



**Murdoch**  
UNIVERSITY

**MURDOCH RESEARCH REPOSITORY**

*This is the author's final version of the work, as accepted for publication following peer review but without the publisher's layout or pagination.*

*The definitive version is available at*

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/cjip/por015>

**Zhang, F. (2012) *The Tsinghua approach and the inception of Chinese theories of international relations*. The Chinese Journal of International Politics, 5 (1). pp. 73-102.**

<http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/7703/>

Copyright: © 2011 by the author

It is posted here for your personal use. No further distribution is permitted.

---

# The Tsinghua Approach and the Inception of Chinese Theories of International Relations

---

Feng Zhang\*†

## Introduction

5

Now marks the first time in China's nascent International Relations (IR) studies that a prestigious Western academic press has translated into English and published a collection of articles by Chinese IR scholars. Until now, this honour has been the preserve of history and philosophy, fields with distinguished pedigrees in China's intellectual history, and whose scholarly accomplishments have long been internationally recognized.<sup>1</sup> The publication by Princeton University Press of these articles, most of them originally written in Chinese by Professor Yan Xuetong and his colleagues at Tsinghua University in Beijing, that comprise *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* suggests a turning point in China's international studies.<sup>2</sup> As it turns out, in addition to being important in the disciplinary history of Chinese IR, the book also carries implications for the global IR discipline. It contains, moreover, theoretical insights and policy implications worth thorough review.

10

15

My aim is to situate the book within the disciplinary context of Chinese IR; to identify its promise as well as problems, and to suggest its implications for the development of Chinese IR, the emergence of Chinese theories of international relations, and the policy problems of China's rise. In what follows, I first identify what I call 'the Tsinghua approach' in Chinese IR,

20

† The author would like to thank Victoria Hui and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article. Any errors of fact or interpretation are his own.

Feng Zhang is a Lecturer in International Relations at the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Murdoch University, Australia.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vols. 1–2, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952–53); Kung-Chuan Hsiao, *A History of Chinese Political Thought: Volume One: From the Beginnings to the Sixth Century A.D.*, trans. F. W. Mote (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

\*Corresponding author: Email: fengzhangmc@gmail.com

its significance in China's international studies and its implications for the debate on the so-called 'Chinese school of IR.' I then discuss the book's methodological assumptions and problems, its theoretical promise and problems and finally its policy implications. Professor Yan has been a distinguished pioneer of the policy, method, and theory of China's international studies for two decades, and this book leaves no doubt as to his achievements. This article is a critical engagement with his scholarship, in the hope that the Tsinghua team may address existing problems and achieve greater accomplishments on the basis of Professor Yan's pioneering groundwork.

## The Tsinghua Approach

Yan Xuetong has been at the forefront of raising the methodological awareness of China's IR studies since the 1990s. Tangible results include a popular textbook on practical methods of international studies<sup>3</sup> and an annual methodological training workshop at Tsinghua University well attended by graduate students and junior scholars from all over the country. Yan's methodological contributions to China's international studies are no less pioneering than his theoretical and policy contributions, and one can see in this book how Professor Yan brings his methodological agenda into play. In promoting what he calls a 'scientific method' Yan is influenced by a positivist understanding of social science, with an emphasis on quantitative methods. Although he acknowledges that different questions need different methods of study, his emphasis on hypothesis testing, causal analysis, objectivity, and verifiability<sup>4</sup> places him firmly in the positivist camp.

*Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* presents an application of this method to the analysis of ancient Chinese thought. I wish here to suggest that, combined with the theoretical ambitions and policy motivations animating the project, this method implies the emergence of a distinctive approach to the study of international relations with a particular type of Chinese consciousness. Since it has been advanced by Yan and his team at the Institute of International Studies (now upgraded to the Institute of Modern International Relations) at Tsinghua University, it may be called the 'Tsinghua approach.' But I wish also to suggest that although this approach is impressive and surely among the most original and exciting of IR frontiers now being explored by Chinese scholars, it does not yet amount to a full-fledged 'Tsinghua school.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Yan Xuetong and Sun Xuefeng, *Guoji guanxi yanjiu shiyong fangfa* (Practical Methods of International Studies), 2nd edition (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 199.

<sup>5</sup> According to Professor Yan, some Chinese scholars have already used the 'Tsinghua school' to refer to his research. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

Three features characterize the Tsinghua approach. First, its motivation originates in a desire to enrich modern IR theory and, no less importantly, to draw policy lessons for China's rise today.<sup>6</sup> Second, it seeks to do so by drawing on China's political thought from the golden age of Chinese philosophy in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period (770–222 BC). No one could fail to notice this as the most distinctive feature of the Tsinghua approach, and where a Chinese consciousness is in full display. And third, as mentioned, it applies Yan's own brand of scientific method to the analysis of ancient Chinese thought. In doing so he is trespassing on the subfield of International Political Theory (which, it must be pointed out in the present context, is almost entirely Eurocentric), though he makes no reference to this and may be unaware of it.

But is there yet a Tsinghua school? A 'school,' if the term is not used too loosely, must possess a distinctive and systematic approach to an area of study, with relatively well established signature method and arguments, while leaving room for further development. The English school, for example, is noted for its pluralistic approach and signature argument with respect to 'international society'.<sup>7</sup> The Copenhagen school develops a theory of 'securitization' informed by speech-act theory, and uses discourse analysis to reveal the social construction of security issues.<sup>8</sup> The Cambridge school within the history of political thought, to use an example from a different field which will become relevant in our later discussion, blends political history and the history of political thought through a distinctive method of analyzing both the meaning and context of 'language'.<sup>9</sup> The Tsinghua scholarship on ancient Chinese thought, modern IR theory, and current Chinese foreign policy, of which *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* is the main embodiment, but which also includes associated Chinese-language works not yet translated into English,<sup>10</sup> however, has neither thought hard about its method nor fully developed its theoretical argument. A Tsinghua school will demand far more work in theory, method, and empirical research.

<sup>6</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 200.

<sup>7</sup> For overviews, see Tim Dunne, 'The English School', in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 267–85; Richard Little, 'The English School's Contribution to the Study of International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2000), pp. 395–422.

<sup>8</sup> See principally, Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> James Tully, ed., *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988); J. G. A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> These are scattered in Yan Xuetong and Xu Jin, *Zhongguo Xianqin guojiajian zhengzhi sixiang xuandu (Pre-Qin Chinese Thoughts on Foreign Relations)* (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2008); and Yan Xuetong and Xu Jin et al., *Wangba tianxia sixiang ji qidi (Thoughts of World Leadership and Implications)* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2009), as well as the many articles published in the journal *Guoji zhengzhi kexue (Quarterly Journal of International Politics)*, which is edited from Tsinghua.

## The Indigenization of China's International Studies

These points will be developed in later sections. We need first to place the project within the larger disciplinary context of China's international studies. Its significance here lies in the fact that it represents the first true indigenization of China's IR discipline. Indigenization means that rather than relying entirely on IR concepts and theories imported from the West, Chinese scholars are now consciously trying to enrich existing theories or develop new ones by drawing on Chinese concepts and thought. Thus in this book we no longer see the introduction of Western theories, as was characteristic of China's theoretical IR in the 1980s and 1990s, but instead a critical engagement with these theories through the lens of indigenous Chinese resources.

A brief overview of the evolution of China's international studies helps better to appreciate the place of the Tsinghua approach in the disciplinary history of Chinese IR. This history can be roughly divided into five phases.<sup>11</sup> During the first phase, from 1949 to 1963, China had no academic International Relations discipline as such. The field, if it could be so called, was commonly referred to as 'international studies', and research consisted in the form of internal reference materials and research reports prepared for the government. There were few publicly available academic publications, and scholarly works based on independent research were simply forbidden. The second phase, over the period 1963–1978, was defined by two epochal events in the history of revolutionary PRC: the Cultural Revolution on the domestic scene and the Sino-Soviet split on the international front. The Sino-Soviet split was the major stimulus behind the government's decision to enhance China's international research and teaching. The significance of this period consists in the institutional foundation it laid for the later development of Chinese IR; China now had for the first time in its history a set of quasi-academic institutions for the study of international relations. But in terms of research methods, focus, and style, this phase differed little from the first, and indeed became even more ideological as a result of the Cultural Revolution.

