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The End of History and the Last Confucian China's Role in the Reproduction of World Order

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Contents

1. Introduction.....	5
The End of History and the Last Confucian – Part I	15
2. Method	19
2.1. Ontological and Epistemological Basis.....	19
2.2. Qualitative Political Science.....	25
2.3. Hermeneutic Science Techniques.....	30
2.4. Analytical Narratives and Ideal-Types	36
2.5. Summary	41
3. The Belt and Road Initiative and World Trade.....	45
Part I - The Belt and Road Initiative	45
3.1. BRI in academic literature.....	49
3.2. An in-depth view on the BRI.....	54
3.2.1. Background	55
3.2.2. Motivations and Intentions.....	58
3.2.3. Design and Organization	60
3.2.4. Infrastructure and Geography.....	62
3.2.5. Geopolitics	65
3.2.6. Critique on the BRI	73
Part II – Trade as an Institution of World Order	76
3.3. Shared interests and shared culture	79
3.4. Institutions	80
3.5. Functional categories.....	82
3.6. Asian Institutions.....	84
3.6.1. Global Political Economy	85
3.6.2. Developmental States	86
3.6.3. Regional Production Networks	91
3.6.4. Functionalism in Asia.....	96

3.7.	Summary and Contextual Transition.....	98
4.	First generation Chinese IR	101
4.1.	Calls for Global IR and Calls for Chinese IR.....	101
4.2.	Three perspectives on contemporary Chinese IR theory.....	106
4.2.1.	Contemporary Confucianism	108
4.2.2.	Morality in Chinese IR theories	112
4.2.3.	Norms and Values in Chinese IR theories	121
4.2.4.	Power and world in Chinese IR theories	132
5.	Second Generation Chinese IR	143
	Part I – Relationality.....	145
5.1.	Balance of Relationships	146
5.2.	Multiple Worlds	149
5.3.	A theory of Relationality	154
	Part II - Subjectivity	157
5.4.	Searching for continuity and homogeneity.....	158
5.5.	Intervention I: The Sinocentric Subject.....	160
5.6.	Intervention II: The context of Chinese identity discourses.....	162
5.7.	Intervention III: Inconsistencies in China’s synthetic identity	165
5.8.	From sinocentric subjectivity to trans-subjectivity	169
5.8.1.	Intervention IV and solution: Resemblance and Post-Chineseness	170
5.8.2.	Ambitious Deconstructions: Non-synthetic, post-hybrid trans-subjectivity	172
5.9.	Transcultural Hybridizations of Chinese and Western IR.....	179
5.10.	Summary	185
6.	Practices, Fields and Cycles of International Relations.....	187
6.1.	Relationality and Power	190
6.1.1.	Norms and Rules as Cultural Systems	192
6.1.2.	Resources in Social Power Relations	202
6.2.	Institutions in English School and Practice Theory.....	205

6.3.	Habitus and Renqing	207
6.3.1.	Dispositions	208
6.3.2.	Subjectivity.....	210
6.3.3.	人情 renqing – economical, affective, political and social investment.....	214
6.4.	Fields and Li.....	216
6.4.1.	Norms-Systems in fields	218
6.4.2.	The state within the concept of fields.....	222
6.4.3.	礼 li – Norms-Systems of Social Order	223
6.5.	A double-cycle of international relations	226
6.5.1.	Modeling international relations	227
6.5.2.	Investment, Institutions, States and Order	230
6.5.3.	Summary	235
7.	Summary and Inconclusion.....	237
7.1.	The End of History and the Last Confucian – Part II.....	237
7.2.	Method.....	241
7.3.	The Belt and Road Initiative and World Trade	243
7.4.	First Generation Chinese IR	249
7.5.	Second Generation Chinese IR.....	255
7.6.	Practices, Fields and Cycles of International Relations	259
7.7.	Final Reflections and Prospects.....	265
8.	References.....	268
9.	Anhang.....	282

1. Introduction

In the general spirit of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*, this thesis explores the constitution of social order with an emphasize on the subjectivity of actors and the environment of their practices. To his end, it elevates the scale to the international level and employs a transcultural perspective. The present thesis assumes that China and the international order have been continually co-constituting each other and examines the latest instance of this interdependence. The new Silk Road/Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) serves as empirical anchor, while relational IR theories function as leitmotif of this work. This research will navigate between these two poles to draft a framework for viewing international relations from a transcultural perspective. Concretely, it aims to analyze the BRI's political philosophy, explore how IR theory connects trade to global order, and investigate where Chinese and Western IR theories intersect in the debate about global order.

The year 2023 marked the tenth anniversary of Xi Jinping's proclamation to build a new Silk Road, both on land and sea. It is thus suitable to inquire what ten years of BRI policies can tell us about China's role in the reproduction of international order. Even though presented as based on financial cooperation, infrastructure and people-to-people exchange, the actual policies of the BRI stressed infrastructure as its main content. The implementation of large transcontinental railroad connections suffered a setback with the Ukraine invasion, the expansion of maritime infrastructure on the other side, should be unimpeded by this development. Being forced to focus on the maritime part of the new Silk Road might even profit Beijing in reaching a more feasible, economically sound realization of its infrastructure projects in the end.

Although publication activity about BRI peaked a few years ago and the topic did lose scholarly attention, the debate resurfaces regularly. Evaluating the BRI, however, is not considered worthwhile in this work, doing justice to the phenomenon of the new Silk Road requires a far deeper analysis in my opinion. Beijing's idea is multilayered and has a diverse, if not eclectic, set of purposes and goals, all of which helped to adapt and update it several times, which leads to further challenges for discerning the BRI. Discounting it therefore, however, has also proved to be an error. Consequently, the direction taken here is a deeper qualitative, hermeneutic method of inquiry. Following English School traditions, I want to focus on a method that includes historical perspectives, discourse analysis and an understanding of international conduct as social practices, which form primary institutions of international society.

The English School of International Relations (ES) in general also is what lends this dissertation its theoretical foundation. There are several reasons why that is the optimal choice for this thesis. Since the turn of the century, contributions to the ES from Chinese authors, who bring in Chinese philosophical backgrounds and lines of thought, have grown and the ES itself increases in popularity in the PRC. This culminated temporarily in 2014 in *Contesting International Society* edited by Zhang Yongjin and Barry Buzan. It thus provides a promising basis from which to contribute to the construction of transcultural perspectives on global politics. A second aspect is the English School's main concept of international society that helps understand international relations as a social space of actors, who conduct their behavior on the basis of common norms and rules. The debate about "rules-based" international order as well as Beijing's aim to emphasize norms of sovereignty against the global expansion of liberalism lend themselves to an analysis from this perspective. Another focus of the English School is the existence of order in an international environment that is otherwise defined by anarchism, in the sense of lacking a central authority. To account for this phenomenon of order, the ES has developed the concept of primary institutions of international society, which are located on a deeper level of international social behavior than secondary institutions like the EU, UN, OECD or ASEAN. In the understanding of the English School, institutions define what the pieces are and how the game is played. Primary institutions (in the remainder of this text often simplified as "institutions") are the places where norms and rules of specific fields of global politics are put into practice in a way that sustains international order. Indeed, it would be highly recommended for the reader to *always* keep in mind the English School's concept of institutions when reading any discussion of norms, rules or norms – and rules – systems in this thesis.

The salience of Chinese IR research is self-evidently by far not exhausted in contributions to the ES. Yan Xuetong's *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, Zhao Tingyang's *All Under Heaven* or Qin Yaqing's *A Relational Theory* are among the more well-known works, which popularized Chinese theories in the Western public. As varied as their approaches to IR are, they all need to be considered representatives of a first generation of 21st century Chinese IR. Shi Chih-yu, a Taiwan-based theorist, has taken up Qin Yaqing's relational approach and developed it further. The late Lily Ling combined a postcolonial, critical research with perspectives grounded in Chinese intellectual history. Those are just two voices, who complement PRC positions with angles from a second generation of Chinese IR. The initiation of the BRI also marked the start of a more assertive era in Beijing's foreign policy that not only addressed day-to-day issues of international cooperation but also pursued an opposition to what it regards to be hegemonial American liberal principles on a more

fundamental ideological level. This is why Yan Xuetong, Zhao Tingyang and Qin Yaqing are of special importance for the interpretation and analysis of Chinese foreign policy in general and the BRI as high-profile strategy in particular. A reference to relationality is found in one way or the other in many publications of Chinese authors and has also started to appear in Western IR. If this is direct Chinese influence on Western IR can hardly be answered conclusively, but the “relational turn” this development constitutes, is of interest to the present thesis.

Being a prominent academic in the People’s Republic of China comes with certain political implications and the present thesis is aware of this situation. I will not, however, reconstruct the political situation for intellectuals at the time *All Under Heaven*, *Ancient Chinese Thought* or *A Relational Theory* were written. This would require a certain amount of speculation, since the gestation period of some of these works is many years in the past. The question of what influenced the authors in the development of their theories covers many dimensions and the political position a high-ranking academic occupies in the PRC is one of those dimensions. The context I look at, however, is an international one due to my thesis being located in the discipline of IR, rather than a domestic, sociological one. The reader of this thesis will encounter many in-depth analyses of the context that shapes the subjectivities, which produce theories of IR but there will not be detailed discussion of Yan Xuetong’s, Qin Yaqing’s or Zhao Tingyang’s involvement in Chinese politics because this thesis approaches context differently in terms of epistemology, as the remainder of this thesis will show.

Another way BRI inspires research is to look at the way international trade and infrastructure is linked to international order. With Barry Buzan’s inclusion of the market as institution of international society or Kalevi Holsti’s chapter on international trade in his discussion of institutions, the English School has addressed one of its former blind spots. Liberalism in IR might be further complemented by other schools of the discipline in its research on trade, global markets and the economy-related sides of international relations if the ‘relational turn’ gains more momentum. The English School’s concept of trade as institution of international society and an understanding of China’s historic role in regional and trans-regional trade networks is conducive to an analysis of China’s role in the reproduction of world order. Scholarship needs to abandon the obsolete notion of an isolated, trade-hostile despotic Asiatic empire and instead emphasize China’s pioneer role in naval technology, the establishment of market-oriented trade networks and institutions of regionalism in East-Asia. Connecting insight into regionalism, research on China’s role in the establishment of earlier trade-networks and efforts of the English School to work out a concept of trade as institution of global order all

contribute to the results of this thesis. Alongside a deeper examination of Chinese contributions to IR, this will help in understanding what the new Silk Road as trade- and infrastructure-focused project can tell us about China's role in the reproduction of international order. It will later be argued in the course of this thesis that trade is indeed the kernel of international politics, far more than strategic conflicts, alliances or imperial conquests and that China was one of the pioneers of transregional, if not even global, trade networks.

Part of the motivation for this thesis was the wide range of attempts to find categories from which to assess and evaluate the BRI both in popular as well as academic publications. Bruno Mações, Peter Frankopan or Parag Khanna, for example, are not quoted in this thesis because they publish scientifically valid literature. Rather, they illustrate the perception of China's new Silk Road and the contextualization that took place in the West, which can be examined through lenses of theory and method to yield further insight. Conventional economic criteria were often either regarded as not applicable or left no other conclusion than the inevitable failure of the project due to its wide-ranging lack of profitability. The insight drawn repeatedly from this was that Beijing pursues a political if not even strategic military goal with these unprecedented investments in infrastructure around the whole globe. The new Silk Road provoked the impression that, geopolitically, China suddenly was everywhere. If this impression was intended or not, however, cannot be determined with certainty, especially since it provoked a strong reaction on the side of the US. BRI's inception also coincided with a period in which Western and Chinese rhetoric lost part of its friendly and cooperative tone and addressed conflicts more directly. During the 1990s and early 2000s there were many strong voices debating the way in which the PRC *will* eventually democratize and liberalize – not *if* the PRC will liberalize. But these optimistic (from the perspective of adherents to Western liberal values) argumentations were slowly superseded by discussions on how China will exert its growing power globally and if it will be able to integrate into a world order characterized by U.S. hegemony or if it poses a serious threat to this order.

The geographical scope of this dissertation will mostly be East Asia, while the temporal scope will mainly consist of the decade since the announcement of BRI. Although the more specific time frame of this research are the ten years of BRI policies from 2013 to the present, history will inform the analysis conducted here to an appropriate degree. Several sections of this dissertation serve the research by drawing longer chronological lines between past and present in order to reach conclusions for the aims and objectives of this project. Following English School traditions, the method will include drawing conclusions by relating contemporary international politics to historical developments. Although this is not a project in

the field of East Asian history, this history is still considered of crucial salience to current international relations and hence has to be covered by the research method.

There will be examinations of the new Silk Road in its transcontinental expression as well as East Asia as a region that is connected through a diverse set of networks. It is evident that even though East Asia is the geographical cornerstone of the research here, networks and relations are emphasized over static concepts of spaces. As initiator and driving force behind BRI, China will be the fulcrum that orients the perspectives of this thesis, both geographically as well as historically. There is an analytical pitfall in this orientation, however. East Asia as a region must not be considered to consist of China as sole relevant agent and a number of secondary actors, only regarded as variables in a sinocentric order. East Asia is constituted by the relations among China, Vietnam, Myanmar, Korea and other states, no single power but a network of diverse actors determines the culture, politics or economy of the region. The way in which regions are created will also briefly be addressed later in this thesis, since there is a huge difference to think of East Asia, the Sinosphere, Pacific Asia or the Indo-Pacific and all of these are constructs with intentions and consequences for policies and interactions. 'East Asia' will nevertheless appear predominantly to refer to China's geopolitical neighborhood out of habit and to offer the reader a familiar term.

Not only is it wrong to simply equate East Asia with China, any work on international relations from a Chinese viewpoint is well advised to at least hint at the uniquely challenging environment Beijing is forced to conduct its policies in. The circumstances are the entire geopolitical opposite of North America as home of the predominant contemporary power, having only two neighbors, Mexico and Canada surrounding its territory and otherwise being separated by two oceans from the rest of the world. Among the PRC's direct neighbors are Russia, India and Japan, three of the most powerful countries in the world. The neighborhood is further characterized by Afghanistan, North Korea and the Taiwan straits, three of the most dangerous potential epicenters of global crises. To complete the geopolitical complexity, South Korea, Pakistan, Taiwan and Indonesia as significant secondary powers of international politics are just as close to China as the major powers and conflict regions mentioned above. The present thesis will not be able to address this geopolitical setup coherently throughout every step of the research process, but it is decisive for China's role in the reproduction of world order. This brief depiction serves merely to clarify the complexity of Beijing's geopolitical position and the challenging circumstances of East Asian international relations, and the reader is invited to remind themselves of those circumstances now and then.

In the course of this dissertation ‘Chinese theories’ or ‘Western theories’ will be mentioned regularly. This terminology is self-evidently extremely deficient, especially in a thesis that promotes transcultural approaches. China has been influencing Western thinking for centuries and vice versa. Without Chinese impact, European philosophy would certainly be different, and consequently also what we consider to be Western IR theories. There is no authentic national essence that makes a theory Chinese or Western. These denominations address the cultural associations we have regarding Qin Yaqing’s or Shih Chih-yu’s publications. Of course, as impactful and established authority of IR in the PRC, we can consider Qin Yaqing’s theory of relationality in a way as ‘Chinese’. Similar things could be said about Zhao Tingyang or Yan Xuetong. The question is how we treat this categorization. One way is to search for the cultural hard core that supposedly lies at the deepest level of theory.¹ Another way is the deconstruction of the intellectual strategies marshalled to ground a theory on distinct cultural foundations, like Shih Chih-yu does when he talks of Post-Chineseness. The present thesis aims for the second approach. There is no way around terms like ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ if this text is to be kept intelligible, but they are considered problematic and should be treated with caution.

What can be stated with certainty is that the government in Beijing has taken a more assertive stance in foreign policy and that its self-conception as representation of the Chinese nation determines how it conducts international relations. What is this China the Beijing government claims to represent, however? Some top tier politicians in both the West and China seem to agree that China is trying to become an alternative model of civilization to the West. The PRC has indeed, it seems, so far presented the most coherent, proactive and, in terms of material implementation, most advanced alternative to the Western liberal world order since the end of the Cold War. All of this takes place against the backdrop of a history of admiration, hostility, fear and envy with the West that provides a singularly rich historical and philosophical background for transcultural research. The answers to the question what China is after all are ambiguous and contestable and yet China is the top priority of diplomats, politicians, economic leaders and public discourses all over the world despite the confusion. This overall situation urges research on China to continue further and serves as the reason why China and its international relations are the focus of this project.

It is not the intention of this thesis, however, to present a meticulous deep dive into the current internal IR discourse of the PRC, since this dissertation belongs more to the field of

¹ Yaqing Qin, *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (Cambridge UP, 2008), 25 ff.

international relations than area studies of East Asia. Extensive translation efforts can henceforth not be attributed to this project as intellectual accomplishment. This dissertation is also not an exhaustive representation of all relevant actors of IR scholarship in the PRC, nor is it a survey of Chinese public opinion toward Beijing's foreign policy or an illustration of the undercurrents of Chinese public dispositions toward the PRC's international relations. Instead, this project inquires which elements are utilized to characterize a policy like BRI or a theory like Qin's relationality as 'Chinese'; and this endeavor is operationalized as examination of impactful Chinese theorists, both from inside and outside the PRC. The question still remains what China contributes to the reproduction of world order, but by taking this differentiated and culturally sensitive approach, I can address the question with more nuance and avoid cultural essentialisms that could compromise the research results.

The first generation of Chinese IR is represented by Zhao Tingyang, Qin Yaqing and Yan Xuetong, who were selected because they cover a spectrum from realism to constructivism and have a significant impact on their respective subfields. This is supported by Peter Markus Kristensen, who identified these authors as leading figures in their specific schools of IR, in his exceptionally insightful research on the Chinese IR landscape.² Rather than approaching the research with the intention to uncover the particular Chinese cultural attributes that characterize the alternative IR theories, my line of inquiry follows the objective when and why distinctions are utilized as a strategy in discourses to mark differences, opposition or maybe also complementary places in what is considered Western and Chinese theory. Shi Chih-yu is included partially for the Taiwanese part of his biography and to stand in for the second-generation Chinese IR theories in order to avoid representing China as monolithic entity in the examination of Chinese theory. L.H.M. Ling will complement the set of authors as a female perspective and also one that has not resided in Chinese speaking East Asia but in New York and still draws on Chinese philosophical traditions in her research.

The general aim of this project is to determine what China's role in the reproduction of international order is with the case of the new Silk Road as starting point. China's role can be best examined by mapping the creation and contestation of spaces of legitimate action in international society. It is hence indicated to analyze the conceptions and relations among the core elements of the research question and not so much to go into detail about internal Chinese IR debates. Uncovering the way in which China and international order have been co-constituting themselves leads more into the direction of comparative, historical and discourse

² Peter Markus Kristensen, "Rising powers in the International Relations discipline: Sociological inquiries into a dividing discipline and the quest for non-Western theory." PhD diss., University of Copenhagen, 2015.

analytical methods and not so much into quantitative, formal and micro-level methods. Field work in the form of interviews among Chinese scholars of IR was initially planned but was not feasible due to the pandemic and may be moved into a potential habilitation or post-doc project.

This dissertation will be moving from the tangible, material scale of the BRI to theoretical questions directly related to the new Silk Road and in a third step to the larger scale of theory on international order. It will not contain truly micro level surveys of individual dispositions but attempt to depict the larger lines of political development. It is therefore not in the setup of this project to dedicate an extensive section of the dissertation to empirical surveys, but to argue logically and conclusively for the transcultural character of world order and offer insight into the co-constitution of world order and China as an important agent in the reproduction of world order. It is the assumption of the author that hermeneutic analyses of IR literature address a desideratum of IR research.

The end of the Cold War dealt a serious blow to Neorealist theories of international relations, which also came under heavy methodological criticism, for example by John Vasquez, who advocated for the closing of the school after he diagnosed a lack of scientifically adequate results and an atrophied research program. Surprisingly, the other great positivism-friendly school of IR has yet to be assessed with similar criticism. As mentioned above, in the 90s and early 2000s, Neoliberalism debated extensively not *if* but *how* the PRC democratizes and liberalizes on the basis of widely praised rigorous, quantitative, empirical research methods, heralded to provide solid and well-proven results. A research program that has proven to be a similar failure as the Neorealist approach but has been spared the appropriate and diligent liquidation in scientific literature. The frustration and setbacks not one, but *both* well-established and well-resourced positivist schools of IR suffered in their research programs have revealed the vast vacancy of qualitative, hermeneutic, reflective research in IR and award these approaches with crucial significance for the overall progress of IR scholarship.

Getting back to the aims of this research, however, leads to the challenge how to operationalize the inquiry into China's role in global order. It is at first evident in the language chosen here that China is assumed to have a role in the reproduction of international order. Other approaches might consider either the current international order or even international order as such threatened by China and will attempt to answer similar questions different or ask different questions in the first place. A further matter is the claim to work towards a transcultural conclusion and neither consult mainly Western IR theory to categorize and master the understanding of China's 'enigmatic' foreign policy, nor to ground my research predominantly in the translation of Chinese theorists and present their work as ultimately inaccessible to

Western IR scholars due to its cultural distinctiveness. International order on the most basic level is considered here as a common enterprise of world society, as Barry Buzan calls it, across cultural, ideological and political separations. This project assumes that scholars from different cultural backgrounds, who address international relations in their publications, do this in order to take part in a common discourse. Translations are necessary, epistemic distance might be quite large between certain positions, culture might be utilized in a form of strategic defensive essentialism to a limited degree, but in the end most contributions want to be received outside of their cultural location and do not exist exclusively as self-referential internal amplifiers to serve the author's national or ideological echo-chamber.

In other words, contributions to a discourse are understood from the target of the discourse, in this case international order and China's function in it, and not primarily from their specific cultural background. The intention to meet on common ground and communicate with each other is assumed for every publication referred to in this work in some degree. Spaces for discourse are closed down and cut off because of alleged cultural incommensurability in situations where a common conversation about a specific topic is not intended. Such rhetoric serves a function in scientific inquiry as object of study in the way it appears as strategy to make claims about what China is for a certain actor in opposition to outside influences or values that disagree with the actor's own principles. Cultural essentialism of this kind is addressed in the section of this research that pursues to clarify which conceptions of China are relevant to international relations. It is, however, just the same degree of cultural essentialism to declare China a 'systemic rival' on the side of Western politicians, who try to articulate a certain disposition towards China that stressed the political differences.

Practice Theory is the third part of this thesis, aside from English School and Chinese IR. A certain cross-fertilization among the three spheres has been taking place for a while now and this research aims not only to account for this but draw insights from actively promoting this synthesize further. To this end, the concepts of habitus, field and practice are utilized and appear regularly in later parts of this thesis. Habitus is a system of durable, transferable dispositions, which generate and organize practices.³ In the shortest possible form, habitus means *socialized subjectivity*, a matrix of dispositions guiding perception and action.⁴ A field is "a bundle of structured relations within which agents are variously positioned."⁵ In essence,

³ David Swartz, *Culture & Power*, (University of Chicago Press, 1997), 100-101.

⁴ Vincent Pouliot and Frédéric Mérand, "Bourdieu's Concepts," in *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking key concepts in IR*, ed. Rebecca Adler-Nissen (Routledge, 2013), 29.

⁵ Vincent Pouliot, "The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of Security Communities," *International Organization* 62, Spring 2008: 276.

the field is a social space that is structured along three principal dimensions: power relations, objects of struggle also regarded as the stakes at play, and the rules that are taken for granted within the field.⁶ A field thus might also be describe as a contested space of specific legitimate action. Practices are produced in the encounter of habitus and field. According to Cornelia Navari, they are socially established actions defined by certain standards. She also argues that the constitution of order through “‘institutions’ of law, war, diplomacy, the balance of power and the great powers actually means the *regulative standards, routines and repertoires* which belong to the activities of law-making, war, diplomacy and so on.”⁷ [my italics] This quote already anticipates the parallels between English School and Practice Theory. For the purpose of this introduction, the definitions of habitus, field and practice provided here shall suffice. A far deeper discussion can be found in chapter six.

This thesis intends to avoid such pitfalls by working with a concept of China as defined by its relations, internal diversity and rich history. The theorists mentioned above, both from mainland China, Taiwan and the Chinese diaspora as well as literature on China’s historic relations and embeddedness in (trade) networks are consulted in order to shed light on this issue. In the course of asking the question which concepts of China are relevant to international relations, different Chinese opinions about its identity will be examined. It needs to be kept in mind, however, that there are many international actors who try to define China as a strategy of their own. So, the more concrete question will be how China regards itself, but what this project intends to stress are the contradictions, inconsistencies and diversity of voices to oppose any monolithic views about China.

Finally, the question remains what the insight into East Asia’s specific character as a region on the one hand and the international aspects of China’s identity on the other can tell us about world order. Research on international relations is still dominated by Western scholarship and partial traces of Eurocentrism remain to this day. Opening this situation further up and introducing more non-Western contributions to the discipline is therefore an important task in IR research. Chinese responses to questions about world order, from both first and second generation of Chinese IR, can help answer them in a more nuanced and transculturally sensitive way. Getting back to the central tenet of the English School will help finding an access to the question: global politics take place within a social space in which states are the primary actors, an international society. This international society is characterized by norms, rules, institutions

⁶ See Julian Go 2008, Trine Villumsen Berling 2012, Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, Markus Schwingel 1995.

⁷ Cornelia Navari “The concept of practice in the English School,” *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 4 (2010): 616-620.

and a mix of conflict and cooperation. Taking the form of a social space and filling it with transcultural content leads to a model of international relations presented in the latter parts of this thesis that depicts elements of mutual investment (far beyond economic aspects), institutions as norms-systems, states as primary actors and the global order as orderly pursuit of the goals of international society as processes that make up the way international relations take place. This model is an attempt to develop an image of international politics that is both relational as well as transcultural.

The End of History and the Last Confucian – Part I

Francis Fukuyama saw the West haunted by two crises in the 20th century, which lead to a certain pessimism “with regard to the possibility of progress in history”, those were a political crisis in regard to the establishment of several fascist and authoritarian regimes with all the atrocities following, and an “intellectual crisis of Western rationalism” that “left liberal democracy without the intellectual resources with which to defend itself.”⁸ He quickly moved on to theorize about a historical rhythm in which liberal democracy increases and decreases all over the globe periodically. We seem to face another such situation, several political crises have shaken the material, cultural and spiritual basis of the Western world order and new intellectual challenges appear to rise with China’s alleged assault on Western values, or maybe the assault on Western values that originates in Western societies themselves out of fear of an imagined barbarian and/or queer Other.⁹

Fukuyama also wrote about China in *The End of History* and, contrary to popular belief, provided a sober view about the prospect of liberal democracy as it competes with East Asian political philosophies. The adaptability of East Asian political systems seems to be one of their great strengths. Although the Chinese leadership tries to gain legitimacy as the “agent of China’s modernization and reform”, “China has become just another Asian authoritarian state”, which “lacks internal legitimacy for a broader sector of its own elite (...) and is not guided by a coherent ideology.”¹⁰ No longer a model for revolutions and radical global transformations, China needed a whole new role with which to distinguish itself internationally. China perfected the image formerly held by Japan as representative of a seemingly alternative model of development. Fukuyama admits that there “is considerable empirical evidence to indicate that market-oriented authoritarian modernizers do better economically than their democratic

⁸ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (Penguin Books, 2020), 11.

⁹ Fukuyama 2020, 330.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

counterparts.” He concludes that there is no necessary connection between liberal democracy and industrial maturity and explains that “the logic of modern natural science and the industrialization process it fosters does not point to a single direction in the sphere of politics, as it does in the sphere of economics.”¹¹

Thirty years ago, he already understood that “the most significant challenge” to democracy comes “from those societies in Asia which combine liberal economies with a kind of paternalistic authoritarianism.” Furthermore, there also appears a glimpse of the hybrid aspects of subjectivity when he explains that Asia’s “success was due not simply to the successful borrowing of Western practices, but to the fact that Asian societies retained certain traditional features of their own cultures.” Since “the long-predicted breakdown of traditional Asian values in the face of modern consumerism has been very slow in materializing”, as he already diagnosed correctly in early 90s, he had a clear view of Asia’s future back then. He predicted correctly that Asia could emphasize its own identity, factored in American and European political and economic crisis and foresaw new hostilities between East and West. Consequently, “a systematic illiberal and non-democratic alternative combining technocratic economic rationalism with paternalistic authoritarianism may gain ground in the Far East.”

Fukuyama’s analysis revealed the two contradictory processes taking place globally, that have only broken to the surface decades later and are still puzzling to academia. First, there is the “the ever-increasing homogenization of mankind being brought about by modern economics and technology” and the idea that the human desire for recognition must be satisfied to a rational degree to provide a government with sufficient legitimacy. Second, however, “there is everywhere a resistance to that homogenization, and a reassertion, largely on a sub-political level, of cultural identities that ultimately reinforce existing barriers”. He also suggests that “ideological differences” between states decrease, while cultural and economic differences grow.¹² The choice of categories is debatable: cultural identities as sub-political level, which together with economy exists in opposition to a political-ideological level of competition. The research design of the present project does not follow these categories but the larger ideas behind them.

The way he addresses culture as a level beneath ideological politics, I argue, permits the interpretation of his categories of ‘sub-political cultural identities’ as similar or maybe even equal to the relational subjectivity I refer to as an analytical category. Fukuyama even farsightedly quoted Alexandre Kojève in suggesting “that instead of Japan becoming

¹¹ Fukuyama 2020, 123-125.

¹² Ibid., 238-244.

Westernized, the West (including Russia) would become Japanized”. Nowadays it would of course be more common to exchange Japan with China in this line of thinking. Additionally, he opens an interesting historical parallel between China today and Germany during the early 20th century, which regarded the first World War “as a revolt against the materialism of the commercial world created by France and that archetype of *bourgeois* societies, Britain.”¹³ Differences outweigh similarities between the two cases but a German perspective might still indeed be more helpful to understand China as opposed to an American or British point of view, given these historical aspects. A Japanized West and the reminder that Germany once saw itself as the antagonist of the West serve to emphasize the fluidity and relationality of subjectivities and the transcultural elements of international relations. Fukuyama demonstrated a noteworthy sensitivity for such matters by incorporating them into his arguments.

Two other crucial topics for the present thesis, which also appear in Fukuyama’s work are relativism and relationality. He defines relativism as “the doctrine that maintains that all values are merely relative and which attacks all ‘privileged perspectives’”. He cautions against relativism and points out that “Relativism is not a weapon that can be aimed selectively” but attacks “not only the ‘absolutisms,’ dogmas, and certainties of the Western tradition, but that tradition’s emphasis on tolerance, diversity, and freedom of thought as well.”¹⁴ The term relationality does not appear literally but is discussed as part of the basis of human society. Hegel is the central figure around which Fukuyama’s theory revolves and he is referred to when Fukuyama explains that “an individual could not become self-conscious, that is, becomes aware of himself as a separate human being, without being recognized by other human beings.” The human individual is inherently a social being, whose “sense of self-worth and identity is intimately connected with the value that other people place” on them.¹⁵

Francis Fukuyama did not attempt to proclaim the immediate supremacy of Western liberal democracy, let alone propagate triumphalist hymns on this political system. His original idea was a sober and critical assessment of world order with what he called weak determinism in regard to future developments, something that might be interpreted as secular eschatology. It is my intent to follow his example in an attempt at a differentiated discussion of the condition of world order. This project will focus on Chinese political philosophy to take up Fukuyama’s many remarks on Asian political systems and their relation to the West and develop them further. In ten years of BRI, Beijing has not convinced the international community to establish

¹³ Fukuyama 2020, 320-332.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 332.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

an alternative world order. It is furthermore doubtful if China questions the general political dogmas of technological progress, capitalist development, market-oriented economy and rational administration even though it rejects liberal democracy of Western design in particular. Similarly, the present project assumes that world order is not the current hierarchy under one hegemon but a collective social activity that necessarily involves every global actor irrespective how small their contribution might be. What 'world order' is and will be in the future, thus cannot be separated from the question who China is.

China's spiritual conflict, torn between Realist and Relational foreign policy, is at the heart of Fukuyama's struggle for recognition. The Last Man populates modern, pluralistic, liberal consolidated democracies according to Fukuyama, an individual without the need to be recognized as greater and better than others. A concept containing the modesty and humility familiar to Confucian social ideas. Some authors of Chinese IR seem to pose the question whether this Confucian society can be introduced between states as well to establish peaceful coexistence. The Realist desire for power contradicts this idea, however, and has become popular again as scholarship began talking about a 'New Cold War', a term I personally find lazy and unscientific in its function for political science, which nevertheless attracts public and intellectuals alike. If the unbound struggle for recognition and desire for power come to dominate international relations as a discipline and as a political practice, scholarship will have failed to a certain degree in opening, developing and cultivating ideational spaces. The question then would indeed be who the Last Confucian, the last state with a desire for authority through morality and civility or the last scholar with a theory thereof, would be.

2. Method

2.1. Ontological and Epistemological Basis

Questions on method first need to clarify what is of relevance to the researcher. Cornelia Navari gathered a variety of these ontological orientations of a number of scholars relevant to the present thesis. She starts with Robert Jackson who mostly pays attention to the codes of conduct, while he “equates order with publicly endorsed common norms”; she then continues with Christian Reus-Smit who “is concerned with identifying social structures (...)”; and mentions that Richard Little focuses on “the environment within which conduct is deemed proper.” Her own stance is that “a society constituted by rules must be produced by rational subjects with intentions.”¹⁶ Sociological directions of IR research describe a similar ontology in Bourdieusian terms as basic puzzle of the “mode of existence of collectives” and the question “[h]ow groups pursue strategies to produce and reproduce the conditions of their collective existence and how culture is constitutive of this reproductive process (...)”¹⁷ The methodological question I derive from this is: How do states behave as actors within a state-collective and how does this activity interact with international order?

Norms, rules and codes of conduct¹⁸ as well as social environments as structures will play major roles in the remainder of this dissertation. Robert Jackson himself further explains that “the justifications of foreign policy are the central material” since they imply “the great constitutive issues of the society of states, which nowadays are questions about the morality of the society of states and the ethics of statecraft.” Research on international ethics, he continues, means “scrutinizing the framework of justification.”¹⁹ Navari also locates the norms that constitute the state-collective in discourses of self-justification, which themselves are embedded in the self-conceptions of the actors.²⁰ Ideas that, as I argue, already hint at the interaction of self-conception and society, in this case concerning states and the state-collective. Although the English School usually speaks of international society, I argue that the term state-collective expresses the twofold ontology of equivalent actors and structures more succinctly. Elsewhere, Navari ventures deeper and suggest looking for “particular cognitive-symbolic

¹⁶ Cornelia Navari, “Introduction: Methods and Methodology in the English School” in *Theorising International Society: English School Methods*, ed. Cornelia Navari (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 3-4.

¹⁷ Swartz 1997, 7.

¹⁸ Following English School traditions used interchangeably; in contrast to values, see further sections below.

¹⁹ Robert Jackson, “International Relations as a Craft Discipline” in Navari 2009, 27-28.

²⁰ Navari in Navari 2009, 12.

structures in what the practitioners are saying and doing”²¹, structures the practitioners “implement in their practical knowledge of the world [and which] are internalized, 'embodied' social structures”²², as Swartz cites Bourdieu to further step into the question how society and self interact.

Concerning legitimacy and authority, the aims of justification, “Bourdieu insists heavily on the *social conditions* which make such an [speech] act potentially successful” [my italics] and directs our attention to the way legitimacy and authority are generated through the medium of language, the medium of meaning-making, under certain social conditions.²³ This ontology has the following consequences for the present thesis. Instead of analyzing, for example, the great power competition between USA and PRC as a systemic conflict between liberty-oriented and sovereignty-oriented ideas of orders, I suggest to pay attention to the way China has been taking part in the constitution of international order and at the very same time has been constituted by that collective order. This process takes place simultaneously with all elements in the global political cosmos.

Concerning one important element in this cosmos, I propose to understand actors as elements with three dimensions. An actor is, first, an individual subsidiary of an intersubjective matrix of dispositions, given the ability to act through, second, a particular distribution of political, economic and cultural resources at, third, a specific position within a social structure that provides norms for any action. In other words, “[t]o understand the subject is to understand it relationally” because its dispositions are shared and collective and define actors in their “socialized subjectivity”.²⁴ These intersubjective, distributive and structural aspects set the actor up as a relational entity, better to be understood as ‘relator’ than as actor.

Society consists of those social structures called fields that function as shared repositories of the above mentioned common cultural, political and economic resources, this capital is the substance relations among actors are made of. Contrary to strictly structuralism approaches, “a relational approach supposes that the analyst is not determining a priori the capacities (...) since the forms of capital only exist if they are recognized as such (...)”²⁵ Swartz mentions that “Bourdieu treats capital as power relations”²⁶ and continues to quote him

²¹ Navari 2010, 618.

