 'genuine'

seems impossible to substantiate on Qin's own relational basis. It can only be 'true' or 'genuine' for

the geoculturally rooted members of a community of practice because, 'any social theory, viewed as

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[142] Yaqing Qin and Astrid H. M. Nordin, "Relationality and rationality," p. 604.
[143] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, p. 45.
[144] Yaqing Qin, "Multiverse of Knowledge," p. 423.
[145] Amitav Acharya, "Global IR and Regional Worlds," p. 649.
[146] Yaqing Qin, "Multiverse of Knowledge," pp. 431-434.

representational knowledge, is necessarily entwined with the background knowledge of the (geo)cultural community or communities through which it emerged'.[147] Prominent features of critical Global IR, such as race, class, gender, indigeneity and sexuality are given the briefest of treatments in Qin's work, located in a barely discussed 'second level' of 'communities of practice', which are functionally defined and focused but clearly subordinated to geocultural community.[148]

The normative potential in using world history to look at the historical, cultural and philosophical contexts that create the orders such as international society and Tianxia means more than abandoning 'diffusionist' modes of history and challenging the violently exclusionary, even racist, accounts of the 'natural' order of things. The active use of interpretive methodologies that facilitate the creation of new forms of knowledge to recover and represent the past, present and future follows from this abandonment. Homogenised history reflecting only an elite perspective is a real danger in the intellectual construction of Chinese IR, as it has been in ES theory. Hagsrtröm and Nordin criticise this historical myopia, pointing to ways 'harmony' has both been written into China's historical record, and how other traditions have been written out.[149] It is striking that Qin and Yan portray Chinese intellectual history as overwhelmingly the result of classical Chinese thought, rooted in the Schools of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period, with Confucianism as the core.[150] This seems to ground claims that Confucianism is the mainstream of Chinese culture,[151] allied to an unbroken tradition (singular) ever since. There is seemingly negligible influence arising from either non-elite experiences and perspectives in Chinese history, or interaction across millennia with other intellectual or religious traditions, at least prior to the Nineteenth Century.

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[147] Yaqing Qin and Astrid H. M. Nordin, "Relationality and rationality," p. 604.
[148] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, pp. 37-38, 40.
[149] Linus Hagström and Astrid H. M. Nordin, "China's "Politics of Harmony"," pp. 516-518.
[150] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory,* Xuetong Yan, *Leadership*.
[151] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, p. 113.

Decolonial theory de-centres European experiences, including knowledge traditions, but recovers marginalised, silenced, or historically excised perspectives. This creates distinctive ethical ideas that privilege the powerless to create radical normative critiques of established orders. As Santos argues through the concept of an 'abyssal line', recovery can be exceptionally difficult and require far-reaching and fundamental change in intellectual perspective, but the normative imperative to do so is consistent across Global IR's diverse critical contributions.[152] This is not to underestimate challenges in aiming to 'recover' experiences of non-elites, exemplified in the hugely influential debates within the subaltern studies collective's historiographical work.[153] Academic claims to represent (or re-present) the experiences of the marginalised have long been hamstrung by recognition of the impossibility of 'transparency', to use Spivak's term, in the representational relationship.[154] Decoloniality's stress on praxis and theorising *for* with marginalised, especially indigenous, communities to produce critical and engaged pedagogies is one way of trying to overcome these epistemological challenges.[155]

Accounts of relationality found in decolonial writing avoid the elite-level focus of ES and Chinese IR, enabling recovery of an alternative normative perspective.[156] That does not just mean highlighting how people and peoples have been made the victims of the international orders, but also by looking at how people adapt, extend, create and occupy existing and new forms of community to create means of resisting victimisation. This recognises the agency of the marginalised, and respects the knowledge forms arising from their experiences. Relational methodology, as Qin notes, puts agency

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[152] Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, pp. 118-135.
[153] Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
[154] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?,' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 70, 74-75, 89-90.
[155] Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, pp. 15-98.
[156] Ibid. pp. 15-102, Karen Tucker, "Unraveling Coloniality in International Relations: Knowledge, Relationality, and Strategies for Engagement," *International Political Sociology,* Vol. 12, No. 1, 2018, Marysia Zalewski, "Forget(ting) feminism? Investigating Relationality in International Relations," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs,* Vol. 32, No. 1, 2019.