IR as an independent academic discipline in China began with the third phase, between 1978 and 1990. The fundamental factors of this change were the 'reform and opening up' process that Deng Xiaoping initiated and the relatively relaxed international environment of the 1980s. This was when

<sup>11</sup> The following account draws on Qin Yaqing, 'Why is There No Chinese International Relations Theory?', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2007), pp. 313–40; Wang Yizhou, 'Xulun' ('Preface'), in Wang Yizhou and Yuan Zhengqing, eds., *Zhongguo guoji guanxi yanjiu 1995-2005 (IR Studies in China 1995-2005)* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2006), pp. 1–60; Ni Shixiong, Su Changhe, and Jin Yingzhong, 'Zhongguo guoji wenti yanjiu 60 nian' ('China's International Studies in 60 Years'), in Yang Jiemian, ed., *Duiwai guanxi yu guoji wenti yanjiu (Foreign Relations and International Studies)* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2009), pp. 211–17.

China, lacking a disciplinary foundation, began the historically unprecedented process of learning and importing Western (predominately American) IR. It was also when, in the final years of the decade, Chinese scholars began to ponder on the Western, and especially American, dominance of IR studies in China, and to consider whether or not China needed to develop its own IR theories. The earliest musings on Chinese theories of IR occurred in 1987 during China's first major IR theory conference in Shanghai, with the proposal that China needed 'IR theory with Chinese characteristics'.<sup>12</sup> Since then, the question of whether or not China needs its own brands of IR theories, what such theories would look like, and how to go about creating them has become a staple of Chinese IR research.

The fourth phase, between 1990 and 2000, was apparent in a further awakening of social scientific theory consciousness and of IR as an independent academic discipline distinct from policy advocacy and interpretation. This period saw a stepping up of imported Western IR, measured in Chinese translations of Western works, multiplied use of Western theoretical approaches, and growingly critical and independent perspectives among Chinese scholars. The field also became aware of the importance of methodology; China displayed in the early 2000s the kind of methodological debates that have characterized Western IR since the 1960s.<sup>13</sup> The deepening discussion on Chinese theories of IR is another noteworthy feature of this period. According to some observers, the debate in the 1990s had more or less solved the question of whether or not China needs its own IR theories; the next question was that of how to create them.<sup>14</sup>

We are now a decade on from the beginning of the fifth phase. Since 2000, China has imported almost all the theoretical approaches currently in vogue in the West—including mainstream, less influential or even marginal ones such as the English School, feminism, and critical theory. Chinese IR has also begun to resemble Western IR in its carrying on of theoretical debates among different schools. A notable development during this phase is the coining and promotion of the term 'Chinese School' (*Zhongguo xuepai*). If 1978 to 1990 was the pre-theory phase and 1990 to 2000 the initial

<sup>12</sup> Shi Bin, 'Guoji guanxi yanjiu 'Zhongguohua' de lunzheng' ('Debates on the 'Sinicization' of International Relations Study'), in Wang Yizhou and Yuan Zhengqing, *Zhongguo guoji guanxi yanjiu 1995-2005*, pp. 518-45, at 522; Ren Xiao, 'Zou zizhu fazhan zhilu: zhenglun zhong de 'Zhongguo xuepai'' ('Taking the Independent Development Route: the 'Chinese School' in Dispute'), *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu (International Politics Quarterly)*, No. 2 (2009), pp. 15-28, at 17.

<sup>13</sup> A good example of the Chinese debate is Qin Yaqing, Yan Xuetong, Zhang Wenmu, Shi Yinhong and Feng Shaolei, 'Guoji guanxi yanjiu fangfa bitan' ('Methodology in the Studies of International Relations: A Pen Discussion'), *Zhongguo shehui kexue (Social Sciences in China)*, No. 1 (2004), pp. 78-93.

<sup>14</sup> Qin Yaqing, 'Zhongguo guoji guanxi lilun' ('Chinese Theories of International Relations'), in Wang Yizhou, ed., *Zhongguo duiwai guanxi zhuanxing 30 nian (The Transformation of China's Foreign Relations in Thirty Years)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2008), pp. 306-43, at 320.

phase of theory learning, the period since 2000 represents the deepening of theory learning and the beginning of theory building.<sup>15</sup>

It is against this disciplinary backdrop that we can fully appreciate the significance in the history of Chinese IR of the Tsinghua approach. There has, of course, been plenty of talk about the need for Chinese IR to be indigenized, and almost universal recognition of the usefulness (and even necessity) of using traditional Chinese resources. But these comments have been largely rhetorical. Frequent references to traditions seemed more related to intuitions on their usefulness than to a substantive understanding of their use. Even in the few rare exceptions—Peking University Professor Ye Zicheng’s study on China’s ancient diplomatic thought, for example—the focus was more on describing Chinese thought and comparing it with Western thought than on the next step of how Chinese thought might enrich existing IR theories and help develop new ones.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, few—including advocates of a ‘Chinese school of IR’—clarified just how indigenization could be carried out or what the resulting products would look like. The Tsinghua approach has thus taken an important step in advancing the indigenization agenda of Chinese IR. This is not to say that it is the only or most fruitful approach, but that it is a bold and serious scholarly effort deserving praise for its pioneering spirit.

## The Tsinghua Approach and the ‘Chinese School of IR’

By way of this discussion, a brief comment can be made on the debate about the ‘Chinese school of IR’, which seems to have died down since its heyday from 2006 to 2008. *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* includes the essay (Appendix 3) entitled ‘Why Is There No Chinese School of International Relations Theory?’ In it, Yan forcefully rejects the legitimacy and validity of the ‘Chinese school’ project. But as it turns out, it is the ‘Chinese school’ label, rather than its substantive intellectual agenda, that he is rejecting. Yan in fact shares a good deal with proponents of the ‘Chinese school’ on how to develop IR theories in China. And it seems that he has in places misrepresented the latter’s intellectual agenda. The debate as framed by his essay is hence not particularly useful in advancing the Chinese IR theoretical agenda. On the other hand, however, it does enable us to see the nature of the debate more clearly; that there is, in fact, no unbridgeable gap between the two sides of the debate, or at least between Professor Yan and his main target, Professor Qin Yaqing of China Foreign Affairs University.

<sup>15</sup> Qin Yaqing, ‘Chinese Theories of International Relations’, pp. 306–43; Qin Yaqing, ‘Why is There No Chinese International Relations Theory?’, pp. 313–40.

<sup>16</sup> Ye Zicheng, *Chunqiu Zhanguo shiqi de Zhongguo waijiao sixiang (China’s Diplomatic Thought during the Spring and Autumn and Warring State Periods)* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong shehui kexue chubanshe, 2003).

Professor Yan gives three reasons for rejecting the ‘Chinese school’ project. First, people other than creators of well-known IR theories generally label them. Second, theories are rarely named after countries; it is more common for a theory to be named according to its core arguments, its creator, or the institution in which it has developed. Third, the term ‘Chinese’ is too broad to designate any theory developed within China. No theory or school of thought can represent the diversity and complexity of China’s history and tradition. It seems to me that these arguments, although reasonable, are largely semantic on the appropriateness of the ‘Chinese school’ label, rather than substantive on why the intellectual agenda itself is on the wrong track.

Yan also argues that if IR were to be viewed as a scientific inquiry, then IR theory should be universally valid. Chinese scholars have the advantage of being able to draw on China’s ancient political thought to build new theories, but this does not mean that theories so created are thereby Chinese. One reason is that new theories, even if they do draw primarily on Chinese thought, have to be developed on the basis of existing IR theory. Second, good theories are built by drawing on all important theoretical traditions. Theories developed by Chinese scholars, therefore, would necessarily contain multiple theoretical components. He therefore counsels that ‘what Chinese scholars should worry about most is not the name but rather giving birth to the baby.’<sup>17</sup>

Implicit in this line of argument is the assumption that the aim of the ‘Chinese school’ is to ‘replace contemporary international relations theory’<sup>18</sup> with entirely Chinese ones. But that is not in fact an assumption shared by the most important proponents of the ‘Chinese school.’ Qin Yaqing, who is in many ways the most sophisticated thinker on the ‘Chinese school’ project, holds that although such a school will originate from local (Chinese) culture, historical traditions, and practical experience, it should eventually be able to transcend local traditions and experiences in being universally valid. The school seeks to create an IR theoretical system of both Chinese substance and universal significance by discovering China’s traditional thought and practice, as well as by drawing on Western IR theories. Its purpose is not to displace existing IR theories but to enrich both them and existing human knowledge.<sup>19</sup> It might well be the case that, having absorbed criticisms (very likely including Yan’s) directed against his earlier works on the same subject, Qin framed his argument in this essay of 2008 somewhat differently. But it is striking that both men, who seem to occupy polar positions of the debate,

<sup>17</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 256.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>19</sup> Qin Yaqing, ‘Chinese Theories of International Relations’, pp. 306–43; This point is repeated in Yaqing Qin, ‘Development of International Relations Theory in China: Progress through Debates’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2011), pp. 231–57, at 250.



agree on two fundamental points: that it is important in developing a Chinese IR research program to discover traditional Chinese thought, and that the purpose of such a program is not to displace existing IR theories but to enrich them. It is possible that Yan and Qin still disagree on the nature of theory, methods, and other specifics of theory building in the Chinese context, and both scholars have yet to clarify what their fundamental disagreements are and how consequential they will be for the development of Chinese IR. But Yan and Qin do at least share important common ground with regards to the pathway and purpose of the theoretical enterprise in Chinese IR.