²² Swartz 1997, 48.

²³ Stefano Guzzini, “Power“ in Adler-Nissen 2013, 83.

²⁴ Inanna Hamati-Ataya, “Transcending objectivism, subjectivism, and the knowledge in-between: the subject in/of ‘strong reflexivity’,” *Review of International Studies* 40, (2014): 169.

²⁵ Didier Bigo, “Pierre Bourdieu and international relations: Power of practices, practices of power” *International political sociology* 5, no. 3 (2011): 237.

²⁶ Swartz 1997, 74.

describing capital as a kind of energy of social physics.²⁷ Zhao Tingyang echoes this in a somewhat esoteric way, since he locates life-force in coexistence, the all-relatedness of ‘all under heaven’.²⁸ Qin Yaqing, approaching the ‘energy’ or ‘life-force’ idea more pragmatically, suggests “to manage relations as a power resource” because “relation is power” in a productive and reciprocal sense that opposes coercive, unilateral power-concepts, a “[l]ife-producing power” as he calls it, further adding:

“Since all these functions happen in a world of relations and relatedness, a most significant ability is the ability to manage relations, where power resides and from where it comes.”²⁹

Different subgroups in a field share a matrix of dispositions, also called habitus, but within these groups, individual distributions of resources, over which the individuals claim sovereign control, shape the individual corelators. A field is not only a repository of resources but also a particular configuration of hierarchical positions and a specific matrix of norms, in other words the rules of the game and the stakes at play. The matrix of dispositions can tell us why the actors pursue their activity and to what end, what lends these actions legitimacy. The matrix of norms tells us what they do and how they do that to achieve their ends, the criteria of efficaciousness of practice. By practicing sovereignty, states pursue the goal of security. By practicing global trade, states pursue the goals of welfare. To complicate that, matrices of dispositions and matrices of norms shape each other in a complex way and are never to be understood in opposition to each other or in separation but in conjunction and interdependence. The difference is which of both those matrices is part of the conflict, what marks the heterodox from the orthodox. Beijing does not contest the existence of sovereignty, multilateralism or environmental stewardship in international order, but the way these concepts are practiced. Sovereignty is part of a matrix of norms for states, the responsibility to protect is a matrix dispositions shared among Western nations. All nations agree to the existence of a global market and international trade, but the question is if this trade is to be just and fair or liberal and unregulated. This will be elaborated in more detail in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

According to Kalevi Holsti, institutions consist of practices, ideas/beliefs and norms, so he differentiates between ideas/beliefs and norms. His ideas/beliefs “describe the needs for common practices” and “contain the justifications (...) regarding the necessity for certain forms of behavior”, or the necessity for changes in behavior, also explaining why certain practices

²⁷ Swartz 1997, 78.

²⁸ Tingyang Zhao, *Alles unter dem Himmel: Vergangenheit und Zukunft der Weltordnung*, trans. Michael Kahn-Ackermann, (Suhrkamp, 2020), 65.

²⁹ Qin 2018, 288.

exist just like the matrix of dispositions. Norms include rules and etiquette, which “prescribe how the critical actors or agents should behave, under what conditions they can do certain things, what types of activities and actions are proscribed (...)”.³⁰ Holsti does not differentiate why and how of practices as clearly as I do it, but shows in his footnotes that he draws on several distinct authors, who each emphasize narrower concepts of institutions. In these sources, rules, norms and standards for practices appear separately to meanings and intersubjective understandings attributed to practices, and thus show that the two aspects do indeed follow my distinction.

Stephen C. Angle locates the same relationship between values and norms in Confucianism when he speaks of the relationship between political values, norms and ethics. He argues that “(...) a certain kind of political structure is ultimately needed as the indirect means to more complete ethical practice” and continues explaining “(...) that the emergence of political norms depends on the actual interaction of ethical agents seeking to better realize their ends (...)” What he calls legitimacy constraints of political norms is the way the framework of these norms should be criticized based on the degree in which it “enable[s] individuals in all groups to develop ethically[.]”³¹ Norms, here, are also part of a process and practice, in contrast to the values, the ends, they help to realize, pursue and achieve.

Intentions, dispositions and norms as quasi-causes are uncovered via generalized laws and regularities starting from observations in a partly inductive, partly abductive method, as the next two examples, taken from the paragraph above, will show. Jackson, as first example, described how the observable justifications can be used to infer to the ethics of statecraft by following the laws of society-constitution among states. Navari starts with the observed self-conceptions and self-justifications of the actor, follows laws of society-constitution among states and thus excavates the norms that constitute this society. Research has been done on rules and norms of international society as well as questions about the morality of the society of states, so there is partial empirical material from which tentative laws have been inferred. It is the task of contemporary and future research in these areas to examine the transformations international society is experiencing at the moment. The reasoning applied here, I argue, is the best way to operate with empirical data and generalized laws that are no longer certain and have suffered serious contestation, but from which sound and promising scientific inquiry can be

³⁰ Kalevi J. Holsti, *Taming the Sovereigns: Institutional Change in International Politics*, (Cambridge, 2004), 21-22.

³¹ Stephen C. Angle, “Self-Restriction and Progressive Confucianism” in *CONFUCIANISM for the Contemporary World: Global Order, Political Plurality, and Social Action*, ed. Tze-ki Hon and Kristin Stapleton (SUNY Press, 2017), 101.

conducted. Empirical material that no longer fits reality and generalized laws that can no longer be generalized are valuable starting grounds and puzzles for a mix of abductive and inductive methods.

Research on norms often neglects „structural power of an immaterial kind” and “social power at work in and the constraining effects of norms” due to “[a] focus upon a single norm as opposed to the broader structural normative order (...).” Thus, norms “have tended to be envisaged as weapons or ‘capabilities’ used to bring about change” unidirectional from socializer to socializee, but “resistance can reveal the configurations of power relations that underpinned the norm’s diffusion (...).”³² The powers of meaning-making, as I argue this dynamic might also be called, are closely connected to culture because “meanings and rules emerge from ‘communities of practice’ (...).”³³ In the present thesis, culture is regarded as the production, circulation and legitimation of meanings (knowledge, conventions, values, goals, attitudes, beliefs, categories, morals, law), through social practices, which materialize as signs and symbols in form of objects, performances, communication and representations in institutions.³⁴ This production and circulation is systemized by Bourdieu, who “conceptualizes culture as a form of capital with specific laws of accumulation, exchange, and exercise.”³⁵ The way culture produces, circulates and legitimizes meanings can be examined, just as much as the practices and representations through which these processes take place.

Asking questions about culture means to ask what a *difference* truly is. Who and what is identified as Chinese/Eastern or Euroamerican/Western and why? How do labels like “Confucian”, “rival”, “liberal” etc. work? How does the culture-performance work to produce boundaries? There will be no other way than to use the denominator “Chinese” in reference to certain kinds of IR research, of researchers, political aspects, social conditions, etc. How is it still possible after decades of political science, that there is no way around a categorization such as “Chinese”? How deep must these specific categorization dispositions run in our mind that we seem totally lack the ability to operate our research without them? Exchange between East and West has been vital for thousands of years, the intense exchange between Chinese and German political activists in the 20s and 30s must have shaped the contemporary Federal Republic and People’s Republic profoundly. The close connection of American upper classes and China via the Opium trade must have made the US a subtly Chinese nation. The decision

³² Charlotte Epstein, “Norms” in Adler-Nissen 2013, 168-169.

³³ Navari 2010, 624.

³⁴ See Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan. Palestine. Iraq.* (John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 8.

³⁵ Swartz 1997, 8.

to call something Chinese, Western, mainstream or placing someone in an allegedly controversial position, no matter if it's a self-designation or the designation of another, always carries with it aspects of power. Designations as containers of culture, however, are no sustainable concept anymore. Maybe culture should be considered more as a meeting point of different influences that is always in motion and that also functions relational as a way to coordinate relations among elements in the global political cosmos. Might culture even be the very capacity that enables actors to invite and integrate various social practices and their meanings into their systematic or arbitrary self-conception?

Fierke and Jabri elaborate on the fluidity of culture because “any one individual may be the product of multiple cultures (...) Cultural references, as realms of meaning, knowledge, and affect, are mobilised in encounters with others and the world, inform identities and practices of identification, and can express solidarity or adversity.”³⁶ Another way to approach this idea might be to theorize that “agents are exposed to various combinations of field trajectories (with their irreducible cultural diversity), which often make for high dispositional variance.”³⁷ Fierke and Jabri continue to explain “that culture is neither static nor contained (...) but is an ongoing and changing performance in relation to others” and describe it as a “product of narration”.³⁸ Understanding culture as relational also supports understanding identities as relational, in some cases even to a point where actors are considered to be formed by their relationship, this type of “relational approach will begin with the moment of the making of the action and will consider the agents only when they act in relation to each other.”³⁹

Following Karen Barad, Fierke and Jabri advocate for an approach that “begins with the whole and examines the processes by which boundaries of difference and with them cultures are produced *within*.” [original italics] They add to Barad's concept that boundary-making processes should also be closer examined in regard of “their role in reproducing states, the West/non-West distinction or neocolonial relations of power.” Especially crucial for this thesis is furthermore the section where they present “the symbolism of the ancient Silk Roads, or the construction of their modern equivalent” (in reference to L.H.M. Ling) as an alternative to think about ways in which cultures engage with each other. Additionally, they also mention that “Barad's intra-action resonates with the theory of relationality articulated by Qin Yaqing

³⁶ Karin M. Fierke and Vivienne Jabri, “Global conversations: Relationality, embodiment and power in the move towards a Global IR,” *Global Constitutionalism* 8, no. 3 (2019): 511.

³⁷ Vincent Pouliot, “Methodology,” in Adler-Nissen 2013, 47.

³⁸ Fierke and Jabri 2019, 512.

³⁹ Bigo 2011, 236-237.

(...).⁴⁰ In other words, the authors propose “to place the relational dynamic within a whole where the parts do not exist in total isolation and alienation, and the conversation is ongoing.”⁴¹ Even in places where the whole is an “integrating logic of competition between opposing viewpoints” the researcher can “relate that conflict to the broader areas of class and power, and identify underlying shared assumptions by opposing parties.”⁴² In other words, they help introduce more dynamics into the concept of culture mentioned above by adding deeper dimensions of relationality and power.

For Fierke and Jabri, conversation as a method of inquiry is not “a static exchange between a priori identities” but is characterized by the way it “shapes and reshapes difference and being along the way (...).” The authors propose a research agenda that addresses several aspects. First, to look at the sites where conversations take place and “uncover the extent to which such sites impact on the form that conversation takes (...).” Another part of their research agenda would be the “mapping of conversations that are manifest as intra-actions in a shared global space, to explore how intra-actions work ontologically in the construction of difference (...).” As an example, they mention Lily Ling’s project on the relation between the BRI and the historical Silk Road ethos⁴³, proving how salient this direction of research on BRI truly is. Looking at the *sites of conversations*, I argue, is the same as examining the *fields of practices*. Furthermore, the powers of meaning-making also describe how intra-action constructs difference.

2.2. Qualitative Political Science

In *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations* (2011) Patrick Jackson attempts to provide a fresh look at methods in order to revitalize the debate about science in IR, which shall be elaborated briefly here since it provided the basis for the research design of this thesis. He develops the argument that a definition of science across IR cannot be based on rigorous standards for the techniques of handling data and testing hypotheses, “since there are no rules so universally agreed upon that their adoption would be uncontroversial”, a definition of science should be guided by the goals of the field instead of its methods.⁴⁴ Working towards a broader definition of science, he first addresses the issue of value commitments on the side of the

⁴⁰ Fierke and Jabri 2019, 514.

⁴¹ Ibid., 519.

⁴² Swartz 1997, 126.

⁴³ Fierke and Jabri 2019, 524 – 526.

⁴⁴ Patrick T. Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of science and its implications for the study of world politics*, (Routledge, 2011), 18.

researcher. In science, Jackson argues, “even someone who rejects our values should be able to acknowledge the validity of our empirical results within the context of our perspective” because, as he continues, “the decisive issue is internal validity: whether, given our assumptions, our conclusions follow rigorously from the evidence and logical argumentation that we provide.”⁴⁵

Jackson proposes four broad categories for families of methods in IR, neopositivism, critical realism, analyticism and reflexivity, derived from two axes that divide what he calls phenomenalism from transfactualism on the one hand and mind-world dualism from mind-world monism on the other.

Regarding phenomenologists, “the important point is that the extension of the range of the senses through physical and conceptual equipment poses no special conceptual problems and demands no special philosophical grounding (...).”⁴⁶ Contrary to phenomenalism, transfactualism means “the notion that valid knowledge-claims reach beyond experiences to grasp the deeper generative causal properties (...).”⁴⁷

To give the briefest possible overview of his categories, Neopositivism describes the conventional approach of “hypothesis testing and the attempt to falsify general claims against empirical evidence”. Critical realism keeps the notion of a mind-independent world but “departs from neopositivism (and from Popper) by pushing the limits of knowledge into the realm of the in-principle unobservable”, transfactualism in this terminology, which is disclosed by abductive inference. “Analyticists reject the notion that in-principle unobservable relations and objects are anything, but instrumental devices used to make sense of the world” as Jackson explains. Concerning technical aspects of research, “knowledge is a useful ordering of experience” in this methodological family. Lastly, practitioners of reflexivity “reject both the notion of an externally existing world and the notion that knowledge is limited to experience; instead, they ground knowledge in the social situation of the researcher.”⁴⁸ This categorization has received some criticism, for example by Inanna Hamati-Ataya⁴⁹, but by refusing to link any method explicitly to a school of IR and instead keeping it a more flexible framework, Jackson provided an accessible and undogmatic aid for the creation of research designs.

⁴⁵ Jackson 2011, 22.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 74-75.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 38-39.

⁴⁹ Inanna Hamati-Ataya, “Reflectivity, reflexivity, reflexivism: IR’s ‘reflexive turn’—and beyond,” *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 4 (2013): 669-694.

Even though Jackson holds on to the idea that any school of IR can make use of methods of all of this four families of methods, he criticizes the “domination of (...) neopositivism that constitutes so much of the methodological common sense in the field when it comes to notions such as explanation, causation, and even science.”⁵⁰ Concerning King, Keohane and Verba’s *Designing Social Inquiry* he attests a “failure to admit the existence of non-neopositivist methodologies that is the primary methodological weakness” and criticizes that their “book takes place on the level of tools and techniques and not on the level of fundamental goals and purposes of inquiry.”⁵¹ Robert A. Dahl cautions against emulating the research methods of physics or economics in political science and opposes the reductionism of “explaining the behavior of complex systems by narrowing causation down”.⁵² Truman F. Bewley advocates for “reciprocity and fairness and justice as motivators, as well as a sense of a group” to receive increased attention in IR research and clarifies that the distinction between “mathematical and verbal reasoning is a false distinction”, explaining that from a certain point on “in mathematics, you’re using definitions and proofs, and that’s all verbal.”⁵³

Jackson refers to John Vasquez’ “combination of Lakatos and Kuhn to argue that the realist school of IR theory was not making sufficient scientific progress and therefore ought to be abandoned.”⁵⁴ Vasquez himself uncovers for the realist paradigm that what has been “taken as theoretical fertility and a continuing ability to provide new insights is not that at all, but a degenerating process of reformulating itself in light of discrepant evidence.”⁵⁵ Navari sheds light on early English Schools rejection of positivism, as “a science based on direct perception and deduction was inadequate in explanatory terms”, further adding that “international society was the product of both subjective and inter-subjective understandings, understandings generally excluded in the positivist agenda.”⁵⁶ To summarize in the words of Vasquez, “[a]ll this points scholars toward a study of belief systems, learning, and the effect of the pulling and hauling of domestic politics on foreign policy and undermines the realist assumption of the state as a unitary rational actor.”⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Jackson 2011, 190.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵² Robert A. Dahl et al., “What have we learned,?” in *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics*, ed. Ian Shapiro et al. (Cambridge UP, 2004), 378-380.

⁵³ Truman F. Bewley et al., “What have we learned?” in Shapiro et al. 2004, 382.

⁵⁴ Jackson 2011, 58.

⁵⁵ John A. Vasquez, “The Realist Paradigm and Degenerative versus Programs: An Appraisal of Neotraditional Research Balancing Proposition,” *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 4 (1997): 911.

⁵⁶ Navari 2009, 2.

⁵⁷ John A. Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics: From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism* (Cambridge UP, 2004), 378.

Consequently, IR scholarship “will need to place as much emphasis on preparation for, and execution of, illuminating concept formation as on our necessary but often highly limited efforts at inferential testing” and also needs to “redefine the basic fields that comprise, and often constrain, the discipline of political science.”⁵⁸ Jackson proposes three factors that define science as distinct mode of knowledge production and that enabled this dissertation to set up a more systemized and structured qualitative research design. The first and most important characteristic is *systematicity*, which demands a “consistent line from presuppositions to conclusions” from the researcher, “to connect their conclusions with their premises systematically” in order to make an evaluation according to “logical or formal standards” possible.⁵⁹ Despite adhering to a scientific logic, Rogers Smith advises to “not equate that logic with whatever particular statistical techniques (...) happen to be widely used (...).”⁶⁰ Second, for knowledge to be scientific, it needs to be “both comprehensible to and therefore criticizable by other members of the relevant community”, which means that “it must explicitly or tacitly use rules and procedures that other members of the community acknowledge as constituting valid logical inference.” Jackson calls this the condition of being *public*. Lastly, Jackson argues that scientific insights “are accessible to anyone employing the proper procedures for disclosing them, and depend not on revelation or intuitive insight but on systematic demonstration and public, if technical, argumentation.” Scientific knowledge, hence, is *worldly knowledge* and refers “to the world rather than to something outside of it, such as a set of divinely legislated moral principles.” Jackson himself summarizes the section by arguing “that these three qualities—systematic, public, and intended to produce worldly knowledge—define a scientific endeavor, differentiating it from other modes of activity such as politics and art.”⁶¹

A relational approach, however, will “avoid any idea of structure with its tendency to invoke grand causalities” in the sense that there are “no laws of history, no essential and natural ideas or concepts to discover” because “[k]nowledge is limited; always fragile and specific”.⁶² In less strict and unconditional terms, a proper analysis is to be “driven neither by an ‘idealist’ view of the world where (...) individuals are at the core of the examination of social sciences, nor by an objectivist, ‘structuralist’ paradigm, one that essentialises history (...) reducing agents to the status of receptacles.”⁶³ For the method I use to examine international order, the status of

⁵⁸ Rogers M. Smith, “The politics of identities and the tasks of political science,” in Shapiro et al. 2004, 43.

⁵⁹ Jackson 2011, 193.

⁶⁰ Smith in Shapiro et al. 2004, 42.

⁶¹ Jackson 2011, 193-195.

⁶² Bigo 2011, 237.

⁶³ Didier Bigo, “Security,” in Adler-Nissen 2013, 125.

scientific knowledge is that of a useful tool of organizing our experiences in a language that is “itself a product of previous attempts to summarize experience purposefully” and “shapes how we make meaningful sense of our situations and craft appropriate responses to them”, as Jackson phrases it. Hence, knowledge originates neither in objective reality nor in the mind alone but in social practices as “rule-governed activities, and the rules provide an impersonal standard against which to evaluate particular acts (...)” to achieve scientific insights.⁶⁴ In turn, this also means, however, that “what is considered to be ‘knowledge’ of the world, its epistemological framing, is itself constituted by contingent and relational structures and dynamics that inform being in the world”, so that a researcher should “move beyond prescriptions of what constitutes ‘ideal-typical dialogue’, towards a recognition of conversations (plural) as open-ended relational wholes.”⁶⁵

According to Patrick Jackson, in the case of academia “it is the researcher’s involvement in her or his research tradition that provides the rules, resources, procedures, and standards for generating valid social-scientific knowledge.” Thus, “the researchers is capable of producing knowledge as a result of her location in a research tradition”⁶⁶ Margaret Levi also points out that “social scientists often already know a lot about the data/problem/case that they study”, which is not necessarily a problem but can be productive for an “analytic narrative where the theory must be imbedded in the narrative.”⁶⁷ The family of methodological practices called “analyticism” by Jackson involves “instrumental oversimplification of complex, actual situations; these deliberate oversimplifications, or ideal-types, are then utilized to form case-specific ‘analytical narratives’ that explain particular outcomes.”⁶⁸ As I will explain in later paragraphs, ideal-types as method explicitly with a focus on surveying relationships of significance are an underappreciated way of analyses of international order that result in a better understanding of the powers of meaning-making for the structural constraints of states’ behavior and especially the way this normative structure is contested.

Research on social phenomena in part always also draws on what Jackson calls critical realism, since social phenomena are unobservable as such but detectable through their effects. The application of this approach to social sciences takes place through “the recognition that detection equipment need not be physical equipment, but can also be *conceptual* equipment.”⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Jackson 2011, 124-128.

⁶⁵ Fierke and Jabri 2019, 516.

⁶⁶ Jackson 2011, 140-141.

⁶⁷ Margaret Levi, “An analytic narrative approach to puzzles and problems,” in Shapiro et al. 2004, 214.

⁶⁸ Jackson 2011, 142.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 87-89.

[original italics] The advantage of this method is a sensitivity to “capacity, in the sense of a potential that may or may not be in fact actualized” and that describes the causal properties of social structures⁷⁰, which “give rise to observed probabilities; they explain why occurrences and phenomena are linked, and thus go beyond simply noting that they are linked. (...)”⁷¹ Discerning the potential effects of causal properties takes place “by investigating the complex and case-specific ways in which factors combine to produce specific outcomes” but, Jackson points out “any such factors, in order to be causally relevant, have to be integrated into case-specific narratives that explain how such factors interact with the actions of particular agents to produce social outcomes.”⁷²

2.3. Hermeneutic Science Techniques

With these qualifications in mind, the present project bases its research design on hermeneutic methods following what the philosophy of science in IR according to Martin Wight, prior to Keohane’s *Two Approaches*, called rationalism. Richard Little follows Andrew Linklater in constructing a methodological structure of IR that links realism with positivism, rationalism with hermeneutics “because it analyses the language and culture of diplomatic practice and the conventions which states obey as members of an international society”, and revolutionism with critical theory.⁷³ Reus-Smit emphasizes the rationalism in hermeneutics for the ES by placing it in a methodological family of interpretivist and reflectivist approaches.⁷⁴ Patrick Jackson mentions Hollis and Smith’s two intellectual categories of *explaining* and *understanding* in differentiating positivist and hermeneutic methods, which distinguish “causal outsider accounts using preferences to explain what actors do in world politics, and meaningful insider accounts using social rules to understand what actors do in world politics.”⁷⁵ Among Vasquez’ criticism is the argument that the rise of realism should be complemented by methodological pluralism in IR because “[t]here is no reason why the field cannot encourage those who embrace philosophical techniques like hermeneutics (...)”⁷⁶ Fierke and Jabri suggest that hermeneutic traditions can be part of a transcultural method “to the end of unravelling what a ‘relational ontology’ might mean in a political theory and how these inform practices of

⁷⁰ Jackson 2011, 91.

⁷¹ Ibid., 99.

⁷² Ibid., 110-111.

⁷³ Richard Little, “History, Theory and Methodological Pluralism in the English School,” in Navari 2009, 90 and Andrew Linklater, *Beyond Realism and Marxism: Critical Theory and International Relations* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1990), 10.

⁷⁴ Christian Reus-Smit, “Constructivism and the English School,” in Navari 2009, 66.

⁷⁵ Jackson 2011, 8-9.

⁷⁶ Vasquez 2004, 384.

knowledge production and relationality (...).”⁷⁷ Jana Rošker explains how Western philosophers from Schleiermacher to Gadamer impacted Chinese hermeneutic approaches and shows how Gu Ming-dong draws on the diverse classical Chinese traditions of hermeneutics for his concept of ‘hermeneutic openness’ that proves to be useful for intercultural research, or how Cheng Chung-ying’s ‘onto-hermeneutics’ present a view in which “understanding is inseparable from being.”⁷⁸

Interpretative methods are essential for “grasping discursively the consciousnesses and senses of value and meaning that identities involve (...)” because in a methodologically complementarity way, *quantitative* methods, too, “dependent on the strength of concepts that are generally formed through other means.” Hermeneutic methods like “textual analyses, ethnographic fieldwork, biographical studies, in-depth interviews, individual and comparative case studies, participant observation research, and other methods generally labeled ‘qualitative’ are likely to yield more insights”⁷⁹ than quantitative ones in research on the social aspects of international order. Regarding the empirical data sources for such methods, Jackson suggests to “interrogate the evidence that statespeople leave in their tracks: the record of their policies and actions and the statements by which they attempt to justify them.”⁸⁰

More precisely concerning the examination of practices in the conduct of international relations, which Didier Bigo calls “the waves or particles of the social universes”⁸¹, empirical material often includes “foreign office documentation, memoirs of the major political actors of the time, interviews, and historical archives” in order to discern the “self-conceptions of the actors who are participating in the processes that constitute international life.”⁸² Rebecca Adler-Nissen describes a similar process as approach to “reconstruct the dispositional logic of practices” and contends that “practical knowledge can be interpretively inferred through a variety of methods” irrespective of “[w]hether practices are ‘seen’ (participant observation), ‘talked about’ (interviews) or ‘read’ (textual analysis) (...).”⁸³ Bigo also advises for a method in this field “to be informed through detailed empirical research using proposography [*sic*], ethnographical interviews, statistics, archives, and discourse analysis in order to show in each

⁷⁷ Fierke and Jabri 2019, 517.

⁷⁸ Jana S. Rošker, *Interpreting Chinese Philosophy: A New Methodology*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 111-115.

⁷⁹ Smith in Shapiro et al. 2004, 52-53.

⁸⁰ Jackson in Navari 2009, 32.

⁸¹ Bigo in Adler-Nissen 2013, 125.

⁸² Navari in Navari 2009, 12.

⁸³ Pouliot in Adler-Nissen 2013, 48.

case the specificities of the field/habitus/doxa relation, and the specific genesis of the present configuration.”⁸⁴

In her examination of the nexus between English School and sociological approaches, Navari refers to Maurice Keens-Soper in describing English School methods and their Bourdieusian characteristics. An affinity towards text as empirical material and a link with discourse theory are attested to the English School, though it considers language to be “expressive of meaning, and its analysis is directed towards recovering intent, not detecting its structural constraints.” Additionally, the English School’s concept of institutions is identical with Bourdieusian practices, as her main argument contends, explaining that institutions are “the regulative standards, routines and repertoires which belong to the activities of law-making, war, diplomacy and so on.”⁸⁵ This will be elaborated further in later chapters, but already hints at a fertile new access to the analysis of international institutions as they conceptualize the expression of norms-systems in states’ behavior under conditions of relations as power-resources.

Bull’s structural-functionalist method serves as an example in the way “[h]e deduced the purposes served by order, and then proposed the requisites of order, from which causes could be theorized.”⁸⁶ In other words, the search for causes of order here also contains examinations of values (the purposes of order). The origin of practices in sociological IR, located in the encounter between order (positions in the field and distributions of capital) and values (intersubjective dispositions)⁸⁷, I argue, can be regarded parallel to Bull’s two levels in the structural-functionalist mode of analysis; utilizing Bourdieu to enhance English School understanding of structure and practice. Vincent Pouliot also posits the origin of practices at the confluence of dispositions, which he explains as “ingrained and mostly inarticulate proclivities and tendencies accumulated through personal exposure and collective history” and positions in a field, which he sees as “defined by the distribution of valued resources inside a social game (...).”⁸⁸ It is important here to keep in mind that ‘relations’ and ‘capital’ are two sides of the same coin, as mentioned above.

“[W]hat people do (...) is made possible by the interplay between habitus and field” as Pouliot further contends, and to analyze this activity he suggests to reconstruct the dispositions

⁸⁴ Bigo 2011, 245.

⁸⁵ Navari 2010, 619-620.

⁸⁶ Navari in Navari 2009, 2.

⁸⁷ Swartz 1997, 141.

⁸⁸ Pouliot in Adler-Nissen 2013, 47.

actors “acquired through exposure and experience in various positions and games.”⁸⁹ Understanding order as goal-oriented social activity as Bull does⁹⁰, I argue, means exactly to locate the motivation for action between dispositions and positions that incline actors to behave in a certain – social goal-oriented – way. In sum, thinking English School and sociological IR in conjunction, the origins of states’ behavior, whether norm-abiding, norm-violating or norm-transforming, can be theorized more coherently.

Elements crucial for the understanding of self-conceptions of actors are “historical political processes of *institution-building and power-structuring* that have strengthened and modified certain existing identities, sometimes fostered novel ones, and often played strong roles in defining the relationships of those identities to various others.”⁹¹ [my italics] Methodological approaches to history involve an examination of “different forms that international society had taken during its evolution (...) which compares different state systems over time to identify their distinctive features” in order to “identify the different elements that motivate action.”⁹² Another function of a historical comparative method is “to isolate the factors relevant in shaping particular historical state systems” and hence “allows for different elements that characterize different state systems to be identified and their role in constituting particular international systems to be hypothesized.”⁹³ History, it follows, informs the method with which the co-constitution of the self-conception of actors and the institutions their embedded in, can be examined. This emphasize on history is a commonality of English School and sociological IR, the difference is that Bourdieu draws on past experiences to theorize subjectivity and the English School looks at history to explain the character of contemporary states-systems. Keeping the interdependence between actor and structure in mind, however, allows for common ground between the two approaches to be explored.

Navari argues that institutional analyses and discourse analyses are the most suitable methods for research on the state-collective and thereby also distinguishes this level of international social analysis from research targeting other levels of global political activity.⁹⁴ Discourse should be understood here “as linguistic interactions manifesting the participants’ respective positions in social space and categories of understanding”, which are “embedded in social hierarchies (...).”⁹⁵ In other words, understanding a certain corelator’s categories of

⁸⁹ Pouliot in Adler-Nissen 2013, 48.

⁹⁰ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, (Columbia UP, 2002), 4.

⁹¹ Smith in Shapiro et al. 2004, 58.

⁹² Navari in Navari 2009, 4-5.

⁹³ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁵ Rebecca Adler-Nissen, “Introduction,” in Adler-Nissen 2013, 6.

understanding requires understanding their relational position in a social context. International society as social context for action becomes salient as “surrounding conditions that gave rise to the inclination to act according to agreed rules.”⁹⁶ Causation in structural-functionalist or institutional analysis, however, also needs to be qualified and defined in more detail. Navari is following Hedley Bull in this case, contending that “rules and institutions of international society ‘explain’ (in modern terms, constitute) the compass and nature of that particular society.” The problem with causal explanations within a framework of the state-collective, she continues, is that this collective is generated intentionally and consciously “[b]ut causal propositions as understood in science are propositions about things that happen irrespective of intentions” [original italics], hence there is no “simple distinction between causes and intentions, not least because intentions may become genuine causes.”⁹⁷ Bigo also opposes simple causations for the case of field and habitus, which “cannot be understood as transhistorical instruments or as new names for the apparatus of power” and instead treats them as “thinking tools as long as they try to render the diversity of practices, the ‘bibelot’ or ‘knick knack’ that this diversity organizes and which is constituted by a specific game.”⁹⁸

Three elements of a differentiated causal explanation can be developed on the basis of English School and Bourdieusian theorizing. First, institutions in the form of institutionalized understandings conducive to the creation of the state-collective, which “will be condition creating and can be said to constitute an environment that *inclines* actors in a certain direction and, accordingly, to have genuine causal properties”. [original italics] Second, when rules become patterns of behavior, they can “convert intentional explanation into causal explanation” by having effects “separate from the particular attitudes or orientations immediately in the heads of the participants.” In Patrick Jackson’s methodology, this corresponds to a “critical realist focus on dispositional causal properties.”⁹⁹ The third element are material conditions because “the process of push and pull between material and cultural factors causes international society”. English School scholars often include comparative analysis, historical or ideal typic, in their research methods. Historical comparisons or ideal types are two types “sometimes referred to, respectively, as historical (or idiopathic) explanation and nomothetic (or cover rule) explanation.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Navari in Navari 2009, 10.

⁹⁷ Cornelia Navari, “What the Classical English School was Trying to Explain, and Why its Members Were not Interested in Causal Explanation,” in Navari 2009, 47 – 48.

⁹⁸ Bigo 2011, 237.

⁹⁹ Jackson 2011, 76.

¹⁰⁰ Navari in Navari 2009, 51-53

For a deeper understanding of the third element, material conditions, sociological IR offers the explanation that “social facts are constructed first in relation to the distribution of material resources”, these facts become social or political through “the way they (...) justify or legitimize the domination through their symbolic violence (...).”¹⁰¹ On the example of the ‘masculine order’, Jabri shows that social aspects of unequal distribution of resources, or objective conditions of difference, can be surveyed through “the rituals and rites of institution implicated in the naturalisation of arbitrary divisions and inequalities (...).”¹⁰², which can be applied to different rules-systems of different societies, as I would argue. One of the first steps of analysis, following a Bourdieusian focus on competition and dominance, would be to identify “whether some form of unified field or several fields exist, where the elites (...) struggle over the rate of exchange of major types of capital.”¹⁰³

In sum, the causes for order on the international level are expected to be located in institutions as elements that create conditions conducive to the constitution of order, rules of the game as disposition forming and material conditions that support the creation of international order. This is relevant because quantitative evidence like the “findings of peace research suggest, contrary to Mearsheimer, that norms and informal institutions do make a difference (...)” and hence proves that when states “make concerted efforts to establish rules of the game to guide their relations, peace is more likely.”¹⁰⁴ This is true even in times of increasing great power competition since “the neorealist analysis of the relationship between polarity and war is empirically inaccurate.”¹⁰⁵

Models of international society as analytical tools of the ideal typic or nomothetic approach prove to be effective here because they measure a reality that “is constituted by, among other things, rules of conduct, or ‘norms’ in some modern usages”, as Navari explains. Such models of the state-collective, she continues, can hence be regarded as “explanatory devices for the study of societies, which try to unpack the motives for action” through “the identification of a social construction that is shaped by a value orientation.”¹⁰⁶ Including value orientation in IR research is “essential to the determination and conduct of practical international action, for interests cannot be defined without values, or strategies devised without knowledge.”¹⁰⁷ Structural constraints need to be understood “in the light of both the separation

¹⁰¹ Bigo 2011, 244.

¹⁰² Vivienne Jabri, “Gender,” in Adler-Nissen 2013, 155.

¹⁰³ Guzzini in Adler-Nissen 2013, 88.

¹⁰⁴ Vasquez 2004, 375.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 376.

¹⁰⁶ Navari in Navari 2009, 5-6.

¹⁰⁷ Reus-Smit in Navari 2009, 73.

and the interaction between facts and values, the relationship between the story told from the outside and the inside (...).”¹⁰⁸ These values are part of the matrix of dispositions that comprises the habitus.¹⁰⁹ Bigo understands politics on the global level as “the struggles concerning the boundaries of categories used not only to understand the world, but also to frame it” and thus arrives at a research program in which “categories used to interpret practices need to be specified, historicised, and analysed as products of struggles (...).” Focusing attention to values through ideal types as devices to examine societies, he continues, helps “to analyse the struggles for categorisation (...) and what they render invisible and unspeakable (the doxa) through the symbolic violence they exert as categories.”¹¹⁰ Legitimacy, I argue, hence is the prime power-resource; and consequently, the most promising way to understand international relations is examining the way states attempt to produce legitimacy for their actions.

The origin of practice in the encounter between field and habitus, structure and actor, appears clearer on this level because it addresses the process directly. Actors with certain dispositions (including values) have to act in a given norms-system (the rules of the game) in order for their actions to take a maximum effect. The categories of possible actions, however, are contested or the results of prior struggles, which can still be reconstructed. Actions receive meaning only by getting related to certain social cultural values of the state-collective. One of the crucial questions is if the actor can define the meaning themselves, deciding which value the action is related to, or if the action is subject to the power of other agents who frame its meaning through relating it to values completely unintended by the original actor. This becomes especially salient in the case of controversial action, where actors touch the boundaries of possibility categories, maybe even with the explicit intent to change these boundaries. This is further emphasized by the fact that “the very definition of power is a highly political issue since it influences the respective value of different power resources (or capitals)”, especially for IR research, since “[t]he relational aspects of recognition and status are still far more open in international affairs.”¹¹¹

2.4. Analytical Narratives and Ideal-Types

International order, as normative environment for the state-collective, can methodologically be treated as “general type of which there were several species” so that the

¹⁰⁸ Little in Navari 2009, 94.

¹⁰⁹ Swartz 1997, 108.

¹¹⁰ Bigo in Adler-Nissen 2013, 125.

¹¹¹ Guzzini in Adler-Nissen 2013, 86.