at the centre of social theory,[157] yet Chinese IR, as with ES theory, has generally not followed the decolonial lead in using relationality to actively engage non-elite experiences, stymieing development of a critical normative agenda. Nordin and Smith offer the most extensive effort to draw out the challenge of radical otherness for relational theorising, both Western and Chinese. Both tend to reproduce 'other' as subordinate, even excluded, reproducing the logics and knowledge forms of colonialism. They set out a research agenda for how this may be overcome that overlaps my efforts in this section of the paper.[158] This goes further than Ling, for example, whose innovative approach of using dramatic forms to set out how Daoist dialectics might shape more inclusive engagements across intellectual traditions provide only illustrative hypothetical examples. How to break the bounds of 'background knowledge' in a Daoist/Confucian dialectic remains unclear, except for Qin, for whom it is impossible.[159]

The multiplicity of communities that increasingly characterise life under globalization pluralises relationality through challenging the idea that a totalising community membership defined by citizenship and/or cultural identity are the only politically significant communities. However, multiple community memberships create relationality at several scales and along diverse vectors, for example gender and sexuality identities, employment statuses, social justice commitments, religious affiliations and many others. These are not just 'representational' knowledge, but are important in defining the world as it looks from particular perspectives, highlighting how intersectional perspectives reveal tensions that individuals and groups have to navigate. A subaltern perspective throws these into far clearer perspective than seeing these knowledge forms as in some sense deviant from a geo-cultural background knowledge defined by, and for, elites. 'Resistance' as an institution of international society is much more than the ways that weaker political actors obstruct

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[157] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, pp. 15-18.
[158] Astrid H. M. Nordin and Graham M. Smith, "Relating Self and Other."
[159] L. H. M. Ling, "Journeys Beyond the West", L. H. M. Ling and Astrid H. M. Nordin, "On Relations and Relationality."

or frustrate the ambitions and goals of dominant players in the system and adapt, subvert or hybridize norms.[160] It offers a way for individuals to engage in community and to sustain and propagate self-understandings and the agency to create and act within a political world that they can, at some level, create. When Qin claims '… social theory bears a cultural birthmark … This birthmark is indelible',[161] culture is singular and based on the experience and perspective of cultural elites.

Rather than homogenised geocultural knowledge blocs, this relational perspective opens questions around how a relational dialectical method illuminates normative debates and judgements involved in the social processes of forming, shifting and dissolving specific historical institutional orders. A *zhongyong* relational analysis is valuable because it puts at its core complementarity and contradiction.[162]. The normative aspects of Global IR reinvigorate the ES-Chinese IR interaction by shifting attention away from the elite-level focus of both, starting by recognising how background and representational knowledge, and the 'stuff' of relations are not neutral. They do not exist independently of power relations. It is noteworthy that Qin and Nordin's description of the concentric circles of Confucian relationality make no mention of power.[163] 'Self-in-relation-with-others', 'self-existence as simultaneously co-existence' look somewhat different from the bottom up and when acknowledging power structures. The shared interests realised through reciprocity,[164] may hold within a community of equals, but as critical Global IR reminds us, there are radical inequalities in multiple dimensions that silence, dispossess, deny, exclude and coerce, even placing some

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[160] John Williams, *Ethics, Diversity and World Politics*, pp. 132-135, Amitav Acharya, *Constructing Global Order*, pp. 17, 42-57.
[161] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, p. 3.
[162] Shannon Brincat and L. H. M. Ling, "Dialectics for IR," p. 677.
[163] Yaqing Qin and Astrid H. M. Nordin, "Relationality and rationality," pp. 606-608.
[164] Ibid. p. 607.