I agree with Yan that the ‘Chinese school’ label is misconceived, and have no intention of defending the ‘Chinese school’ project. But given the common ground, the debate about the misconception of the label, which is relatively inconsequential, should give way to a more productive debate on substantive issues that could advance the theoretical agenda of Chinese IR, which is really what is at stake. Indeed, given Yan’s pioneering work on pre-Qin thought, Qin has already placed his work within the ‘Chinese paradigm of IR theory’!<sup>20</sup> Moreover, there is every possibility that outside observers may interpret *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* as proposing the rudiments of Chinese theories of international relations. The agreement between two of the most prominent IR scholars in China today also suggests a possible and important future trajectory of Chinese IR: that of further indigenization through a synthesis of traditional Chinese thought and modern IR theory.

## The Scientific Method and Ancient Chinese Thought

Yan apparently believes that the positivist scientific method can be unproblematically applied to analysis of ancient Chinese thought contained in classical texts. He therefore does not, and might not have felt the need to, justify its use. His brief discussion on methodology appears in two places. The first is by way of responding to certain criticisms of his study with regards to the authenticity of the pre-Qin works and consequently the reliability of conclusions based on them, and the relevance of ancient Chinese experiences to modern international relations. He argues that the authenticity of ancient works has no bearing on our ability to draw lessons from them, and that ancient Chinese history can provide us with many instructive examples of international politics.

The second is reflected in a quotation contained in the chapter by Yang Qianru, one of the book’s three critical reviews of Yan’s work. As it

<sup>20</sup> Qin Yaqing, ‘Chinese Theories of International Relations’, pp. 306–43.

encapsulates Yan's methodological and theoretical assumptions, it is worth quoting in full:

What we are researching is contemporary international relations. We study ancient thought in order to more accurately understand the present, not the past. Since there is no way of establishing the reliability of the events recounted in the works of the pre-Qin masters, when we study them we focus on their thought rather than on the events themselves. In studying intellectual history, one often seeks to understand texts in the context of their time. This is necessary, but for international relations studies we cannot be—nor do we want to be—concerned with the real meaning of the texts because there is still no consensus regarding the real meaning of pre-Qin works and we cannot use different meanings as a basis for research and discussion. Scientific research can be undertaken only on the basis of common standards and shared ideas; hence, the evidence-based historical research method comparable to the scientific method can do nothing other than to take the literal meaning as its standard because most people do not disagree about the literal meaning. Rather than trying to understand the words of ancient authors by relying on what someone today imagines or on historical facts the authenticity of which cannot be guaranteed, it is better to understand the thought of the ancients from the point of view of an abstract human society. If it is said that neither is able to truly reflect the real face of history of that time, then at least the latter method is more in tune with the purpose of international relations theory, because the purpose of theoretical research is to seek what is universally reasonable, not to look for particularity.<sup>21</sup>

Here again Yan brings up the issue of historical authenticity, but interestingly he argues that because the authenticity of either the classical texts or the events recorded in them cannot be certain, we should not be concerned with the 'real meaning' of the texts but rather focus on their 'literal meaning.' Also worth noting is the instrumental motivation behind studying ancient Chinese thought, wherein the aim is not to achieve a better understanding of the ideas themselves but rather to use them as an intellectual repository for meeting contemporary theoretical and policy needs.

Let us note at once that this is a common practice among contemporary IR scholars, and that such instrumentality has self-imposed limits on the promise of the project. That providing philosophical foundations for contemporary theories, explaining and justifying contemporary policies, and defining and structuring theoretical and policy debates are among the most common uses of classical authors within contemporary international thought and practice is well recognized.<sup>22</sup> If Yan is using ancient Chinese thought for both modern IR theory and the policy problem of China's rise, then that is perhaps only to be expected, since 'Theory is always *for* someone

<sup>21</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, pp. 155–6.

<sup>22</sup> Beate Jahn, 'Classical Theory and International Relations in Context', in Beate Jahn, ed., *Classical Theory in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1–24, at 2.

and *for* some purpose'.<sup>23</sup> Yet if the instrumentality is too strong, one can lose sight of the fact that the classical texts themselves are a fruitful avenue of research in international relations, and that studying Chinese classical texts and ideas may make a very important contribution to the subfield of International Political Theory, which has so far hardly taken classical Chinese thought seriously or been able to do so.<sup>24</sup> This criticism would be unfair if directed entirely toward the Tsinghua project, since this project has been fruitful in a number of ways, and any project has limits in both aim and scope. But it does raise awareness of the fact that the Tsinghua approach is one among several ways to study ancient Chinese thought, and that the subject has more scholarly potential than the Tsinghua approach has recognized.

The Tsinghua approach, however, has a deeper methodological problem than that of instrumentality. Neither historical authenticity nor relevance is at issue, as some of Yan's critics have charged. Rather, it concerns two other different sorts of problem. First is the basic but vexing problem of how to understand ancient thought through studying the classical texts. Here, Yan's answer seems to be 'focus on the literal meaning rather than the real meaning.' It is based on the assumption that the literal meaning of the classical texts is knowable while the real meaning is not. His strategy of focusing on the former and ignoring the latter reduces the whole problem of methodology to an apparently simple literal reading of the texts. In effect, the question of methodology disappears. Studying ancient Chinese thought thus appears to require no distinctive method other than the scientific method.

But it can be pointed out that, first of all, the distinction between 'real meaning' and 'literal meaning' is somewhat underdeveloped. What does 'real meaning' refer to? What is the relationship between 'real meaning' and 'literal meaning,' if any? Second, and more important, studying the 'literal meaning' may not be sufficient for understanding the thought contained in the text; on the contrary, it may result in misunderstandings and misrepresentations. Indeed, if the Cambridge school is any guide within the study of international political thought, then such study must necessarily take into account both the meaning and the context of classical texts.<sup>25</sup> In other

<sup>23</sup> Robert Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', in Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 204–54, at 207.

<sup>24</sup> A recent attempt is Luke Glanville, 'Retaining the Mandate of Heaven: Sovereign Accountability in Ancient China', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2010), pp. 323–43.

<sup>25</sup> For discussions on the relevance of the Cambridge school, especially the work of Quentin Skinner, in IR, see Gerard Holden, 'Who Contextualizes the Contextualizers? Disciplinary History and the Discourse about IR Discourse', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2002), pp. 253–70; Duncan S. A. Bell, 'Political Theory and the Functions of Intellectual History: A Response to Emmanuel Navon', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 29, No.1 (2003), pp. 151–60.

words, such study must reveal not only what the author was saying but also what he/she was doing with his/her arguments in his/her own historical, political, intellectual, and linguistic context.<sup>26</sup> The study of ancient Chinese thought requires a method of its own beyond the scientific method.

The second problem is that of presentism; that is, ‘contemporary assumptions are read back into classical authors instead of being opened up for reflection through the use of classical authors’.<sup>27</sup> This problem is pervasive in contemporary scholarship, which often employs classical writers to articulate particular positions, as in the famous example of taking Thucydides as the father of realism. The problem with this approach is not so much that it necessarily results in absurdities as that it relies on a predetermined account of international relations.<sup>28</sup> As Quentin Skinner says, ‘It will never be possible simply to study what any writer has *said* (especially in an alien culture) without bringing to bear our own expectations and pre-judgments about what they must be saying.’<sup>29</sup> And the danger is that scholars often approach the classical texts with preconceived paradigms, their own familiar criteria of classification and discrimination. The remedy must consist in understanding the classical writers in their own terms and their own context. Furthermore, it is argued that:

[I]t is a mistake to think that there is a timeless agenda of political questions that thinkers from all ages can be taken to be addressing; instead each thinker addresses the agenda of his or her own age in his or her own terms. It may be that their agendas can, in certain circumstances, be seen to be not dissimilar to ours, but this identification cannot be taken for granted; it has to be argued for on a case by case basis.<sup>30</sup>

If this argument is valid, it is well worth asking whether the analytical themes of ancient Chinese thought that Yan has identified were really those that preoccupied the ancients. Yan recognizes that ‘We must be very careful in applying concepts of contemporary international relations theory to the thought of the pre-Qin masters... because although there are instances in which these concepts and those of pre-Qin thought overlap, there are also differences’.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, in places he appears to have been (perhaps unconsciously) affected by it.

<sup>26</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), chapter 4.

<sup>27</sup> Beate Jahn, ‘Classical Theory and International Relations in Context’, pp. 3–4.