“‘severalness’ allows for the sorts of comparisons from which generalizations can be drawn.”¹¹² The technique Edward Keene applies for this is ‘evaluative interpretation’, which means relating actual events to cultural values and thereby identifying relationships of significance and, in the next step, motives for action. Concretely, when analyzing a phenomenon, “the critical question is how to identify which bits of it are *worth knowing*.” [original italics] Attributing significance takes place through “a judgment of the relevance of a phenomenon to the values that are embedded in a culture” in order to “make transparent, systematic and as general as possible the evaluative interpretation of a phenomena [sic] in terms of its relevance to a *range* of viewpoints (...).” [original italics] In other words, Keene tries to arrive at an objective explanation for the causes of orderly international activity by relating the meaning-making of actions located in the dispositions of actors to empirical observations in a systematic, transparent and general method.

Generating “an analysis of the relationships between concrete historical patterns” is the main function of Keene’s evaluative interpretation. General laws of causation, however, only serve as heuristic tools and means of enquiry, to the end result of finding *causal relationships*.¹¹³ A research design that corresponds exactly to the mix of abductive and inductive approaches mentioned above. Instead of emphasizing general laws, Rošker points out that Chinese scholars, too, “were rather interested in generating structures of meaning (...).” Their “patterns of reasoning follow a thought process by which a known aspect or segment of reality shapes a *model* that can be applied in order to recognize another unknown aspect or segment of that same reality (...) which not only regards objects, but also relations between particular objects and relations between relations.” [my italics]¹¹⁴ The analogical reasoning of classical Chinese logic, hence, seems to go well with the method of finding causal relationships through models, which trace structures of meaning.

Emphasizing institutions in the analysis, I argue, is crucial because they are the places where values get transformed from subjective dispositions to social norms that shape the conduct of relations and hence describe the interaction of state, state-collective and international order. Bourdieu also opposes simple understandings of causation and instead “wants to understand what makes a resource a power resource in the first place.”¹¹⁵ According to Swartz, this method of studying social life equates reality with relationships as opposed to substances and considers the function of science as the process of uncovering these invisibilized

¹¹² Navari in Navari 2009, 10.

¹¹³ Edward Keene, “International Society as an Ideal Type,” in Navari 2009, 104-124.

¹¹⁴ Rošker 2021, 84-85.

¹¹⁵ Guzzini in Adler-Nissen 2013, 80.

relationships. Identifying relationships of significance, exactly as Keene proposes, is thus also the Bourdieusian way of social analysis in which “[i]ndividual facts are to be assembled into models of broader sets of relations so that the individual elements” reveal their relevance to an actual phenomenon in a similar way as ideal types.¹¹⁶

Margaret Levi terms her concept of ideal types ‘analytical narrative’ and describes it as “a model of action, to theorize about the relationships among the actors, institutions, and structures that are the constituent parts of a complex phenomenon”¹¹⁷, defining “institutions as rules, both formal and informal, that influence behavior by means of constraints and incentives.”¹¹⁸ With this idea of analytical narrative, she echoes the way fields map the topography of domestic or global social spaces by identifying the main object of struggle, the population and the boundaries of fields that all define “the relationships that objectively link different positions around a given set of stakes”.¹¹⁹ Such an analysis, however, needs to keep in mind that “there is an unequal distribution of resources for reality construction” so that “not all actors are equally situated to understand and act upon the world in similar terms.”¹²⁰

Levi continues to explain that “[u]nderstanding sources of change is critical to understanding institutional transformation” but also advises “to comprehend the reasons for institutional stability.” In her understanding, the process consists of “choosing a problem or puzzle, then building a model to explicate the logic of the explanation and to elucidate the key decision points and possibilities, and finally evaluating the model through (...) the testable implications the model generates”¹²¹ by “logic, conformability and generalization (...)”¹²² Although Levi explains that *analytic* in analytical narrative “here refers to the use of models derived from rational choice”¹²³, Jackson argues in reference to *his* concept of analytical narrative:

“It is immaterial whether those analytical narratives are based in rational-choice, social-mechanistic, or discursive practice ideal-typifications of social action; in all of these cases, what researchers do is to order analytically the empirical data in

¹¹⁶ Swartz 1997, 61-62.

¹¹⁷ Levi in Shapiro et al. 2004, 202.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 204-205.

¹¹⁹ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 32.

¹²⁰ Swartz 1997, 57.

¹²¹ Levi in Shapiro et al. 2004, 208.

¹²² Ibid., 216-219.

¹²³ Ibid., 208.

accord with a model the worth of which lies not in its correspondence to the world, but in its pragmatic consequences for ordering the facts of the world.”¹²⁴

Analytical narratives can be seen as a way to operationalize ideal types more concretely. They require the extraction of “key actors, their goals, and their preferences and the effective rules that influence actors’ behaviors” and “elaborating the strategic interactions that produce an equilibrium that constrains some actions and facilitates others” in order “to pose a challenge that might produce new insights and competitive interpretations of the data.”¹²⁵ Referring to the authors she developed the concept of analytical narrative in collaboration with, she mentions that “each has training and experience in historical research, fieldwork, or both” to give insight into the methodological background that precedes working with analytical narratives. Crucially for the international society, Levi concludes that “[c]ertain institutions in certain contexts become self-enforcing in the sense that the alternatives continue to appear unattractive”, adding that “[b]eliefs by the players then matter as much as history”, beliefs that are affected by historical experience but also “by what actors know of the other players within the current context.”¹²⁶ A similar reference to game theory as part of an explanation for behavior in international society is also present in Navari’s publication on methods in the English School.¹²⁷ The concept of field itself draws on ideas close to game theory. According to Bigo, empirical research is first needed to uncover “what is specifically at stake in the game” to understand, in a second step, how agents position themselves in relation to others, along which lines and which resources they mobilize for this. An additional element are the rules of the game a field contains, which possess partial autonomy in the way they exert power on the agents in a field and cannot be considered mere instruments of power.¹²⁸

Analytical narratives and ideal-types, equated and subsumed by Jackson under the label of analyticism, lend themselves to transcultural research since they place the cultural value commitments that make up the personal capacity of the researcher to attribute significance to certain elements of a phenomenon front and center in their method.¹²⁹ This is also the exact meeting place where Hedley Bull and Pierre Bourdieu enter into a dialog. Adler-Nissen emphasizes that “Bourdieu would have agreed with Bull that IR scholars lack ‘reflexivity’ (...)” due to the way values of researchers enter the research design unconsciously in conventionally

¹²⁴ Jackson 2011, 115.

¹²⁵ Levi in Shapiro et al. 2004, 208-209.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 214-215.

¹²⁷ Navari in Navari 2009, 9.

¹²⁸ Bigo 2011, 240.

¹²⁹ Jackson 2011, 143.

formalistic scientific methods.¹³⁰ Regarding the discipline of philosophy, Rošker demonstrates the problem of transcultural methods. There is just no third objective and neutral angle from which to view Western and Chinese IR and compare them and consequently what any research design draws on always includes a Western perspective to some degree. “Any comparative discourse or procedure which aims to provide new knowledge, must therefore also include interpretations, evaluations, and hence judgments.”¹³¹ Objectivity’s impossibility, however, does not doom any transcultural research method to invalidity but it does mean that scholars must be aware and conscious that any transcultural approach has a Western-centric burden right from the start. Rošker provides orientation through Li Zehou’s philosophy, which “is holistic, but structured in accordance with binary categories that function through the principle of correlative complementarity” and has a “dynamic, processual, and contextual nature, which also belong to the main specific features of the Confucian framework.”¹³²

Following Jackson’s methodological explanation, after researchers located themselves in a particular cultural context in first analytical step corresponding with the situation described in the previous paragraph, the corresponding values are formalized in relation to empirical observations about a certain phenomenon, in order to craft an explanatory device for this phenomenon. This means using one’s own dispositions, by virtue of a reflective step in the research design, in a systematic, logical and generalized way as scientific equipment to conclude to the causes of behavior. Connecting values and practices this way does not lead to lifelike depictions or representations but *analytical* representations, or analytical narratives, that transparently trace why certain aspects are perceived to be significant and others are not. Application of analytical narratives does not take place in the fashion of hypothesis testing aiming to falsify or verify a certain statement, since this approach does not aim at producing objectively true facts about causality in a certain phenomenon. The model constructed serves the purpose of answering questions that inquire about the meaning of certain actions, as well as the values embedded in and the motivations behind certain behavior.¹³³

In other words, observations of practices that take place under the inevitable condition of the researcher’s own positionality, which is transparently systemized, serve to theorize about causes for behavior (causality understood here in heavily qualified terms), by means of generalized laws that, too, due to their limited validity, can only serve as heuristic tools. Again, the combined inductive-abductive method is clearly recognizable in the research design. This

¹³⁰ Adler-Nissen in Adler-Nissen 2013, 10.

¹³¹ Rošker 2021, 122-123.

¹³² Ibid., 132.

¹³³ Jackson 2011, 143-145.

thesis enjoys the specific advantage of examining areas of norm contestation, where values are exposed intentionally with the goal of substituting or complementing them. The task here is to distinguish between a research design that opposes Eurocentric understandings of international order on the one hand, and strategic geopolitical criticism of the Chinese government on what it considers to be a global order that is dominated by ‘Western, liberal’ norms on the other hand.

Sociological analysis in the tradition of Bourdieu similarly starts by “an epistemological break with commonsense, everyday representations by constructing the statistical regularities of practice.”¹³⁴ Bigo advises to analyze a field by searching for similarities between agent’s objective positions and “the discourses and position takings of the agents”, which I argue are close to the narratives, self-justifications and self-conceptions mentioned above. These subjective narratives, however, need to get complemented by an evaluative analysis of the capital, the power resources and relations between the agents of the field with specific attention on the factors that award relations with significance and meaning.¹³⁵ The researcher induces agent’s realities and practical logics and “then objectifies them through the interpretation of intersubjective contexts and thereafter pursues further objectification through historicization” to arrive at dispositional logics or ‘meaning of practices’.¹³⁶ The analysis moves between dispositional and structural levels by abstracting structural conditions from individual experiences but also reintegrating those insights in the theorization of agents’ possibilities of practice.¹³⁷ “Practices are therefore constitutive of objective structures” as Swartz explains¹³⁸, though it needs to be pointed out that these objective structures only *seem* objective. Pouliot operationalizes Bourdieu threefold. His research design ultimately results in the construction of *positional* logics, through the reconstruction of *dispositional* logics as middle step, on the basis of an observation of agent’s practices as initial task of the researcher.¹³⁹ An approach where the levels of international order and state respectively fit in without much of a conceptual problem.

2.5. Summary

Ideal-types are created with an explicit research design in mind and can hence “only have scientific merit inasmuch as they help us make sense of actually experienced situations”, in other words, “ideal-typical analysis is all about the transmutation of cultural values into

¹³⁴ Swartz 1997, 56.

¹³⁵ Bigo 2011, 245.

¹³⁶ Pouliot in Adler-Nissen 2013, 50.

¹³⁷ Michael C. Williams, „Culture,“ in Adler-Nissen 2013, 134.

¹³⁸ Swartz 1997, 59.

¹³⁹ Pouliot in Adler-Nissen 2013, 46.

useful analytical tools.”¹⁴⁰ Understanding the reproduction of international order, according to this method, is to examine how resources of power become recognized and significant as such, which is a process of meaning-making through institutions of international society as the ES conceptualizes them. *Tianxia*, for example, “provides us with a heuristic device for understanding how Chinese elites view their role in the world, and the world itself”, according to William Callahan.¹⁴¹ Beijing’s part-taking in the practice of institutions reveals the self-conceptions and justifications of action that are part of the Chinese government’s own effort of meaning-making and can thus be examined by a sociological/English School method of analysis of international relations. Following this approach, one salient question is which resources of the PRC are considered power resources; why; and by whom. For the answer to this question, ideal-types provide us with “specialized conceptual filters” and “categories and terms that a scholar has derived from a set of value-commitments (...) of a model (...) that might—or might not!— express some of the relevant features of the object.”¹⁴² Summarized from a different perspective, ideal-types “organize empirical observations into systematic facts”, they “are not designed to capture the whole of actuality, but instead to help us bring some analytical order to our experiences. (...) Ideal-types provide a set of analytical categories in terms of which empirical observations can be generated and sorted (...).”¹⁴³

The function of the method as a whole, as far as the authors generally agree, is the examination of the *structure of relations of significance* within the state-collective, by focusing our attention on the link between actors, institutions and structures, as Levi clarified. The basic technique for this method is to turn value commitments into analytic lenses to uncover relations between empirical observations and cultural values that award the former significance. This configuration of analytical lenses, however, means crafting a model not to verify or falsify hypotheses, but instead understand the meanings and motives of behavior. Institutions define the relationships between identities as Smith argued, and similarly according to Navari, institutions and rules/norms create conditions and dispositions conducive to the creation of international order. Ideal-types provide us with specialized conceptual filters and analytical categories with which a researcher can generate and systemize empirical observations in order to identify how institutions shape motives and conditions for action. What follows, is a complex understanding of the causations for international order that emphasizes the mutual constitution

¹⁴⁰ Jackson 2011, 144.

¹⁴¹ William A. Callahan, “Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-hegemonic or a New Hegemony?,” *International Studies Review* 10, (2008): 757.

¹⁴² Jackson 2011, 145-146.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 151-154.

of subjectivity, expressed in values and dispositions, and structure, expressed in norms-systems and power-relations.

In short, I will examine contributions to IR from mainland China and beyond utilizing a qualitative technique. This abductive-inductive technique illustrated above focusses on the link authors create between events and values, which is the fundamental process in human cognition for producing meaning and significance on the elementary level of our knowledge-systems. Working out where meaning and significance originate by uncovering which values are linked to certain events, experiences and observations serves this thesis on two levels. This technique uncovers the construction pattern of IR theories on the academic level but also contributes to the understanding of primary institutions of international society because, following K. Holsti, they represent a link between values, norms and practices as well. The bridge between those two levels is the normative character of some Chinese IR theories. Zhao Tingyang, Qin Yaqing and Yan Xuetong not only try to explain the world, but they also tell their audience what a good world order would be, and this naturally sets values on a prominent place in their theories. Of course, neorealism, constructivism, the English School and other directions within the broader discipline of IR also contain values, but those values are deeper seated than in the “Chinese school”.

For the present thesis, this means that I propose a model of the way China took part in the reproduction of international order and the way international order also took part in the creation of the various incarnations of China in several states-systems. The Chinese self-conception heavily builds on the idea of a cultural continuity reaching millennia into the past, and it is scientifically salient to pay attention to the way certain instances of a Chinese state have indeed been present during the series of highly diverse historic international orders. This fact enables an intricate research design in the way the seemingly constant presence of China plays out against a diverse sequence of different orders China has been embedded in. The concrete research objective here, is to find a better way to describe how Beijing practices powers of meaning-making on the one hand and how it tries to promote the value of the power resource ‘culture’, Chinese cultural capital, on the other. The innovative way this research design works, is by understanding culture as relational power resource and emphasizing meaning-making as salient practice of international political behavior. Meaning-making works through the attribution of significance in the attempt of an actor to connect certain values with elements of the global political cosmos to pursue certain goals.

The cornerstone of this methodology is to explain international order, which includes Hedley Bull’s conception of international order as goal-oriented activity patterns. Additionally,

following Practice Theory opens up new understandings of actor and structure, which is why I argue that the questions “What is order?” and “Who is actor?” are two sides of the same coin. Especially while keeping in mind the idea of order as goal-oriented social activity patterns. My proposal in conclusion of this chapter, is to search for causal relationships behind both orders and actors in institutions. (Institutions, as will be explained in the remainder of this text, in the sense of primary institutions in the sense of the English School as practices and rules-systems, as opposed to secondary institutions such as international organizations.) The search for causes does not mean to look *if* institutions exist, but *how* they work, and which norms and values are negotiated within them. To understand the contemporary changes in international order from the background of growing PRC assertiveness and an alleged great power competition between PRC and US, this project aims to investigate how Chinese ideas are aimed to impact institutions.

3. The Belt and Road Initiative and World Trade

In the previous chapter it has been clarified that the present thesis examines relationships between actors, institutions and structures through a reflection and deep dive into the powers of meaning-making with the aim to answer the question “Who is actor/What is order?”. The second research objective presented in the previous chapter is mapping the creation and contestation of *spaces of legitimate action*, which I suggest to call institutions. These are connected because, as it will be shown later, who an actor is determines what they can legitimately do. This chapter will answer the question which actors, institutions and structures shall be examined and introduce actors and orders so that the thesis overall can inquire who these actors truly are and what this order actually is. Before engaging this objective in a complex conceptual way however, this chapter will illustrate how the PRC government conducts this in actual foreign policy. This contributes to the general content of the chapter discussing the puzzle that started the present thesis: Asian regionalism, its influence on world order and China’s role in that. The chapter on methods introduced the idea that a research design should examine a value-event-link. This chapter will introduce the event examined in the present project: the BRI. This chapter’s sections about the developmental state and regional production networks could represent the material side of trans-subjectivity or the cultural networks of norms-systems and are they even the material side or are materiality and ideas so wildly mixed in these concepts that regional production networks are just another perspective on Asian cultural networks.

Part I - The Belt and Road Initiative

Asia gains momentum as fulcrum of geopolitics and geoeconomics against the transatlantic¹⁴⁴ and how to theorize about this new situation is contested¹⁴⁵. For Martin Jaques, “2003-5 global awareness of [China’s] transformation and the meaning and effects of that transformation for the rest of the world suddenly began to dawn.”¹⁴⁶ A Chinese rise with global transformational effects as it is mentioned here, is best represented by the Belt and Road Initiative because “the world economy is increasingly Asia-centered and Asia’s economy is

¹⁴⁴ Kuan-Hsing Chen, “Introduction: The decolonization question,” in *Trajectories: Inter-Asian Cultural Studies*, ed. Kuan-Hsing Chen (Routledge, 1998), 2.

¹⁴⁵ William A. Callahan, “Sino-speak: Chinese Exceptionalism and the Politics of History,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71, no. 1 (2012): 33–55.

¹⁴⁶ Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order*, (Penguin Books, 2012), 463.

increasingly Sinocentric”¹⁴⁷. Other authors described this as a “Sinocentric Eurasian order”.¹⁴⁸ Although China’s rise has received overwhelming attention, epistemological background analysis need to continuously adapt, even more so, many theories on the PRC’s transformation have not even emancipated themselves entirely from orientalist ideas.¹⁴⁹ Beijing’s inauguration of the new Silk Road meant that “Asia now stands ready to face the West not just economically or politically but also normatively and epistemically.”¹⁵⁰

During the peak of globalization enthusiasm in the 90s and early 2000s, ambitious theorization emerged, suggesting that the ‘constitution of the global economy’ results from the world’s cultural economy or the “cultural politics of global trade”.¹⁵¹ This refers to a system made up by the interrelation of economy, culture and politics, which is so complex that no causal order exists in it. The socio-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai notably theorized that global flows manifest in ethno-, techno-, finance-, media- and ideoscapes.¹⁵² If one were to maintain the idea of a causal order, capitalism in its expression of financial capital, with its advantage to take initiative (that is, in causation) over other flows, can be attributed more impact on the world than the other categories.¹⁵³ Understanding world order in terms of a global cultural economy means accepting that there is no social, political or cultural phenomenon and space, which exists outside dimensions of trade.¹⁵⁴ Ulrich Menzel’s *Die Ordnung der Welt* (The Order of the World, 2015) illustrates that the organization of international trade¹⁵⁵ and innovations in the transport sector¹⁵⁶ must be prioritized above all else in states’ pursuit of power. Unlike many Western governments, those in East Asia seem to grasp the paramount importance of this existential issue.¹⁵⁷

¹⁴⁷ Randall Morck and Bernard Yeung, "China in Asia," *China Economic Review* 40, (2016): 297.

¹⁴⁸ Nadège Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century?: Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative* (National Bureau of Asian Research, 2017), 3.

¹⁴⁹ Michael Clarke, "Beijing’s March West: ‘One Belt, One Road’ and China’s Continental Frontiers into the 21st Century," (paper presented at the 66th PSA Annual International Conference “Politics and the Good Life”, Brighton, March 2016), 7.

¹⁵⁰ LHM Ling, “Three-ness: Healing world politics with epistemic compassion,” *Politics* 39, no. 1 (2019): 41.

¹⁵¹ Daniel Drache and Marc D. Froese, "The global cultural commons after Cancun: identity, diversity and citizenship," CSGR Working Paper No. 178/05 (November 2005), 3.

¹⁵² Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and difference in global cultural economy,” in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 27 – 47.

¹⁵³ Josiah Heyman and Howard Campbell, "The anthropology of global flows A critical reading of Appadurai's Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy'," *Anthropological Theory* 9, no. 2 (2009): 131-148.

¹⁵⁴ William I. Robinson, "Critical globalization studies," *Public sociologies reader* 35, no. 6 (2005): 23; Robert J.C. Young, *Empire, Colony, Postcolony* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 119-121; Christian Fuchs, "Critical globalization studies and the new imperialism," *Critical Sociology* 36, no.6 (2010): 840.

¹⁵⁵ Ulrich Menzel, *Die Ordnung der Welt* (Suhrkamp, 2013), 1084.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁵⁷ Peter Frankopan, *The New Silk Roads: The Present and Future of the World* (Bloomsbury, 2018), 52-53.

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an umbrella term for several investment projects and something that be called a ‘meta-strategy’. It has two parts namely the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. It is a concept which aims to increase connectivity between Asia, Europe and Africa, to enhance trade flows and spur long-term regional economic development, with an inclusive intention to benefit all those involved. Central Asia will be given priority, because of its proximity to Western China, abundance of natural resources and need for greater stability.¹⁵⁸ The Silk Road Economic Belt envisages a massive network of roads, railways, pipelines, communication links, bridges and other hard and soft infrastructure. China’s \$4 trillion fund of foreign reserves could support much of its foreign investment program, supplemented by its newly created Silk Road Fund and from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRICS group’s New Development Bank.¹⁵⁹ Infrastructure and connectivity are the main barriers to trade on Eurasian land-routes today.¹⁶⁰ Several of China’s poorer provinces—Tibet and Xinjiang among them—lie on China’s borderlands, and connecting the neighboring economies through them would act as a spur to their overall development.¹⁶¹

As the architect of the new Eurasian infrastructure, the Chinese government aims to construct pipeline and transport routes directed at China to build the foundation of China-centered production-networks.¹⁶² The Silk Road Economic Belt is also supposed to serve the political task of stabilizing both China’s western provinces and the crisis regions beyond its borders like Afghanistan and Pakistan. China also tries to establish dependency structures which help to increase international influence, as most of the financing for the infrastructure projects comes from Chinese funds. The superior objective behind this is to actively participate in furthering the multipolar world order, strengthen the initiative to reform the global constitution of power and establish a new system of international relations.¹⁶³ BRI is expected to be the critical driver for China’s long-term development, a way to reform the structure of its own economy and a key pillar of its ‘going global’ strategy. It is meant to shape both China’s national economic development strategy and international activities for decades to come. Far beyond any Western government’s horizon the project’s full-scale spans 40 years, with 2049 as

¹⁵⁸ Yeroen van der Leer and Joshua Yau, "China’s New Silk Route: The Long and Winding Road," (PwC’s Growth Markets Centre, February 2016): 1-7.

¹⁵⁹ Ravi Bhoothalingam, "The Silk Road as a global brand," *China Report* 52, no.1 (2016): 48.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 45–52.

¹⁶² Moritz Rudolf, "One belt, one road: mit der Seidenstraßeninitiative baut China ein globales Infrastrukturnetz" *MERICCS China mapping* (Mercator Institute for China Studies, 2015).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

a key milestone on the 100th anniversary of the PRC.¹⁶⁴ Within China, around 16 of the country's 27 provinces are covered by BRI and an even larger number has indicated a desire to participate. In its current form, BRI is also China's grand strategy for developing a larger leadership role on the international stage and enhancing ties with neighboring nations. Alongside its trade power, the country hopes to expand its influence in a geopolitical marketplace.¹⁶⁵

The Silk Road Economic Belt contained projects from long to short distance transportation. Regional lines link China's westernmost city Kashgar and Gwadar, a harbor in Pakistan, or Kunming in South China and the Chinese infrastructure project in Myanmar's Sittwe. The YuXinOu railway line¹⁶⁶ was an example for long distance transportation, which due to the war in Ukraine has become obsolete. To capture the former scope of the BRI, the long-distance routes will be introduced nevertheless. It was regarded as a successful project by some, with endpoints in several European cities like Duisburg, Lodz and Hamburg and various Chinese cities like Shenyang, Chengdu and Chongqing. For several years, a number of fast block trains had been put into operation by Chinese, Russian and German companies.¹⁶⁷ At some moment, twenty trains per week ran between West-China and Duisburg, Europe's biggest river port. DB Schenker was a main player transporting car parts over 11000 kilometers to Shenyang, a city in Northeast China. Since late 2016, once a week a train left Hamburg for Hefei in East China. DHL also sent several trains each week from China to Lodz in Poland and further to Hamburg, each loaded with 41 containers. The fastest trains took twelve days, though from China's coastal provinces it was three weeks.¹⁶⁸ Several million laptop computers and accessories made in China were shipped this way, bound for customers in London, Paris and Berlin. Since 2011, Hewlett-Packert used this line between one and three times a week to equip stores in Europe. Goods like tires, shoes and clothes traveled from China to Europe. Electronics, construction machinery, auto parts, vehicles and medical equipment took the train back from Germany to China. The sea route, however, has been 25% cheaper, which had to be weighed against the cost of the added time by sea.

¹⁶⁴ Balázs Sárvári and Anna Szeidovitz, "The Political Economics of the New Silk Road" *Journal of European Studies* 6, no.1 (2016): 5.

¹⁶⁵ van der Leer and Yau, 2016.

¹⁶⁶ 渝新欧, the first character is the abbreviation for Chongqing, the second for the middle station in Xinjiang, and the last one for Europe; describing the original connection

¹⁶⁷ Alena Khaslavskaya, "Potential Impact of the New Railway Silk Route on Eurasian Cargo Transportation: Forwarders' Perception" Master's Thesis, Lappeenranta University of Technology, 2016.

¹⁶⁸ Michael Bauchmüller, "Wie Duisburg von einer Zugverbindung nach China profitiert," *Sueddeutsche*, November 6, 2016, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/wirtschaft/logistik-rattern-auf-der-seidenstrasse-1.3234807>.

3.1. BRI in academic literature

Simona Picciau (2016) takes a direct look at the implications of BRI for Europe. Early on, she expresses concern about the future of the EU as global actor in general. The EU-China relations are characterized as ambivalently positive but eventually Picciau states that both China and the EU need to make BRI work for their own sake of securing a stable future.

Karluk and Karaman (2014) are optimistic about BRI saying it moves on toward the “promised outcome”, though this must be a metaphor for a higher aim since no final result was ever defined for the project. Nevertheless, they also mention substantial achievements of the project by introducing the YuXinOu train route. The final evaluation only urges a multilateral approach as critic on BRI and otherwise expects overall positive outcomes.

Morck and Yeung (2016) base their work on the expressive finding that “the world economy is increasingly Asia-centered and Asia’s economy is increasingly Sinocentric”; a statement they affirm several times. They diagnose China’s growth model and weak spots it needs to rectify. But essentially, they assure us of China’s ever increasing economic success in the future. Most importantly they coin the powerful image that “an intra-Asian positive feedback loop seems to be forming”.

Brugier (2014) has a strategic approach aiming at the relations between China and Russia. A view one encounters regularly in works on BRI. She mentions energy security and the stabilization of Xinjiang as objectives for Beijing. Points which are solidly justified and important narratives in the analysis of BRI.

Even though Clarke’s (2008) essay was written five years before BRI was formulated, he puts the extraordinary important aspect of Xinjiang’s integration in the focus and identifies Chinese the approaches which come to full effect through BRI. Those approaches comprise the exact open and interest-based new regionalism that animates the BRI initiative. Xinjiang is now played as an asset and its geopolitical condition complements the processes of building BRI’s Silk Road Economic Belt.

Swaine (2015) displays the Chinese views on BRI and divides sources by presence or absence of authority. Naturally, authoritative sources clad BRI in most diplomatic guises. No hints exist which could prove BRI’s character of mutual benefit wrong, though it is also clear that it would be naïve to think Beijing did not calculate the geopolitical strategic advantages in putting up the BRI initiative.

Schaefer, Shen and Loesekrug-Pietri (2016) see the mutual benefit BRI has for Europe and China, the necessity for China’s future and the challenge it bears for geopolitics. They stress

the cooperation-oriented aspect and laud the AIIB. The authors are the only ones with the economical vision to take emerging low-end industries in Africa into account in which China secures its stand by bringing the trade routes of the prolonged Suez Canal under its control or at least under its observation. The article is generally visionary directed into the future with its analysis of China's future socioeconomic problems, the strategic implications of geoeconomics and the politico-cultural challenge of the eastern resurgence. They conclude that it is necessary both from competitive and cooperative aspects for Europe to embrace BRI and take an active role in implementing the initiative. Not only to avoid losing strategic advantages but also because of promising economic benefits for both the EU and China.

David Vines' (2016) main theory is that China's ascension introduces a new form of global leadership he calls 'concerted unilateralism'. In his eyes, the global US-leadership or Germany's European leadership are authoritarian and opposed to concerted unilateralism, which has an economic approach without social or political obligations. He concludes that the peaceful nature of China's rise will be harder to maintain in the future and therefore advocates for careful management of further trade liberalization in order to avoid disruptive geoeconomic conflicts.

Fallon (2015) might be the most outspokenly geostrategic approach to BRI. Becoming a world power is supposed to be a rejuvenation of China. She links BRI to the sophisticated heartland theory, a martial narrative from the early 20th century, which heavily influenced Cold War strategies. The heartland theory emphasizes the overwhelming importance of Central Asia for geopolitics, in respect to BRI a sensitive framework of analysis. Of course, energy security, Sino-Russian relations and indopakistani aspects appear as well as separated evaluations for the US and Europe in which she unsurprisingly diagnoses strategic competitions between China and the West.

Wacker and Hilpert (2015) take a more conciliatory tone and emphasize the opportunities and mutual benefits. They speak about proactive foreign policy and the West's demand that China takes more global responsibility. The Bretton-Woods system is in an adaptive development and denouncing BRI as antiwestern is a fault of over-zealous Western scholars. Yet they also warn that Europe must act united to prevent being outmaneuvered and truly being a junior partner among many others in BRI.

Jin, Li and Wu (2016) start with a promising China-friendly outlook to future Chinese economic growth, which will benefit poorer countries in their development. They analyze China's outward investment mechanisms and present China as supporter of the global political economy moderately and cautiously promoting reform. Finally, they predict that China's

international influence will be channeled in three ways: through international trade, investment and international finance and international governance. Transformations which follow this influence will be mutually beneficial to both poor and developed countries.

Feng Zhang (2016) connects China's ascension to President Xi Jinping. Partnership-, Silkroad- and financial diplomacy are the pillars of Xi's strategy of rejuvenating China. A sinocentric Eurasian economic system is to be established by strategic partnerships, an open and inclusive framework of regional cooperation and a sinocentric international financial order. All this however, will only be achieved if China manages the uncertainties and risks carefully.

Baklanov (2015) sheds light on the cooperation between Russia and China in Trans-Siberian infrastructure. Most interesting is their introduction of infrastructure-promoted socioeconomic development. The construction of transport routes sets off a process in four stages. Settlements appear on the road and evolve into midsized local economic complexes, which diversify their economy further and grow in population. Eventually, a social-economic belt tens of kilometers in width is being formed along transport ways. An encouraging projection, whose validity they proved by examples for successful predecessors like the Amur River region and the main Trans-Siberian Railway.

Lin (2011) sees continuities between the naval missions of Zheng He during the Ming dynasty and China's contemporary policies. Additionally, the Westphalian Concept of nation states seems deeply alien to China in her analysis. The testimonial of Zheng He as an envoy of peace and friendship is supposed to disguise China's neo-imperial role in the global order. In respect to China's neo-colonialist approach to Africa however, Zheng He is seen as a man of gunboat diplomacy who symbolizes proto-maritime colonialism. With China's Finlandization of the Western Pacific it replicates this form of colonialism. North Korea, Afghanistan and Myanmar are victims of a Quasi-Manchukuo Policy conducted by China in their discreet expansion and stealth imperialism. After revealing that China is steadily militarizing its railway, Lin concludes with a warning against a strengthening Sino-Turkish alliance.

McBride (2015) also links China's new self-confidence to the leadership of Xi Jinping. The main motives for BRI are exporting consumer goods and overcapacity for infrastructure. A strategic aim is the stabilization of Xinjiang by economic development. He also mentions the popular aspect of energy security, which certainly is a reason for China to promote the Central Asian infrastructure.

According to Huang (2016), BRI is mainly supposed to support future economic growth in China, but he also acknowledges the comprehensive dimension of the initiative including a greater Chinese influence in the international economic architecture among other goals. China

realizes the need to adjust its economy and is willing to do so in a way which invites neighboring countries to take beneficial part in the process. The other side of BRI is the reform of the global system. There seems to be a consensus that international political economy must be reformed. The world has changed tremendously since the system was established in the aftermath of WWII, but international economic institutions do not reflect that change. China's recent initiatives like BRI and AIIB are part of a self-defensive mechanism against Western domination. Beijing has no intention to overthrow the existing order. BRI might or might not change the global economy, but it has a chance to contribute significantly to Central Asian infrastructure and this alone deserves support.

Aris (2016) mentions the Duisburg-Chongqing-Line as one piece in a puzzle whose bigger picture is a China-centered connectivity project. Beijing must address the fear of sovereignty-losses by smaller countries to overcome the resistance to BRI. The initiative is vital to China for a variety of reasons: Domestic political stability, securing future economic development and establishing enough international influence to protect Chinese interests. Aris' conclusion points to the need of solving the tensions in the Chinese-Russian-European power triangle in order to successfully realize the BRI project.

Habova's (2015) strength is the realization of the limited validity of Western explanation frameworks. China's sovereignty depends on the stability of Xinjiang. For this aim, China is competing with the great powers in Central Asia through the recently cultivated periphery diplomacy by offering neighbor-countries win-win partnerships. Such partnerships attract developing countries with convenient conditions in contrast to cooperations with Western nations. Although the consolidation of a Eurasian power nexus would challenge the West heavily, Islamic extremism, the development of Sino-Russian relations and the future role of the USA all have considerable impact on the further progress and could render such projections to mere specters.

Wang (2016) illustrates the official Chinese view on Sino-European cooperation in the BRI initiative. He stresses the benefits of linking the East Asian economic powerhouse with the West European advanced industries and markets. Cooperating in a new model of globalization to form a gigantic Eurasian economic sphere is his goal. Surprisingly he admits that BRI and the Marshall Plan have similarities in their diplomatic approach. Among the benefits of BRI he mentions that Eurasia shall be the center of human civilization again, Russia and Europe could seize the chance to reconcile, the EU could strengthen its integrational process and could take part in the affairs of the Pacific region more easily to strengthen its position against the USA.

Clarke (2016) talks about the ‘export of Beijing’s development model’ and introduces Francis Fukuyama’s recent publication that heralds a global revolution of power structure in case of BRI’s success. Clarke criticizes a number of authors for considerably underestimating the issue of Chinese ethnic minorities. “The importance of China’s ethnic minority populations can also be gauged by noting that they are concentrated in 64,3% of the country’s total land area and 90% of China’s border regions” (2). Two big mistakes have been made in analysis of international politics around China’s rise. The first one is the neglect of Chinese position in Central Asia. The second one is a striking lack of quality in theories describing a ‘global China’. Of central importance to China’s international position is its behavior in Central Asia and this behavior is defined by its relationship to its ethnic minorities. Clarke discusses this relationship in depth as he draws from traditional Chinese paternalistic center-periphery attitudes and even from North American narratives about a frontier experience. The very existence of China depends on relieving the disparity between its coastal and western provinces through economic development. In order to implement this development, Beijing needs to gain the trust of the sinophobic populations in its own Western regions as well as in its neighbor states. China hopes that the benefits for Central Asia are promising enough to win the Central Asian states over for BRI. Also, Xinjiang has been integrated in such a degree that it could serve as an emitter for Chinese politics into Central Asia and perhaps exerting enough political influence to push forward BRI against any obstacles.

Williams (2016) compares the Washington Consensus with the Beijing Consensus. The Beijing Consensus, he clarifies, is *neither a consensus nor of Beijing-origin* and hence only serves as an awkward term for the Chinese developmental model. Williams’ thesis is an attempt to define and substantialize this term and determine the difference between Chinese and Western developmental models. He does this by isolating and discussing four “ideological pillar(s)” of BRI to “illuminate BRI as an extension of key aspects of the Chinese approach”. First, the emphasis on infrastructure as part of economic growth. Second, China’s hybrid economy of socialist and neoliberal elements in which state-control is emphasized over free markets, whereas both exist parallel. The third pillar is an egalitarian approach to international relations that stresses mutual non-intervention principles and inclusive multilateralism. Lastly the promotion of solidarity among the peoples of China and the developing countries by people-to-people-exchange. Examples from the China-Africa cooperation and the Confucius institutes are extensively listed to illustrate China’s enormous advance in cultural politics. Williams diagnoses that “these tools of cultural diplomacy are foundational to BRI. He concludes with a call for US-support to BRI and the embrace of a new multipolar world.