'beyond the abyssal line' that renders null the possibility of their validity as members of a relational community present in international society.[165]

Geocultural knowledge as Qin portrays it, and especially in its conflated Chinese/Confucian form, can be highly disciplinary. Confucianism's five core relationships reflect assumptions about 'correct' social relationships and orders that are hierarchical, patriarchal and heteronormative.[166] Family life analogies are highly important in exploring interstate relations, and a harmonious international society will resemble a harmonious family.[167] Harmony, as the normative goal of a *zhongyong* dialectic extends these 'correct' social relationships, drawing on the distinctive methodological perspective of each pole as a contradiction existing within the other. A dialectical relationship led by suitably trained and skilled interlocutors can guide this mutual becoming of the two poles, which, whilst never complete, does, over time, achieve a harmonious 'appropriate middle'. The appropriate middle, characterised by appropriateness, reasonableness, and auspiciousness,[168] and contrary to assertions,[169] is an inhospitable place for the marginalised. It contrasts sharply with, for example, Walsh's analysis of a relationally framed 'interculturality' that:

> …suggests a permanent and active process of negotiation and interrelation in which difference does not disappear. Sociocultural, ancestral, political, epistemic, linguistic and existence-based difference is affirmed in collective and community-based terms, and understood as contributions to the creation of new comprehensions, coexistences, solidarities and collaborations'.[170]

Marginalised knowledge forms, such as indigenous communities and counter-hegemonic movements such as the Zapatistas, are privileged because of the specific insights that come from the

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[165] E.g. David L. Blaney and Arlene B. Tickner, "Worlding, Ontological Politics and the Possibility of a Decolonial IR", Zeynep Gülşah Çapan, "Writing International Relations", Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, Karen Tucker, "Unraveling Coloniality", Kimberley Hutchings, 'Decolonizing Global Ethics.'
[166] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, pp. 211, 212, 215, 272, 338, 342.
[167] Ibid. pp. 212-214.
[168] Ibid. pp. 184-185.
[169] Ibid. pp. 187.
[170] Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, p. 59.

experience of living repressed lives. Whilst Mignolo consigns Mao to a still-Western post-colonial modernity,[171] and Mao's view of peasant rebellions as steps in a historical-materialist path to modernity and ultimately communist revolution[172] clearly jars with decoloniality, liberating the repressed, including the peasantry, was crucial to the legitimation of the Chinese Communist Party.

Nordin and Smith point to the homogenising relationality of Zhao's account of Tianxia in their analysis of the limitations on retaining a place for radical alterity within relational theorising.[173] This reinforces the need for the kinds of empirically grounded, praxis based approaches to knowledge formation and development Walsh emphasises via her notion of 'praxicality' that inverts the hierarchical approach to knowledge typical in Chinese IR.[174] A decolonial relationality within Global IR asks us to investigate, from the bottom up, non-Confucian perspectives on Tianxia, harmony and notions such as humane governance that characterise Chinese historical political thought and its contemporary uses. Relationality is not an exclusively Confucian notion, with relationships between indigenous peoples and their land, for example, prominent in decolonial accounts, including the way that land, territory and space are constructed within cosmologies that are very different from Western rationalism or Confucianism.[175] Relations within a community and amongst communities may include transcendental notions, such as harmony or order, but those are not homogeneous and may involve complex relationships to ancestors – a feature of Confucianism[176] – and to God(s), other spirits, and other lifeforms.[177]

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[171] Ibid. pp. 129-130.
[172] E.g. Yuri Pines, *The Everlasting Empire: the Political Culture of Ancient China and its Imperial Legacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 159.
[173] Astrid H. M. Nordin and Graham M. Smith, "Relating Self and Other," pp. 643-644, See also Tingyang Zhao, "Rethinking Empire", Tingyang Zhao, "A Political World Philosophy in terms of All-under-heaven (Tian-xia)."
[174] Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, pp. esp. 33-50.
[175] E.g. Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality.*
[176] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, p. 108.
[177] Cristina Yumie Aoki Inoue, "Worlding Global Environmental Politics."