<sup>28</sup> Chris Brown, Terry Nardin, and Nicholas Rengger, ‘Introduction’, in Chris Brown, Terry Nardin, and Nicholas Rengger, eds., *International Relations in Political Thought: Texts from the Ancient Greeks to the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.1–15, at 3–4.

<sup>29</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, p. 58.

<sup>30</sup> Chris Brown, Terry Nardin, and Nicholas Rengger, ‘Introduction’, p. 4. See also, Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, p. 88.

<sup>31</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 24.

One of the areas where contemporary methodological assumptions have explicitly exerted influence on him is the use of the ‘levels of analysis’ tool in analyzing ancient Chinese thought. The result is a classification that puts the analytical perspectives of Mozi and Laozi on the level of the system, those of Guanzi and Hanfeizi on the level of the state, and those of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi on the level of the individual.<sup>32</sup> Such classification can of course be made—and it is interesting—but the question is how useful it is for understanding the thought of these thinkers. The ‘levels of analysis’ is a very modern methodological assumption in studying international relations. Most classical thinkers in the East as well as in the West made no firm distinctions between international and domestic politics, or among system, state, and individual levels. Yan recognizes that in pre-Qin texts ‘domestic politics and foreign affairs were not clearly distinguished and there was very little in the way of systematic work’.<sup>33</sup> Yet in using the ‘levels of analysis’ he has assigned the masters to pre-conceived methodological boxes, rather than reflected on contemporary assumptions through the masters’ ways of thinking. The point is not that this cannot be done, but that it may not be the most useful and innovative method. Not denying the insights this approach has generated, one can suggest that it has also obscured some distinctively Chinese modes of thinking on these issues.

Another example where contemporary assumptions are very much in play is the comment on Xunzi’s analytical method:

Although Xunzi’s understanding of interstate politics is quite markedly logical, according to the standard of modern science his analytical method is not scientific. His way of quoting examples to justify his arguments is not done well according to scientific positivism. Many of the examples he chooses come from historical legends. They lack any time for the events, background, or basic account and there is no way of ascertaining their authenticity. Moreover, his examples lack the necessary variable control and his way of using examples is by simple case-selection. Although this method is frequently used in modern international relations theory, its scientific value is poor.<sup>34</sup>

As Xu Jin notes in one of the book’s critical review chapters, these remarks are ‘a bit hard on the ancients’.<sup>35</sup> In fact, one may find it quite curious to judge pre-Qin thinkers according to modern scientific positivism. If that were the standard, then all the masters would fail the test. In fact, Xunzi is ‘the most orderly mind in early Chinese thought’,<sup>36</sup> his thinking noted for being ‘rigorous and hard-headed’.<sup>37</sup> But of course, that orderliness and rigor

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>36</sup> Frederick W. Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 61.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

are of an early Chinese kind, and we could no more subject Xunzi to our modern scientific assumptions than we could subject ourselves to the new scientific standards that will appear 2000 years hence. Doing so would prevent us from recognizing the distinctiveness of ancient thought that we are supposed to find.

A third example where Yan might have been influenced by contemporary assumptions—in this case, his own earlier research on the relationships among political, economic, and military power<sup>38</sup>—is his claim that political power is the basis for economic and military power.<sup>39</sup> Political, economic, and military power are modern categories, and a question can be raised on whether or not Xunzi can really be interpreted as so arguing, or if Yan has imposed his own prior understanding of power on Xunzi to make the latter's thinking appear familiar.

I now turn to the first methodological problem by way of a critical discussion of Yan's chapter on Xunzi (Chapter 2). Understanding ancient thought cannot just rely on the literal meaning of a text but must take into account both its meaning and context. This problem seems to have manifested itself on three levels. First, and most apparently, Yan often takes what Xunzi is referring to in a domestic context as his reflections on international politics—clearly an example of Yan having taken Xunzi's remarks out of context.

For example, Yan says that 'Xunzi thinks that the evil of human nature is the basic cause of interstate conflict'.<sup>40</sup> Yet Xunzi only implies that human nature is the root cause of human conflict, and seems to be referring to domestic rather than international society.<sup>41</sup> After discussing Xunzi's idea about how social norms can restrain human nature, which again appears to be domestically oriented, Yan shifts the topic to international norms: 'Xunzi's ideas about how to use norms to prevent interstate violent conflict has points in common with contemporary neoliberalism'.<sup>42</sup> But Xunzi has no explicit discussion on 'how to use norms to prevent *interstate* violent conflict' (emphasis added). The same problem appears in the claim: 'Xunzi thinks that if there were no social classes to repress human beings' natural desire to seek material goods, then interstate violent conflict could not be avoided'.<sup>43</sup> But the quotation from Xunzi that Yan uses to

<sup>38</sup> Yan Xuetong, 'The Rise of China and Its Power Status', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 1, No.1 (2006), pp. 5-33.

<sup>39</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 78.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>41</sup> Xunzi, 'Human Nature Is Evil', Chapter 23 in Shen Xiaohuan and Wang Xingxian, *Xunzi jijie (Collected Notes on the Xunzi)* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), pp. 434-49.

<sup>42</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 94.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

support this claim in fact shows that Xunzi is referring to a domestic context:

When distinctions are equal, then there is no sequence. When one grasps hold of equality, then there is no unity. When the mass of people are equal, then no one can be sent on commission. There is heaven and there is earth and hence up and down are to be distinguished. *As soon as an enlightened king holds power, he runs his state with regulations* (emphasis added).<sup>44</sup>

Now it may be countered that since Xunzi does not distinguish between international and domestic politics, it is legitimate to apply his thinking on domestic governance to international politics. Certainly, Thucydides and Machiavelli made no categorical distinction between domestic and international politics, and in the twentieth century Niebuhr and Carr advanced realism as a general approach to the study of politics.<sup>45</sup> Still, this assumption needs to be made explicit and the applicability demonstrated. This also shows that it is not enough to rely on the literal meaning of what Xunzi was saying, because such meaning can be so easily taken out of context.

This point can be further illustrated by Yan's interpretation of Xunzi's use of the Five Services system of the Western Zhou, on which his theoretical argument on international hierarchy is based (more on this in the next section). He writes:

According to the historical experience of the Five Services of the Western Zhou, Xunzi thinks that by relying on the relationship of near and far to establish interstate norms of different grades it is possible to repress interstate violent conflict. He thinks that the system of Five Services established by the Zhou was able to uphold the stability of the interstate system under the Western Zhou because this system involves different grades of state undertaking different areas of responsibility and hence this system of norms was effective: 'The norms of humane authority are to observe the circumstances so as to produce the tools to work thereon, to weigh the distance and determine the tribute due. How could it then all be equal!' This is to say, interstate norms should be designed according to the differences between states rather than be the same for each state.<sup>46</sup>

Although differentiated interstate norms might be effective in repressing interstate conflict, however, this does not seem to be Xunzi's intention in using the Five Services example. Rather, he is countering the argument that King Tang of Shang and King Wu of Zhou cannot control distant states like Chu and Yue. When he says 'How could it then all be equal', he is reminding his opponents that the Zhou court exercises differential degrees of control over its subordinate states and therefore that it does have—albeit unequal—control over distant states as well as the nearer ones. True to the title of the

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>45</sup> William C. Wohlforth, 'Realism', in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, pp. 131–49, at 134.

<sup>46</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 96.

chapter where this discussion takes place, Xunzi is correcting for him a misunderstanding about the rule of Kings Tang and Wu.<sup>47</sup> It seems clear in this case that Xunzi is not making an argument about the relationship between interstate norms and systemic stability. Yan has therefore taken the passage out of its context and misrepresented Xunzi's intention. This is not to say that the theoretical implications that Yan derives from his reading—hierarchical norms in international politics—are not useful. On the contrary, as will be shown in the next section, they are highly suggestive. But the value of the conclusion should not obscure the problem of the method.

On a second level, the problem is that Yan reads Xunzi from his scientific methodological perspective, failing to see that many of Xunzi's remarks are ideological in character and thus cannot be subjected to a modern scientific reading. Although Xunzi is the most orderly mind in early Chinese thought, he may not be the scientific thinker that Yan has read him to be. Earlier we noted that Yan criticizes Xunzi for being not scientific enough. This criticism, we can now assert, misses the point of an important part of Xunzi's argument.

It is essential to recognize that Xunzi was not writing in an intellectual and ideological vacuum, but during a period of dramatic political and ideological transformation. After all, this was a period when the so-called 'hundred schools' competed with one another not only for intellectual allegiance but also for political following. Xunzi, as the last of the great Confucians in ancient China, also had his own intellectual and political agendas. His argument was ideological in the sense that he preached his own doctrines in the hope that wise rulers would adopt them. This ideological motivation, which necessarily resulted in the partiality of the argument and the selectivity of the evidence, makes Xunzi hardly amenable to a modern positivist reading, for Xunzi was as much promoting his own brand of Confucian statecraft as he was seeking 'universal truth'.