Fukuyama (2016) calls BRI a potential transformation of ‘the economic core of Eurasia’. According to Fukuyama a revolution in Chinese foreign policies leads to a global geopolitical competition between Chinese and Western approaches to economic progress. An ideological earthquake of enormous dimensions would shake up the world’s economic, cultural, social and political realities. Fukuyama hints at a direct link between strength in infrastructure and economy on the one side and cultural-political domination on the other.

This was a brief introduction of a variety of articles to give a quick overview of the academic perception of the BRI. The articles all touch vital aspects: Sino-Russian relations, EU-China relations as well as geoeconomical and geopolitical issues. The literature review summarized here caused the initial approach to examine the powers of meaning-making regarding China and the BRI because the perspectives gathered here differ considerable and cover a wide variety of opinions and evaluations, so that a reader eventually wonders who is right in their evaluation of the BRI. Nobody, of course, can authoritatively define what the BRI is, but the stark diversity of perceptions is one puzzle that is worth keeping in mind.

3.2. An in-depth view on the BRI

Instead of adjusting policies according to alleged malign intentions of supposedly antagonist countries, it would be better first to discern the real ramifications global trade has cast on the international community. “Eurasian trade in goods is now close to \$2 trillion each year” as Bruno Maçães points out before continuing: “This is all the more remarkable as this is the axis of the world economy where physical and legal restrictions are most significant and therefore where the potential for growth is the highest.”¹⁶⁹ This urges the question about Eurasia’s future. Eurasia is home to advanced economies in Europe, industrial powerhouses in East Asia, major global energy and resource providers with Russia and the Middle East and a number of emerging economies. Including Africa would make the picture even more expressive yet infinitely more complicated, still, thinking Eurasia without Africa is not possible. This environment is challenging for every actor, be they individual, transnational such as multinational corporations, or states as classic actors on the international stage; let alone hybrids such as state-owned enterprises. How states internally organize their interactions with other units of the international society is very important in order to analyze global politics as an ongoing process of administering the world. Only in this way, one can predict and respond properly to certain state’s behavior and because China is about to offer serious alternatives on

¹⁶⁹ Bruno Maçães, *Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order* (Hurst & Company, 2018), 3.

how to legitimize state behavior and how to establish state identity. So, the framework in which the conduct of international relations was accepted is transforming, and this transformation needs to be understood and must include western state's contribution in shaping its new form, so that core democratic, liberal values will not get lost in a post-Atlantic age. The most tangible advance of this age is China's Belt and Road Initiative. Western states have been wondering whether and how to respond to that initiative and had severe problems in dealing with Beijing's new assertiveness.

3.2.1. Background

Convergence, the idea that all countries eventually become liberal democracies through globalization and capitalist market economy was “perhaps the most powerful foreign policy idea of the last three decades.” Disillusionment with such ideologies, particularly in the case of China, gave way to new ideas of world order. Multipolarity is considered far more realistic meanwhile and the way actors influence each other's norms-system must be understood as far more complex process ¹⁷⁰, a research program this thesis attempts to contribute to. Maybe as a conclusion of this situation, Henry Kissinger can be quoted assessing America's reaction to the Chinese challenge as insufficient and poor, since “[w]e're not good at it, because we don't understand their history and culture.”¹⁷¹

One of the great puzzles that is hard for liberal Western societies to grasp, is the way China seems to manage to develop a hybrid of socialism, Confucianism and conventional economics. Mações thinks that through the universalisms of *tianxia* and Marxism, a global governance approach comes naturally to the Chinese government because it “stresses the relations of interdependence between individual units in a system and takes that insight to its logical conclusion.” He further reminds us that the ideas of Lenin, Wallerstein and others, who “have insisted that the unit of social reality within which we operate, whose rules constrain us, is for the most part the world economy” have an unbroken tradition in Chinese intellectual history.¹⁷² Hybridity is the condition of a whole being mixed together from several different parts. Since there are a large number of countries in global political economy, with all variations of national political economies, the global political economy can be described as a hybrid phenomenon. Hybridity in the case of China's political foundations is described by Ni Peimin in the following words:

¹⁷⁰ Mações 2018, 174-179.

¹⁷¹ Frankopan 2018, 159.

¹⁷² Mações 2018, 78.

“Confucians are well-known for their sense of seeing *tianxia*, “all under heaven,” as a community of shared destiny. (...) *Tianxia* entails a sense of seeing all under the heaven as interconnected (...) But one thing people often forget today is that inherent in communism is a global *tianxia* vision also (...). They saw in this communist vision what the early Confucians called *datong*, or Grand Harmony.”¹⁷³

The term *datong* can also be translated as ‘great community’ and was used in the beginning of the 20th century by Kang Youwei, one of the most influential Chinese reformers, for his utopia of an international community. L.H.M. Ling also emphasizes China’s adaptive approach to political ideology. For China’s case, she explains that “learning involves hybridizing Marxist–Maoist socialism with Asian Capitalism, and precedential learning, drawing on the successes and mistakes of its capitalist neighbours.”¹⁷⁴ Not only in abstract political philosophy, however, does China seek inspiration from outside its own cultural sphere, also in respect of the definition of practical political goals for the future. Peter Ferdinand explains the interest of Chinese politicians in foreign models of development by referring to a chapter about foreign ideas in a publication for party cadres, which discusses China’s path for the 21st century. In this text, European principles of social capitalism, pluralism, quality of live and multilateralism was contrasted with American market fundamentalism, uniformity, materialism and unilateralism. The European norms-system “was presented as more appropriate for peoples around the world than the American one.”¹⁷⁵

European and especially German concepts of political economy are also mentioned by Parag Khanna as a model for China. He even positions this in an historical perspective, explaining that “communist East Germany was a role model for Chinese economic planners” in the 1970s. He continues illustrating that “twenty-first-century Germany is a high-tech social democracy” and then jumps to the arguable conclusion that “China wants to be a giant Germany”.¹⁷⁶ China’s goal seems to be using what is here termed “social capitalism” or “social democracy” as a template for advanced national development. Meanwhile voices rise in Europe claiming to copy the Chinese model and choose or build up certain companies as European “champions” to strengthen the European position in world market. This is the way in which the hybridity of the global political economy works.

¹⁷³ Peimin Ni, "The Underlying Philosophy and Impact of the New “Silk Road World Order”.,” *The Federalist Debate*, no. 1 (2016): 25.

¹⁷⁴ Ling 2019, 42.

¹⁷⁵ Peter Ferdinand, "Westward ho—the China dream and ‘one belt, one road’: Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping," *International Affairs* 92. no. 4 (2016): 947.

¹⁷⁶ Parag Khanna, *Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilizations* (Random House, 2016), 163.

The BRI is hence not only a challenge for Western-style liberal capitalist world order but also philosophically. Socialism with Chinese characteristics seems to be a success story given the country's development in the past decades.¹⁷⁷ The Belt and Road does not follow the trajectory of liberal, free market economy in large parts and instead “perpetuates socialism with Chinese characteristics.”¹⁷⁸ What this means in practical terms is described by Maçães as the ‘Chinese model’ in which the states remains in control and “oversees the way in which the Chinese economy relates to global markets.” International cooperation of this model has “a synergetic relation with the preservation and growth of large state-owned enterprises which can engage in long-term investment”.¹⁷⁹ Unprofitable projects get compensated by lucrative projects, but the return on investment need not necessarily be monetary but political and materialize as increased influence.¹⁸⁰ This idea seems very similar to the Confucian practice of gift-giving, explored deeper in subsequent chapter of this thesis.

Beijing probably does not intent to propagate socialism in a way the Soviet Union did during the Cold War, but it does provide a narrative with the BRI that includes the win-win principle and community of shared destiny. Maçães ponders the status of values in contemporary international society and suggest that “to rebuild the concept of values on a new plane, the effort to bridge differences and find common ground will have to begin anew.” The period world politics is entering has not left behind “the belief in the inevitability of interdependency and connectivity, but it combines it with the recognition of division and conflict.” Borders are of less importance, but cultural and civilizational differences seem more important than before, leading to “a permanently unstable compound of heterogeneous elements.” US-hegemony and *tianxia* would serve the same function of exerting pressure over countries within the system to harmonize their strategies and policies, but their respective worldviews differ significantly. The appeal of *tianxia* might be its emphasis on relationality, unity and togetherness in contrast to the cold mechanisms of capitalism characterizing American capitalism. He suggests that “[n]ations are better seen as intersecting stories and power the ability to determine where the story goes next.”¹⁸¹

Evoking the story of the Silk Roads is convincing “in providing a common narrative that binds peoples and cultures together”¹⁸², but the power strategy behind is must always be

¹⁷⁷ Frankopan 2018, 243.

¹⁷⁸ Rolland 2017, 109.

¹⁷⁹ Maçães 2018, 42.

¹⁸⁰ Rolland 2017, 102.

¹⁸¹ Maçães 2018, 180-193.

¹⁸² Frankopan 2018, 117.

kept in mind. Controlling the narrative is a crucial power instrument to give meaning and legitimacy to the initiative and to counter criticism and “in this, the US has slipped a long way behind a highly competitive field.”¹⁸³ The narrative of the Silk Road in combination with the physical projects could promote an ‘Asian awareness’, supported by the fact that, historically, China’s “identity has primarily been that of a continental power”, which strengthens the continental dimensions of the BRI.¹⁸⁴ Part of the attraction the BRI radiates is the feeling that China as a whole is striving towards one goal laid down in a comprehensive grand strategy.¹⁸⁵ This goal, defined by Xi Jinping himself, is the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.¹⁸⁶ The Beijing government self-evidently is far too weak to mobilize the entire country in something like a new Great Leap Forward, but the image of China as monolithic, powerful party-state is influential in the minds of partners and rivals alike.

3.2.2. Motivations and Intentions

Speculations about the intentions and motivations for the BRI proliferated infinitely in the literature a few years ago. Frankopan even finds that “[e]valuating China’s motivations, actions and their outcomes not just in Africa or along the Silk Roads but around the globe is perhaps the single most important challenge for policy makers in every country around the world today.”¹⁸⁷ He names three main motivators for the BRI. The first one is securing natural resources, primarily energy but also in areas such as agriculture. The second motivation is the transformation of Chinese economy from heavy industry into a more mature form relying on service, skills and technology. Finally, implementing infrastructure projects abroad also helps improve China’s domestic economic geography. Still with a heavy imbalance towards the eastern coastal regions, the BRI is also deep seated in the tradition of opening up and developing China’s westernmost provinces.¹⁸⁸

Additionally, China’s role in the globalization lead to the “realization that China was now highly dependent on foreign markets” and “made it clear that some level of political influence over the latter would have to be developed.” In the course of this endeavor, “China would get new markets for its exports, but in due time it could also import at favorable terms those goods which could no longer be profitably produced at home.” All of this aimed at creating a favorable international environment for China, which can be described as “the initial

¹⁸³ Ibid., 214.

¹⁸⁴ Rolland 2017, 3-4.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 91.

¹⁸⁶ Mações 2018, 165.

¹⁸⁷ Frankopan 2018, 232.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 100-104.

impetus for the Belt and Road.” Mações aptly summarizes the combination of factors in China’s motivation to initiate BRI. “Overcapacity was less the motivation for the Belt and Road than an example of the fundamental problem the initiative was meant to address: China’s dependence on a global system it could not shape or control.”¹⁸⁹ He also points out China’s issues with the ‘middle-income trap’. This describes “a situation where a country can no longer compete internationally in standardized, labor-intensive commodities because wages are relatively too high, but neither can it compete in higher value added activities on a broad enough scale because productivity – constrained by structural factors – remains relatively too low.” Replacing former growth drivers with innovation-driven productivity is a challenging task. “China will get squeezed between low wage competitors in mature industries, and rich-country innovators in industries with rapid technological change”, if the BRI will not succeed in promoting the transition of China’s economy.¹⁹⁰

According to Rolland, “the logic of physical connectivity is as powerful today as it was 150 years ago” and she recognizes the spirit of transcontinental railway projects in the BRI. Apart from spiritual inspiration, she also mentions more tangible aspects: “Beijing hopes to recycle some of its accumulated foreign reserves, utilizes its overcapacity in construction materials and basic industries, and boost the fortunes of state-owned enterprises by opening new markets.” A welcome side effect for Beijing would then be the strengthening and stabilization of authoritarian regimes in China’s neighborhood.¹⁹¹ Historically, she links BRI to two events. The 2008 financial crisis and Obama’s ‘pivot to Asia’ in 2010 “had a profound impact on the Chinese elites’ ongoing assessment of their country’s economic development prospects and external strategic environment.” After these two developments, Beijing felt the necessity of “further broadening China’s ‘strategic hinterland and international space’ and creating a secure and stable peripheral environment”. The BRI attempts to achieve this by “promoting better-balanced domestic development, opening up China’s inland provinces to the outside world, expanding export markets for Chinese goods, and increasing available channels for energy imports.”¹⁹² Rolland concludes that the BRI was Beijing’s endeavor “to mobilize and coordinate the use of all available national resources (political, economic, diplomatic, military, and ideological) to pursue internal (economic development) and external (diplomacy and national security) objectives in an integrated way.”¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Mações 2018, 17-20.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

¹⁹¹ Rolland 2017, 2-3.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 94-96.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 119.

3.2.3. Design and Organization

The BRI is first and foremost the umbrella term for China's infrastructure projects, of all the "roads, railways, pipelines, communication links, bridges and other hard and soft infrastructure" that was summarized under its general headline.¹⁹⁴ "[I]t is a long-term project that aims at creating a web of connections between China and the Eurasian continent" as Rolland explains, starting "from transportation, telecommunication, and energy infrastructure to financial integration and political coordination." She continues to sum up that "6 main economic corridors will constitute its backbone, 56 MOUs and 11 FTAs with BRI countries have been signed, financial institutions have been created".¹⁹⁵ Despite its high profile in Chinese foreign policy in the 2010s, the BRI was not coherent, comprehensive master plan and its "concrete implementation is an evolutionary process that can be adjusted and adapted over time, with each Chinese entity interpreting the concept to suit its own purposes and objectives." In 2017, at the height of BRI activity, the project was run by a 'central leading small group' (an executive group established on demand across different agencies). It was coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce by an office within the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), China's top economic planning agency. The personnel at that time also illustrates the importance and the scope of the BRI:

"Members of the BRI leading group are vice premier and Politburo Standing Committee member Zhang Gaoli (...) Wang Huning, a key policy adviser to Xi and one of the fathers of the BRI idea; Vice Premier Wang Yang, whose portfolio includes trade, agriculture, and tourism; Yang Jiechi, a former minister of foreign affairs and state counselor; and Yang Jing, who serves at key coordinating positions within both the Central Committee and the State Council."¹⁹⁶

The core of the BRI is the concept of 'economic corridors', as Bruno Maçães explains. In contrast to traditional concepts focusing only "on the end-points of the connection with limited consideration to what goes on between them, the economic corridor concept deliberately considers the whole space." This concept considers "different segments of the production chain, to build an expanded 'factory floor' along the full economic corridor across national borders." Economic corridors emerge "through gradual development, urban agglomeration and division of labor leading to the formation of economic clusters."¹⁹⁷ Later on, he points out that a "country

¹⁹⁴ Bhoothalingam 2016, 47.

¹⁹⁵ Rolland 2017, 90.

¹⁹⁶ Rolland 2017, 50-52.

¹⁹⁷ Maçães 2018, 53.

has far more to gain by moving into higher-value segments in a supply chain than by increasing productivity in an already-occupied segment.” For this reason, China is not (only) trying to climb to the top of certain value chains but also tries to build new ones in “capital-intensive and technology-intensive activities”, examples might be robotics, A.I. or electric cars. Building value chains across different countries requires the BRI to include a ‘transnational industrial policy’, coordinating that “the right transportation and communication infrastructures have been out in place and if those countries adopt the right economic policy decisions.”¹⁹⁸ Mações characterizes the BRI as ‘international industrial capacity cooperation’, which is defined as a way to ensure the state’s dominance in economic matters despite capitalist globalization. Although this regional form of cooperation is state-guided, protectionism and economic nationalism is avoided through the creation of platforms in which actors can coordinate their economic policies and strategies.¹⁹⁹

The BRI’s financial were often discussed in superlatives but due to its unsystematic character there was no definitive budget, so that the estimated overall investment ranged “from USD 1.4 trillion to USD 6 trillion.”²⁰⁰ The sources for this sum included the “Silk Road Fund, AIIB, BRICS’ New Development Bank, SCO Development Bank, China-ASEAN Investment Fund”.²⁰¹ Peter Frankopan mentions that by “2015 the China Development Bank, one of the country’s key financial institutions, declared that it had reserved \$890bn to spend on some 900 projects mainly focusing on transportation, infrastructure and energy.” For the same year, he also notes that “the Export-Import Bank of China announced that it had begun the financing of what it expected to number more than 1,000 projects in forty-nine countries as part of the Belt and Road Initiative”. Following the enthusiastic narrative of the time, he also pointed out the scope of these projects: “Multibillion-dollar loans for motorways, bridges, power plants and deep-water ports have been approved in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, with major projects in Indonesia. Vietnam, the Philippines and Thailand also underway.”²⁰² As impressive as this projected budget is, it only seems to be a reasonable answer to Asia’s \$8 trillion infrastructure investment need.²⁰³ An additional function of finance instruments in the

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 80-81.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 102-103.

²⁰⁰ Fan Zhai, “China’s belt and road initiative: A preliminary quantitative assessment.,” *Journal of Asian Economics* 55, (2018): 85.

²⁰¹ Tim Summers, „China’s ‘New Silk Roads’: sub-national regions and networks of global political economy“ *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 9 (2016) 1637.

²⁰² Frankopan 2018, 92-98.

²⁰³ Rolland 2017, 55.

overall strategy, however, is to solve the contradiction between BRI's free market mechanisms and its emphasize on strong state control.²⁰⁴

3.2.4. Infrastructure and Geography

Giving an overview of the infrastructure projects the BRI entails is not an easy task but the attempt will be made here nevertheless, to provide the reader with an idea of the initial scope of the BRI. Fan Zhai admits that the “development has been scattered and uneven” but “[c]onstruction has begun on a railway between Hungary and Serbia, the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Rail, the China-Laos railway, and the China-Thailand railway.” He also adds that “some expressway projects are under construction” and in “Pakistan, some energy infrastructure projects have started.”²⁰⁵ Such energy projects address one of China's biggest problems, “80 per cent of China's imported oil passed through the Indian Ocean and Malacca Strait into the South China Sea.”²⁰⁶ Even though these figures are several years old, with the slow development of the BRI, there can be not significant improvement on the situation for China. Rolland projects for the near future that “China will need to import 600 million tons of crude oil and 300 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually.” The continental corridors of the BRI were estimated to “provide up to 143 million tons of crude oil and 206 billion cubic meters of natural gas – a significant portion of China's projected energy needs.”²⁰⁷

Besides energy infrastructure, one of the signature activities of the BRI was the establishment of Special Economic Zones, trade hubs or industrial parks in order to develop economic corridors across borders, as Mações explains. “By 2016 a progress report on the Belt and Road already enumerated eighteen border cooperation zones and fifty-two industrial parks as being operational across eighteen countries.” In Horgos, or Khorgos, on the border between Kazakhstan and China, “a major new dryport is being developed with the explicit ambition of organizing the network of future roads and railways”. The initial idea was to have a large cargo hub at the middle point of the China-Europe lines, which could also serve as the seed of an economic corridor that would grow from this network node. The expectations involved “new industrial areas and new cities to start emerging along the new trade routes, taking advantage of the new infrastructure, low labor costs and growing industrial specialization in different economic regions.”

²⁰⁴ Mações 2018, 48.

²⁰⁵ Fan Zhai 2018, 86.

²⁰⁶ Mações 2018, 21.

²⁰⁷ Rolland 2017, 113.

Mações continues to explain the role of sea-ports, which of course are just as much included in the BRI as dryports. With the new situation in Eurasia after Russia's invasion in Ukraine, they probably rose steeply in importance. He elaborates that "Chinese companies have been involved in the construction, management and expansion of numerous port facilities, from Hambantota in Sri Lanka to Gwadar in Pakistan, Kyaukpyu in Myanmar and Doraleh in Djibouti." Some of these ports are not only steps along the way but have a more intricate function to link land and sea. Gwadar in Pakistan and Kyaukpyu in Myanmar are the main ports that "are meant to connect the Indian Ocean with China via overland transport corridors" and might help China bypass the chokepoint of the Malacca Straits. Beyond Asia there are examples like the port of Doraleh, which is an extension of the port of Djibouti. The "initial rationale was to serve landlocked Ethiopia, a country of 100 million inhabitants where China wants to move some of its low-end manufacturing, such as footwear and apparel." This port is integrated into a larger economic zone as well and China "has financed and built a new fast railway linking Addis Ababa and Djibouti".²⁰⁸

L.H.M. Ling provides an historic perspective on the infrastructure of the old Silk Roads that might be compared to the modern incarnation. She points out the variety between the settings, "urban centres and desert oases, monasteries and medical clinics, centres of learning and diverse populations, and various forms of governance with their technologies of war as well as peace." This picture draws parallels to the diversity of settings the modern Silk Road attempts to envelope in its network. What is true for the old nodes of the Silk Roads is also true for the new ones, "[e]ach mixed a wide range of cultures and peoples, lifestyles and worldviews" enriched by exchange and flows between them "despite frequent conflicts and contestations." Ling eventually terms the intellectual tradition of interdependence and adaptability "that led to a non-individualistic, non-predatory way of life" the *Silk Road Ethos*. This ethos was practiced through the physical infrastructure from the Tang capital of Xian all the way to the metropolises of Alexandria and Cordoba, and she believes it lives on "as an underlying, unspoken, unnamed legacy."²⁰⁹

Returning to the present, the BRI also made headlines with its long-distance railway lines of which there were several running from Spain to China's coastal regions. Even though they are no longer in operation, it would not do justice to the BRI to withhold a brief overview of the transcontinental railway projects. The Zhengzhou-Hamburg line opened in 2008, the Suzhou-Warsaw line was launched in September 2011, the Chongqing-Duisburg line was

²⁰⁸ Mações 2018, 55-68.

²⁰⁹ Ling 2019, 39-40.

inaugurated in January 2011, the Chengdu-Lodz line started operating in April 2013 and the Yiwu-Madrid line was inaugurated in December 2014. These lines helped to reduce the transit time for containers trains between Asia and Europe “to only ten to seventeen days, 50% faster than ocean freight.” Rolland considered the BRI as “a network of roads and railways that will stretch across the roughly 11,000 kilometers (km) Eurasian continent.” “Together with a parallel network of pipelines, fiber-optic cables, and telecommunication links”, she explained during the BRI hype, “this transportation infrastructure is seen as the first step in the creation of an economic corridor that will integrate the landlocked economies of the Eurasian hinterland and tie them more tightly to China.”²¹⁰

The foundation of this network can be traced back to “the beginning of the 1990s thanks to China's cross-border connection with the ex-Soviet network in Central Asia.” The BRI used this basis and expanded considerably on it. In 2015, trains made 815 trips between China and Europe, increasing by 165% in comparison with 2014, carrying goods from China such as clothing and information technology products and often returning from Europe with goods such as mechanical equipment and food products.²¹¹ All of this was made possible by China’s progress in the high-speed rail sector, which presents “a particularly striking example of the mutual reinforcement and increased synergies between the objectives of the central government and those of the SOEs.” This became so much intertwined with Chinese foreign policy that the term “high-speed railway diplomacy” was coined, describing “the diplomatic message that is at the heart of BRI: connection, interaction, and cooperation”. Although the initiative mostly served Chinese interest, high-speed railways were a symbol of China’s success in regions where Western institutions and Western countries previously failed to implement economic development.²¹²

The BRI is a fascinating collision of material reality and ideational symbolism. In Frankopan’s words, the value of the transcontinental railway lines has always been “symbolic rather than of immediate practical use, given that shipping by land is significantly more expensive than by sea”.²¹³ The South China Sea is an issue far more on the practical side. Not only *a* crossroads of global economy but *the* crossroads of global economy, it is essential for China to exert influence in this region. China’s defensive network of fortified islands serves more to protect China’s position rather than enhance it and thus “protecting the South China Sea is not just a question of an expression of newfound military and political power or even an

²¹⁰ Rolland 2017, 37-48.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

²¹² Rolland 2017, 103.

²¹³ Frankopan 2018, 99.

issue of national security.” It is the bare minimum to ensure China survival, lest its rivals simply cut it off from trade routes, markets and resource supplies. The interesting puzzle here is that China’s approach towards this threat was not to conduct careful steps towards this goal but the inaugurate the BRI as a massive grand strategy. The BRI as a “vision is more expansive and ambitious than just creating new connections with neighbors (...) for the network that China has been building is one that spreads into the Pacific, the Indian Ocean and deep into Africa.”²¹⁴

3.2.5. Geopolitics

The Belt and Road Initiative might be considered China’s apprenticeship as major power. All the successes and failures of the last ten years taught Beijing valuable lessons about global politics, international influence, cooperation and competition or diplomacy. Only three years after the BRI’s inauguration, “thousands of negotiations have been initiated and a quite impressive list of concrete results has already been delivered”.²¹⁵ The initiative was meaningful in high profile diplomacy as well as in day-to-day cooperation on a more economic and administrative level. On the hand stand the challenges linked to establishing a railway between the southern parts of China and Laos, and on the other hand performing on the stages of international summits. One particularly memorable moment is Xi Jinping’s speech at Davos in 2017, where the world wondered about a Chinese leader advocating for free and fair trade, in contrast to an American president.²¹⁶

Beijing is not oblivious to the apprehension many neighbors and smaller countries around the world experience in facing China’s threateningly fast ascent. Political alliances based on ideological attraction are therefore no option, so China put its (literal) money on the idea of ‘strategic economy. The core of the BRI is the idea that “[e]conomic cooperation is not just a way to boost development”, but “also a tool to be used for political and strategic gain”²¹⁷ The strategy profits from growing dissatisfaction with the overall economic order expressed for example in the establishment of the BRICS-group. The sentiment that a ‘Western club’ benefits disproportionately from the system as compared to the global south is growing. Frankopan finds that certain “developing countries were summarily excluded in a system that locks in advantages for the rich, at the expense of the poor – while enabling the former to pontificate to

²¹⁴ Ibid., 110-113.

²¹⁵ Rolland 2017, 71.

²¹⁶ Frankopan 2018, 244.

²¹⁷ Rolland 2017, 115.

the latter.” China, it seems to the contrary, “is opening its doors at a time when those elsewhere are being closed.”²¹⁸ Rolland sums up this point rather aptly:

“Infrastructure is the physical manifestation of globalization. Roads, railways, pipelines, bridges, and airports are the vital sinews of trade and commerce – the conveyors of goods, materials, produce, and people; the epitome of openness; and the supposed antidote to economic isolation and backwardness.”²¹⁹

The economic challenge for the West is two-pronged, first off “American and European multinationals may see their supply networks erode as China emerges as a rival buyer and producer”. If China organizes its own, new supply chains, however, Western companies also find themselves “losing important streams of revenue from controlling the standards used worldwide.” Consequently, the “principal issue is what *set of rules* will govern the way these value chains are organized.”²²⁰ [my italics] China’s strategic economic approach is even broader than that, since Beijing proclaimed to “also provide assistance of RMB 60 billion to countries along the BRI routes that will be focused on food, housing, health care, and poverty alleviation.”²²¹ Even though Mações states that “development is no longer seen as bricks-and-mortar building of factories and bridges, but as institution-building” in the BRI, this seems exaggerated in light of the many infrastructure and industry projects of the initiative. He might still be right in considering the BRI “a major change in developmental philosophy, an alternative development model, a complete break with the ideas now dominant in Western-led institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank”.²²² Earlier in his book, he illustrated this new political economy in the following way:

“The economic geography bringing all these projects together is one where the Congo occupies the bottom segments of the supply chain, Kazakhstan moves to the middle and China occupies the top, reserving for itself both the most lucrative segments of production and the organizing role. Western companies are – in this case – nowhere to be found.”²²³

During the BRI hype, many declared a new age of international politics to be dawning with tones ranging from alarmistic and terrified to hopeful and utopian. There is no evidence that the BRI indeed represents “a complete break” with ideas about development. Frankopan

²¹⁸ Frankopan 2018, 123.

²¹⁹ Rolland 2017, 39.

²²⁰ Mações 2018, 96-97.

²²¹ Fan Zhai 2018, 86.

²²² Mações 2018, 172-173.

²²³ Ibid., 104.

cautioned that “shrill caricatures of China are unhelpful”. Furthermore, he contends that “far from being a subversive power seeking to undermine the international liberal order – as the Soviet Union was – China is in fact conspicuous in the way that it works within institutions”.²²⁴ The US nevertheless regarded the BRI “as a major strategic threat to American power” and developed strategies to contain and disrupt the initiative. Concerning the partner countries, China and the US “will be supporting different elements within the elites and political class, attempting to help them prevail in the domestic competition for power.”²²⁵

The BRI was and is an attempt to “deepen China’s strategic space” in order to prevent an effective US-led containment.²²⁶ In a slightly dramatic way, Frankopan explains that Beijing has been busy making friends and partners all around the world, while “it is striking then to see how few friends the US and the West have along the Silk Roads.”²²⁷ Additionally, it seems that even the allies of the US and the West are unreliable. Most prominent of all India, which “is reluctant to be unnecessarily antagonistic towards its powerful neighbor” and instead opts for a constructive and pragmatic relationship.²²⁸ Russia has of course drifted ever deeper into China’s political and economic gravity, probably urging infrastructure projects in Central Asia to continue even though trains will not go all the way to Western Europe any more.

The Indo-Pacific

Another level where USA and PRC clash is in the very conceptualization of geopolitical regions. In the contemporary discourse, the contested nature of the Asia’s geography has risen to considerable prominence with the concept of ‘Indo-Pacific’, which became popularized in recent years and substituted ‘East Asia’ in most debates on the region. The term was first used in a contemporary geopolitical context by Gurpreet S. Khurana, the executive director of India’s National Maritime Foundation and a former captain in the Indian Navy, “primarily to cope with the growing comprehensive power of China.”²²⁹ During Obama’s first term, it entered US security discourse in relation to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (The Quad)²³⁰ and was made official doctrine under Trump as part of the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy to counter China’s global strategy.”²³¹ Its true origin, however, can be traced back to 1924 in

²²⁴ Frankopan 2018, 160.

²²⁵ Mações 2018, 125.

²²⁶ Rolland 2017, 3

²²⁷ Frankopan 2018, 213.

²²⁸ Ibid., 180.

²²⁹ Sharifah Munirah Alatas, “Appropriating the Indo-Pacific Construct: An Analysis of Eurocentrism from a Southeast Asian Perspective,” *Politikon* 49, no. 2 (2022): 8.

²³⁰ Il Hyun Cho, “Dueling hegemony: China’s Belt and Road Initiative and America’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 2, no. 4 (2019): 18.

²³¹ Cho 2019, 14.

the works of Karl Haushofer (1869–1946), a German geographer.²³² The modern incarnation of the concept, as becomes clear from the quotes above, is clearly an expression of great power competition ”fuelled by the ‘rules-based’, ‘freedom of navigation’ and ‘free and open shipping lanes’ narrative”, which themselves necessitate criticism via indigenous local concepts such as nusantara (derived from the Sanskrit words ‘nusa’ *island* and ‘antara’ *between*) and bebas-aktif (independent and active).²³³

A broader renaissance of the Indo-Pacific discourses took place at the same time the US was searching for a political framework within which strategic responses to the PRC’s activities in the South China Sea could take place.²³⁴ Even though this anteceded official announcements of the BRI, concepts linked to globalization like ‘Asia-Pacific’ were increasingly discarded in favor of the more strategic ‘Indo-Pacific’ once a reaction to the BRI was required.²³⁵ A barely disguised revenant of the ‘yellow peril’, the ‘China threat’ narrative, “is the basis of the Quad’s Indo-Pacific perspective” according to Sharifah Munirah Alatas, who explains that the Indo-Pacific is associated with notions of conflict and security while “principles of connectivity, engagement, and mutual co-existence are secondary.”²³⁶ BRI invokes the Silk Road and despite the project’s maritime part, the image of the Silk Road is primarily a picture of trade along transcontinental routes overland. Eurasia is hence the leitmotif for Silk Road foreign policy, and strictly speaking from geography of proximity and distance, I argue that Eurasia is the most inaccessible and inconvenient concept for US strategic geopolitics. How welcome the re-emergence of a maritime geographic conceptualization of Asia must have been for American strategists. It is ironic how an explicitly Anti-American concept like the Indo-Pacific became the political background for US hegemony in East Asia. Li Hansong explains for example, that the US in this “original Indo-Pacific concept, has no position in the Pacific, there is no spatial coherence in the idea of an American Pacific, thus the US is an Atlantic power and cannot be a member of the Indo-Pacific.”²³⁷

His article is an in-depth analysis of the original Indo-Pacific concept by Karl Haushofer. Li draws parallels between Haushofer’s and 21st century strategists’ failure to reconcile the cultural disunity prevalent in the area described as Indo-Pacific with the claim to

²³² Hansong Li, “The “Indo-Pacific”: intellectual origins and international visions in global contexts,” *Modern Intellectual History* 19, no. 3 (2022): 819.

²³³ Alatas 2022, 13.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

²³⁵ Shaun Lin et al., “Theorising from the belt and road initiative (一帶一路),” *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 62, no. 3 (2021): 262.

²³⁶ Alatas 2022, 8.

²³⁷ Li 2022, 818-819.

conceptualize this area as one consistent region. The strategic partnership, which is supposed to revolve around common values, between India, Japan and the US is invoked by some advocates of the “Indo-Pacific”, but not only Li is skeptical about this approach.²³⁸ Ba also cautions in the case of India’s position in the Quad that “for India domestic priorities, different strategic realities, plus a strategic culture of non-alignment militates against a fuller embrace” and it “has explicitly pushed back against the exclusivist and confrontational logics being attached to the Indo-Pacific.”²³⁹ Other sources support the idea of the skepticism New Delhi has against the Quad in the way the American Anti-China emphasize contradicts India’s inclusive approach towards a regional order.²⁴⁰

Notwithstanding how controversial Haushofer’s position in history is, he did oppose his contemporary colleagues’ fixation on great power competition over resource-abundant regions with a focus on indigenous perspectives in the theorization of sovereign spaces.²⁴¹ After the concept has been severed from its original meaning and twisted to serve great power interests, Alatas suggests nusantara as description of the region defined by cooperation that expresses opposition to both China’s and the USA’s strategic appropriation of the region.²⁴² This concept, however, is little known outside Indonesia and will probably not gain a lot of traction. How both power’s grand strategy is transformed, adapted and partially outright rejected across the region is also the content of Il Hyun Cho’s 2019 article “Dueling Hegemony”. Haushofer hoped that decolonization would change the world order, not European wars, and the conception of the Indo-Pacific as self-perceived region was supposed to be his contribution to the anti-imperialist struggle.²⁴³ The Indo-Pacific, however, has become a Western discourse unaligned with local concepts.²⁴⁴

Haushofer saw the Indo-Pacific as an example for the potential of maritime international environments. He opposed Carl Schmitt’s depiction of maritime nations as almost Lovecraftian ‘fishmen’, inferior to ‘terrestrial races’, and instead derives his Indo-Pacific concept from an appreciation for maritime lifestyles.²⁴⁵ The current Indo-Pacific concept excludes how oceanic spaces bolster a regionalization that promotes not only coexistence but even active engagement of all local states with China and the other dominant powers on the basis of values of “self-

²³⁸ Ibid., 827.

²³⁹ Alice D. Ba, “Multilateralism and East Asian transitions: the English School, diplomacy, and a networking regional order,” *International Politics* 57, (2020): 270-271.

²⁴⁰ Cho 2019, 27-28.

²⁴¹ Li 2022, 822.

²⁴² Alatas 2022, 10-11.

²⁴³ Li 2022, 829.

²⁴⁴ Alatas 2022, 8.