The normative vision emerging from Zhao's, Qin's and Yan's accounts of Chinese IR is of 'humane

governance' by modern-day incarnations of the sage-kings of Chinese classical history able to

navigate the challenges of the world and help avoid the potential catastrophes associated with

chaos and disorder. Bad faith, poor leadership and changing circumstances can, of course, stymie or

reverse this process. The epigrams for each chapter in Yan's book on leadership symbolise the

double-sided, progressive and regressive, characteristics of good and bad leadership.[178] But the

presence of a resolution is inherent within the dialectic because of the mutuality of each pole within

the other. Some of this dialectical process rests on intuitive, non-verbal understandings of the

situation arising from shared geocultural knowledge.[179] That 'inheritance' means that members of

the same geocultural knowledge community 'get' ideas in ways that non-members cannot – their

shared reservoir of cultural reference points; ways of knowing, speaking and reasoning; and,

understanding of the 'right' outcome from contradiction. 'Skilful management' can ensure the

tendency towards 'natural harmony' is advanced, including the use of 'necessary … coercive

force'.[180] Yan's account of political capability similarly accepts there is a singular 'right' direction of

travel, noting that reform is both descriptive and prescriptive in his use – human governance delivers

moral progress, not degenerate regress.[181] Zhao bluntly asserts that this must be done by elites,

because 'most people do not really know what is best for them, but … the elite do so … ought to

genuinely decide for the people.'[182]

The dice are heavily loaded in favour of those who can define the nature of the contradiction and

the progress/regress spectrum. This clearly echoes critiques of ES theory's diffusionist history, with

its tendency to see history as 'progressive'; and white, Western leadership as therefore normatively

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[178] Xuetong Yan, *Leadership*.
[179] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, pp. 208, 214, 281.
[180] Ibid, p. 234.
[181] Xuetong Yan, *Leadership,* p. 13.
[182] Tingyang Zhao, "Rethinking Empire," p. 32.

desirable.[183] To pick an ES-relevant instance, if the polarities are order and justice, the dialectic is

very different from one where they are order and chaos. A dialectical polarity of liberty and tyranny

is very different from one of liberty and duty. Established authorities are highly privileged. Those

least advantaged in the system seemingly have to wait for dialectic to achieve harmony over time.

Their subjugation is inherent in their rulers' privilege, and vice versa, and in the long run, with good

faith, good luck and good leaders, harmony will be achieved. Struggling for it, revolting against the

system, challenging the tenets of the system that creates privilege, and demanding justice now bring

conflict where harmony is needed. Seeking to introduce knowledge forms or normative claims from

outside the dominant geocultural framework, something central to the decolonial project,

destabilises and disrupts the *zhongyong* dialectic, further endangering the attainment of harmony.

Whilst Chinese history is replete with 'rebellion' aimed at addressing dynastic injustice and in

response to dynastic decay, Pines emphasises that re-establishing 'proper' imperial rule and 'correct'

social order differentiates rebellion from, unknown prior to the nineteenth century, 'revolution'

aiming to overthrow the system.[184] Leaders informed by key virtues, such as benevolence and

righteousness, and acting in accordance with a five thousand year Chinese tradition portrayed as

sharing core outcomes including 'beneficence' and 'inclusiveness' can achieve an international order

marked by peace, non-aggression, good-neighbourliness and a harmonious inclusivity with

difference.[185] A putative 'fusion' of Chinese and liberal values is nevertheless established on a

narrow basis that further excludes non-elite and marginalised positions within both traditions, and

those outside those traditions.[186] Groups, such as indigenous communities and racial, religious and

sexual minorities, whose relational perspective is at odds with the dominant group, therefore

introduce conflict. They are rendered deviant, and thus dangerous, via their ascription to a social

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[183] For critiques see e.g. John M. Hobson, *Eurocentric Conception*, Tim Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit, "The Globalization of International Society," Ian Hall, 'The "Revolt Against the West' Revisited,"
[184] Yuri Pines, *Everlasting Empire*, pp. 134-145, 156-161.
[185] Xuetong Yan, *Leadership*, pp. 134-135.
[186] Ibid. pp. 145-153.

account that lacks 'reality' because it obscures harmony.[187] As individuals, denying relationality they are rendered 'autistic'.[188] Conflict is rendered ontologically non-existent.[189] A new 'abyssal line' is recreated within Global IR.[190]