This ideology is discernable throughout the text. When Xunzi emphasizes the distinction between *Wang*, *Ba*, *Qiang*, he is preaching that wise rulers should adopt *Wang* (humane authority) as the ruling strategy. When he thinks that the *tianxia* ('all under heaven') is not a status that the ruler can win by violence,<sup>48</sup> he is advising rulers to be benevolent, possibly with his intellectual and ideological opponents such as Shen Buhai and Shang Yang, who advocate Legalist methods, in mind. When he thinks that humane authority is the highest form of world power resting on the morality of the ruler and cites the superior morality of King Tang of the Shang and King Wu of the Zhou, who attained leadership of the *tianxia* on the basis of

<sup>47</sup> Xunzi, 'A Discussion of Corrections', Chapter 18 in Shen Xiaohuan and Wang Xingxian, *Collected Notes on the Xunzi*, pp. 321–45.

<sup>48</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 85.



the small territories of Bo and Hao, respectively, as examples,<sup>49</sup> he is counselling that rulers must develop morality in ruling. As Yan recognizes, the examples that Xunzi uses—King Tang of the Shang and King Wu of the Zhou and how they supposedly unified the *tianxia* with morality, examples  
 5 also favoured by Confucius and Mencius, the other two great Confucians—are mythical and legendary. But that of course in part demonstrates the ideological character of Xunzi's argument. It thus becomes apparent that the implications which Yan has derived from Xunzi and which he tries to make into a universally applicable scientific theory are at least in part based  
 10 on Xunzi's ideology.

This point also suggests an important problem with Yan's claim that:

We study ancient thought in order to more accurately understand the present, not the past. Since there is no way of establishing the reliability of the events recounted in the works of the pre-Qin masters, when we study them we focus on  
 15 their thought rather on the events themselves.<sup>50</sup>

In fact, we do have to be concerned with the events, not those events as recounted by the philosophers, but those which have been carefully established by rigorous historical research conducted by both traditional and modern historians. For the events as demonstrated by careful historical  
 20 research, even though their authenticity may still be uncertain ('truth' may never be conclusively established by history or philosophy or even science itself), can help us uncover the ideological dimension of ancient Chinese thought and thus guard us against taking ideology for scientific or logical argument. It is also only through an appreciation of historical events—how-  
 25 ever tentative our understanding of them may be—that we can hope to understand the contexts of the classical thought. It is thus, I believe, indefensible to ignore the 'factual' dimension of ancient Chinese thought.<sup>51</sup>

On a third and deeper level, the problem is that Yan has almost completely ignored the larger political contexts and implications of Xunzi's thought, some of which demand close reflection, especially given the purpose of using  
 30 Xunzi for enriching modern IR theory and providing lessons for China's rise. One of the main ways in which Yan draws on Xunzi is through the latter's ideas of social distinctions, norms, and hierarchy. These concepts are of fundamental importance to Xunzi because if human nature is evil, as he  
 35 has stipulated, then only the establishment of hierarchical social norms enforced by the ruler will be able to restrain and direct it toward positive outcomes. In order for this to happen, however, there must be a strong ruler and a powerful state in the first place. Xunzi therefore rigorously proclaims

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86–7.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>51</sup> Two very relevant recent IR works in this regard are Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Yuan-kang Wang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

and supports the elevation of the ruler. In fact, for Xunzi the ruler is the origin of almost everything important in social life.<sup>52</sup> A related implication is the importance of the state in Xunzi's thought, and he has indeed devoted extensive discussion to state-strengthening strategies.

Notice that Xunzi presents this system of thought mainly in the context of domestic society, and his logic requires the existence of a strong ruler to impose ethical standards and enforce social norms. His society is therefore 'ordered from the top, a creation of rulers (Xunzi does not here ask how their position came to exist or how they came to occupy it), to lift mankind out of a natural state of destructive strife.'<sup>53</sup> But in contrast to domestic politics, where the imposition of hierarchic order is the norm, how can one find in international politics a replica of Xunzi's ruler that is able to impose hierarchical norms on the constituent units? In Xunzi's idealized society, social norms were first developed and imposed by the sage-kings in an assumed original situation so far back into the past as to require no discussion,<sup>54</sup> but where can we find 'sage-kings' in international politics? Yan has not considered the problem of applying Xunzi's idea about social norms, which is made in a hierarchic, domestic political context, to an international political setting wherein some of the conditions (e.g. a strong ruler or central government buttressed by the state machine) necessary for the establishment of hierarchical norms are absent. In other words, Yan has here become more Confucian than realist in downplaying or even neglecting the problem of anarchy in international politics. Again this is not to say that social norms are impossible in international politics or that Xunzi's thought cannot be applied to international politics; international norms are now an established area for research, and Xunzi's thought clearly has important relevance for international politics. But it is to say that applying Xunzi cannot only rely on what Xunzi has said literally but also needs to take into account the context of his arguments.

Another extremely important feature of Xunzi's thought—one of great historical significance and recognized by historians since—is that the exaltation of the ruler and the state, and the regulation of social distinctions and the enforcement of social norms—two distinctive ideas of Xunzi—can when pushed to the extremes lead logically to a theory about authoritarian government maintained by the ruler's power and regulated by law (that is, by

<sup>52</sup> Kung-Chuan Hsiao, *A History of Chinese Political Thought*, pp. 190–91; Frederick W. Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China*, p. 62.

<sup>53</sup> David Shepherd Nivison, 'The Classical Philosophical Writings', in Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 745–812, at 794.

<sup>54</sup> Xunzi, 'A Discussion of Rites', Chapter 19 in Shen Xiaohuan and Wang Xingxian, *Collected Notes on the Xunzi*, pp. 346–78. See also, David Shepherd Nivison, 'The Classical Philosophical Writings', p. 797.

rewards and punishments and not by the rule of law).<sup>55</sup> Indeed, such a theory was first brought into existence by Xunzi's students Hanfeizi and Li Si, who became noted Legalists in Chinese history, and then in varied forms adopted by China's imperial rulers over the next two thousand years. Of course, we can no more blame Xunzi, who is decidedly more Confucian than Legalist, for the Legalist triumph in China than we can blame Plato for Hitler in the West,<sup>56</sup> but the theoretical flaw, ethical problem, and historical consequence of Xunzi's thought must be recognized, especially when using it for contemporary purposes. Every theory—ancient Chinese thought or modern IR theory—has its ethical and normative dimensions.<sup>57</sup> Without clarification of these matters, the Xunzi-derived argument risks being seen as promoting a Chinese model of post-imperial hierarchic international politics for China's hegemony, just as Zhao Tingyang's 'tianxia system' argument has been seen as an attempt to revive China's imperial mode of governance in the twenty-first century.<sup>58</sup>

## Ancient Chinese Thought and Modern International Relations Theory

Moving on from method to theory, the book makes a number of fascinating theoretical propositions. Rather than developing a new theory on the basis of pre-Qin thought, however, its main contribution is that of raising certain rudiments of such theories for future work. Recognizing this limitation, Yan acknowledges that 'no systematic theory has yet been created'<sup>59</sup> and identifies creating 'a new international relations theory on the basis of both pre-Qin thought and contemporary international relations theory'<sup>60</sup> as a future task. Much still needs to be done to advance the theoretical rigour and depth of the Tsinghua approach. It is due to this aspect of the work, coupled with the methodological problems discussed in the preceding section, that one may say that a Tsinghua school cannot yet be identified. Such a school is likely to be established when the theoretical promise that the book suggests is fully realized. This is not intended as a criticism of the book, since there are limits to what one book can accomplish, especially one that sets out to start a new area of research. It is more directed towards

<sup>55</sup> Kung-Chuan Hsiao, *A History of Chinese Political Thought*, pp. 205–06; Wang Gungwu, *The Chineseness of China: Selected Essays* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 173.

<sup>56</sup> Frederick W. Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China*, p. 63.

<sup>57</sup> Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, 'Between Utopia and Reality: The Practical Discourses of International Relations', in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 3–37.

<sup>58</sup> William A. Callahan, 'Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony', *International Studies Review*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (2008), pp. 749–61.

<sup>59</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 199.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

identifying areas of problems as well as of promise that future work may address and deliver. The following comments are made on the assumption that the aforementioned methodological problems do not compromise the validity and value of the theoretical implications so deduced.