²⁴⁵ Li 2022, 814-815.

determination, neutrality, multilateralism, equality, and nonaggression (...) that should be articulated within the context of a more holistic discourse about the ‘post-colonial’ Indo-Pacific construct.”²⁴⁶ Imagining the Indo-Pacific as space of anticolonial struggles is also exactly what Haushofer suggested through his involvement with Chinese and Indian revolutionaries.²⁴⁷

Mações considers the American concept of Indo-Pacific as “a condominium of India, America, Australia and Japan” that is very much the opposition to the BRI. Hence, it represents the “most singular and important fact about contemporary geopolitics: political and economic integration, the dilution of borders, goes together with increasing competition about how this enlarged space is to be managed and defined.” He places Halford Mackinder and Alfred Mahan in the same tradition as Karl Haushofer, who all criticized the arbitrary divisions of colonial boundaries and “started to advocate the idea of a Eurasian supercontinent from which these modern divisions had been removed.” An idea not dissimilar to China’s vision of Eurasia. The Indo-Pacific as it is imagined by US containment politics, however, would turn Eurasia into “the hinterland of the Indo-Pacific.” The concept of the Indo-Pacific, hence, “is less the acknowledgment of an ineluctable political geography than an initial, inchoate move to create a political initiative, one intended to rival China’s Belt and Road.” Thus, Mações concludes that the “pivotal consequence of the Belt and Road has been to force the United States to adopt a similar concept of geographic space.”²⁴⁸

The values are expressed by the prevalent role inter-connectivity, communication and engagement play as they define the human relationships but also the conduct of international relations in the Indo-Pacific.²⁴⁹ Characteristics of a region that mirror the moral conviction in ancient China “that the universe is one peaceful and harmonious whole.”²⁵⁰ The historical dominance of peaceful trade relations and scarcity of conflicts proves how deeply rooted this behavior is for East and Southeast Asian governments.²⁵¹ This argument is also supported by Cho, who contends that neither China nor the US will become hegemonic in East Asia because Asia does not work according to great power competition logics. Both fail to realize that grand strategy is invalid in a region where not one power can rise up and present a big plan, but deliberation, continuous engagement, communication and interconnectedness is the only

²⁴⁶ Alatas 2022, 12-13.

²⁴⁷ Li 2022, 823.

²⁴⁸ Mações 2018, 119-124.

²⁴⁹ Alatas 2022, 5.

²⁵⁰ Yongjin Zhang and Barry Buzan, “The tributary system as international society in theory and practice,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5, no. 1 (2012): 13.

²⁵¹ Alatas 2022, 7.

working foundation of international relations.²⁵² East Asia is a vivid and potent international society, but not as alliance network of a predominant power, but as discursive space because the international society of East Asia as an “idea is manifested mainly in contestation over what such a regional international society should look like.”²⁵³ ASEAN is the prime representative of this kind of international relations, with a security approach that “prioritises maritime cooperation, connectivity, sustainable development and economic cooperation.”²⁵⁴

ASEAN, but also the other major players like Japan, South Korea or India, will neither wholeheartedly enter into any sinocentric sphere of influence nor a US led anti-China alliance. Although the regional governments engage with both the BRI policies and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, the “key driver behind these strategic calculations is the pursuit of greater regional autonomy in a changing regional order.”²⁵⁵ Eventually, “the resulting regional order in Asia will be far more complex than the extant accounts of hegemony and balancing typically assume.”²⁵⁶

Central Asia

The transnational nature of the BRI is nowhere as apparent as in Central Asia. The BRI was always embedded in efforts to develop China’s northwest and vice versa. “Investments in transportation, water conservancy, power generation and communication has led to a rash of new businesses being established in China’s western provinces”.²⁵⁷ Internationally, Rolland explains that “events such as the Karamay Forum in August 2016, which brought together political and business representatives from Iran, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan” are supposed to promote Xinjiang’s role as regional developmental platform.²⁵⁸ Apart from economic aspects, “[r]educing the development gap between coastal and inner provinces is necessary to preserve social stability, especially in the western province of Xinjiang”.²⁵⁹ The “uneven distribution of growth among the different provinces” has been a challenge for many years to Beijing, which eventually understood that “[c]ities such as Urumqi in Xinjiang were after all closer to the borders of Europe than to Beijing or Shanghai.”²⁶⁰ Although this factor became obsolete in the meantime, the goal was to capitalize on the short transport time of, for

²⁵² See Cho 2019, 15.

²⁵³ Barry Buzan and Yongjin Zhang, “Conclusion: the contest over East Asian international society,” in *Contesting International Society in East Asia*, ed. Barry Buzan and Yongjin Zhang (Cambridge UP, 2014), 207.

²⁵⁴ Alatas 2022, 14.

²⁵⁵ Cho 2019, 15.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁵⁷ Frankopan 2018, 103-104.

²⁵⁸ Rolland 2017, 54.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

²⁶⁰ Mações 2018, 20.

example only twelve days between Xinjiang and Germany. Furthermore, cotton boycotts from Western companies notwithstanding, Xinjiang's cotton industry and clothing exports are essential for Western China, leading Maçães to the projection that Urumqi "will turn into the fashion capital of Central Asia."²⁶¹

Another important factor among the BRI projects is security, associated especially with the Central Asian parts of the route, even though piracy seems to be an ever-recurring issue on the trade routes between Asia and Europe. Central Asia, forgotten as a trade hub by the West with the war in Ukraine, will likely become more important as economic ties between Russia and China intensify. Michael Clarke conducted extensive research on Central Asia's political and security situation and produced invaluable insights into the region and China's role in it. Xinjiang was supposed to be "a central hub of three of the BRI's six identified 'economic corridors'". Its tense security situation however, "may inhibit China's efforts to develop interconnectivity between itself and Central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East." Historically, Clarke designates China as a hybrid power with both maritime and continental strategic potential. The larger threat from Central and Northern Asia, however, means that its strategic culture is firmly continentalist. He names the raids of steppe nomads as example, but I would argue that the Soviet-Chinese antagonism in the 20th century also contributed to this strategic culture.

Clarke argues that the expansive geographic potential to also occupy maritime space, both figuratively and literally, endows China with greater flexibility than the Soviet Union. China's coastline, hence, makes "the application of a Cold War-esque 'containment' strategy by the United States impractical". In addition to the maritime capacity, China has been considering Xinjiang as potential asset from the 1980s onward. If implemented successfully, Xinjiang could be both integrated tighter into China proper as well as developed as a trade and security platform directed at Central Asia. The Vice President of the influential China Institute for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), Yuan Peng, even developed a whole strategic theory around the role of Xinjiang for China. He thinks Central Asia could link China's three geostrategic "rings": the first one being China's fourteen direct neighbors, the second one East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and the Pacific and the third one composed of the remaining nations in further regions. This background turns the BRI from a

²⁶¹ Ibid., 100-101.

2010's moniker for Xi's foreign policy into one part of a whole historic process. The mix of opportunity and challenges suggests to think of Central Asia as "China's Latin America".²⁶²

Some of the specific problems include feelings of Sinophobia caused by China's growing presence in the region or Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's role as transit states in narcotics trade targeting China as end market. Beijing's answers to the security challenges are quite interesting. The Frontier Services Group, a Chinese state-owned security company founded by Erik Prince, former Blackwater chief, is working with China on Belt and Road projects and was allowed "to set up a forward operating base in Xinjiang and Yunnan provinces". In 2018 Mações pondered about growing Chinese military presence in the region and the resistance and opposition, particularly a conflict with Russia, this might entail.²⁶³ With the Russian military concentrated on Ukraine and increased economic ties between the two countries, I argue that China might even be able to push into the power vacuum emerging in Central Asia and strengthen its foothold in the region. In this way, Putin might have thwarted Beijing's plans to establish continental links to Europe but created a greater strategic space in China's immediate neighborhood.

The striking problem in the concept of the BRI concerning Xinjiang becomes clear in the contradiction between openness and connectivity against repression and surveillance. Transnational connectivity enhances Beijing's influence in Central Asia but "is also likely to create opportunities for the transmission of unregulated currents" that disrupt Xinjiang's further integration into the Chinese state. Still, China's intention is to establish a "logistical power base' that will permit it access to overland trade, communication and energy flows and routes to Central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East and as a means of overcoming Uyghur unrest." Clarke even goes so far as to name "consolidating China's pre-eminence in the 'eastern half of the Eurasian landmass'" a "core geopolitical goal animating BRI."²⁶⁴

3.2.6. Critique on the BRI

The Belt and Road Initiative is accused of many things. Ranging from less realistic arguments, such as the military threat said to emanate from the BRI, to reasonable analysis of the debt levels accumulated by China's partners in the BRI but also by China itself. The European Union explains its reluctance to take part in the initiative with a lack of transparency. An aspect where China certainly needs assistance since it has no tradition of transparency in

²⁶² Michael Clarke, "The Belt and Road Initiative: Exploring Beijing's Motivations and Challenges for its New Silk Road," *Strategic Analysis* 42, no. 2 (2018): 85-90.

²⁶³ Mações 2018, 127-129.

²⁶⁴ Clarke 2018, 96.

official administration. Fan Zhai sums up the typical challenges as “lack of a cohesive and reliable institutional and legal environment in most BRI countries, high political risks along BRI routes to carry out infrastructure projects, shortage of qualified individuals in Chinese firms, and the massive funding requirement.”²⁶⁵ Ling adds, among other things, the environmental damage and destructive forms of land-grabbing and extractive capitalism, non-transference of skills to local workers and cultural arrogance of the Chinese entrepreneurs.²⁶⁶ There are also rather basic obstacles, transportation by train will always be more expensive than by ship and the railway infrastructure projects target transportation bottlenecks that are insignificant to global trade anyways.²⁶⁷

By 2018, Beijing was already well aware of one of the most prominent problems connected to the BRI: debt. Xi Jinping personally addressed the problem, promised a more prudent use of Chinese funds in the future and sought to prove this immediately in a new round of grants and loans for African nations.²⁶⁸ Both China and many partner countries in the BRI struggle with soaring debt levels, “between the fourth quarter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2018 China’s gross debt exploded from 171 to 299 per cent of GDP”. Chinese authorities try to manage the rising debt levels but especially at the height of BRI activity, this hardly matched with the ambitious goals of the initiative. The concern might be exaggerated. Becoming the world’s largest economy has its advantages and “[g]iven the nature of China’s economy, both debtors and creditors are mostly government entities, so the government can adjust their debt relationship without precipitating a financial panic.”²⁶⁹ In 2018, Li Ruogu, the former president of the Export-Import Bank of China, nevertheless warned that many BRI participants have “average liability and debt ratios had reached 35 and 126 per cent, respectively, far above the globally recognized warning lines.”²⁷⁰

Despite this show of responsible finance management, “Chinese officials themselves recognize that 80 per cent of the money ploughed into Pakistan, half that invested into Myanmar and a full third that is expended in Central Asia will probably be lost.” This led to the question what China’s intentions with BRI truly are and why one should “invest in schemes that are either commercially unviable, overoptimistic, one-sided – or all three.” Frankopan doubles

²⁶⁵ Fan Zhai 2018, 92.

²⁶⁶ Ling 2019, 43.

²⁶⁷ Mações 2018, 9-10.

²⁶⁸ Frankopan 2018, 231-232.

²⁶⁹ Mações 2018, 153-160.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

down on the criticism and continues explaining “rather than being a ‘win-win’ scenario, the initiative enables Chinese companies to do well, not alongside others, but at their expense.”²⁷¹

In the course of these problems, skeptical voices have risen both domestically and abroad. Frankopan refers to a Chinese critic, who argued that wealth created in China is “spent on supporting failed states like North Korea and Venezuela and making enormous investments in other countries”. He reminds us that China may appear to be united in its pursuit of the BRI, but dissent with the initiative should not be underestimated.²⁷² Mações lists China’s international blowbacks. Starting with Mahathir Mohamad’s election victory in 2018, Malaysia distanced itself from the BRI, followed by Indonesia in the same year. “Thailand is taking the lead in creating a regional fund with its neighbors, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, to back infrastructure and other development projects and to lessen reliance in Chinese investment.” Of all nations in Asia and the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand probably were the loudest to articulate their rejection of the BRI.²⁷³

Problems with rising debt reappear in this situation. If Beijing shoulders all the finance itself, it risks the stability of its economy but if it shares the debt burden with the partner country, “investments become divisive political issues, poisoning relations between China and other countries.”²⁷⁴ Rolland explains that many countries were reluctant in that past “to fully embrace the openness and liberalization subtext that came attached to infrastructure development as it was envisaged by the United Nations, the EU, or ADB.” Transregional infrastructure projects are intensely political endeavors, no matter how sober the rhetoric around them and so she sums up the biggest obstacles:

“rivalries among neighbors, the lack of high-level commitment, elites’ reluctance to give up revenue generated by illicit trafficking, and their fear that opening their country to foreign passage will loosen their grip on power constitute the biggest roadblocks to transcontinental interconnectivity.”²⁷⁵

As if the regional backlash and containment from the US was not enough, the EU proved to be extremely unconvinced as well. On the first BRI summit in 2017, “European Union countries declined to sign a joint statement on trade, uncomfortable with its omission of social and environmental sustainability, as well as imperfect transparency requirements”.²⁷⁶ Beijing

²⁷¹ Frankopan 2018, 120.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 248-249.

²⁷³ Mações 2018, 130-132.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

²⁷⁵ Rolland 2017, 41.

²⁷⁶ Mações 2018, 143.

tried to respond to that by setting up “a new international court for settling disputes among companies participating in the Belt and Road”. This supposedly “new Belt and Road dispute settlement mechanism is aimed at protecting both Chinese and foreign parties’ legal rights and interests, and creating a stable, fair, transparent business environment governed by the rule of law.”²⁷⁷ A significant cooldown in BRI activity might have prevented the court from having to prove itself on the world stage.

Rolland eventually also points out China’s lack of experience with the diversity of Eurasia’s cultural landscape as additional setback. She further mentions that criticism against the BRI was more difficult the more it became synonymous with the leadership’s overall belief in how to solve the nation’s economic problems. Subjugating business to political directives poses a clear risk of proliferating unprofitable investments but giving companies more autonomy in deciding where they want to invest and urging a further reform of SOE’s would help to strengthen market forces in the initiative. The relationship between politics and economics is always shifting in the BRI but political goals are strong enough to override short-term financial losses. “\$1 trillion may simply be the price China has to pay in order to achieve its ultimate strategic objectives”, Rolland concludes.²⁷⁸

Part II – Trade as an Institution of World Order

Every government has an ideal of how world order should look like, probably with itself at the center. Since states’ sovereign powers, however, – at least nominally – end at their border, it is in setting up and running institutions where struggles over world order take shape. International institutions are the fields where a state’s international political agenda not only clashes with global phenomena like climate change, political economy or terrorism and non-state actors; but there it also clashes with other states’ sovereignty.²⁷⁹ In this chapter, order shall be conceptualized in its usage for the remainder of the text, as well as its relations to international institutions, which also become defined in the broader context of this work. Inspired partially by Hedley Bull, the background here is not inquiring into the conflictual aspects of international relations but the question why order exists, even to a degree where it

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 28.

²⁷⁸ Rolland 2017, 154-158.

²⁷⁹ See Andrew Hurrell, *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society* (Oxford UP, 2007), 11.

forms an international society and what the cornerstones of this system, the institutions of interstate society, are.²⁸⁰ The definition of international society is provided by Bull:

A society of states (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.²⁸¹

In the present theoretic model, the driving force behind international relations is the “desire to create a modicum of both order and justice beyond the level of the state”²⁸². Initially, order should be thought of “as a quality that may or may not obtain in international politics at any one time or place, or that may be present to a greater or lesser degree” and should be regarded “as an actual or possible situation of state of affairs, not as a value, goal or objective”.²⁸³ So order as a fact must not be confused with the means with which different societies implement it, or with the goals pursued in the name of order among different societies.²⁸⁴ *Social* order, then, is a “kind of purposive pattern [of behavior] (...) that leads to a particular outcome” and “involves a particular set of goals, objectives, and values”.²⁸⁵ In other words: “International order is a pattern of activity that sustains primary goals of international society”.²⁸⁶ The goals of international society, deriving from the problem how to minimize states harming each other, are survival and coexistence²⁸⁷, as well as the preservation of the system and society of states itself²⁸⁸.

Examples for an international order with flexible cultural basis in a diverse region are the leagues of the middle ages, which fascinatingly also got compared to China’s international economic network. Buzan and Little refer to the Hanseatic League as most significant example of leagues of cities as a popular type of political organization, which was eventually eclipsed by the nation state.²⁸⁹ This might be the case because the Hanseatic League, while not possessing any of the characteristics of a state, nevertheless had the full power of a state.²⁹⁰ The

²⁸⁰ Laust Schouenborg, “The English School and Institutions: British Institutionalists?,” in *Guide to the English School in International Studies*, ed. Cornelia Navari and Daniel M. Green (John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 80-81.

²⁸¹ Bull 2002, 13.

²⁸² Jiangli Wang and Barry Buzan, “The English and Chinese Schools of International Relations: Comparisons and Lessons,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 1 (2014): 13.

²⁸³ Bull 2002, xxxiv – xxxv.

²⁸⁴ See *Ibid.* 7.

²⁸⁵ Hurrell 2007, 2.

²⁸⁶ Bull 2002, 8.

²⁸⁷ Hurrell 2007, 4.

²⁸⁸ Bull 2002, 16.

²⁸⁹ Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford UP, 2000), 175.

²⁹⁰ Philippe Dollinger, *Die Hanse* (Kröner, 2012), 135.

early European political structure was characterized by a notable diversity, which included weak states alongside empires and city-leagues. Leagues were formed by some of the most powerful actors in this system, the large trading cities in the economically thriving belt from northern Italy to northern Germany, in order to organize security and economic activity, not unlike contemporary institutions.²⁹¹ It is worth pointing out that the organization of economy and security in flexible, open arrangements, which are embedded in an international environment in which a variety of actors such as states, NGO's or individuals interact bilaterally as well as in a diverse set of organizations, also perfectly represents the current state of East Asia. This might be true in some way for all regions, but it is particularly fitting for Asia with its outstanding diversity in the constitution, size and power of states and the cultures, societies and economic systems. The intensity of economic activity serves as another point in case just as much as the dense network of international organizations, associations, alliances and cooperations that weaves the region together.

Thirty years ago, Murray Weidenbaum saw a “historical parallel” between “the key role in international commerce of the Hanseatic League” and the role of ‘greater China’ as economic engine for world trade. “[L]ike the Hanseatic League of old”, he explains in regard to the area of Chinese economic activity, “that area would not be dominated by a single government unit or depend on a military or political pact”, but would contribute and benefit to Pacific Asia’s dynamic economy.²⁹² Notwithstanding narratives of China’s invincibility and overwhelmingly threatening power, recent years also exposed its dependence on world trade and domestic challenges. A single government thus might indeed be unable to dominate East Asia’s economy and the regional aversion against strict contractual agreements and exclusive alliances is widely accepted. Weidenbaum, hence, had a point in predicting a ‘Hanseatic’ regional constitution with an open and flexible international political organization alongside an economic system with a heavy-weight local power that cannot quite attain hegemony. Katzenstein and Shiraishi agreed that “the comparison is apt and might be extended to other manifestations of Asian regionalism” as a form of cooperation “on matters of mutual economic concern.”²⁹³

Thus, Buzan and Little representing the English School, I argue, seem to back up Weidenbaum’s ideas about the political organization of Asia under Chinese aegis. The cornerstone of the present thesis is the argument that an Asian political structure that gravitates

²⁹¹ Buzan and Little 2000, 243-250.

²⁹² Murray Weidenbaum, “Greater China: A New Economic Colossus?,” *The Washington Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1993): 71-83.

²⁹³ Peter J. Katzenstein, „Introduction: Asian Regionalism in Comparative Perspective,“ in *Network Power: Japan and Asia*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi (Cornell UP, 1997), 42.

towards China as its center must be organized around cultural systems and trade, not around military predominance. The leagues were prototypes of this organization as they represent informal agreements with limited means to enforce the few binding rules they had and relied far more on informal norms and behavioral codes. They rarely mustered the power to actually be able to use war as an instrument of power politics and turned to economic sanctions far more often than to military options. Even though leagues were loosely organized associations with little enforcement mechanisms or even binding rules, they were some of the most powerful entities in their respective international systems and such is the nature of China's diplomatic network. As I will show in this thesis, China's international power is not in promoting an alternative rules-system with military force, China's own idea of hegemony is based on informal norms, codes of conduct and voluntary membership. Bruno Maçães even defines *tianxia* as a system of sovereign units, connected by economic ties in an “informal, unstructured” network like a medieval league.²⁹⁴

Despite Qin Yaqing's insistence that rationality is the basis for Western political philosophy and despite Realism's emphasize on anarchy and sovereignty, the Hanseatic League is proof that the actual foundation of European International Relations concepts lies in international structures that were adamantly relational, trade-dominated and culture-based. These principles have impacted European states for far longer than the recent developments of sovereignty or the actor-type of the nation-state. Therefore, it is possible to access a Western understanding for seemingly Chinese ideas of international relations within the West's own cultural frame of reference. This hybridization via diverse memories, as we will see later, is also a key technique for Shih Chih-yu to construct subjectivities.

3.3. Shared interests and shared culture

There are two perspectives on the question how the interests of states lead to cooperation: self-interest in managing collective problems or shared interests. It is helpful to take a look at regime theory in this respect, which considers cooperation as behavior of “utility maximizers, cognizant that the environment in which they operate denies any possibility of achieving their preferred options through self-help (...)”²⁹⁵. This can be applied to the English School, as Hurrell explains that “institutions make it rational for states to cooperate out of self-interest” elaborating further that institutions are “purposively generated solutions to different

²⁹⁴ Maçães 2018, 35.

²⁹⁵ Tony Evans and Peter Wilson, “Regime Theory and the English School of International Relations: A comparison,” *Journal of International Studies* 21, no. 3 (1992): 331.

kinds of collective action problems”.²⁹⁶ Yet caution should be advised here, not the blur the usually clear divide between regime theory’s focus on specific issue-areas to which regimes are management solutions and the English School’s focus on the international society and order as a whole, in which institutions cover broader social dynamics.²⁹⁷ Even for the representatives of the English School, who make a strong case for state sovereignty in international society, institutions are traditionally more likely built around the idea of common interests²⁹⁸, and it is these common interests that impel states to accept common rules and institutions, where the sense for shared interests is also reinforced by a common culture²⁹⁹. Overall however, the importance of interests is much higher in regime theory, since the English School is more concerned with “the shared cultural elements that precede rational cooperation”.³⁰⁰ On the one hand, a shared culture is promoted by “globalization, the changed nature of security challenges, and (...) expansive normative aspirations embodied in powerful political forces” and the task to create a “morally more acceptable form of global political order” is an ongoing challenge at the heart of global politics.³⁰¹ Also, there are other voices rightfully questioning the homogeneity of the shared culture of international society and diagnose “alienation and resistance to some aspects of the Western project, and significant variations in practice” that lead to “political differences that can be identified in quite precise institutional terms”.³⁰²

3.4. Institutions

Institutions, explained in most simple terms, define what the pieces are and how the game is played.³⁰³ The word institution here possesses the double connotation of *secondary* and *primary* institutions of international society, the first one representing what is called regimes in liberal institutionalist approaches, for example the World Bank or World Trade Organization³⁰⁴, the latter will be elaborated in more depth and is generally what is referred to by the simple use of the term ‘institution’ further on. According to Bull’s early definition institutions are:

[A] set of habits and practices shaped towards the realization of common goals. These institutions do not deprive states of their central role (...) as a surrogate central authority in the international system. They are rather an expression of the element of

²⁹⁶ Hurrell 2007, 14.

²⁹⁷ Evans and Wilson 1992, 336.

²⁹⁸ Hurrell 2007, 55.

²⁹⁹ Bull 2002, 15.

³⁰⁰ Buzan 2014, 31.

³⁰¹ Hurrell 2007, 12.

³⁰² Buzan und Zhang 2014, 223.

³⁰³ Barry Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations* (Cambridge UP, 2014), 31.

³⁰⁴ Ibid. 17.

collaboration among states in discharging their political functions - and at the same time a means of sustaining this collaboration.³⁰⁵

A definition that can be further refined with the help of Barry Buzan: “Primary institutions are (...) shared practices (...) by the members of interstate societies, embodying a mix of norms, rules and principles. (...) such practices must play a constitutive role in relation to both the pieces/players and the rules of the game.”³⁰⁶ Regimes in Keohane and Nye’s *Power and Interdependence* receive a definition which is strikingly similar to the definition of institutions in the English School as “principles, rules, norms, and procedures around which expectations can converge in a given area of international relations” or “as a descriptive device to encompass clusters of rules, institutions, and practices”³⁰⁷. The difference is here more located in the content of institutions as compared to regimes, which are “concerned with the question of the management of technological, scientific and economic ‘progress’ which is to be contrasted with the “English School’s concern of order and security”.³⁰⁸

Common to both regime theory and English school is the Grotian attitude that “[t]he lack of a common sovereign does not preclude the possibility of rule-making”, since normative rules exist in the international realm and have their source in state practice.³⁰⁹ According to Bull, the premise of order is not the fear of a central government but reciprocal interests, he also draws on Locke for an analogy of the society of states in which there is no central authority but rules nevertheless get enforced and interpreted by the individual members of society.³¹⁰ The shared practice of states in the operation of institutions fulfil governmental functions in the absence of a central authority on the global level; functions such as, among others, making, interpreting, enforcing and legitimizing the rules of international society.³¹¹ In order to avoid the tautology to explain institutions through goals, which in turn are explained through institutions, this line of thought is developed further by Schouenborg following Buzan’s pursuits in the matter of typologies of functional differentiation.³¹² The second crucial point he advocates is to remedy the English School’s birth-defect of Eurocentrism with functional

³⁰⁵ Bull 2002, 71.

³⁰⁶ Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge UP, 2004), 181.

³⁰⁷ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (Longman, 2001), 278.

³⁰⁸ Evans and Wilson 1992, 350.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 334.

³¹⁰ Bull 2002, 46.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 68-70.

³¹² Laust Schouenborg, “A New Institutionalism? The English School as International Sociological Theory” *International Relations* 25, no. 1 (2011): 40.

categories in an attempt “to caution against essentialising concepts that inherently belong to the modern era of history”.³¹³

3.5. Functional categories

Table 1. Functional categories and suggested institutions. Adapted and simplified from Schouenborg

Functional Categories	Primary Institutions
Legitimacy and membership	Sovereignty Dynasticism Nationalism Liberal democracy ‘The standard of civilization’ Human rights
Regulating conflicts	War Great power management Alliances
Trade	Relay trade Tribute systems Free trade
Authoritative communication	Messengers Diplomats Embassies
International organization	Conferences and congresses Multilateralism

This typology is by no means a clear-cut device for the analysis of primary institutions, it is a more productive way of approaching the nature of such institutions, contrary to the attempt to capture the current international society by a definitive list of its institutions. Primary institutions of international society are, hence, to be differentiated by their function of legitimizing membership in international society, regulating conflicts, their function for trade, authoritative communication and, finally, international organization.³¹⁴ For second-order societies, that is societies whose members are not biological individuals but human collectives, who is regarded as legitimate member is a crucial question.

³¹³ Ibid., 32.

³¹⁴ Schouenborg 2011.

Lesser contested functional categories are authoritative communication with all functions of diplomacy³¹⁵ and a category for the function of aggregating interests and power, which Schouenborg phrases as international organization, not in the sense of secondary institutions but “to conceptually recognize the various forms of political cooperation”, e.g. multilateralism³¹⁶. Limits to the use of force³¹⁷ or regulating conflicts is justified as a functional category since “war has been largely de-legitimised and can only be rightfully employed against polities that are considered to be less than full members of international society”³¹⁸, with the issue of membership illustrating that these functional categories are not discreetly isolated themselves but overlap in certain aspects. The last category and the one most interesting to this work is trade. With a somewhat weaker standing in Buzan’s conceptualization, it only appears under another functional category called “allocation of property rights”, even though earlier he admits that “[t]rade is another very old practice in human affairs”³¹⁹. Schouenborg cautions “not to conflate modern understandings of property and market economics with exchange relationships found in the past” and continues to point out for trade that:

“throughout history this has performed a plethora of functions, some having to do with subsistence consumption, some having to do with the accumulation of wealth, and yet others having to do with various symbolic, political, military and broadly social purposes”³²⁰

Analysis of political economy is chronically underdeveloped in the English School, which is ironic since two of its founding fathers, Wight and Bull, both “claimed that trade was the most characteristic feature of the Grotian conception of international society”³²¹, with Bull stating that the particular international activity which “best typifies international activity as a whole is neither war between states, nor horizontal conflict cutting across the boundaries of states, but trade (...)”³²². Buzan easily identifies the market as an institution of international society. He does speculate if the concept of (world) trade itself can be seen as institution, but considers rules and principles with which trade is regulated as a better candidate, leaving trade in a realm of functional categories and elaborating on the market that „since the end of the Cold War, the market has emerged clearly as one of the major primary institutions of contemporary

³¹⁵ Buzan 2004, 188. Schouenborg 2011, 37.

³¹⁶ Schouenborg 2011, 39.

³¹⁷ Buzan 2004, 189.

³¹⁸ Schouenborg 2011, 37.

³¹⁹ Buzan 2004, 183.

³²⁰ Schouenborg 2011, 38.

³²¹ Evans and Wilson 1992, 343.

³²² Bull 2002, 25.

interstate society.”³²³ This is backed and further differentiated by Hurrell who emphasizes “to distinguish between the market as itself constituting a mechanism for allocation of resources (...) and the rules and institutions that are necessary for markets to function”.³²⁴ On the relationship between market and states, Buzan makes a strong case for the power of the market:

Like war, the market can be seen both as a mechanical structure and as an institution of interstate (and interhuman and transnational) society. (...) It could well be argued that in contemporary interstate societies it is the market that makes the state and the state that makes markets.³²⁵

In Buzan and Zhang’s path-breaking work *Contesting International Society in East Asia*, a frontal engagement with the English School’s Eurocentric tendencies, Alice Ba discusses the position of the market in East Asia as an especially defining institution³²⁶. She, as well as Beeson and Breslin³²⁷, create an illuminating display of the ways in which global norms and institutions of trade and commerce get adapted on a regional level in diverging cultural environments. The developmental state is one example of this adaptation, because “the state in East Asia has been made a critical spearhead of economic reconstruction, industrialization efforts and political unification”³²⁸, it “represents a distinctive way of adopting and creatively evolving capitalist ideas and economic practices in East Asia” and “has fostered a special set of relationships between state and market (...).”³²⁹ Domestic ideologies and the market influence each other in a synthetic dynamic that produces institutions, like the developmental state, which have “profound consequences for the conduct of inter-state relations in East Asia”.³³⁰ The market is just one example how the significance, purpose and logic of primary institutions get mediated through regional characteristics³³¹ and opens a promising path of inquiry for this work.

3.6. Asian Institutions

After having introduced the concepts of order and institutions, the analysis should be directed at Asia in order to determine the institutions of the regional international society, so

³²³ Buzan 2004, 183.

³²⁴ Hurrell 2007, 105.

³²⁵ Buzan 2004, 196-97.

³²⁶ Alice D. Ba, "Outside-in and inside-out: political ideology, the English School and East Asia," in Buzan and Zhang 2014, 122.

³²⁷ Mark Beeson and Shaun Breslin, "Regional and global forces in East Asia’s economic engagement with international society," in Buzan and Zhang 2014, 94.

³²⁸ Ba in Buzan and Zhang 2014, 131.

³²⁹ Buzan and Zhang in Buzan and Zhang 2014, 227.

³³⁰ Ba in Buzan and Zhang 2014, 122.

³³¹ Ibid. 142.

that a further exploration of the BRI and China's role in the reproduction of international order is set in the right framework. This section aims at a better understanding of development and regionalization and of the essential role institutions, especially institutions of political economy with a hybrid political nature, play in this process. For this goal, the global political economy, the developmental state and regional and global production networks will be put in the focus of the analytical framework as institutions of international politics. These three have a decisive impact on the growing regionalization in geopolitics but also on interregional dynamics, especially in an Asian context. Given the increasing salience of regionalization in international relations, the subject of analysis must be "(...) regional and sub-regional organizational activity (...) driven by the interplay of three principal actions: (i) socio-cultural norms, (ii) market structures and (iii) institutional politics."³³² In the case of Asia, "it is the interpretive and adaptive evolution of state sovereignty and the market, when laced with Asian characteristics in the second half of the 20th century that has provided the dynamic for the unique articulation of regionalism that is emerging in Asia in the 21st century."³³³

3.6.1. Global Political Economy

If one is to examine how the contemporary international community of states functions, it is necessary not only to analyze how actors in the system, but also how their rulebook is constituted. In 2016, Higgott explained the increasing importance of economic factors with "a drift from state-led regional cooperative endeavors built around security considerations in the Cold War era to the increasingly market-led imperatives that accompanied the globalisation of the neo-liberal era."³³⁴ The decline of security concerns seems reversed in the meantime but it is still worth remembering Buzan's idea how a broader structure of the analytical framework for international relations should be composed. He finds that "[e]conomic, societal and environmental institutions can be just as constitutive of players and rules of the game in interstate societies as can the narrow set of strictly politico-military ones."³³⁵ This echoes the socio-cultural norms, market structures and institutional politics of organizational activity mentioned above, and demonstrates that social and economic institutions play a major role in regionalization.

³³² Richard Higgott, "Regional Worlds, Regional Institutions: Towards the Regional Economic Institutionalisation of East Asia?," CSGR Working Paper No. 280/16 (2016), Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation, University of Warwick, 3.

³³³ Higgott 2016, 13.

³³⁴ Higgott 2016, 5.

³³⁵ Buzan 2004, 195.

Hence, institutions should be the starting point of any study on intra- and interregional dynamics. Higgott points out that “any emerging Asian regional order is no mere subset of a wider (initially European and subsequently American driven) global order” but is formed in a struggle which “has a dynamic of its own that continues to generate new ideas, norms and practices that challenge and adjust existing understandings of global order.”³³⁶ How international orders take shape under regional and local conditions is subject of much research. Shaun Breslin and Marc Beeson sum it up in following way:

Although market-oriented economic activities are now a ubiquitous feature of the international system, the distinctive ways in which capitalism has developed in East Asia and elsewhere remind us of how complex and multidimensional a process this is, and how the influence of the ‘Western core’ has been mediated at the regional level.³³⁷

Despite the wide spread dissemination of Western political ideas to every single state in the international society, Reus-Smit states that “modern international society is multicultural, extending beyond the liberal-constitutionalist core to encompass a wide variety of states.”³³⁸ Looking on China, Balasz Sárvári explains how “global networks will have more and more Chinese characteristics”³³⁹ and considering global dynamics, “the current trends of globalization will hold not just Western, but Chinese characteristics as well.”³⁴⁰ Breslin and Beeson thus draw the conclusion that the best way “to describe the organization of economic activity that has both ‘local’ regional features and an increasingly universal logic is ‘the global political economy’ (GPE)” and even think of it “as a master primary institution with important and distinctive regional derivations.”³⁴¹ For East Asia, important and distinctive regional derivations are regional production networks and the developmental state, they “ought to be considered as a primary institution” because they “are central to trade and investment patterns in East Asia”.³⁴²

3.6.2. Developmental States

“‘Developmental State’ is a shorthand for the seamless web of political, bureaucratic, and moneyed influences that structures economic life in capitalist Northeast Asia.”³⁴³ The

³³⁶ Higgott 2016, 3-4.

³³⁷ Beeson and Breslin 2014, 94.

³³⁸ Christian Reus-Smit, “The Constitutional Structure of International Society and the Nature of Fundamental Institutions,” *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (1997): 584.

³³⁹ Sárvári and Szeidovitz 2016, 4.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁴¹ Beeson and Breslin 2014, 94.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 99.

³⁴³ Meredith Woo-Cumings, ed., *The Developmental State* (Cornell UP, 1999), 1.

developmental state is a type of political economy in East Asia, which came into being as regional model after the second World War, in order to integrate East Asia into the global economy without submitting it unconditionally to capitalism and the market. Buzan sums up the correlation between global market and developmental state by explaining that it “represents a distinctive way of adopting and creatively evolving capitalist ideas and economic practices in East Asia” and “has fostered a special set of relationships between state and market”.³⁴⁴ Richard Stubbs illustrates the situation in greater detail and explains the structural depth the developmental state reached in the constitution of the region, up to the point that the developmental state is identical with modern East Asia. The developmental state represents, defines and sustains the states of the region. “It was more than simply a set of key institutions and policies that were put in place under the label of the DS; a whole system of social, political and economic institutions became embedded in the life of specific countries.”³⁴⁵

States in the region consider it one of their main tasks to strongly and proactively take part in the national economic development. They faced the challenge to integrate into the global economy without getting stuck on the lower end of the value chain. A situation of continuing relevance as Parag Khanna explains, because “free trade alone won’t actually benefit them”, however, “it is by leveraging foreign investment to improve infrastructure, education, and social systems that free trade becomes a two-way street.”³⁴⁶ The developmental state in East Asia served this purpose, but it also linked the state administration close together with the national economic structure, so the agendas of both became linked as well. For Asian states, “economics occupies an important place in conceptualizations of domestic order, security and regime legitimacy” and that economic focus “has informed their embrace of the market as a primary institution in East Asia and eventually the developmental state as a model of development.”³⁴⁷

Giving the state such a prominent role in the national economy always carries the danger of drifting into a protectionist economic attitude and slowing both development and regional integration. This is one of the reasons why the developmental state is also referred to as a new form of mercantilism.³⁴⁸ This, however, did not compromise the strong position of the state in East Asia. To the contrary, the model of the developmental state is still popular. It even seems to be the preferred path of development for developing countries and newly developed

³⁴⁴ Buzan 2014, 227.