A critical relational analysis therefore needs a wider research agenda beyond the principally theoretical discussions about the nature of dialectics[191] and radical otherness that runs into the sands of knowing and representing the unknowable and unrepesentable.[192] Recall that the interpretivism underpinning the normativity of ES-Chinese IR interactions asks for exploration of how people understand their efforts to achieve the things they value within their social context and the dynamics that shape that context. The empiricism of world history and area studies that offer common ground in Global IR and have seen ES-Chinese IR marked as a productive example of Global IR in action can flourish further through embracing decolonialism's multifaceted praxis. Useful topics include: how China's historical interaction with other East and South Asian societies, communities and states changed the principal trends of thought about politics within China; how different responses to and within a Confucian tradition are represented and repressed; how the Chinese Communist Party utilises a homogenised and monopolised Confucianism in its relations with other communities within China, such as Christians and Muslims; and, how these and other perspectives provide knowledge resources for the construction of multiple communities and means of resistance for the marginalised. As with any tradition of thought – liberalism, Marxism, Buddhism – the Chinese philosophical tradition is not monolithic and efforts to present it as such by authoritative (and authoritarian) actors must be mistrusted. Decolonial relationalism can also ground more functional analysis from the positionality of the subaltern, as has been started in ES theory in relation to core

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[187] Yaqing Qin, *Relational Theory*, pp. 187-188, 190.
[188] Ibid. p. 208.
[189] Ibid. p. 192.
[190] Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, pp. 118-135.
[191] Shannon Brincat and L. H. M. Ling, "Dialectics for IR."
[192] Astrid H. M. Nordin and Graham M. Smith, "Relating Self and Other," pp. 637, 648-650.

issues of Western-led dynamics in international society, including security, violence, and distributive justice.[193]

Conclusion

I have shown how existing interaction between ES and Chinese IR, highlighted as a fruitful line of enquiry within a broader Global IR perspective, has effectively drawn out the importance of a world historical perspective to demonstrate diverse forms of international society and how cultural and civilizational commonalities create distinctive institutions and modes of practice within those societies. This contributes to effective comparative analysis and a two-way exchange around the analytical similarities of both perspectives. There has been cross-fertilisation that is enriching both perspectives' accounts of key features of IR, such as how to explain long-run patterns of political order, how social-structures and key actors are co-constituted via the operation of institutions, and, how we can understand key dynamics of change strengthening and weakening international society.

Digging beneath these interactions, I have shown that interpretivist methodological similarities both reinforce the opportunity for interaction and point to limitations of both ES and Chinese IR approaches, in particular how their methodologies stymie their full normative potential. Again drawing on aspects of a diverse Global IR agenda, specifically decolonial theorising, this brought out how normatively privileging elite perspectives is deeply methodologically rooted in much ES and Chinese IR. More critical elements within both approaches have pointed this out, and point towards important opportunities for interaction with decolonial theorising. The final section started this deeper engagement and showed how the strengths in ES and Chinese IR – their shared historical interest and potential for extended empirical engagement with regional specialists – can augment more purely theoretical critique. However, that relies on telling very different histories than the

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[193] E.g. John Williams, *Ethics, Diversity and World Politics*, pp. 155-177.

elite-focused accounts that dominate at present, and being willing to explore beyond the epistemological and ontological boundaries of much current debate, which typically close off, even erase, the experience of groups such as indigenous peoples and religious, sexual and ethnic minority communities.

Consequently, I have sought to reaffirm the potential for continuing constructive interactions between ES and Chinese IR, whilst highlighting how that interaction to date has lacked some of the critical edge that has the potential to further unlock potential insights. As one example of how a Global IR approach can produce mutually beneficial outcomes, ES-Chinese IR interaction also points up why normative questions about who sets the boundaries of that interaction matters, and what might be gained by opening that debate further.

The current ES-Chinese IR interaction misses the normative potential crucial to Global IR. That potential ranges from the expressly ethical in concepts such as the pluriverse,[194] through to the analytical common ground of reflecting world history and re-engaging area studies,[195] and the praxis of decolonial theorising *for* via engaged pedagogies.[196] That poses serious questions for the order and harmony the ES and Chinese IR typically envisage for the world, and the costs they have, continue to, and will impose on those who are least advantaged in the world. Global IR captures the normative potential that comes from abandoning elite Eurocentrism whilst avoiding replacing that with a different set of elite perspectives subject to little more than comparative analysis.

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[194] e.g. Kimberley Hutchings, "Decolonizing Global Ethics."
[195] E.g. Amitav Acharya, "Global IR and Regional Worlds", Acharya, "Theorising Asia."
[196] Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, pp. 81-98.