Yan summarizes four theoretical implications. They are: the hierarchical structure of power; the function of hierarchical norms; the internalization of norms; and the fundamental importance of political power.<sup>61</sup> On international hierarchy, he argues:

Pre-Qin thinkers generally thought that power in both international and domestic society had a hierarchical structure. This is manifestly different from the assumptions of contemporary international relations theory. Contemporary international relations theory generally holds that international society is an anarchic system—that is, international actors play similar roles and their power relationships are equal—whereas domestic society has a hierarchical structure in which actors have different roles and power is expressed in terms of relations from top to bottom. If we look carefully at today's international system, however, we discover that the power relationships among members of the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund are all structured hierarchically and are not equal. . . . If we combine what contemporary international relations theory has to say about equality of power with the hierarchical idea of the pre-Qin thinkers we will arrive at a new way of thinking. For instance, in international society, relations between states are neither equal nor ranked from top to bottom. Rather they form a loose hierarchy. Domestic power relationships are determined by social norms, whereas international power relationships are determined by the capability of states. In the domestic system, hierarchical norms guide conduct in society, whereas in the international system norms of both hierarchy and equality direct state behaviour.<sup>62</sup>

This seems to propose a theory of international hierarchy by suggesting a loosening of the anarchy assumption prevalent in contemporary IR theory. Several comments can be made. First, anarchy in IR theory generally refers to the absence of a central authority—or world government—in international politics.<sup>63</sup> It does not mean that 'international actors play similar roles and their power relationships are equal'. In fact, the inequality of states' capabilities—an all too important defining characteristic of international politics—has long been recognized. Even Waltz has written about 'the virtues of inequality'.<sup>64</sup> The very concept of polarity is a reflection of the vast inequalities among states.<sup>65</sup> Second, it is not entirely clear conceptually what kind of hierarchy is meant here. The first sentence seems to imply a

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 212–14.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 212–13.

<sup>63</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 88.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 131–32.

<sup>65</sup> Randall L. Schweller, 'Entropy and the Trajectory of World Politics: Why Polarity Has Become Less Meaningful', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2010), pp. 145–63, at 149.

hierarchy of power, but the use of the examples of the membership of international organizations seems to imply a hierarchy of ranking or status. Third, the suggestion that 'in the international system norms of both hierarchy and equality direct state behaviour' is extremely interesting, but this is also where a fully developed theory is most needed.

It is important to point out that international hierarchy is increasingly becoming a prominent area of research, producing a burgeoning literature that the Tsinghua team seems to have overlooked.<sup>66</sup> That it has not been able to draw on the latest scholarship in this area is also apparent in the assertion that 'The distinction pre-Qin thinkers made between state power and international authority makes us realize that contemporary international relations theory lacks a distinction between power and authority. Furthermore, it lacks any research into the issue of authority.'<sup>67</sup> This was hardly true in 2005, when the present project began, and is much less so now, given the growing literature on international hierarchy and authority.<sup>68</sup> To gain greater international recognition, the Tsinghua team needs to speak to the latest scholarship while carefully developing the logic of its theories, so that these theories and the existing ones can be compared and the precise contribution of the Tsinghua approach assessed.

Yan also seems to be proposing a theory of hierarchical norms in international politics:

Pre-Qin thinkers generally believe that hierarchical norms can restrain state behaviour and thus maintain order among states, whereas contemporary international relations theorists think that, to restrain states' behaviour, norms of equality alone can uphold the order of the international system. If we look at history, we find that relations of absolute equality between states lead to violent conflict, and relations of absolute hierarchy lead to tyranny in which the strong

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); William C. Wohlforth, 'Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War', *World Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (2009), pp. 28–57; David C. Kang, 'Hierarchy and Legitimacy in International Systems: The Tribute System in Early Modern East Asia', *Security Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2010), pp. 591–622; and David C. Kang, 'Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks', *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (2003), pp. 57–85.

<sup>67</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 64.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, David Held and Anthony McGrew, eds., *Governing Globalization: Power, Authority, and Global Governance* (New York: Polity, 2002); Miles Kahler and David A. Lake, eds., *Governance in a Global Economy: Political Authority in Transition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); David A. Lake, 'Rightful Rules: Authority, Order, and the Foundations of Global Governance', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (2010), pp. 587–613; Katja Weber, *Hierarchy Amidst Anarchy: Transaction Costs and Institutional Choice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000); Alexander Cooley and Hendrik Spruyt, *Contracting States: Sovereignty Transfers in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Ian Hurd, 'Legitimacy and Authority in International Relations', *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (1999), pp. 379–408; Bruce Cronin and Ian Hurd, eds., *The UN Security Council and the Politics of International Authority* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

oppress the weak. If we unite the views of both ways of thinking, we may suppose that a combination of norms of equality and norms of hierarchy is best for upholding international order.<sup>69</sup>

Again this points to an important aspect of international politics, and the suggestion that ‘a combination of norms of equality and norms of hierarchy is best for upholding international order’ is very interesting. But the question, as ever, is how this can be done, in theory as well as in practice. Where and how can hierarchical norms be generated and accepted by diverse international actors? In other words, we will need a theory of the genesis and internalization of hierarchical norms in international politics. Furthermore, this discussion seems to point to the important issue of international justice, which the book has largely neglected.

A third distinctive claim is that political power is the basis of economic and military power and the foundation of hegemony:

... the conversion of political power into military and economic power is the basis for a state to attain international leadership. From this we can establish a pyramidal framework for hegemonic theory in which hegemony is based on hard power, and hard power on political power. The wider and more solid the foundations of political power are, the stronger and greater the economic and military power it can generate.<sup>70</sup>

Although the meaning of economic and military power is intuitively obvious, it is not, however, clear what political power means. At times, Yan appears to equate political power with the result of state policy; at one point he seems to regard it as ‘the power of political manipulation’.<sup>71</sup> In an earlier work, it is interpreted ‘as a state’s capability of mobilization,’ including domestic and international capabilities of mobilization.<sup>72</sup> Still, what are the components of such mobilization capabilities? How do they change and how can they be measured? There is now a huge literature on power in international relations<sup>73</sup> which does not seem to have been extensively used. In this area, too, a more elaborate theory of power, including its origins, components and effects, and especially the relationships among political, economic, and military power, needs to be developed on the basis of relevant ideas from ancient Chinese thought, Yan’s own distinguished work on Chinese power in international politics, and the latest IR scholarship on power. At the moment, it can be briefly noted that there may be a contradiction between the conception of political power and that of economic and

<sup>69</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 213.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>72</sup> Yan Xuetong, ‘The Rise of China and Its Power Status’, p. 21.

<sup>73</sup> For overviews, see Janice Bially Mattern, ‘The Concept of Power and the (Un)discipline of International Relations’, in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, pp. 691–8; David A. Baldwin, ‘Power and International Relations’, in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons, eds., *Handbook of International Relations* (London: Sage, 2002), pp. 177–91.

military power. The latter is power defined in terms of attributes (resources of material capabilities), which is the dominant understanding of power among realists. But political power does not seem to be conceptualized in terms of such attributes—or, if it is, it is not clear what such attributes are.

5 Among the ‘four faces of power’,<sup>74</sup> where does political power belong? And among the various approaches to power analysis, including realist, constructivist, and critical ones, which one is Yan adopting? If none, then what is the theoretical foundation?

Yan also suggests a theory of hegemonic power, proposing that the nature of the hegemonic state may determine the degree of international stability:

... the theory of hegemonic stability in contemporary international relations theory has overlooked the relationship between the nature of hegemonic power and the stability of the international order... Not only did the pre-Qin thinkers provide a concept corresponding to hegemonic power—namely, humane authority—but they also recognized that the core difference between the two was in morality. According to their way of thinking, we can suppose that the level of morality of the hegemon is related to the degree of stability of the international system and the length of time of its endurance.<sup>75</sup>

If this logic is valid—that it is the hegemonic state’s morality rather than material capability that determines international stability—the theoretical question becomes that of how to define states’ morality and how to theorize its sources, change, and effects. Although the existing literature has some discussion on moral authority in international politics,<sup>76</sup> this does not seem to be the same as the morality of the state. In what sense can we talk about the morality of the state? Does it come down to the quality of the ruler, the policy of the state, or something else? How should concepts such as ‘international benevolent authority’<sup>77</sup> be defined? A different sort of question also worth asking is: Is there any intrinsic reason why ancient Chinese thought has placed so much emphasis on the nature of the state, in contrast to certain Western thought such as contemporary realism, where this factor simply fails to register? Needless to say, all the theories proposed above, with their logical structures fully explicated, will also need rigorous empirical testing, involving some difficult methodological questions.

At this point it needs to be pointed out that this book is obviously unlike a traditional research monograph, with a careful research design to tackle a specific research question. It is a set of articles with an overarching theme, but not an overall research design aimed at a particular research question. This seems to have been determined by the way in which Yan organized the project. He has assigned different scholars to study different thinkers and

<sup>74</sup> See Janice Bially Mattern, ‘The Concept of Power’, pp. 691–8.