³⁴⁵ Richard Stubbs, “What ever happened to the East Asian Developmental State? The unfolding debate,” *The Pacific Review* 22, no. 1 (2009): 13.

³⁴⁶ Khanna 2016, 283.

³⁴⁷ Buzan 2014, 134-135.

³⁴⁸ Higgott 2016, 17.

countries. “China’s model of semi-authoritarian capitalism, (...) looks more appealing to many regional partners than the contemporary Anglo-American version of democratic capitalism.”³⁴⁹ Stubbs suspects a large consensus around the idea “that a transformed DS has survived and that, indeed, a relatively strong central state capacity is necessary in order for East Asian states to continue to enjoy the economic success they achieved in the past.”³⁵⁰

Developmental states have a comprehensive dimension, with impact on many different political fields. This model of political economy touches domestic, as well as foreign policy, ideology and realpolitik, economic as well as security aspects, which is the reason why simple theoretical tools cannot capture it in an analysis.

“The domestic ideologies that provide the content for the developmental state are informed by structure (...) and culture (...). The developmental state institutionalizes more communitarian conceptions of the state, the interdependence of domestic and international vulnerabilities, and comprehensive notions of security that make economics a basis for regime legitimacy. Meanwhile, the turn to market strategies also ensures regional exchange.”³⁵¹

The developmental state is the unique feature of the East Asian political economy and thus the most characteristic institution of the East Asian regional international community.³⁵² China obviously has adapted this model of development as well.³⁵³ In order to compensate for the slow development during most of the 20th century it practices economic policies also sometimes referred to as neomercantilist, but Parag Khanna differentiates this neomercantilism against European imperialism: “China’s neo-mercantilism (...) is the pursuit of catch-up modernization rather than global hegemony”.³⁵⁴ Throughout the region, this political economy has become the main characteristic not only for China but for all the countries in East Asia: “(...) the neo-mercantilist ideas that underpinned the DS and its policies became deeply embedded in the formal institutions and informal practices of government.”³⁵⁵ Because of this, the BRI will be most successful if it becomes first and foremost a functional instrument of economic integration. In a region of postcolonial states, where sovereignty is the fundamental institution of international community, supranational and federative proposals of integration will fail. Only functional concepts of integration, can be successful in a group of “sovereignty-

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 17.

³⁵⁰ Stubbs 2009, 17- 18.

³⁵¹ Buzan 2014, 122.

³⁵² Ibid., 93.

³⁵³ Ibid., 110-111.

³⁵⁴ Khanna 2016, 148.

³⁵⁵ Stubbs 2009, 12.

conscious” governments and thus “stand a far better chance of being seen as legitimate and consistent with state interests than top-down federal style alternatives.”³⁵⁶

The developmental state has been shaping Asia for decades and despite all prophecies of its demise during the Asian Crisis towards the end of the 90s, and “despite all its problems, the concept of the DS remains an important feature of analysis of the political economy of East Asia.”³⁵⁷ Verifying, that the developmental state is truly an institution is a twofold question about the constitution of actors in the international society. First it means asking if it has a part in establishing the identity of states and second if it legitimizes their behavior. Barry Buzan offers two reasons for that. The developmental state is, first, of historic significance for the changes East Asian states underwent, not only for national transformations they suffered during the 20th century but also for the restructuring of East Asia as an international region. Secondly, it poses a strong challenge to the liberal foundations of the “Anglo-American political economies”.³⁵⁸ This directly legitimizes promoting a strong state in national political economies and refusing free trade oriented and market based economic policies.

According to Buzan the developmental state is also an institution “that has profound consequences for the conduct of inter-state relations in East Asia.”³⁵⁹ Conducting interstate relations can be taken as a synonym for the behavior of state actors and this proves how deeply rooted the developmental state is in the social practices of East Asia. Naturally, as a unique feature of the East Asian political economy and the most characteristic institution of the region, it contributes strongly to forming the identities of East Asian states. Buzan’s above mentioned first reason, however, opens an even deeper, profound historic level of significance. Representing not only the current situation but also the transformations that shaped the region as a whole and every one of the single actors illustrates how important the developmental state is as a part of the identity of East Asian states.

Furthermore, there are regions where economies based on liberal principles fail to show effect. “The market on the other hand is still irresponsive to developing the region”³⁶⁰, as Balasz Sárvári phrases it. He is referring to the Chinese Central Asian province of Xinjiang here, but this is true for all of Central Asia (and other regions around the globe as well). Not only Western ideas of free trade and market economy, but also Western developmental aid has

³⁵⁶ Shaun Breslin and Jeffrey D. Wilson. “Towards Asian regional functional futures: bringing Mitrany back in?,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 69, no. 2 (2014): 20.

³⁵⁷ Stubbs 2009, 9.

³⁵⁸ Buzan 2014, 229-230.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

³⁶⁰ Sárvári and Szeidovitz 2016, 17.

clear weaknesses. Parag Khanna defends infrastructure initiatives as “job-creating projects that enhance poor and landlocked countries’ ability to participate in the global economy” and criticizes ‘traditional Western aid projects for’, which so far “failed to create jobs in ways that only these sectors can.”³⁶¹

Despite Japan’s role as a pioneer for the developmental state³⁶², China took over the leading position in representing it. Models of this type of political economy, which challenge Western ideas of development, are given names such as “Beijing Consensus”³⁶³ or “Chinese Model”. Such concepts are manifold, but they all have one thing in common: “And yet while there is little consensus over what the ‘Chinese model’ might be (or entail), one of the strongest themes (...) is the importance of strong state development.”³⁶⁴ Not only global economy as a whole but this model itself has a hybrid character. It might be East Asia’s unique institution, but part of its roots are the ideas of Friedrich List or Alexander Hamilton³⁶⁵, or it is overall described as neomercantilist³⁶⁶, a term bearing clear European associations. Following the “neo-mercantilist playbook” of China, according to Parag Khanna, means to “access raw materials and bring them back home for the manufacturing and construction industries and then to use export processing zones near major markets to accelerate its throughput.”³⁶⁷

The future prospect of the developmental state as a model of national political economy is promising, it has spread from its native region to Southeast Asia³⁶⁸ and thus increases even further in its international political weight. The developmental state “takes the goals of long-term growth and structural change seriously, “politically” manages the economy to ease the conflicts inevitable during the process of such change (...), and engages in institutional adaption and innovation to achieve those goals.”³⁶⁹ One of the secrets of its tenacity might be that this mission contains elements and issues prevalent in many countries’ developmental path.

This section has identified the developmental state as an institution of international society and what this symbolizes for international politics. With East and Southeast Asia, a significant community of states has adopted the developmental state as their leading idea of political economy. As the developmental state spread and became adapted all over East Asia

³⁶¹ Khanna 2016, 181.

³⁶² Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese miracle: the growth of industrial policy: 1925-1975*. (Stanford University Press, 1982).

³⁶³ Joshua Cooper Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus*. (Foreign Policy Centre, 2004).

³⁶⁴ Buzan 2014, 111.

³⁶⁵ Buzan 2014, 96.

³⁶⁶ Stubbs 2009, 12.

³⁶⁷ Khanna 2016, 182.

³⁶⁸ Buzan 2014, 103.

³⁶⁹ Ha-Joon Chang, “The Economic Theory of the Developmental State,” in Woo-Cumings 1999, 192.

there was an “important convergence around a state developmentalist ideology, as well as a common state-led engagement with the market.”³⁷⁰ Including India, this geopolitical region is home to a majority of the world’s population and a large and still growing part of world economy takes place here. This leads to the question if a model with a strong state and the rejection of unconditional free trade and strictly market oriented economic policies is the deviation or might in fact be the global standard.

3.6.3. Regional Production Networks

Asian regional production networks (RPNs) can be defined as “transnationally connected systems among firms and are based on a multi-tier division of labor between the leading economy and follower economies (...).”³⁷¹ Of course this is not an exhaustive covering of the phenomenon. They are important to understand “regional development as a form of trans-local dynamics constituted by the complex strategic coupling process between local firms and lead firms” and “show how the archetypical Asian developmental state can play a necessary but not sufficient role in engendering regional development.”³⁷² Transnational actors play a crucial role in regional production networks and fixing the view on state actors would be wrong, not only because of the significance of private multinational corporations. There are significant economic zones on subregional and subnational level, which served and still serve as a vanguard in the exchange of goods and financial services.³⁷³ Additionally, there are ethnic linkages between the populations of East Asian states, the best example being the overseas Chinese community, who turn ethnicity into an economic resource for conducting business.³⁷⁴ Expanding on the earlier definition, it should thus also be mentioned that the “components of the RPN include subsidiaries and branch companies of the MNC [multinational companies], partnerships with local residents, joint ventures, and so forth, as well as production sharing or cooperative production, production consignment or compensation trade.”³⁷⁵

RPN are institutions of global politics because they represent both the formal and informal structure of interaction in the rulebook of international society. In Confucian East Asia, informal arrangements are of similar binding significance as formal contracts. The popular ‘ASEAN-Way’ of international treaties in East and Southeast Asia, for example, prefers

³⁷⁰ Buzan 2014, 135-136.

³⁷¹ Dajin Peng, “Invisible Linkages: A Regional Perspective of East Asian Political Economy,” *International Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (2002): 425.

³⁷² Yeung 2009, 28-29. Henry Wai-Chung Yeung, “Regional Development and the Competitive Dynamics of Global Production Networks: An East Asian Perspective,” *Regional Studies* 43, no. 3 (2009): 28-29.

³⁷³ Peng 2002, 434.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 430-432.

³⁷⁵ Peng 2002, 428.

non-formal agreements over officially formalized obligations.³⁷⁶ Within RPN, states, private companies more powerful than certain states, special economic zones beyond traditional geographical perceptions of states and many other different actors meet and make RPN a very complex phenomenon.

Laws do not always take full effect in this environment and hence cannot regulate the interaction of all the actors, which is the reason why institutions evolve, which define the relationship between the separate elements of the network. Consequently, the single developmental states of East and Southeast Asia do not only form discreet units of unique political-economic nature, but they also comprise networks with special characteristics. Apart from the institutions of the market and the developmental state, the institution of global and regional production networks is a defining element of regional international society, because it determines how the region operates economically³⁷⁷. Studying international relations is often fixed on sovereign states as independent actors, but taking the view of Parag Khanna or Arjun Appadurai³⁷⁸ unravels the manifold linkages and relations of goods- and finance-flows or the flows of migration, technology and knowledge between states, individual and transnational actors. In addition to the exposure of flows and linkages not only the supply chains but also the fight over the control of these networks becomes visible. Contemporary conflicts emerge as a tug-of-war “not over territory but over flows – of money, goods, resources, technology, knowledge, and talent” and eventually aim at “pulling the world’s supply chains toward oneself; to be the largest producer of resources and goods and gain the maximum share of value from the transaction.”³⁷⁹

Here, the emphasis is on states, but a complete image can only form if states, individual and transnational actors come together with formal and informal agreements. Peng might consider multinational corporations as essential actors, but Buzan explains that the picture has grown more complex since then through the ascent of China in global political economy³⁸⁰. States are by far not the only actors in regional production networks, such networks however have an enormous impact on states. To dissociate from regional and global production networks always entails significant self-damage to states, a complete decoupling from these networks has been tried but never holds many advantages for the national economy³⁸¹. A state’s main focus

³⁷⁶ Breslin and Wilson 2014, 15.

³⁷⁷ Buzan 2014, 107.

³⁷⁸ Appadurai 1996.

³⁷⁹ Khanna 2016, 138.

³⁸⁰ Buzan 2014, 107.

³⁸¹ Khanna 2016, 306.

needs to rest on developing a strategy how the networks surrounding the state can be brought to maximal utility, how and what is imported or exported or what parts of its industry must be protected. The degree of power in contemporary international society is measured by how much power an actor has over regional production networks. “Connectivity matters (...) more than sovereignty.”³⁸²

Without regional production networks, Asia would just be an incoherent group of extremely heterogeneous states, in which the differences between poor and rich countries or democratic and undemocratic countries are already tremendous. Taking states out of their regional production networks in an analysis cannot provide a valid image. This is of course especially important for the BRI and China’s foreign trade policies in general. A study in which China remains in its regional production networks also shows the tight links it maintains with its Central Asian neighbors, an aspect often underestimated.

“China represents the next phase for Central Asia after Mongol-Turkic empire and Soviet backwater: Eurasian resource corridor. Xi Jinping’s latest moniker, ‘Silk Road Economic Belt,’ portends the regions transformation into a collection of midsize urban nodes anchoring transport and energy corridors.”³⁸³

In this paragraph, it is clear how the embeddedness in regional production networks establishes the identity of Central Asia as a region or certain actors within the region. Defining regional production networks as an institution is as much a twofold question about the constitution of actors in the international society as it was with verifying the developmental state as such. It also means asking if regional production networks take part in establishing the identity of states and if they legitimize state’s behavior. The reference to the many roles Central Asia played under Mongol, Soviet and now Chinese supremacy has already demonstrated how regional production networks work in the forming of state’s identities. Buzan made it just as obvious by writing that “(...) the market that makes the state and the state that makes markets”³⁸⁴. The power of regional production networks in legitimating behavior is proven by the fact “that such regional and global structures are important derivative manifestations of the GPE [global political economy] and that their impact is sufficiently pervasive and important as to shape political and diplomatic outcomes across the region.”³⁸⁵

China’s own development demonstrates how complex a state’s integration into regional production networks can be, far from pure free trade and market economic dynamics. In this

³⁸² Ibid., 51.

³⁸³ Ibid., 198.

³⁸⁴ Buzan 2004, 196-97.

³⁸⁵ Beeson and Breslin in Buzan 2014, 94.

case, for example, in the form of ethnic business networks. “The overseas Chinese not only have provided enormous amounts of capital to fuel growth but have also brought management techniques and marketing networks.”³⁸⁶ Additionally, political and economic spheres naturally overlap in a region where the developmental state plays such an important role. China’s unique form of market socialism has promoted an even deeper intersection of politics and economics.

Buzan explains the relation between RPN and China’s position in the following words:

(...) regional production networks represent another important primary institution that determines economic outcomes in distinctive ways. The rise of China as a critical regional and global economic actor has reinforced this situation, but also changed the patterns of regional economic interactions (...) ³⁸⁷

China’s resurgence had and of course still has a huge influence on the structure of global and regional production networks, in other words “China’s economic rise has changed the understanding of the regional economic space”.³⁸⁸ The challenge does not stop, however, by integrating China into world economy. When Asia became the new center of world trade it caused the global political economy to undergo a metamorphosis with a result nobody can yet predict. Beijing opens and develops production networks where Western competition is still weak. Apart from the economic aspects strategic security implications cannot be denied. When establishing new trade routes or reviving old ones, China aims at ensuring its resource and energy supply. Similar to German and Russian strategy in the struggle with the, at that time, dominant United Kingdom, China in its tug-of-war over global position with the US also turns to the “land routes on the old Eurasian developmental track” („Landrouten auf der alten eurasischen Entwicklungsschiene“³⁸⁹). Beijing’s efforts to raise its standing in global political economy and consequently in the world power architecture by opening new trade routes or forgotten ones is also described by Summers. The projects of the BRI, he states, “represent continuing efforts by China’s elites to further integration into the global economy, but involving areas across Asia which were previously peripheral to it, and on terms and reflecting power relations more favourable to China than those in the past”.³⁹⁰

Just like the control over trade routes, China learned from Western imperialism how to build economic bridgeheads in foreign countries to secure access to regional markets. “China has had plenty of time to study how to set up and manage such overseas enclaves because that

³⁸⁶ Peng 2002, 432.

³⁸⁷ Buzan 2014, 107.

³⁸⁸ Breslin and Wilson 2014, 9.

³⁸⁹ Menzel 2015, 816.

³⁹⁰ Summers 2016, 1639.

is what European powers did for centuries in China”, consequently it “has build dozens of such special economic zones not only inside its own borders but also across Asia, Latin America, and Africa.”³⁹¹ China is not merely copying the successful, yet imperialist, economic strategies of Western colonialism, it also draws on Cold War internationalism. Appearing as equal partner, it offers infrastructure for resources, in a deal Khanna describes as “Chinese construction services in exchange for millions of tons of raw materials”. He continuous clarifying that China stepped into the vacuum the World Bank left when “in the 1960s it shifted its aid focus away from infrastructure, leaving basic irrigation, transportation, and electrification system underdeveloped.”³⁹²

On the one hand, the Silk Road with the rich, exotic associations it causes in the imagination demonstrates the significance of narratives of cultural institutions for power politics. On the other hand, the Silk Road teaches us the meaning of basic physical infrastructure for world trade. It proves that world trade is not a virtual function of the global market but a physical process on streets, rails and sea lanes, which cost effort to build and maintain. This is the material side of regional and global production networks. With elevating RPN to institutions of international society, a stronger focus on infrastructure automatically follows along. “Physical interaction capacity obviously matters, for the technical ability to move goods, people and information around the system conditions the opportunities of actors in all the domains and across all of history.”³⁹³ Parag Khanna regards infrastructure as supreme means of economic development: “For countries to get on the global economic map as productive hubs rather than failed states, no investment is more important that basic infrastructure.”³⁹⁴ Theories of economic development, regionalization, institutions and hybridity all come together in the phenomenon of the Silk Road. Crucial for China’s initiative, however, is not the appeal to a global cultural institution but the actual building of extensive, real infrastructure. All the factors above can be seen juristically, scientifically or politically and this produced an enormous amount of literature. Though, significant for the initiative is the spending of money and the implementation of local construction projects all around the globe.

Western critics often evaluate the new Silk Road by one of its few prestige projects and declare the initiative a failure because the Nicaragua or Kra-Canal has not been realized yet, but the demand for fundamental, small scale infrastructure is already huge in China’s immediate

³⁹¹ Khanna 2016, 228.

³⁹² Khanna 2016, 95.

³⁹³ Buzan 2004, 200.

³⁹⁴ Khanna 2016, 292.

neighborhood³⁹⁵, where China is one of the first countries to approach for infrastructure investment. Theorizing regional and global production networks is insufficient without taking into account the physical side of infrastructure. Without railroads, rail stations, streets and ports, theories on economic development remain irrelevant. Consequently, aid for building good governance in developing countries is only as good as the infrastructure that is build to back up the development. Khanna points out that it “is hard to see how lofty goals of nation building mean anything without basic connectivity” and refers to the Marshal Plan, which “was first and foremost a \$13 billion stimulus package to invest in rebuilding infrastructure across western Europe”. “The hardware came first” he continues, repeating that “[t]here is no greater imperative than to build and maintain basic infrastructure assets”³⁹⁶

Transnational actors such as companies shy away from capital intensive, risky infrastructure projects. This is the reason why states or state-owned enterprises occupy such an important role in this particular phase of building regional production networks. Especially in Asia, this is a typical pattern, rather than bottom-up, functionally-discrete, small-scale, top-down initiatives are the rule.³⁹⁷ The coupling of local, regional and global corporations is a crucial part of regional production networks. This is, however, driven by national networking initiatives, trying to provide benefits for local companies. The most important support for the building of regional production networks in Asia was the infrastructure provided by states:

“The availability of the above transnational communities and organizational technological capabilities of local firms must be at least partially explained by the relentless efforts of state institutions in paving the way for this strategic coupling to take place. (...) The role of these state institutions during the past 15 years has been particularly important in enhancing human resources and physical infrastructure in respective industrial districts and growth regions.”³⁹⁸

3.6.4. Functionalism in Asia

The rulebook of global political economy is being rewritten, and this process is well under way, causing stern opposition from the states who first formulated the rules. The pressure is felt in long established economic powers, forcefully advancing economies and countries at the very end of the value chain. A reform of the rules of world trade can benefit all alike and regionalization can serve as a means to achieve this goal and strengthen the position of weaker

³⁹⁵ Peng 2002, 437.

³⁹⁶ Khanna 2016, 294.

³⁹⁷ Breslin und Wilson 2014, 19.

³⁹⁸ Yeung 2009, 16-17.

states in the overall economic environment: “(...) regional economic groupings are mainly responses to the global economic order, and that their existence may well serve to stabilise that order (...) [and] offer options to strengthen the position of participating states within the global economy (...)”³⁹⁹. Initiatives in which states can take a proactive part in the building of regional production networks while still retaining control over the networks they get embedded in might be the best way to integrate them into the global economy and provide them with fair and sustainable advantages.

This functionalist cooperation among states respects sovereignty and hence offers appealing opportunities to weaker states, who fear for their independence, by setting clear investment-needs and overall resource-requirements that can be shared and split among participants. “Internationally speaking, political self-determination in this way is translated into functional co-determination.”⁴⁰⁰ In regard of Asia, Breslin and Wilson follow his ideas further. Asia should “concentrate on not what Europe has become, but instead how it started and the process by which it arrived there.” The best way to achieve further cooperation is by “doing what works best on a bottom-up case by case basis – building functional regions – will be far more effective than trying to create a single federal region in a top-down manner.” They conclude to “[l]et cooperation create the Asian region, not the other way round.”⁴⁰¹

This is exactly the direction in which Parag Khanna’s plea for infrastructure as well as Beeson and Breslin’s introduction of the global political economy, developmental state and production networks as intuitions of international politics lead. Regionalization is indeed best implemented as a functional network, which does not concentrate on political but on economic necessities. A line of thought that was brought forth by David Mitrany already in 1966 and is still of such relevance for the current situation. Success in regional cooperation can be achieved “by making use of the present social and scientific opportunities to link together particular activities and interests, one at a time, according to need and acceptability, giving each joint authority and policy limited to that activity alone. That is the functional way.”⁴⁰²

Transnational actors force states to cooperate. Multinational corporations wield a certain amount of power, even compared to states, because they are native to the world of supply chains and global and regional production networks, while states are native to a static world of borders and sovereignty. States have a hard time acquiring a sense for the dynamics of this world and

³⁹⁹ Buzan 2004, 209-210.

⁴⁰⁰ David Mitrany, “The prospect of integration: federal or functional,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 4, no. 2 (1965): 139.

⁴⁰¹ Breslin and Wilson 2014, 21-22.

⁴⁰² Mitrany 1965, 135.

overcoming their own nature to produce effective measures to deal with transnational actors. World Trade, the developmental state and regional production networks are institutions of international society and treating them as such in an analysis is the best way to capture their roles for global politics.

3.7. Summary and Contextual Transition

There will be a sharp transition from themes of infrastructure, trade and politics in this chapter to theory and philosophy in the next chapter. This thesis does not intent to analyze the topic with a narrow angle but rather to discern the environment in which the new Silk Road emerged, phrased alternatively: to map the creation and contestation of institutions. The institution of world trade is contested by numerous actors around issues of fairness, intellectual property, labor standards or de-coupling/de-risking. LHM Ling and Bruno Mações will assist to underscore the crucial insight that should be drawn from this chapter. This bridge to the theoretical parts of this thesis also shows that the BRI is only a part of China's strategy to contest and adapt the institution of world trade and that Chinese IR scholarship represents another part of this strategy.

One of the more ambitious efforts in researching the BRI was conducted by Alisha C. Perrigoue and L.H.M. Ling, who developed a concept called the 'Silk Road Ethos', a whole belief system around the old and new Silk Roads. The intention of this concept was "to decolonize this global order" and to offer "a normative and methodological intervention into contemporary Western-led, Westphalian IR." Morality will appear as major theme in Chinese IR in the next chapter and Ling also follows this trend with her claim to include morality both in international relations as a practice and as a discipline again. The morality of the Silk Road Ethos "dissolves dichotomies by revealing the mutualities, liminalities, and inbetweenness that bind even die-hard opposites" and thus produces "a third domain of open-ended entwinements". L.H.M Ling fiercely attacked the criteria of parsimony, rigor and autonomy as hallmarks of political science and seems to have understood her research program as alternative to that. In her article with Perrigoue, they argue that "parsimony necessarily rules out multiplicity by subsuming Difference under Sameness" and instead promote to "not only break down categories that are supposedly intractable (...) but also re-constitute them into a new, hybrid third domain (e.g. queerness)."

This section of their article anticipates the arguments around Queer Theory that will appear in the remainder of this thesis and also establishes a link between Queer Theory and the new Silk Road. Ling and Perrigoue emphasize their intention to create insight and understand

the meaning of connections and context in their research and their focus on the relation of Sameness and Difference⁴⁰³ is also Queer Theory's focus. The Silk Road Ethos works through mutual resonance across sites of difference, so that an "inherent integrity for both Sameness and Difference remains, accounting for a mutual recognition: that is, we co-produce who and what we are, no matter where or when." This disruption of conventional epistemology "undermines Westphalia's usual dichotomies: e.g. inside *versus* outside, center *versus* periphery, past *versus* present versus future, myth *versus* reality, culture *versus* materiality, Self *versus* Other."⁴⁰⁴ In another article with Alan Chong, this argument is repeated, pointing out that a supposedly ancient "Silk-Road globalization" did not "carry the kind of Self-Other hierarchy that prevails in the global political economy today." They accuse neoliberalism of imposing hegemony on knowledge in some form of epistemic violence and contrast that the "Silk-Road globalization did not propagate violence: it never erased the Other."⁴⁰⁵

Apart from Ling's postcolonial criticism, the perceived (or constructed) cultural differences between East and West inspire scholarship as well, which also sounds more similar to China's official, common critique against Western governments. Beijing's "clear challenge to the existing liberal order (...) is one openly advocated by Chinese officials and intellectuals". They see cultural conflicts "not as failures to live up to Western values but as the affirmation of a different system carrying different values". These values draw on traditional Confucian classics and include "principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness furthering a community of shared destiny", as Mações argues, which I will support in the discussion of the first generation of 21st century Chinese IR in the next chapter. Many contemporary challenges are global in scale require solutions with equal dimensions, "Chinese authorities thus have some ground to argue that the world as a whole is facing a dire governance crisis, that the West has run out of ideas and therefore that it is perhaps time for other to take up the task."⁴⁰⁶ Mações summarizes some of the popular sentiments among Chinese intellectuals: "In contrast with a West which is described as exploitative and aggressive, China is portrayed by Chinese scholars as inherently benevolent and peaceful." Rhetoric around the new Silk Road also included China's claim to promote a "new type of great power relations" that reject power politics and confrontations but rather emphasizes peace and dialogue. Such claims "are a

⁴⁰³ Both capitalized in their text.

⁴⁰⁴ LHM Ling and Alisha C. Perrigoue, "OBOR and the Silk Road Ethos: An ancient template for contemporary world politics," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 3, no. 3 (2018): 208-209.

⁴⁰⁵ Alan Chong and LHM Ling, "The Silk Roads: Globalization before neoliberalization: Introduction to the special issue" *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 3, no. 3 (2018): 190.

⁴⁰⁶ Mações 2018, 171.

reformulation of *Tianxia*, often going so far as propounding old Confucian virtues of ‘sincerity,’ ‘honesty’ and ‘amity’ as governing principles for world politics.’⁴⁰⁷

This chapter shed light on the Belt and Road Initiative and the English School concept of primary institutions, through which the present thesis approaches the new Silk Road. Quoting Ling and Perrigoue, and Ling and Chon respectively, introduced research on the BRI with more epistemic ambition than most of the literature reviewed earlier in this chapter. It became clear for example, that the BRI, and in extension Chinese IR in general, can also be understood through the lens of Queer IR Theory, which will reappear later in this thesis as argument. Maçães offered some prospect on the attitudes traditionalist Chinese IR represents and thus provided abridged the gap between the politics of the BRI and the theories examined in the following chapter. Concerning the resurgence of Confucianism among Chinese intellectuals, Chinese public and Chinese politicians, his discussion of Confucian values is particularly worth keeping in mind throughout the next chapter.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 31.

4. First generation Chinese IR

4.1. Calls for Global IR and Calls for Chinese IR

Starting this chapter, I proposed to address the approach to Chinese contributions to IR with two experimental changes of perspective. First, communism did not lose the Cold War in the People's Republic of China. On the contrary, it celebrated its greatest achievement in the 90s and later on with China's ascent as global power. Second, at the very same moment in history when the West, with its self-image as cradle of enlightenment and rationality, started coping with total civilizational collapse during and after World War II, China celebrated overcoming its civilizational trauma after the century of humiliation with the liberation from imperialism and colonialism, an experience shared with the majority of contemporary states. The victory of communism at the conclusion of the Cold War and the end of World War II as a triumph over national traumas are two experiences, which manifest the distinct path of China in the 20th century.

Even if these two suggested changes in perspective proved mostly exaggerated, they would still capture enough of the difference in experiences. The decisive historic fulcrums of recent history played out in the strongest possible contrast. This theoretical exercise shows how salient Amitav Acharya's call for Global IR⁴⁰⁸ was and still is and how important it is to put the Chinese experience in a prominent place when broadening the discipline and its foundations. The Global IR agenda was defined by six main dimensions: pluralistic universalism preferring diversity to universality; world history as basis of IR rather than local histories; subsuming existing IR theories into Global IR instead of rejecting them; integration of regionalisms and area studies into IR, favoring comparative perspectives and eschewing exceptionalism; and lastly, a broad concept of agency beyond material power, e.g. resistance, normative action or local international orders.

The research program of Global IR, however, has received criticism of its own. The two examples I chose represent somewhat opposite poles of commentary but still converge in certain aspects. Yong-Soo Eun's (2019) weaker points of critique are, first, the warning against the division of the discipline caused by pluralism and, second, his confusion of Western IR's dominance in China, the very fact that necessitates Global IR, as evidence rather than puzzle. Despite his adherence to generalizability as benchmark of good theory, he still concludes his

⁴⁰⁸ Amitav Acharya, "Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds," *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2014), 647–59.

criticism with a reference to relational ontology and the works of L.H.M. Ling. A crucial aspect he addresses is the reproduction of otherness and exoticism through the cultural relativism of nativism and ethnocentricities.⁴⁰⁹ Criticism that will be addressed in later parts of this dissertation.

This aspect is also part of the criticism Anderl and Witt (2020) direct towards Global IR. It is one of the things that contribute to their focus of criticism: problematizing the *Global* in Global IR. This means uncovering how the concept of the international as a field keeps being constructed alongside its own structure of rule.⁴¹⁰ Building on Gurinder K. Bhambra's argument in *Connected Sociologies*, they question if epistemological foundations which were not developed on the philosophical basis of an interconnected globality but on a Eurocentric worldview can still serve as background for knowledge production in a world that is increasingly aware of its relational nature. Not just adding perspectives is the solution, they advocate, but rather questioning our operational categories.⁴¹¹ The authors criticize that merely including non-western contributions in the imagined *singular* global canon and community of IR reproduces problematic perspectives by assigning fixed roles as bearers of essential cultural properties to them, similar to Eun. One of their conclusions is that becoming more pluralistic has to happen not only by inclusion of non-Western scholarship but also by inviting transformations spurred by this scholarship.

Immersing oneself in the Chinese experience, as suggested above, inevitably leads to a transformation of perspective and provides an angle from which to question core assumptions of mainstream anglophone IR. Zhang Yongjin addresses the "anomalous position that the People's Republic of China (PRC) occupied in international society from 1949 to 1979"⁴¹² and the distinct understanding of international relations this alienation bred. In Eun's opinion "anarchy, survival, and the balance of power have been the key operating principles of state-to-state interactions since the pre-modern period" for China's governments, thus postulating that several aspects of international life have universal validity through time and space. A sentiment of universality Yan Xuetong would agree to, which is not without controversy, however. Eun also problematizes how "Confucianism, Marxism, '*Tianxia*' (all-under-heaven), and the Chinese tributary system" comprise an *unsystematic pool of references* drawn upon for an IR

⁴⁰⁹ Yong-Soo Eun, "Opening up the debate over 'non-western' international relations," *Politics* 39, no. 1 (2019): 7.

⁴¹⁰ Felix Anderl and Antonia Witt, "Problematizing the Global in Global IR," *Millennium Journal of International Studies* 49, no. 1 (2020): 52.

⁴¹¹ Anderl and Witt 2020, 49.

⁴¹² Yongjin Zhang, "The 'English School' in China: A Travelogue of Ideas and their Diffusion," *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 1 (2003) 90.

paradigm with Chinese characteristics.⁴¹³ Zhang, however, considers this to be a *productive diversity of sources* for the unique outlook of the Chinese epistemic community, rather than a deficiency.⁴¹⁴ We might call this outlook, in Muthiah Alagappa's term, the 'master research narrative' of China's epistemic community. This Chinese master narrative comprises the most important discourses in Chinese IR: multipolarity, global governance, and the mutual integration and co-constitution of China and the world (order).⁴¹⁵ These somewhat continue earlier discourses in Chinese IR but take place in a changed environment. Phases of dominant Marxism and, afterwards, eager imports of Western theories are now followed by the resurgence of Confucianism and other Chinese traditions as philosophical basis of IR scholarship.⁴¹⁶ The purpose a Chinese school tries to achieve, according to Alagappa, lies in "constituting and governing the world (like the normative variant in Western IR theory) rather than explaining a world that already exists."⁴¹⁷

Before the call to establish a Chinese theory of IR was first put forward, there was a period when Western scholarship was eagerly imported and received in the PRC. The first substantial piece on Western IR was published by Chen Lemin in 1981 in the form an essay, several years later in 1985, a book by Chen Hanwen followed.⁴¹⁸ As Zhang Yongjin illustrates, "the US have invested heavily in fostering and promoting international studies in China" and hence shaped Chinese IR discourses with mainstream American paradigms.⁴¹⁹ Comparing this aspect with the sections on researcher's positionality and value commitments in the previous chapter on methods, I argue, has tremendous impact on the research design. Formalistic, positivist or quantitative approaches find themselves in murky environments surrounded by normative dynamics and value orientation they suffer a total blindness towards, if they refuse to act within a qualitative-reflexive and hermeneutic framework.

The idea of an IR theory with Chinese characteristics was first articulated in a paper by Wang Jianwei and others in 1986⁴²⁰ and more broadly conceived in 1987 at a Shanghai IR theory conference. The one to articulate the call at the conference was Huan Xiang, at that time director and chief cadre of the newly established International Studies Centre directly under the

⁴¹³ Eun 2019, 6.

⁴¹⁴ Zhang 2003, 89.

⁴¹⁵ Muthiah Alagappa, "International Relations studies in Asia: distinctive trajectories," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 11, (2011): 206.

⁴¹⁶ Alagappa 2011, 210-211.

⁴¹⁷ Alagappa 2011, 222.

⁴¹⁸ Zhang 2003, 91.

⁴¹⁹ Zhang 2003, 101-102.

⁴²⁰ Wang and Buzan 2014, 6.

State Council.⁴²¹ This development was accompanied by the three great debates of Chinese IR, as explained by Alagappa in reference to Qin Yaqing's typology of the history of Chinese IR discourse. The first one being about the nature of the international system and how China relates to it and secondly, in the 1990s, if China should pursue her national goals through competition or cooperation. The third debate inquired whether China could rise peacefully, with liberal positions tending to be affirmative of a peaceful rise if China integrates herself successfully into the international institutional order, similarly to the constructivists who also saw a change in China's identity towards a responsibly stake holder. Only the Chinese academics who fall into the realist spectrum consider conflict to be inevitable.⁴²² Ironically, considering how the US invested in promoting American mainstream IR in China, which is congruent with realist theories to a considerable degree, I argue that the US itself contributed to the shaping of a Chinese idea of conflict with the US.

In addition to historical and scholarly dimensions, a brief overview of the implementation and actors of actual Chinese foreign policy shall also be provided here. The three scholars discussed in detail in this chapter are not official politicians or diplomats, rather, they influence Chinese foreign policy through their research and not by direct involvement in foreign policy. The purpose of this overview is to highlight the significance control over narratives and powers meaning-making for the Communist Party and Xi Jinping personally. The subjectivity of the Chinese state is unique in that it is reflected internally by the collective identity of the Party and has become increasingly personalized with the centralization of power around Xi Jinping. This dynamic is not only organizational but also ideational. The party places tremendous value on culture as source and means of foreign policy and seeks to shape and control the narratives in a more unified and directed way than it would take place in pluralistic, democratic, liberal societies. The organizations established to achieve this goal are introduced in the following paragraphs.

Since 2018, "(...) the principal consultative loci for foreign affairs are the respective offices of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission and National Security Commission, both of which report directly to Xi Jinping".⁴²³ Swanström elaborates that the Central Foreign Affairs Commission (CFAC) "was created in 2018 by Xi Jinping to control and exert more influence

⁴²¹ Zhang 2003, 92; Nele Noesselt, "Is There a "Chinese School" of IR?," *GIGA Working Papers*, No. 188 (2012), German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), 14.

⁴²² Alagappa 2011, 205-206.

⁴²³ Vito S. Acosta, "Chinese Foreign Policy in Central Asia: Who makes it and what matters?," (paper presented at the workshop "Central Asia's international relations: unpacking actors and factors" at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, April 2023), 4.

over the creation of foreign policy and consolidate the leadership of the CPC and President Xi personally.” He continues explaining that it “has become a central instrument for Xi but operates on the Party’s instructions” and “replaced the LSG [leading small group] in foreign affairs as the primary institution to coordinate China’s foreign policy”.⁴²⁴ This followed the larger “Plan for Deepening the Reform of the Institutions of the Party and the State” developed by the CCP’s central committee, which pursued the “objective of centralizing the competences of foreign policy decision-making under the purview of the CCP’s central party apparatus.”⁴²⁵ However, “the creation of new and complex Party-government structures” has its disadvantages as Kishan Rana points out. He argues that “Chinese diplomacy loses suppleness, at a time when BRI creates situations where the external country situations, not amenable to Beijing’s control, require creative local actions.”⁴²⁶

Swanström also names two other influential organizations, the United Front Work Department (UFWD) and the CPC International (liaison) department (CPCID). “China does not distinguish between government resources, private companies, and Chinese citizens”, he clarifies, “[t]hey are all components that the State uses to its advantage”. He categorizes the UFWD as “crucial component” in the “indoctrination and influence campaigns that China has been conducting internationally”, but also points out that “other forms of intelligence work and Chinese companies and students play a critical role in the implementation and, to specific degree, the formulation of Chinese foreign policy.”⁴²⁷ The UFWD, he continues, “has been mandated to control the narrative in Chinese newspapers” but also coordinate activities internationally such as “influence campaigns in foreign states”, its focus is “to engage and infiltrate ethnic Chinese communities in foreign countries.” To that end it maintains collaborations with several organizations “such as Chinese Students and Scholars Associations, Confucius Institutes etc.” The international relations of the CPC with other political parties, on the other hand, is managed by the International Liaison Department through a kind of “behind curtain diplomacy”. Although not developing political ideas itself, it is tasked with circulating and propagating Chinese foreign policy to political parties abroad. Another mission of the Liaison Department is “creating popular support for the BRI” through “conferences,

⁴²⁴ Niklas Swanström, “The Party-State Dichotomy: Convergence and Divergence in China’s Foreign Policy,” in *China’s Foreign Policy Today: Who is in Charge of What?*, ed. Axel Berkofsky and Giulia Sciorati (Ledizioni LediPublishing, 2022), 19.

⁴²⁵ Hua Xin, “The influence of Chinese foreign policy think tanks on China’s EU policy: a comparative analysis of CIIS and SIIS,” *Asia Europe Journal* 21, no. 2 (2023): 198.

⁴²⁶ Kishan S. Rana, “China’s Foreign Ministry: Fit for Purpose in the Era of Xi Jinping, BRI and ‘Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics’?,” *China Report* 55, no. 3 (2019), 215.

⁴²⁷ Swanström in Berkofsky and Sciorati 2022, 16-17.

workshops, and trips to China to increase the optimistic view of China, its foreign policy, and the BRI.”⁴²⁸

4.2. Three perspectives on contemporary Chinese IR theory

This section examines publications of three International Relations theorists, who rose to prominence in the last decade and have been influential in the discipline globally, but particularly in sinophone IR. Main themes in the works of Qin Yaqing, Zhao Tingyang and Yan Xuetong are morality, classical Chinese philosophy as basis for theory and the alleged difference between eastern and Western culture. Qin Yaqing is the most prominent Chinese constructivist, Yan Xuetong holds this position for Realism and Zhao Tingyang established his own domestically impactful brand of IR. While Zhao Tingyang’s concept dominated the discourse within China, as Callahan describes in his article, Yan Xuetong “has been the most cited Chinese political scientist in the West (...)”.⁴²⁹ Of particular importance to the BRI is Qin Yaqing’s through his talk at a Politburo collective study session in 2015, “where outsiders are invited to give topical presentations to the top leadership”, the ideas he presented on global governance became “relevant to the international rule-making activities of BRI and the AIIB.”⁴³⁰

Zhao, influential philosopher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, published his reinvention of the *tianxia* concept in 2005. “*The Tianxia System* became a best-seller in China because it caught a wave of interest in Chinese-style solutions to world problems” as Callahan describes, especially because “*Tianxia* combines the seemingly contradictory discourses of nationalism and cosmopolitanism.”⁴³¹ Following this discourses, all three of them tend to stress differences to European or US theory and sometimes overemphasizes this cultural division lines. Qin Yaqing and Zhao Tingyang are the most important representatives of this increasingly attractive trend of cultural Chinese exceptionalism, but Yan Xuetong could also count as an example of the idea that Western dominated rationalistic IR needs a humane Chinese alternative.⁴³² Although Yan Xuetong and Qin Yaqing develop different ideas to *tianxia*, it is Zhao Tingyang’s achievement to revive the debate about Chinese IR that started in the 80s and

⁴²⁸ Swanström in Berkofsky and Sciorati 2022, 21.

⁴²⁹ Vasilis Trigkas, “On Global Power Differentials, Moral Realism, and the Rise of China: A Review Essay”, *Journal of Contemporary China* 29, (2020): 4.

⁴³⁰ William A. Callahan, “China’s “Asia Dream””: The Belt Road Initiative and the new regional order,” *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 1, no. 3 (2016): 229.

⁴³¹ Callahan 2008, 750.

⁴³² Trigkas 2020, 7.

thus create a space of discourse in which Qin and Yan could place their theories. The idea of a Chinese School of IR is not contained in academia but has been discussed among public intellectuals, as state policy and even in popular culture because it addresses the question *Who is China?*, which is “the perennial question that transfixes intellectuals and policy elites in Beijing (...).”⁴³³

I will avoid merely applying Chinese theories to international relations or comparing them to Western theories. Comparisons always run the risk of tainting themselves with a character of Western validation towards non-western theories or exploitation of non-western resources to revitalize Western theories that have become stagnant. Nonetheless, I also oppose the idea that Chinese thought can only be understood by Chinese thought, culturally inherent or scholarly practiced. Criticism against Chinese theory both within the PRC and abroad is plenty and must be considered as a token of its significance. European or American criticism directed at the cultural essentialism in Chinese theories must not however, even implicitly, absolve Western scholars from reflections on their own cultural essentialism. Science is a social practice, and the present thesis does not outright accuse theories of carrying sociocultural traits but aims at examining them in the case of Chinese theories with scientific reason and respectful sensitivity.

I agree with PRC scholars insofar as cultural traits are not a deficiency that limits the universal validity of a theory, towards which a reasonable academic should anyways be skeptical, but as a valuable source of further insight. That is the reason why I explicitly investigate the cultural features of Chinese theories that would normally be considered a hindrance to their global applicability. Besides countless other instances, global application of IR studies, especially in the case of Chinese intellectuals with close ties to official political leaders, can be analyzed in the way cultural values are fused with social practice and norms/rules in international institutions. Causes for order, or causal relationships behind the reproduction of order, can be explained by international institutions as places/functions where these three factors join. What is required for this is a research design that detects values with a technique that possesses perceptiveness for the relationships between society and culture. Behind the utilization of resources that are regarded as traditional, indigenous, local or national heritage can be a number of strategies. Depending on the point an author endeavors to make with their research, these strategies can contribute to the overall thrust of their project albeit they might run the risk of facing critique of a certain programmatic undercurrent in their work.

⁴³³ Callahan 2008, 750.

One of the interim findings of the present thesis is that, even more than in other IR literature, taking the context of the works examined in this chapter into consideration must be one of the prime techniques of analysis. This is connected to the point mentioned above, the strategic analysis of different cultural influences on theory. All three of the authors are close to official political circles in the PRC and they present an image of IR where there is a cultural separation between Western and Chinese theories and where this clear categorization also is not considered problematic. Qin Yaqing even dedicates the first third of *A Relational Theory* to a detailed discussion of distinct cultural sources for contrasting scientific theories. This insistence on cultural differences is especially noteworthy in a theory that even contains relationality in its very name. Zhao and Yan also refer to relationality to a certain degree (even though Zhao still more than Yan), but present an image of differences and divisions.

4.2.1. Contemporary Confucianism

What is also common to all three is the regular reference to Confucianism, be it by mentioning Confucian concepts, quoting Confucian authors or directly designating something to be Confucian. In search for causes of order, or causal relationships that lead to order, Confucianism in IR presents an insightful study object because it enables a deeper understanding of the relationships between social, political and cultural factors for order. This is even more the case in research design that considers “What is order?” and “Who is actor?” as two sides of the same coin. As Berthrong explains, “(...) the Confucian Way has been highly instrumental in the self-definition of Chinese [ethos]” and “appears to be making a remarkable comeback (...).”⁴³⁴ Although Confucianism was something of an official ideology, the Chinese empire was ruled according to a mix of Confucianism and Legalism.⁴³⁵ Among the many things Confucianism is supposed to be on the spectrum between religion and ideology, I follow Bai in regarding it first and foremost as a political philosophy.⁴³⁶ The PRC seems to be rediscovering both who it is and what world it wants to exist in simultaneously in one single unified philosophical undertaking.

This discourse is manifold and even though this chapter will only shed light on PRC authors, an overall contextualization is necessary to avoid any falsely simplistic and homogenous images of Confucianism and its role in current Chinese IR scholarship. The history

⁴³⁴ John H. Berthrong, “Beyond New Confucianism Expanding the Contemporary Rudao,” in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 225.

⁴³⁵ Feng Zhang, “The Tsinghua Approach and the Inception of Chinese Theories of International Relations,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5, (2012): 96.

⁴³⁶ Tongdong Bai, “Confucianism to Save the World” in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 68

of Confucianism in the 20th century is an arduous phase in its development because “no other great philosophical or religious tradition suffered as much from its encounter with Western Enlightenment modernity and the imperial West (...).”⁴³⁷ Radical and moderate reformers debated “that Confucianism had long been associated with (...) autocracy, elitism, and patriarchy” but Tang Junyi, one of the latter, believed that democracy and freedom were also rooted in Chinese culture and advocated for a transcultural “developmental model that followed the global pattern and yet was derived from and resonated with local experience and practices.”⁴³⁸ This illustrates the overall program of 20th century scholars as a “need to devise a New Confucianism that is conceptually linked to Classical Confucian resources and is not always carried out in what is basically a Western mode of philosophical discourse.”⁴³⁹

The discourse on Confucianism, however, is not confined to academia. “[S]ince the late 1990s, CCP has started to show increased interest (...) to promote patriotism” and “the worship of Confucius has been aimed at creating a sound and proper political consciousness among the population.”⁴⁴⁰ Beijing’s efforts to promote Confucianism as national ideology is apparent from the media products of the last two decades. One turning point was the release of the first movie to depict Confucius in a positive way in 2009. A TV series from 2010 that was one of the audio-visual publishing planning projects of China’s Eleventh Five-Year Plan is included in the official Chinese traditional culture educational materials for the National Youth Organization. Additionally, as early as 2011, an internet media format was also published, confirming that the government wants to communicate its messages on every available platform as wide as possible.⁴⁴¹

In addition to the domestic promotion of Confucianism, it also became an element in Chinese soft power strategies⁴⁴², maybe even the most important part of it. Even more than just a soft power strategy, according to Hong et al., Confucianism is an attempt “to convince more countries to accept the Chinese view of the global order.”⁴⁴³ This soft power strategy, however, is heavily impeded by the government’s obvious force behind this promotion of Confucianism instead of an organic cross-border spread of culture.⁴⁴⁴ One example of a more organic

⁴³⁷ Berthrong in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 226.

⁴³⁸ Hok Yin Chan, “A Critique of Colonialism and Capitalism Tang Junyi’s Views on Plurality and Openness,” in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 174.

⁴³⁹ Berthrong in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 231.

⁴⁴⁰ Marc Andrew Matten, “Worshipping Ancestors in Modern China Confucius and the Yellow Emperor as Icons of Chinese Identity,” in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 189

⁴⁴¹ Junhao Hong et al., “The Chinese Media’s Campaign for Confucianism Motivations, Implications, and Problems” in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 210-212.

⁴⁴² Matten in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 197.

⁴⁴³ Hong et al. in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 218.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 222.

international soft power effect are memorial ceremonies in 2006, which for the first time in the modern era took place in Mainland China and Taiwan simultaneously, or the 2008 the First World Confucianism General Assembly.⁴⁴⁵ In most cases, however, Beijing is “using the Confucian culture to achieve its political goal in the era of globalization.”⁴⁴⁶ This becomes even more salient because “[t]he Chinese leadership regards the realm of culture as inseparable from Chinese sovereignty”, so the party-state considers it one of its prime duties to protect this sphere of culture⁴⁴⁷ in order to “resist the invasion of Western cultural values.”⁴⁴⁸ Within this complex of domestic ideological and international soft power strategies, “Confucius is obviously an important, if not the most important, *national icon* of China (...).”⁴⁴⁹ [my italics]

Confucianism obviously seems to be regarded as important ideological or ideational resource on which to draw for power strategies, nationality, identity and even world order. Yet there are countless levels of history, culture, discourse, society and psychology below the surface. A direct recourse to history is often included in one way or the other to contribute to Chinese theories of IR. Understanding history, many IR scholars would universally agree, is indeed crucial to understand the contemporary world, but turning to history is not without risks, as Barabantseva explains:

“In order to draw from history to understand the present, it is important to identify the actors who make history and the templates according to which history is cast to the audiences (who also in turn are not passive consumers but also contribute to the way history is formed and made).”⁴⁵⁰

Furthermore, Confucianism has to be understood not only in this differentiated historical dimension but also can never be understood in isolation from its cultural environment. An environment “including Daoism, Buddhism, and now Marxism, which are three major classical and modern forces in Chinese life” and moreover, beneath those exists “the massive substrate of Chinese regional, local, and popular vernacular culture.”⁴⁵¹ This dynamic historical and cultural context falsifies finding causes for China’s behavior in the Chinese worldview because “Chinese images of the world and China’s role in it are subject to constant negotiation” and thus “China’s visions of the world and engagement with it are constructed, contested, and

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 212-213.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 215.

⁴⁴⁷ Elena Barabantseva, “Change vs. Order: Shijie Meets Tianxia in China’s Interactions with the World,” *Alternatives* 34, (2009): 133.

⁴⁴⁸ Hong et al. in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 218.

⁴⁴⁹ Matten in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 193.

⁴⁵⁰ Barabantseva 2009, 130.

⁴⁵¹ Berthrong in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 225.

negotiated.”⁴⁵² China should consequently be treated “as a construct made up of multifarious identities at different levels” and not as a monolithic unit.⁴⁵³ Confucianism reflects this complex transformation in the way scholarship on Chinese philosophy changed with the advent of Western academic mindsets. Although classical Chinese texts might have remained the material to study, as Berthrong explains, “the methodology used to analyze these texts was now informed by Western philosophical categories, methodologies, and sensibilities.” In the course of this process even “texts that had long fallen out of favor with Chinese intellectuals, such as the Mozi, returned to be studied (...)” and Berthrong concludes that “this pattern of internal and external dispute and transformation has marked and continues to mark the second and third epochs of the Confucian Way.”⁴⁵⁴ Three major factors are important in present day Confucianism, as Barabantseva points out. First, scholars should not forget how “China’s presentation of itself as a Confucian nation involves an ideological shift” from Marxism to traditionalism. Second, apart from its domestic dimension, “China seems to increasingly present Confucian principles as guidelines for foreigners’ perceptions of China”. Third, communism and Confucianism get conflated along ideological and pragmatic political lines, where it fits the requirements and challenges of China’s current situation.⁴⁵⁵ Confucianism as a relatively new part of *official and modern* PRC identity, as international soft power strategy and in its unique mix with communism presents a complex ongoing discourse. Some scholars even criticize “claiming that China now is still a Confucian state, after so many years of radical ‘modernization,’ is also dubious.”⁴⁵⁶ The reader of this chapter needs to keep this in mind when dealing with Yan Xuetong’s, Qin Yaqing’s and Zhao Tingyang’s references to Confucian concepts, which tend to underrepresent the fragmented and plural condition of Confucianism in the contemporary era.

Berthrong summarizes four main directions and narratives of the overall discourse of New Confucianism. The reception of mid-20th century New Confucian scholarship is the first aspect he mentions that characterizes the current debate, in combination with, secondly, a “more politically and socially engaged and sensitive contribution to the revival and renewal of the Confucian Way”. Another issue is the philosophically qualified reconstruction of classical literature and, lastly, “an intense desire to apply these insights to the political and social life of

⁴⁵² Barabantseva 2009, 133.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 130.

⁴⁵⁴ Berthrong in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 228-229.

⁴⁵⁵ Barabantseva Ibid., 139-140.

⁴⁵⁶ Bai in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 65.

China.”⁴⁵⁷ In contrast to this academic development of Confucianism in the 21st century, Matten criticizes its political exploitation, complaining that “Confucius is clearly an empty signifier” and “a postmodern persona because he means anything that anybody wants him to be.”⁴⁵⁸ Hong et al. present yet another stark contrast to both perspectives above, one that is also remarkable as the result of a research project on Chinese media campaigns. They conclude the analysis in their chapter with the following findings:

“Intermittently Confucianism has *dominated China for more than 2,000 years, (...) First and foremost, Confucianism must be recognized as an essential element of Chinese modern culture* and be used to enhance the cohesion of Chinese people and society. Second, *cultivating the spirit of Chinese nationality* based on Confucianism is crucial. In order to establish the *glory of Chinese culture* at this new historical stage, China must create a new form of Confucianism that directly responds to the challenges of the contemporary world.”⁴⁵⁹ [my italics]

Scholars who believe in the universality of Confucianism would certainly take a different position, a discourse studied by Bai in *Confucianism for the Contemporary World*. He argues that the belief in Confucianism’s universality was only lost when the aggression of imperialism drove China to adopt “a culture-specific view of Confucianism”. New Confucians tried to save its universality by shaping Confucianism more along the example of Western philosophy, “an implicit acknowledgement of the universality of Western values (...)”, but this means to smooth out its political dimensions.⁴⁶⁰ This divide between a Confucianism that is made unpolitical to become universal and an essentially cultural Confucianism serving the glory and spirit of the Chinese nation proves how plural Confucianisms present themselves to people studying their development.

4.2.2. Morality in Chinese IR theories

One prominent theme of Chinese IR theories this text discusses is morality. There are two very different - one might even say opposing - types of morality presented by Yan and Zhao on the one hand and Qin on the other. Both are derived from Classical Chinese philosophy in their respective theories. Throughout PRC academia resonates the sentiment that China’s “ethical system of domestic and international order” was lost through Western imperialism and the

⁴⁵⁷ Berthrong in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 230.

⁴⁵⁸ Matten in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 200.

⁴⁵⁹ Hong et al. in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 222-223.

⁴⁶⁰ Bai in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 67.

Westphalian international system.⁴⁶¹ The question of morality thus becomes another fault line in competing knowledge production, but it is not without controversy within China as well. Zhao Tingyang criticizes Confucianism, in traditional Daoist manner, for focusing morality on one's own family and explains that morality in *tianxia* was therefore twofold. Confucian morality with a focus on the family and the permeating effect a virtuous ruler who inspires his subject to act morally was one element, but the selfish human nature was also addressed by *tianxia* in providing material incentives to join the order. This was a contribution of the legalist school of statecraft (the great rivals of Confucianism) to *tianxia*, with the idea that to be convincing, a moral order must also be a successful order so that it attracts potential members with substantial benefits.⁴⁶² A line of argument he shares with Yan Xuetong, who applies this directly to the present.⁴⁶³ According to Zhao, the Zhou dynasty established two important pillars of Chinese political culture. First, political legitimacy that is based on morality and second, replacing prophetic revelations with historical consciousness as basis for a political self-conception.⁴⁶⁴ Zhao mentions meeting the “feelings of the people” for classic understandings of a government's legitimacy, this is not the *volonté générale*, as Europeans would associate, but the political economy of the public (economic) interests and needs. Through this, he arrives at the conclusion that moral governance is “to guarantee a universal provision of security and benefits” and “an institutional arrangement wherein everyone could universally benefit.”⁴⁶⁵ Moral governance is characterized even more directly as caring for the livelihood of the people later.⁴⁶⁶ A finding that Yan Xuetong would wholeheartedly agree upon, as will be shown below. Zhao summarizes the complex between morality, legitimacy and the satisfaction of public needs in the following paragraph:

“From Confucius's perspective, what universal human affect determines to be moral is what is constant in the feelings of the people. Since the feelings of the people and morality are continuous in this way, to accord with morality is to accord with the feelings of the people. It is in this sense that Confucius believed morality to be an effective basis for political legitimacy. From this we can also understand why the Zhou dynasty believed that

⁴⁶¹ Callahan 2008, 752.

⁴⁶² Zhao 2020, 82-83.

⁴⁶³ Xuetong Yan, “Xunzi's Interstate Political Philosophy and Its Message for Today,” in *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, Xuetong Yan, ed. Daniel A. Bell and Sun Zhe, trans. Edmund Ryden, (Princeton UP, 2011), 99.

⁴⁶⁴ Zhao 2020, 90 - 91

⁴⁶⁵ Tingyang Zhao, *All under Heaven: The Tianxia System for a possible World Order*, trans. Joseph E. Harnoff (University of California Press, 2016), 85-87.

⁴⁶⁶ Zhao 2016, 94-97.

reverencing virtuosity resided in caring for the people and that caring for the people amounted to maintaining the heavenly invoked order (...).”⁴⁶⁷

This consequentialist line within the presented type of morality is even more apparent in Yan Xuetong’s discussion of morality. Yan is called a moral or Confucian realist because of his “emphasis on political power as opposed to economic and military power, hierarchy as opposed to anarchy, and on international norms, state morality, political ideas (...)” as well as humane authority.⁴⁶⁸ As Trigkas explains, “Yan makes clear that humane authority is not a categorical but rather a consequentialist and instrumental take”, which in reality means that “[a] state which provides security to weaker states and follows fair diplomatic rituals can expand its international authority and thus build legitimacy (...).”⁴⁶⁹ Among different types of morality, Yan emphasizes governmental morality, which he defines as “the responsibility to protect national interests, the duty to practice international norms, and strategic credibility with regard to allies” and also a government’s “responsibility to the interest of the people’s it rules (...).”⁴⁷⁰

Yan Xuetong follows a difference between personal and governmental moral but focusses so much attention on leadership that it opens a massive contradiction between how dependent on the personal moral of the leader an international order is in contradiction to his emphases on governmental morality for international order. Furthermore, morality seems to have no content, but becomes the virtuous conduct of action. Values are more goals to Yan than reasons; morality is a means to the end of values. Values don’t motivate behavior for him, self-help in an anarchical society motivates action, but nevertheless he cautions aspiring states to act in accordance with morality and he does imply in good Confucian fashion, that “lesser” states will follow the example of a morally acting leading state.⁴⁷¹ In emphasizing leadership the way Yan does, he is completely in line with Hans Morgenthau, who himself said that the quality of government is among the most important components of national power.⁴⁷²

Implementing and enforcing norms to uphold a stable order seems to be baseline of Yan’s concept morality. According to his reading of pre-Qin thinkers, the level of morality of the hegemon is related to the degree of stability of the international system.⁴⁷³ Morality does not

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 89.

⁴⁶⁸ Feng Zhang 2012, 95.

⁴⁶⁹ Trigkas , 6-7.

⁴⁷⁰ Xuetong Yan, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers* (Princeton UP, 2019), 9 and 24.

⁴⁷¹ Yan 2019, 144.

⁴⁷² Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (McGraw-Hill, 2006), 215.

⁴⁷³ Xuetong Yan “A Comparative Study of Pre-Qin Interstate Political Philosophy,” in Yan 2011, 65.

imply a rejection of force to uphold order.⁴⁷⁴ Discussing Xunzi⁴⁷⁵, Yan draws the conclusion that implementing norms⁴⁷⁶ and being reliable in alliances are further aspects of morality in Confucian philosophy.⁴⁷⁷ Another standard to assess the morality of a leader, according to the *Stratagems*, is whether he or she employs worthy people.⁴⁷⁸ Furthering the argument of morality and use of force, a hegemon can even gain moral influence when he responds the aggression appropriately.⁴⁷⁹ This does not contradict humane authority since “early Confucians nevertheless supported wars of humanitarian intervention.”⁴⁸⁰ Additionally to the dimensions of norms and strategic credibility, Yan mentions another element of morality in state leadership: reform. On the one hand “operational capability is mainly determined by the direction and execution of political reforms” and on the other “[r]eform politically embraces a moral dimension and is antithetical to retrogression.”⁴⁸¹ Qin Yaqing would agree to the moral requirements on leadership and the dependence of “hard” power on this aspect, because “[t]he rule of morality is thus also understood as the rule of humanity”, in which the decisive “power to realize this is not material power, but moral and normative power.”⁴⁸²

The reason why Yan stresses stability, norms and order as expressions of morality can be found in his conception of humans, which seems to be synthesis of Xunzi and IR Realism. He grounds his realist mindset on the idea that “(...) states controlled by human beings must also be driven by self-interests” which supposedly “is backed up by the theory of evolution (...) the force of natural selection as evident in animal behaviors is attributable to selfish survival needs, while hypotheses based on group altruism are demonstrably implausible.”⁴⁸³ A far-reaching judgment he vaguely grounds on a single study he quotes. Later he elaborates on the “innately human character” and “inborn nature of human beings” that drives tyrannical states to a foreign policy of social Darwinism, even refers to thermodynamics to make his point and concludes that “humans instinctively use violence as a means of self-protection and for the sake of interests.”⁴⁸⁴ The last statement is based on a quote of Confucius but his whole concept of human nature, I argue, might as well be considered a concession to Realism in order to make

⁴⁷⁴ Yan in Yan 2011, 41.

⁴⁷⁵ Jin Xu, “The Two Poles of Confucianism: A Comparison of the Interstate Political Philosophies of Mencius and Xunzi” in Yan 2011, 168.

⁴⁷⁶ Yan in Yan 2011, 87.

⁴⁷⁷ Xu in Yan 2011, 168-169.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁴⁷⁹ Rihua Wang, “Political Hegemony in Ancient China: A Review of “Hegemony in The Stratagems of the Warring States,” in Yan 2011, 193.

⁴⁸⁰ Bai in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 73.

⁴⁸¹ Yan 2019, 24.

⁴⁸² Qin 2018, 341.

⁴⁸³ Yan 2019, 67.

⁴⁸⁴ Yan 2019, 109-110.

sure his theory still belongs to this school. On his cursory level of argumentation about human nature, one only has to consult Graeber's and Wengrow's *Dawn of Everything*⁴⁸⁵ or the work of Rutger Bregman to falsify this basis of Yan's theory.

I summarize four elements of morality in Yan Xuetong's research. First, the protection of national interests and the interests of one's people. Second, to implement, enforce and practice norms, possibly with humanitarian intervention. Third, strategic credibility in alliances. Fourth, a government that is able to reform and employs skilled ministers. All of this rests on a capable, morally superior leadership that determines the military, economic and cultural power of a state through its ability and competence. The question Yan's strong emphases on leadership poses is: How easy does morality as condition for authority become the assumption that authority possesses morality? Some critics point out that "Yan is concerned first and foremost with helping to bring about China's rise in the world and in so doing bring about a better, more harmonious (Chinese-led) world order."⁴⁸⁶ He is adamant in preaching the coming bipolar great power competition between USA and PRC⁴⁸⁷ and attempts to mimic the hawkish American public intellectuals, who advocate for US hegemony as somewhere between necessary and morally mandated.⁴⁸⁸ In doing so, he implies that a world order under Chinese leadership will be superior to US hegemony.

While Zhao and Yan define morality as an active part of governing with the aim of securing people's livelihood, Qin regards morality as an ideal that both organizes human communities and concurrently gives them higher meaning. In his specific section on morality, Qin explicitly defines it as a process that governs society by *codes and principles*, which are based on moral norms and expressed through virtues of benevolence, justice, propriety, reason and honor. The "morality-doctrine", he continues, works toward harmonization for a meaningful collectivity of worthy human beings. Crucial here is the double function of not only organizing society but also giving it meaning, both of which cannot exist without the other in this conceptualization.⁴⁸⁹ Qin's argumentation sometimes seems cyclical, postulating that relational governance is moral because it is relational because it is moral and so on. I argue in favor of an understanding of morality in Qin's line of thinking, which is deeper rooted and therefore presents itself on such

⁴⁸⁵ David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The dawn of everything: A new history of humanity*, (Penguin UK, 2021).

⁴⁸⁶ Lindsay Cunningham-Cross, "A Realist never changes his Spots: A Critical Analysis of Yan Xuetong's turn to Culture in Chinese International Relations," in *Asian Thought on China's Changing International Relations*, ed. Niv Horesh and Emilian Kavalski (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 45.

⁴⁸⁷ Xuetong Yan, "Why a Bipolar World Is More Likely Than a Unipolar or Multipolar One," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 32, (2015).

⁴⁸⁸ Cunningham-Cross in Horesh and Kavalski 2014, 38.

⁴⁸⁹ Qin 2018, 339-342.

a fundamental level that its self-evident nature seems puzzling to Western readings. In other words, Qin treats morality as something, which is so naturally given that it hardly needs argumentation. The reason for this can be traced back to 11th century Neo-Confucians (not to be confused with 20th century New Confucians). This Song-dynasty revival introduced moral-metaphysics in which “morality is valid only because moral principle is the same as the principle of the universe” and thus “morality is not only cosmologically rooted but also a representation of the principle of the natural world”, as Sheng explains. He continues saying that for New Confucians, who Qin echoes in his depiction of relational governance, morality matters “because it is universal and it is the only way that human beings should choose.”⁴⁹⁰

Qin Yaqing addresses the aspect of morality mostly as one element of his relational governance. He defines relational governance “as a process of negotiating socio-political arrangements that manage complex relationships in a community to produce order so that members behave in a reciprocal and cooperative fashion with mutual trust evolving over a *shared understanding of social norms and human morality*.”⁴⁹¹ [my italics] Managing relationships to produce order based on trust and morality is his main point here. Indeed, relational governance would be impossible for Qin “[i]f there should be no room for moral values and no political soil for social trust, and if there should be no extensive and equal participation of social members (...).”⁴⁹²

Towards the conclusion of his discussion of the elements of relational governance, he summarizes relational governance and defines its primary aim as *establishing good order*. He then gives us an image with four layers. *Morality* is the fundamental level, *trust* is built upon this level of morality, *harmonious relations* are based on trust and the *good order* on top is based on harmonious relations. Those are the four layers of good governance. He adds to this an individual factor, which he calls “virtuous person”, a reference to *junzi*, the ideal Confucian human. Maybe the reason why he avoids using the term individual is that he argued extensively for a heavy contrast between relational-Confucian and rational-individualistic belief systems, the fact however, that the individual enters his theory here is indisputable. The virtuous person seems to be the core element that animates his whole system. In this virtuous person, morality is cultivated and sincerity is expressed to form trust. This is crucial to the understanding of Qin’s theory: he does not observe and analyze objectively and neutrally but instead develops a proposal for a good, just, harmonious and moral order.

⁴⁹⁰ Ke Sheng, “A Mission Impossible? Mou Zongsan’s Attempt to Rebuild Morality in the Modern Age” in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 119-121.

⁴⁹¹ Qin 2018, 335.

⁴⁹² Ibid, 337.

A strong conviction for Confucianism also reveals itself in his finding that “[g]ood governance is hence a *natural* element of a Confucian society” [my italics], from which one can infer that a badly governed society cannot be characterized as Confucian and a properly Confucian society will always be well governed. This in turn lifts Confucianism up from a political philosophy around which discussion can take place to an ideal or dogmatic creed, a highly problematic line of argumentation, or even the end of argumentation and a clear switch towards normative lecturing. Furthermore, four main goals or principles direct his Confucian society: it *harmonizes relations*, practices the *rule of morality*, cultivates *virtuous individuals* and pursues *trust* as principle for behavior. Obvious in this description of relational governance is that its goals are identical with its preconditions. This governance aspires to realize principles and ideals, which are also supposed to serve as its requirements.⁴⁹³ Taking this not as an analysis but as a model of good governance in its own right enables us draw interesting parallels to the English School, since the application of this model to global politics describes an international society with social goals that would fit Hedley Bull’s typology. He describes “[t]he order which men look for in social life” is “an arrangement of social life such that it promotes certain goals or values.”⁴⁹⁴ Although Bull only describes *that* values are part of order and Qin prescribes *which* values make up a good order, the recognition that order is based on values and pursues moral aspects can be seen as a bridge between English School and “Chinese” School.

A brief look at history may ground this idealistic outlook. Part of the development of Confucianism is the period in which each of the warring states were in search for “a new social glue that could hold it together and find a new model of international relations”; the solution of Confucianism was, and still is, “not that of the European nation-state, which uses imagined national identity to attach the people to it, but is based on humanity (ren 仁) and compassion (...).”⁴⁹⁵ Humanity and compassion however, are not the only elements that drive this model. More insight into the meaning of the idea that governance rests on morality is Qin’s argument that:

“[f]aith in the ruler, confidence in government, and trust among members of society go before any other condition for good governance (...) trust of people in government are the most important factors for governing. It is also the foundation of the rule of morality.”⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 345-346.

⁴⁹⁴ Bull 2002, 3-4.

⁴⁹⁵ Bai in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 72.

⁴⁹⁶ Qin 2018, 344.

This paragraph includes a reference to William Theodore de Barry, who is also quoted to express Qin's sympathy for the idea that Confucian morality encompasses "eternal, core values common to all human kind." A sentence one should keep in mind when later getting confronted with Qin's criticism against Western rule-based governance for being too essentialist and universalistic. An international system based on these ideas, however, would lead to a universal empire, a state that would govern the globe according to this philosophy would be morally legitimized by simply being the leader. Faith in the ruler as both condition for good governance and foundation of moral rule is a two-edged sword that carries with it connotations of authoritarianism. Postulating this as a theory of international relations collides brutally with the most sober and pessimistic neoclassical realists. Approaches in the tradition of Morgenthau, which attempt to explain great power rivalry with the desire for power, could not exist in more contrast to an approach that justifies power by authority. As in Yan Xuetong's theory, where does morality as condition for authority become the assumption of authority as moral? *Tianxia* is also often theorized as static system "preoccupied with maintaining hierarchy, order, and unity (...)", and described "as an inward-looking system of values and governance that looked to Confucianism and the emperor as the highest authority" and "prioritizes maintenance of the order imposed from above (...)." ⁴⁹⁷

Several sections of *A Relational Theory* express unambiguously the cultural differences Qin diagnoses in different societies. He claims, for example that "rationality is the most characteristic concept of Western societies, relationality provides the foundation of the Chinese social world."⁴⁹⁸ Additionally, he postulates that "the rule of morality is a characteristic feature of traditional Chinese society as the rule of law is one of Western society: Rules govern individuals while morality governs more relations among people."⁴⁹⁹ A few pages later, he repeats:

"While the rule-based model places emphasis on rationality, egoism, and contracts, this tripartite scheme of relationality, morality, and trust reflects the essence of the relational approach to governance. The former is more legal, relying on impersonal laws, while the latter is more social, relying on human morality."⁵⁰⁰

He seems to reanimate the Asian Values Debate by echoing some 1990s scholars' opinion "that Western concepts such as liberty, equality, and human rights are specific to Euro-American culture" and it is "East and Southeast Asian countries where kinship and

⁴⁹⁷ Barabantseva "2009, 132-134.