<sup>75</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, pp. 64–5.

<sup>76</sup> Rodney Bruce Hall, ‘Moral Authority as a Power Resource’, *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (1997), pp. 591–622.

<sup>77</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 65.

then weaved their findings into a coherent conclusion. It will, however, serve the further development of this scholarship to focus on one theoretical proposition or research question and then thoroughly develop the theoretical logic, methodological procedure, and empirical evaluation, all in one careful research design. 5

From a somewhat different angle, it is also very interesting to note that apart from suggesting the aforementioned explanatory theories to explain events by providing accounts of causal sequence, Yan also engages a kind of normative theory in proposing what needs to be done. For example, based on the understanding that hierarchical norms can contribute to conflict prevention and international stability, he argues strongly that such norms need to be established in order to ensure international equity, citing China's cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a positive example and Japan's cooperation with ASEAN as a negative one.<sup>78</sup> 10  
The best illustration, however, is that of his remarks on the international impact of China's rise: 15

From the point of view of the world as a whole, we can reflect on how China's rise can be of benefit to the stability of the international order and the progress of international norms. According to pre-Qin thought, China's rise may have two different strategic goals, namely, to establish either a humane authority or hegemony. The former is a comparatively harmonious international system; the latter is the more commonly seen international system. Similarly, the world is faced with two options during China's rise: either to establish a new type of international order or to repeat an American-style hegemonic order. The establishment of a new international order requires changing not only the international power structure but also international norms.<sup>79</sup> 20 25

In connection with this normative dimension, it may be pointed out that by virtue of this book Yan has become what I will call a 'moral realist' or 'Confucian realist', an apparently unlikely but entirely explainable intellectual orientation in the Chinese context. Yan retains a key element of realist thought—that hard power is a central factor in international politics<sup>80</sup>—but his new and greater emphasis on political power as opposed to economic and military power, hierarchy as opposed to anarchy, and on international norms, state morality, political ideas, and of course the very idea of humane authority, makes him quite un-realist from the (Western) realist perspective. Yet his new moral orientation is natural given the influence of Xunzi and other pre-Qin thinkers, and the theoretical commitment he has retained from realism—the importance of hard power—can be explained by his understanding of China's need for more power during its rise. Thus, we see these two separate and apparently unrelated intellectual traditions 30 35 40

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90, 212.



converge to produce in him an incipient moral realism in Chinese IR. It provides a most interesting case of the sociology of knowledge in the globalization of IR studies today.

More substantively, it can be suggested that this moral realism, rather than being seen as degenerating on the realist ‘hardcore’, might promise a normatively more defensible direction in realist theorizing. As E. H. Carr noted long ago, neither unadulterated realism nor idealism could sustain international relations, and IR as a political science must have both ‘utopia and reality, morality and power’ in its system of political thought and practice.<sup>81</sup> In this regard, the blending of Confucian moralism and a realist understanding of power might produce surprising theoretical potentials. Historical Confucianism was largely an idealist philosophy subverted by Legalist statecraft at the dawn of China’s imperial age. Although it subsequently became the official imperial ideology, imperial China was in practice sustained by a combination of Confucian ideals and Legalist practices—‘Legalism with a Confucian facade’, as it is often called. What Confucianism lacked was thus an appreciation of the realities of power politics. What modern realism lacks, in contrast, is an explicit awareness of its ethical poverty. Moral realism thus promises to offer an integration of the key insights from both traditions that might remedy the deficiencies of each. In this respect, Yan has much more in common with classical realists, who have reserved an important place for norms and ethics in international politics, than with neorealists, who have all but purged the normative dimension in search of a science of international politics.<sup>82</sup> Yan may not acknowledge this, since he also claims to be studying international politics scientifically. Yet he has in fact theorized in a normative as well as explanatory manner, an entirely natural undertaking since ‘every international relations theory is simultaneously about what the world *is* like and about what it *ought* to be like’.<sup>83</sup> And it is now the ‘utopia’ in his theory—a moral dimension nurtured by Confucian philosophy—rather than the ‘reality’—the important but somewhat barren idea about the centrality of power—that gives his thought a most distinctive edge. It is also this Confucian normative dimension that promises to remedy the ethical sterility of many existing realist theories.

Yan’s moral realism is ethically more open-ended than contemporary realism, though it has its own problems. Contemporary realism, with its emphasis on anarchy, egoism, and groupism, leads to a prescription for prudence in amoral power politics, often ‘encouraging a monstrously

<sup>81</sup> E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, 2nd edition (London: Macmillan, 1946).

<sup>82</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>83</sup> Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, ‘Between Utopia and Reality’, p. 6 (emphasis in original).

distorted foreign policy' leaving no place for international justice.<sup>84</sup> Yan's argument, with its emphasis on hierarchy, norms, and morality, has more space for stability and justice in international politics. On the other hand, however, there is the potential danger of moral realism being misused and abused. Instead of facilitating an ethical mutual enriching between moralism and realism so that power can have a moral anchor and ideals can have a practical foundation, it might produce a dangerous ideology of power politics with moral trappings, which has occurred so frequently in Chinese history. It is this ethical dilemma that Yan's theory must address. Moreover, Yan's argument also imbues an undeniable statism and great power mentality, and even a sort of hegemonism, in unashamedly advocating and in places assuming Chinese hegemony in international politics, even though it is 'benevolent hegemony'—humane authority—that he is promoting. This is then, another ethical dilemma of Yan's theory—one that is all too strong for Chinese IR during this era of China's rise.

It is also worth pointing out that a good part of ancient Chinese thought—certainly including Xunzi—focused on how the ruler could unify the Chinese world (the *tianxia*). In Xunzi, we certainly find this ideology of unification as well as lots of discussions on state-strengthening strategies and governing institutions and philosophies. Yet in the book, Xunzi's strategy for obtaining the *tianxia* has become, at least in part, the strategy for China's rise. Without clarifying the different contexts of ancient Chinese thought and Yan's own motivation and intention in using this body of thought, and without addressing the ethical dilemma of his theory, misinterpretations of his argument may be inevitable.

Finally, it may be briefly suggested that the Tsinghua approach also needs a critical dimension. Critical theory 'sets out to identify and criticize a particular set of social circumstances and demonstrate how they came to exist'.<sup>85</sup> This type of theory is relevant because Yan clearly hints at the injustice and other problems of present international politics and hopes to use ancient Chinese thought to address some of these problems. More importantly, as will be shown in the next section, the theoretical and policy implications of Yan's work point inexorably to problems of China's own making and suggest, among other things, the need for political reform and policy change. After all, Yan has long been noted for his blunt and insightful criticisms of government policies. The potential for critical theory in the Tsinghua approach embodied by this book, therefore, is great. And it should be possible for a theory to be explanatory, critical, and normative

<sup>84</sup> Jack Donnelly, 'The Ethics of Realism', in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, pp. 150–62, at 159.

<sup>85</sup> Milja Kurki and Colin Wight, 'International Relations and Social Science', in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith, eds., *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 14–35, at 28.

at the same time. A good theory should seek to explain political realities, criticize existing politics, and advance desirable future directions.

## Moral Realism and China's Rise

If moral realism is interesting theoretically, it is also important in policy terms. The importance lies in two respects. First, it proposes truly original policy suggestions that are either often at odds with, or directly challenge, existing policies; second, it advances a new strategic discourse that promises to influence the intellectual landscape of China's foreign policy thinking. *Wang* (humane authority), *Ba* (hegemony), *Qiang* (Tyranny), international benevolent authority, strategic reliability—these are some of the most noteworthy terms that the book has brought to the policy circle, terms that have not previously been advanced or presented as such. Yan, of course, has long been noted for his provocation in policy discussions, but now he has found a new foundation—ancient Chinese thought—for his ‘radical’ ideas, ones that may appear palatable to many Chinese. It is often said that language is also politics. The new theoretical and policy language that this book presents (this is clearer in the original Chinese version) may stimulate an intellectual ferment in China's foreign policy.

The book's substantive policy suggestions revolve around the question of ‘how China can become the leading power in the world and what kind of world leadership it can provide’.<sup>86</sup> Bear in mind how radical this question would have been a decade ago, and still is in some quarters of the Chinese foreign policy community. It is a direct challenge to Deng Xiaoping's dictum laid down in the early 1990s that China should keep a low profile and never claim international leadership. The notion of Chinese leadership, therefore, has been almost a taboo, and re-broaching it (the last time China openly talked about international leadership was during the Maoist era of revolutionary zeal; Yan seems to have in mind the imperial era<sup>87</sup>) represents a significant shift in China's international thinking. Yan was among the first to recognize China's need for an activist foreign policy (back in the 1990s), and though more analysts have since joined the chorus, his voice remains distinctive and certainly, through this book, with great potential for policy impact in the future.

Yan's policy advice appears on three levels. On the level of grand strategy, he advocates that China make world hegemony—of a kind resembling the humane authority in ancient China—its foreign policy goal and distinguish itself from the ‘hypocritical hegemony’ of the United States.<sup>88</sup> Replacing the United States as the world hegemon, however, will require China to become

<sup>86</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 216.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 218, 219.

‘a more responsible state than the United States’,<sup>89</sup> and ‘to provide a better model for society than that given by the United States’.<sup>90</sup> He also suggests that China present to the outside world ‘a universal vision’ instead of ‘China’s special characteristics’.<sup>91</sup> Whatever grand strategies the PRC has adopted in the past,<sup>92</sup> benevolent hegemony is decidedly not one of them. And whatever vision it has presented does not appear to have been ‘universal’ (with the possible exception of the Maoist era). The present government seems more content with Deng’s dictum of ‘lying low’ than with initiating a policy transformation. But we now know from Yan that, contrary to what the Chinese government proclaims, hegemony or its superior strain—humane authority—is definitely on the policy menu of Chinese analysts. 5 10

The policy suggestion to China of world hegemony, like John Mearsheimer’s advice to the US government on containing China,<sup>93</sup> suggests something just as extraordinary in moral realism as in offensive realism. It is not that Yan’s argument seems a perfect vindication of certain American realists’ suspicions of China’s hegemonic ambition.<sup>94</sup> Yan is not here following realist logic in asserting China’s need for hegemony. His is a cultural Confucian rather than material realist theory, and the justification for Chinese hegemony seems to be based entirely on the attraction of the ancient ideas of *Wang* and *Ba*. Ancient concepts are apparently inescapable for contemporary Chinese scholars searching for China’s roles and strategies, as has been amply demonstrated in the cases of Yan Xuetong and Zhao Tinyang. And this suggests that some degree of indigenization of the theory and policy of China’s international relations may be inevitable. 15 20

But it is also apparent—as can be seen from the varied reactions to Zhao’s ‘tianxia system’ thesis—that the contemporary application of such ideas requires careful contextualization. And if imperial China is the model, we will also need a comparison between the China of then and of today in order to be convinced that the strategy of world hegemony attempted by imperial China in the pre-modern era<sup>95</sup> will be equally relevant and apposite to contemporary China in the twenty-first century. Yan is clearly assuming that international politics is a succession of hegemonies, and that China is next in 25 30

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65–6.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>92</sup> For a recent discussion, see Wang Jisi, ‘China’s Search for a Grand Strategy: A Rising Great Power Finds Its Way’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (2011), pp. 61–79.

<sup>93</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

<sup>94</sup> A recent example is Aaron L. Friedberg, ‘Hegemony with Chinese Characteristics’, *The National Interest*, July–August 2011, <http://nationalinterest.org/article/hegemony-chinese-characteristics-5439> (accessed on July 27, 2011), which cites Yan as a ‘conservative scholar.’

<sup>95</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 218. Whether imperial China indeed adopted such a strategy, however, is a research question that will require extensive historical research that the Tsinghua team has scarcely begun.

line to replace the United States as world hegemon.<sup>96</sup> But even if that were the case, a future Chinese hegemony is likely to look different from its imperial predecessor, given the profound historical changes that have taken place in the intervening centuries. A more refined argument based on a more detailed theoretical and historical analysis is therefore needed to clarify this part of the work.

Despite this problem, however, I also wish to point out that Yan's emphasis on morality and political, as opposed to economic and military, power is a healthy antidote to what Christopher Hughes has described as the 'geopolitik nationalism' that is now engrossing a notable section of China's strategic and intellectual community.<sup>97</sup> In this sense, the Tsinghua approach is to be welcomed, because it promotes a new and apparently more humane strategic discourse that challenges, with a great deal of intellectual force and institutional resources, some of the darkest corners of China's strategic thinking, promising a more healthy debate on China's future strategies. To be sure, Yan is also a nationalist, as he readily acknowledges,<sup>98</sup> but his 'neo-traditionalist nationalism' derives from a reconstructed indigenous Chinese tradition, and is at odds with the 'geopolitik nationalism' rooted in the modern West. This also suggests potential multiple sources of contemporary Chinese nationalism, and that we need not be unduly concerned about the possible triumph of the crudest version of *geopolitik* or other such kinds of nationalism as long as we can assume the existence of an adequate space for intellectual and policy debate in China.

Second, on the level of foreign policy and national power, Yan argues:

Learning from the distinction between humane authority and hegemony in pre-Qin times, the strategy for China's rise in its foreign policy should be distinct from that of the United States in three areas. First, China should promote an international order that takes as its principle a balance between responsibilities and rights... Second, China should reflect on the principle of reverse double standards, namely, that more developed countries should observe international norms more strictly than less developed ones... Third, China should promote the open principle of the traditional idea of all under heaven as one, that is, China should be open to the whole world and all the countries in the world should be open to China.<sup>99</sup>

In other words, China needs to be a more responsible power with a greater openness to the outside world—clearly a call for a more activist foreign policy. The invocation of the traditional idea of *tianxia* may make us wonder if, for Yan the IR scholar as well as for Zhao the philosopher,

<sup>96</sup> For an argument that the future of world politics may be characterized by decentered globalism without superpowers, see Barry Buzan, 'A World Order Without Superpowers: Decentered Globalism', *International Relations*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2011), pp. 3–25.

<sup>97</sup> Christopher Hughes, 'Reclassifying Chinese Nationalism: the Geopolitik Turn', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 20, No. 71 (2011), pp. 601–20.

<sup>98</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, p. 245.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 219–20.

*tianxia* might be an inescapable idea for many Chinese intellectuals. Yan also argues that China needs to expand its political power, or at least strategic reliability,<sup>100</sup> and to carry out balanced development of its political, military, and economic power.<sup>101</sup> This is a criticism of China's economy-centred national development strategy in the reform era—no insignificant criticism given the dominance of the ideology of economic development over the past 30 years. 5

Third, Yan also proposes specific strategies for China's rise. For example, in arguing that China must have strategic creativity, he suggests abandoning the long-standing principle of nonalignment and instead developing an alliance-building strategy for expanding China's international influence.<sup>102</sup> This, again, is a direct challenge to a major principle in current Chinese foreign policy. Though not as radical as it seems—after all, China had a military alliance with the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s—it would transform the spirit of China's 'independent and self-reliant foreign policy of peace' proclaimed in the early 1980s. It may also—and this is more relevant to Yan's moral realist argument—cost China's moral appeal, since this would make China no different from major Western states for which alliance has for centuries been a major tool of statecraft. 10 15

An intriguing but extremely important policy implication, one that Yan never makes explicit, is the need for political reform in the domestic arena. He argues that China needs to develop a personnel strategy to attract international talent; that it needs to practice new ideas domestically before they can be promoted internationally;<sup>103</sup> that it needs to invent systems and regulations because these are the key to ensuring the rise of a great power;<sup>104</sup> and that it must promote the moral principle of democracy.<sup>105</sup> He says 'A nation that cannot face historical events correctly is one that cannot win over the hearts of other states'.<sup>106</sup> None of these things can be effectively done without a good deal of domestic reform. The last point is particularly ironic; can we say that China (and the Chinese Communist Party) has faced historical events correctly and is consequently ready to win over the hearts of other states? Ultimately, it seems that Yan's moral realism is at its core a theory of domestic politics; unless China adopts political reforms internally it will never be able to claim humane authority internationally. 20 25 30

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102, 217.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 68.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

## Conclusion

*Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* signifies the appearance within International Relations of the Tsinghua approach. As might be expected of a new approach that seeks to explore an exciting frontier in Chinese IR, important methodological and theoretical problems remain to be addressed. The book will occupy an important place in the disciplinary history of Chinese IR, as it symbolizes the indigenization of China's international studies. As a creative intellectual endeavour to make Chinese contributions to international relations both as a field of study and a political practice, it has great theoretical potential and policy importance. From the perspective of Chinese IR, the book is significant in having begun a type of knowledge reconstruction of China's international relations from its traditional resources, suggesting an important direction in the theory and practice of China's international relations. From the perspective of the global IR discipline, its significance lies in having rendered the question 'why is there no non-Western international relations theory?' somewhat obsolete.<sup>107</sup> For, clearly, the book has provided the rudiments of Chinese theories of international relations, even though these emergent theories will need a great deal more work to command international recognition and compete in the global field of IR.

<sup>107</sup> Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, eds., *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia* (London: Routledge, 2010). See also relevant discussions published in *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2011).