⁴⁹⁸ Qin 2018, 150.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 340.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 346.

collectivity are treasured over individuality and privacy.”⁵⁰¹ These arguments sure resemble Qin’s line of thinking, the Asian Values Debate however, failed in developing convincing arguments for this cultural essentialism. Qin Yaqing speaks about a compatibility of the two belief systems but his overall emphases lies in difference rather than synthesis. Criticism against Western dominated international relations is often framed as simple antagonism between Chinese culture and the Western state system but such an image fails to comprehend how China and the world co-constitute each other.⁵⁰² Bai mentions several problems with the over-emphases on Confucianism, the first presenting itself in the fact that Confucianism might never have been *the* state ideology of China, it has never been a coherent system of thinking and that after decades of modernization it is questionable how much of Confucian tradition is authentically preserved to draw upon if one were to rebuild a Confucian political system.⁵⁰³ Questions about culture are complex and seldom easy to answer conclusively, yet even if we would follow Qin and entertain the idea that certain traits are innate to particular cultures in scientific open-mindedness, there is a caveat best described by quoting Jana Rošker:

“(…) relativization of values does not imply that all values are equally good (…) it does not imply that elementary issues, which are not beneficiary for humanity, or even in contradiction with preserving the integration and dignity of human beings, can be pursued and implemented in the name of some ‘specific culturally conditioned values.’”⁵⁰⁴

In contrast to a simple relationality-rationality-antinomy, Lin an-wu argues that debates about Confucian morality can use the concepts of inner sage and outer king in order to “directly address the two fundamental concerns of our modern era: equality and plurality.” Individual subjectivity and self-transformative power are located at the inner sage, while “the outer king must contribute to creation of a fair and just society [in which everyone is] protected by democratic institutions and the rule of law.”⁵⁰⁵ This is only the surface level of breaking up alleged differences and essential cultural characteristics, which will be reprised later. Even Qin Yaqing himself, however, cannot carry the dichotomy between Western and Confucian culture unconditionally through his whole argumentation. On a deeper level of analysis, one might inquire what the difference is between the *rules* that supposedly are so clearly part of the Western culture in separation and opposition to the Confucian culture and the *codes, principles*

⁵⁰¹ Ming-huei Lee, “Building Democracy: The Theory and Practice of Contemporary New Confucianism,” in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 86

⁵⁰² Barabantseva 2009, 135.

⁵⁰³ Bai in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 66.

⁵⁰⁴ Rošker 2021, 12.

⁵⁰⁵ An-wu Lin, “Confucianism and Civil Society: The New Meanings of “Inner Sage” and “Outer King”,” in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 112.

and norms that allegedly belong to the Confucian model. Qin also hardly clarifies how the virtuous *person* he sees as cornerstone of relational governance is different to the *individual* that is governed by the rule-based system. One is defined as being morally cultivated and the other as egoistic, but this characterization is only assumed and postulated and never argued for and especially insufficiently addresses if both figures depict a natural state of humans, a civilizational state of humans or if both concepts of the human condition are even located on epistemological levels that can be compared. One might connect Qin's chapter in a way that present the virtuous person as node in the webs and networks of relations he describes earlier in the volume, yet he himself never makes this connection directly, which would be so close to argue for. As for the other aspect: What honestly is the difference between "rational rules" and "relational codes"? Again, one might turn to earlier explanations and find the biggest difference in the deeper meaning relational-Confucian models of governance are supposed to provide for society. Hence relational norms are rules with the bonus of providing deeper meaning. This, however, can only be a conjecture of different parts of Qin's theory and is neither stated in his own words nor appears as a clear line of argument in this theory.

Lastly and most severely, Qin ends his book under the heading of a synthesis of the two approaches of governance and is of the opinion that both are complementary. If good governance is already a natural element of Confucian societies however, where is the need to synthesize a naturally good governance with a seemingly inferior system of governance? Eventually, the synthesis consequentially fails and ends in a repetition of two separate modes of governance. Qin's idea of synthesis appears to let two separate, incommensurable modes of governance work parallel in a society so that one can complement the deficiencies of the other, transcultural hybridization does not take place. If anything, the two modes of government might be considered to consist of discrete, distinct building blocks that might be combined creatively but never blend. This serves to illustrate the difference between intercultural and transcultural approaches. Interculturality "starts from a conception of cultures as 'islands' or 'spheres' and creates a separatist character of cultures", whereas transculturality breaks up boundaries in a truly relational, inclusive approach of hybridization.⁵⁰⁶

4.2.3. Norms and Values in Chinese IR theories

Closely related to questions of morality are norms of international society, another topic to which all three contribute. While Zhao explicitly mentions norms only in describing the

⁵⁰⁶ Rošker 2021, 13.

achievement of the Zhou dynasty to establish an interstate system based on norms⁵⁰⁷, certain concepts repeated frequently seem to attain such salience that one might call them norms of the *tianxia* system. Most importantly inclusivity⁵⁰⁸ and compatibility⁵⁰⁹, the first one meaning that there is no “outside” or “other” in the *tianxia* system and second one that the system must accommodate the whole diversity of states. He also mentions self-restraint as expression of relational rationality⁵¹⁰, something which is regarded as goal of social norms by Yan and Qin. The latter describing norms of self-cultivation as a way of reaching the harmonious centrality of the Zhongyong dialectics.⁵¹¹ Social norms appear in *Ancient Chinese Thought* as the solution to conflict itself. Since human desires know no limits, increasing wealth cannot be a strategy to solve conflict. The only way to restrain desires is reinforcing rationality by social norms.⁵¹² Fukuyama agrees entirely with Yan and explains that people are unhappy “not because they fail to gratify some fixed set of desires, but by the gap that continually arises between new wants and their fulfillment.”⁵¹³ Yan’s concept of rationality also reminds of relational rationality as it appears in Qin⁵¹⁴ and Zhao⁵¹⁵. Norms play an important role in Yan’s school of realism, as part of morality⁵¹⁶, as basis for legitimacy⁵¹⁷ and as a way to express hierarchy⁵¹⁸. Norms, however, should be observed stricter by developed states, while developing states should be allowed a more relaxed attitude toward international norms in Yan’s opinion.⁵¹⁹

What are norms?

In the writings of Qin and Yan, norms are far more prevalent. Yan Xuetong’s defines them by basically copying Krasner’s definition of norms as principles of behavior and adds acceptance of a majority of states as another aspect. He thus phrases his definition of norms “as behavioral principles in regard to the rights and obligations accepted by the majority of states in an independent international system.”⁵²⁰ He also insists on including norms of violent conduct, which could be regarded as crucial step further in the conceptualization of norms. I would personally also agree that the conduct of wars is in many cases determined by norms and

⁵⁰⁷ Zhao 2020, 67.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid. Expl. 29-30, 210.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid. Expl. 30, 47, 73, 202.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid. 43.

⁵¹¹ Qin 2018, 190-191.

⁵¹² Yan in Yan 2011, 93-94.

⁵¹³ Fukuyama 2020, 83.

⁵¹⁴ Qin 2018, 218.

⁵¹⁵ Zhao 2020, 36.

⁵¹⁶ Yan in Yan 2011, 38, 87.

⁵¹⁷ Wang in Yan 2011, 190-191.

⁵¹⁸ Xuetong Yan, “Pre-Qin Philosophy and China's Rise Today” in Yan 2011, 140, 213-214.

⁵¹⁹ Yan in Yan 2011, 96.

⁵²⁰ Yan 2019, 108.

even laws. “Behavioral principles” still seems to be a rather slender definition, but Yan excels more at elaborating norms throughout his theory than at presenting a definition. Qin, on the other side, concludes from a general overview of conventional (Western) studies on international norms “that norms as a structural element *causally* constitute the unit identities and interests, and therefore, *constitutively* cause state behaviors.”⁵²¹ [original italics] He refers to Kratochwil and Krasner and regularly uses the phrasing “rules and norms” in his discussion of norms in the context of rules-based governance and realist and institutionalist IR theories. He admits right at the beginning “informal rules and social processes are also recognized as important” but mostly focusses on formal rules in his criticism.⁵²² That is an unfortunate choice since he chooses to contrast norms as moral values in *his* theory against norms as formal rules in what he perceives to be Western theories, which produces obvious differences. It would be far more enlightening if he concentrated on the informal rules and social processes mentioned above so that the comparison to his idea of norms would lead to a more detailed development of the two variations of norms. While Qin takes international norms in the Chinese context as unchanging values, Yan takes the opposite direction and even considers *moral* norms specific to a certain historical period and, as mentioned above, depended on the acceptance of a majority of states.⁵²³ He even rates double-standards to be the most popular kind of norms in the history of international relations.⁵²⁴

Values, Norms and their relation to each other

Yan Xuetong considers classic Chinese thought relevant for foreign affairs because Beijing declared to follow it in their policy. Furthermore, he thinks rising states need to “create a new, universally acceptable ideology that legitimizes” them and even overcome opposition to their ascent by “cultivation of new mainstream values.”⁵²⁵ In the case of China, he unsurprisingly finds that the power to truly challenge liberalism as dominant world ideology are Chinese traditional values.⁵²⁶ Concerning Qin’s systematization of norms, one has to decipher his terminology. He states that “norms are designed more to govern relationships rather than individuals”⁵²⁷ and the five cardinal Confucian relationships “are based upon moral

⁵²¹ Qin 2018, 94.

⁵²² Qin 2018, 320-325.

⁵²³ Yan 2019, 110.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁵²⁵ Xuetong Yan, “Chinese Values vs. Liberalism: What Ideology Will Shape the International Normative Order?,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 11, no. 1 (2018): 9 and 19.

⁵²⁶ Yan 2019, 153.

⁵²⁷ Qin 2018, xiv.

norms (...).”⁵²⁸ They need “appropriate maintenance by appropriate norms (...)”, so “[n]orms, governance, social order, and morality are therefore all for relational management.”⁵²⁹ Norms however, also appear in totally different contexts. The mechanisms of Western transactional (cost economics) governance, “depend on something impersonal, power of coercion, of institutions, or of norms”⁵³⁰, so this concept of norms seems to be about “norms which, through individualistic rationality, shape and reshape the identities, interests, and therefore behavior of the units.”⁵³¹ Part of the solution to this riddle is the location of both variations of the concept within his study. The former is placed in his Confucian cultural sphere and the latter in his rationalistic cultural sphere. It is indeed a meta-level of relationality to change the meaning of the same term depending on its context, even though it would have been easier for the reader to distinguish the two variations with different words. I argue that the tendency is such that Confucian norms regularly take the function of values as ends here and Western norms often take the function of rules as means. Yan might help us to examine the connection between the two. In his opinion, “international norms are formed under the guidance of international mainstream values” and “the character of the former will change along with changes in the latter.”⁵³²

Yan even explicitly names the values he considers the basis for humane authority, the classic Chinese ideal of good governance. Benevolence, righteousness and rites, the three paramount Confucian values, he argues, “can be modernised as the values of fairness, justice, and civility through their embrace of equality, democracy, and freedom.” This embrace, he continues, means merging Confucian values with Western values so that “rising states can establish new international norms not by rejecting the values of liberalism but by merging them with the modernised values of humane authority” in order to establishment a durable international order. The superiority of humane authority over liberalism as world ideology is threefold in his opinion. It can be accepted by liberal states as well as states with other political systems, it is “favorable to smaller states” and “its core values are universally moral”, leading to a broader legitimacy.⁵³³

I follow Yan’s argumentation for the sake of categorizing Qin’s Confucian “norms” as values because he refers to the same set of Confucian principles as Yan. “Filial piety, loyalty,

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 342.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 151.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 347.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 101.

⁵³² Yan 2019, 126.

⁵³³ Yan 2018, 19. Yan 2019, 145-154.

and sincerity, for example, are not out of self-interest calculation, but out of a moral value system that governs relationships and defines a genuine fiduciary society at work.”⁵³⁴ The three principles named here belong to the same category of core Confucian values as Yan’s benevolence, righteousness and rites. On a side note, Ling names *ren*/benevolence as value linked to BRI and translates it with “mutual sociality”.⁵³⁵ Additionally, Qin broadens his concept to include “[r]elational norms, such as trust”, which “work as self-enforcing safeguards that are more effective and less costly than formal contracts.”⁵³⁶ He even uses this idea of trust to further contrast Western *impersonal* norms with Confucian *human* norms in saying that “[t]rust in the Chinese cultural condition depends exactly on humans who are considered as moral beings in the first place.”⁵³⁷ This focus on humans as moral beings opens his arguments up for the individual to reenter his theory after getting so rigorously excluded. Qin again refers to the virtuous individual, who “follow[s] moral values and norms conscientiously through education and self-cultivation, thus being reliable and trustworthy.”⁵³⁸ He defines self-cultivation as “inward-oriented human agency (...) through which the self realizes its harmonization with the other, with the social world, and with nature.”⁵³⁹ Substituting the rejection of Western concepts and instead merging Western and Chinese ideas seems to be the new strategy of Beijing’s soft power approach.⁵⁴⁰

The values of Western liberalism Yan mentioned in his book are equality, democracy and freedom and the selection of Chinese traditional values he presents is benevolence, righteousness and *li* (禮, rites).⁵⁴¹ His idea is a combination of equality and benevolence, democracy and righteousness, as well as freedom and *li*, in order to arrive at an improved set of values for international order: fairness, justice and civility. Norms form under the guidance of values as he argues. In contrast to the domestic ideological environment, Marxism is no longer Beijing’s guiding ideology for foreign policy, the strongest recent trend in the undercurrents of Chinese foreign policy is the turn toward traditionalism according to Yan. The turn to traditional Chinese values is promoted in domestic as well as foreign affairs, but in for Beijing’s international politics traditionalism does have the same competition from Marxism as

⁵³⁴ Qin 2018, 342

⁵³⁵ Ling 2019, 36.

⁵³⁶ Qin 2018, 330.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 347.

⁵³⁸ Qin 2018, 337.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁵⁴⁰ Thanks to Prof. Dr. Nele Noesselt for pointing this out to me.

⁵⁴¹ Yan 2019, 145-154.

it has domestically. That might explain, why *tianxia*, Confucianism, or references to ancient Chinese philosophy have been so successful and widely received in the last decade.

While it is quite interesting which values Yan chooses to discuss, speculations about his intentions and motivations to include those values, out of all he could choose, shall not be the focus of attention here. Instead, I consider it more promising to inquire how values function for him and how he uses this debate in this overall theory. Personally, I also find his argumentation quite unconvincing. The attempt to make a valid point of combining benevolence with equality on less than two pages might be intended as a mere point of departure for further thinking, but it is certainly not presented as that. The same is true for the combination of democracy and righteousness or freedom and *li*. How do you even “combine” two such concepts? Does that mean democracy lacks righteousness? The way he also misrepresents equality, democracy or freedom is in line with obsolete criticism and bad faith reading. All of which does not help to strengthen this section of his argument and possibly even weakening it. Why include it then anyways? The discussion of values is all part of this idea that a hegemon needs to propagate their own ideology. Yan explains how liberalism is in steep decline and how people, even in the West, look to China as a home of optimism and opportunity, but he still criticizes Beijing for not yet being ready to become the new hegemon. Partly due to its internal ideological struggles, which should be solved in Yan’s opinion, by forming a new all-encompassing state ideology that once China has united behind, can be spread out globally. I find this idea rather naïve. Remarkably though, this could be interpreted in a similar line as Zhao Tingyang’s and Qin Yaqing’s ideas that the proper cultural basis will lead to a harmonious and ordered international system. Which is even more remarkable if we keep in mind that Yan Xuetong is a self-proclaimed realist.

Stephen C. Angle, in his discussion of Mou Zongsan, Self-Restriction and progressive Confucianism, presents another perspective on the relationship between political norms and ethical values. Contemporary Confucian scholars can contribute to current discourses by “understanding the role of ethical values as indirectly grounding our political norms (...).” He further explains the relationship between norms and values as mutual and reciprocal: politics are based on ethics, but ethics also benefit from political interaction, both however have to be independent from the other to a certain degree. Paraphrasing social practice, he points out “that the emergence of political norms depends on the actual interaction of ethical agents seeking to better realize their ends (...).” On the other hand, however, “a certain kind of political structure is ultimately needed as the indirect means to more complete ethical practice.” The legitimacy

of norms hence depends on the question: “To what degree does the resulting framework enable individuals in all groups to develop ethically?”⁵⁴²

To summarize, when individuals meet, politics emerges as the way they join for the pursuit and coordination of their goals. Political structures are needed for a better way to pursue those goals, and this structure can be evaluated in its ability to support this pursuit. The norms of this political structure lie in actual practice (“actual interaction of ethical agents”) and legitimacy of these norms depends on how good they enable all groups to develop ethically. So, politics/political structure, I would argue, is the intersubjective medium that emerges as agents coexist in the pursuit of their development and the need to coordinate values and interaction arises; and this medium is the source for norms. Norms, here, are also part of a process and practice, in contrast to the values they help to realize, pursue and achieve. This presents itself as a synthesis of Hedley Bull and Qin Yaqing. The former developed an idea of international relations expressing itself in international society, a society of actors who pursue certain social goals and establish institutions to pursue those goals. The latter explains how actors, through their relational nature, co-constitute each other in reciprocal mutuality and how this nature leads to their interests converge in large parts and their identities emerge out of relations and not attributes and characteristics.

Introduction and establishment of norms into a society

Since good governance is natural to a Confucian society according to Qin Yaqing, the moral norms in which it rests do not seem to originate anywhere but are already present from the start. If we dig deeper, the source of moral norms for Qin’s relational governance, which is closely linked to the factor of education, is the individual, who manifests norms through self-cultivation. “When a society is peopled by virtuous persons” he contends, “trust triumphs, relations are harmonized, and good governance prevails.” Trust is “a way of life for virtuous persons, who trust one another because all of such people constantly engage themselves in self-cultivation toward moral perfection.”⁵⁴³ Yan Xuetong differs at first glance in his explanation of norm formation because he distances himself further from the analogy of domestic society:

“The formation process of a new type of international norm is often a combination of internalization and socialization through interactions between new leading states and other states. The formation of a new type of international norm occurs through unconventional

⁵⁴² Angle in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 101-102.

⁵⁴³ Qin 2018, 345-348.

interactions, whereby the interactions between the new leadership and other states accord with a principle that differs from the existing norms.”⁵⁴⁴

Locating the origin of norms in the educated and cultivated individual unit, however, leads back to internalization and socialization. Qin eventually defines trust as “a practice that is historical and sociocultural, defining a community and shaping the behavior of its members.” In another section, trust is “based on social practice and realized through moral cultivation” and explicitly “not a tool to be chosen and used by the rational actor merely to reduce transactional costs (...).”⁵⁴⁵ His basic moral norm from which all conduct of relations derives, hence is a historical, cultural, social practice that defines a community and shapes behavior, which actors internalize as goal rather than means. This, I would argue, are not essential characteristics of a specific Confucian culture but a form of widely recognized processes of internalization and socialization. In a more developed categorization, Yan Xuotong provides three types in which dominant states establish norms. Because of the sound and precise phrasing, I again quote him in full:

“Among the three mechanisms, example-imitation plays the fundamental role in shaping international norms, because no dominant state can establish new international norms that it does not practice itself. The support-reinforcement and punishment-maintenance mechanisms induce or force other states to behave according to the norms advocated by the dominant states but play secondary roles in the socialization and internalization of new norms.”⁵⁴⁶

In a critique against allegedly Western rules-based approach to governance, Qin opposes the supposedly essentialist idea of actors with inherent dispositions and invariable attributes, which he locates in rational-individualistic theories, and considers this idea the basis of the Western norm concept. He adamantly links the concept of egoistic, utility-maximizing individuals to the concept of rules-based governance and argues that, ontologically, the former must lead to the latter (in opposition to relational governance of course). “Rules guide individual actors' behavior”, he summarizes Western theories, “and a rule-permeated environment (...) helps maintain global or regional order”, so consequentially “rules make practices, patterned practices, rather than the other way around.”⁵⁴⁷ In a footnote to this section on the same page, Qin criticizes that “[n]orm studies in the mainstream Western IR literature reflect a similar essentialist logic: It is norms that make practices rather than the other way

⁵⁴⁴ Yan 2019, 123-124.

⁵⁴⁵ Qin 2018, 348-349.

⁵⁴⁶ Yan 2019, 124.

⁵⁴⁷ Qin 2018, 326.

round.” He continues accusing Finnemore and others for assuming the independent ontological status of norms “without an in-depth analysis of processes and practices of agents which provide for norm formation, acceptance, and observance.” Since one can find plenty of differentiated discussions of norms that would meet Qin’s criteria this seems to be an oversimplified depiction, which serves the function of painting a contrast between rational and relational theories that is obviously not that striking in reality. Finding Western IR literature that approaches rules as being based on practices not the other way around is no challenge, especially since Qin relies heavily on Bourdieusian sociology in the first part of his book, which attempts exactly to complicate this process of internalization. An aspect that will be discussed more broadly later in this dissertation. Qin, however, uses this sociological scholarship only in the first part of his book to make a point about how different cultural environments lead to different academic theorizing and does not include it in his comparison of Western and Confucian norm-making. Two other aspects are striking in his footnote, he first jumps from rules to norms, treating them as equal without previously declaring that he considers them the same, which would be no problem as long as it would be clarified. Secondly, he complains that rules/norms make practices and not the other way around without ever explicitly arguing for the idea that practices make rules/norms, presumably since he rejects the idea of rules in any case.

Although Yan Xuetong clearly states that “[i]nteraction is a mechanism through which to establish international norms”⁵⁴⁸, we cannot be certain that his insight would meet Qin’s criteria. Taking into consideration Yan’s concept of a morality that is dependent on historic circumstances and acceptance of the majority as well as his idea that the establishment of norms serves to increase the power of a nation, it seems safe to say that Qin would also oppose Yan’s analysis. In other words, neither is it true that “Western mainstream IR literature” omits an in-depth analysis of norm formation nor is it true that only Western mainstream IR literature should be a target of his critique, since his Chinese colleagues also seem to fail in this respect according to Qin’s criteria. Summarizing the relation between Western and Confucian norms in Qin’s theory, there are several interesting points. Confucian norms define communities and shape behavior and Western norms shape identity and guide or cause behavior, so their function seems to be identical. Self-cultivation and education as roots of Confucian norms, I argue, are just different terms for internalization and socialization. Hence the difference between Qin’s highly contrasted variants of norms lies in rational or relational motivation and this also only in

⁵⁴⁸ Yan 2019, 112.

Qin's rather abstract conceptualization of rational and relational dispositions. The other question whether rules make practices or practices make rules, I argue, has a diverse set of answers across a variety of cultural backgrounds and cannot be traced back to a Western-individualistic or Confucian-relational essence.

The function of norms

While moral norms act as fundamental conditions for relational governance and sometimes even as goals simultaneously for Qin, Yan Xuetong elaborates their function in this theory further. In *Leadership*, he argues that the establishment of norms is identical with attaining hegemony since the dominant state will build an international order that favors its supremacy. This order requires norms to remain stable and reduce the overall costs to maintain this order. Since norms are so closely linked to interstate leadership, change in leadership also heavily effects international norms. Hegemonic competition, for Yan, can take the form of providing public goods with the intention to change norms in fields related to a particular global public good. This is why a rising state will first try and change norms in areas where its capability to provide public goods is most prevalent. Yan uses the example of infrastructure investment and the BRI for the competition between the US and PRC here. It is of course, a most pronounced contrast to Qin Yaqing's idea of good Confucian relational governance and the role norms play in his theory. For Yan's Moral Realism, it is morally right to follow international norms but on the other side, establishing norms serves to purpose to increase one's power and ascend to world domination. He even phrases the implementation of norms as cost-reduction of the maintenance of hegemony and the related international order, which is an idea of norms that obviously belongs to rational utility-maximizing ontologies. Qin could point out that Yan's theory deliberately attempts to be internationally acceptable, but Yan also bases his insights explicitly on classical Chinese works of statecraft. Eventually, this could be a good point to prove how pluralistic the seemingly homogenous field of Confucianism is.⁵⁴⁹

Yan's great achievement is his thorough typology of international leadership, and the impacts certain types of leadership have on international politics. Not dissimilar to the English School and Hedley Bull, who he also directly refers to, Yan introduces international order and international system as two distinct levels of international political interaction. First, he "defines the system as a complex whole and the order as the state of a system" in which "international norms perform the function of defining the normative character of a given international order or international system." This could indeed be read parallel to English School ideas of order,

⁵⁴⁹ Yan 2019, 69-70.

where order promotes certain goals or values, which I argue is the same as defining the normative character of a given order. He continues to elaborate that a system consists of *actors* and a *configuration* whereas order contains mainstream *values* and institutional *arrangements*. Both share the component *norms* where they converge. Yan focusses less on developing a detailed explanation of system and order, his intention is to illustrate the context in which change in international leadership takes place. His point is that a change in leadership might change the international order but not the more fundamental international system. He divides international order further into the two domains of structural and normative order, with the first referring to “the structure of power distribution” and the second one “to the character of norms”.⁵⁵⁰

The difference becomes clear when we turn to Hedley Bull and his link between the institution of balance of power and the threat of the states-system turning into an universal empire by conquest. The UK becoming the dominant power in the 19th century, the German empire rising after 1871 or the UK passing the baton the US after WWII are examples of leading states changing while the society of states remained the same, or more precise the principle that the world is organized as a group of sovereign states remained untouched. For Yan the order would change but the system would remain the same. Napoleonic France, Nazi Germany or the China under Mao that was more focused on world revolution were examples of actors that attempted to change the basic principle of global political life. In Yan’s words: not only the order would change but the system would undergo a fundamental revolution.

Zhao Tingyang presents a fascinating narrative here with *tianxia*. All under Heaven would be the end of the system of sovereign states and indeed a radical change in the basic operating principles of global politics. Zhao cautions against an alliance of advanced technological authoritarianism and global financial capitalism that would form an unlimited systemized power and usher in a dystopia of a highly efficient but malign international order.⁵⁵¹ Globalization however, can lead to either a humane, benevolent *tianxia* system or the dystopian systemized order, depending on the forces that will prevail in utilizing the material basis globalization provides. It is in this section where Zhao’s Marxism is most pronounced, not least because he refers to Marx directly here.

As one might expect from Qin Yaqing following his line of argumentation and presentation throughout his whole book, he discusses norms in opposition to Western concepts of norms and presents his own Confucian/Chinese against what he claims to be Western ideas.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 75-77.

⁵⁵¹ Zhao 2016, 23; Zhao 2020, 34.

There are those norms Qin always mentions together with rules as part of Western IR and Confucian norms he considers to be moral norms, which promote relational governance. The term *norms* seems not to be the crucial element in the argument, it is again the difference between rational-rules-based norms or relational-moral norms that counts. At one point he criticizes that rules make practices and not the other way around. He never mentions however, if it is part of his argumentation that practices make rules. Though it turns out “practices make rules” is an explicit part of Yan Xuetong’s theory. Unfortunately, he explains *how* realists and institutionalist include the workings of norms in their theory but for Confucian norms like trust, sincerity, filial piety, he only claims *that* they are instrumental in relational governance but does never clarify *how*. In the context of his Western mainstream IR, norms seem to belong to rules, similarly to the close association between the concept in English School theorizing. Where moral norms for relational governance are concerned, the more appropriate term would be values. Trust, sincerity, filial piety or other Confucian values are mentioned when Qin speaks of moral norms and principles for moral governance. There is still a link to norms if we follow Yan Xuetong’s line of thinking, who continues with a chapter on values right after his chapter on norms in *Leadership*. In this chapter on values, Yan mentions the same category of Confucian principles Qin names as norms. Splitting up the discussion of norms and values into their own separate chapters already makes Yan’s more systemized terminology obvious.

4.2.4. Power and world in Chinese IR theories

In his article on Zhao Tingyang and *tianxia*, William Callahan astutely identifies the core of Zhao’s belief system: knowledge production as key to world power. Callahan’s analysis of Zhao further goes:

“To be a *knowledge power*, China needs to stop importing ideas from the West, and exploit its own indigenous ‘resources of traditional thought.’ Thus, the aim of his book is to ‘rethink China’ so as to ‘restructure China.’ But because China’s problems are the world’s problems, we then need to *rethink and restructure the world* in terms of *Tianxia*.”⁵⁵² [my italics]

Tianxia “is employed to underline China’s peculiar historic position” and from this position its ambition to be “a *generator of new ideas and norms* (...).”⁵⁵³ [my italics] The implications here are manifold and the value-event-link is obvious and especially crucial in the connection between the national political power of the PRC with knowledge, ideas and tradition. The list

⁵⁵² Callahan 2008, 757.

⁵⁵³ Barabantseva 2009, 13.

of Confucian values, which as a list of virtues on its own is rather inconsequential, is regularly lectured to be instrumental for Chinese hard power. “Ancient concepts are apparently inescapable for contemporary Chinese scholars searching for China’s roles and strategies” according to Feng Zhang, who also explicitly mentions the role of *tianxia* for Yan Xuetong and Zhao Tingyang in this respect.⁵⁵⁴ Zhang hence shows that even Yan Xuetong, “a conservative, nationalistic scholar who is particularly hard-line when it comes to Sino–US relations” who even as (Moral) Realist “has become synonymous with Chinese international relations (IR) research both within China and, importantly, beyond”⁵⁵⁵ is subject to Zhao’s idea of *tianxia* as elementary Chinese concept of world order. The idea of *tianxia* developed its pervasiveness and power by becoming a discourse that shaped the basic belief systems of intellectuals and politicians alike. The official doctrine of “Harmonious World” under Hu Jintao, but also the Chinese School IR and the mere practice of reviving classic culture in contemporary context all can be linked to Zhao’s *tianxia* research.⁵⁵⁶ Yan argues, for example, for an optimistic future in the spirit of *tianxia* in which the more internationally oriented generation of millennials will be able to connect better across borders because of their more cosmopolitan upbringing in the digital era.⁵⁵⁷ He seems to forget however, the decades of “patriotic education” with a nationalist curriculum Chinese millennials went through, and thus the question whether nationalism or cosmopolitanism will dominate the minds of future Chinese leaders.⁵⁵⁸

The *tianxia*-discourse was and is a manifestation of “(...) debates in Beijing about identity, security and China’s role in the world”, showing how the meaning of “China” is a multidimensional discourse-arena of negotiation and contestation.⁵⁵⁹ We can see clearly the paramount importance of culture and values in a debate that revolves around the *meaning* of “China” and aims at defining the PRC as *knowledge power* and generator of *norms and ideas*. It seems self-evident that the interpretations of *tianxia* that come with those debates “endow China with qualities that make it a distinct and special place in the world, one that cannot be grasped through Western concepts.”⁵⁶⁰ According to this “reverse orientalism”, differences between societies are inherent and characteristics of Confucian culture are the product of an oriental essence.⁵⁶¹ Based on this incompatibility argument, as Bai describes it, is “the idea that

⁵⁵⁴ Feng Zhang 2012, 99-101.

⁵⁵⁵ Cunningham-Cross in Horesh and Kavalski 2014, 34.

⁵⁵⁶ Callahan 2008, 757-758.

⁵⁵⁷ Zhao 2019, 145.

⁵⁵⁸ Trigkas 2020, 9.

⁵⁵⁹ Callahan 2008, 756.

⁵⁶⁰ Barabantseva 2009, 132

⁵⁶¹ Rošker 2021, 18.

Chinese thoughts are so peculiar that any attempt to understand and interpret them with (Western) philosophical terminology is doomed to be misleading, and they can only be understood by the Chinese, or by using traditional Chinese vocabularies.”⁵⁶² A significant aspect here is how much resistance Zhao received from some of his *Chinese* critics, who “argue that this *Tianxia* system is merely his own individual perspective, which is full of errors”, even though he presented himself as an essentially Chinese point of view on IR.⁵⁶³ Even the research results of a renowned Chinese intellectual that shaped and dominated the discourse, build on traditional cultural heritage of classic Chinese philosophy, thus cannot be taken as deep understanding of Chinese thought by Chinese academics.

“[C]ulture makes social theory”⁵⁶⁴, Qin Yaqing nevertheless finds. Following Lakatos, Qin’s cornerstone for arguing about cultural differences is a theory’s hard core, which he splits up in a “substantive component” of perception and observation and “metaphysical component” of conception and ideational filters.⁵⁶⁵ Incommensurability between theories is drawn from Kuhn’s concept of paradigms. Hence for a theory to be innovative, he argues, it needs a metaphysical hard core component, which presents “a different worldview, a different interpretive mechanism, and a different perspective toward fundamental aspects of social life.” For IR theories specifically, Qin refers to Callahan in clarifying how “big ideas” direct theory, “democratic peace” for American mainstream IR, “international society” for the English School and “Datong” (Universal harmony) for Chinese IR theory.⁵⁶⁶ Towards the end of his discussion of Lakatos, Bourdieu, Kuhn and many others, he claims:

“(…) we need to go deep into a particular culture defined in terms of background knowledge and explore its fundamental assumptions about universe, life, and ways of thinking and doing. Then we need to crystalize them into a key concept or idea that constitutes the metaphysical component of the theoretical hard core, from which a systematic and coherent theory is to be unfolding and growing.”⁵⁶⁷

Notwithstanding this simplified summary, Qin does succeed in certain illuminating parts of his discussion of the relation between culture and social theory making. I suggest to be cautious against a conclusion however, which takes only two steps from beliefs about the universe via crystallization (or essentialization?) into one single idea that completely defines an

⁵⁶² Bai in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 66.

⁵⁶³ Callahan “2008, 753.

⁵⁶⁴ Qin 2018, 57.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁶⁶ Qin 2018, 53-55.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 72.

IR theory imagined as cultural monolith. Similar criticism has been directed against Zhao, especially concerning his accusation of Western theories as binary and exclusive while establishing East-West-binaries and a Western *Other* himself.⁵⁶⁸ This Chinese exceptionalism leads to the feeling of a “patriotic duty” to spread Chinese culture, changing the idea of China as a responsible power “from that of a conservative state that is responsible to the current world order to Zhao’s *Tianxia* that is responsible for creating a totally new world order” as Callahan warns. The success of Zhao’s *tianxia* concept, he concludes, “shows that there is a thirst in China for ‘Chinese solutions’ to world problems, and a hunger for nationalist solutions to global issues, especially when they promote a patriotic form of cosmopolitanism.”⁵⁶⁹ Yan Xuetong’s work presents a more complicated situation because he strongly argues for universal IR theory, even as condition to be considered scientifically valid.⁵⁷⁰ Yan has to navigate however, between claims for universality and assertions of particularity, even though his theory of the relationship between global order and leadership can be taken as “a genuine scientific hypothesis and not an attempt to morally justify China’s illiberal domestic order.”⁵⁷¹ He does sell the idea of a special access that Chinese academics allegedly have to Chinese sources (just like Zhao) through which “his pre-Qin research aims to enrich, improve or even transform existing theories of IR by drawing upon the timeless wisdom of China’s ancient philosophers.”⁵⁷² This also describes the common ground between Qin Yaqing and Yan Xuetong. First, for both “it is important in developing a Chinese IR research program to discover traditional Chinese thought” and second, “the purpose of such a program is not to displace existing IR theories but to enrich them”, while keeping in mind Chinese IR’s trajectory “of further indigenization through a synthesis of traditional Chinese thought and modern IR theory.”⁵⁷³

Critique on (mainly Yan’s) methods

Some of those aspects Zhang diagnoses as characteristic features of Yan’s research program, but it also “applies Yan’s own brand of scientific method to the analysis of ancient Chinese thought”⁵⁷⁴, which brings its own criticism with it echoing Zhao Tingyang’s critics. Barabantseva points out that analyses of *tianxia* “interpret and construct China’s present through appealing to certain historical readings of China’s traditional worldview.”⁵⁷⁵ Regarding

⁵⁶⁸ Callahan 2008, 754.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 757-759.

⁵⁷⁰ Feng Zhang 2012, 79.

⁵⁷¹ Trigkas 2020, 5.

⁵⁷² Cunningham-Cross in Horesh and Kavalski 2014, 44-45.

⁵⁷³ Feng Zhang 2012, 80.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 75.

⁵⁷⁵ Barabantseva 2009, 132.

Zhao's treatment of classic sources, Callahan additionally admonishes that "his argument is based on a cavalier use of a few key passages from Chinese thought, which upon closer consideration actually do not support his *Tianxia* worldview."⁵⁷⁶ The critique of simplifying the relationship between past and present and a careless use of literature in making one's argument also concerns Yan as will be shown below. It needs to be pointed out again how devastating this is for the argument that only Chinese can understand China, if the leading authorities in their field fail to employ classic literature in a scientifically sound and conscientious way.

In his critique on Yan's "presentism", Zhang cautions against presuming the existence of "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 term."⁵⁷⁷ He cautions against an unreflecting application of preconceptions and criteria belonging to contemporary paradigms and finds "it quite curious to judge pre-Qin thinkers according to modern scientific positivism" because "all the masters would fail the test." Although the dimensions of power as economic, political and military are not intrinsic to Xunzi, Yan still develops his theory by forcing those two disparate sets of ideas together and making it appear as though classic texts can be made to speak about current problems without disclosing how much of his own interpretation was needed to achieve this goal.⁵⁷⁸ This is part of a wider phenomenon in Chinese society and research on China. "Chinese history is neatly divorced from the present and treated as a natural course of development that has informed China's interactions with the outside world", Barabantseva complains. Explanations of China's international behavior as well as China's identity all capitalize on history. The way Chinese popular nationalism is characterized by the "century of humiliation" is one of the strongest examples how history is exploited to "reflect and create the present."⁵⁷⁹ This serves to illustrate, I would expand on her arguments, how history is given a facade of objective scientific resource but in reality is molded by contemporary requirements so that studies of historical material yield the results expected from them. Rošker provides a side note here in criticizing that Chinese studies departments at most universities have declined through substituting a rich research

⁵⁷⁶ Callahan 2008, 753.

⁵⁷⁷ He quotes Brown for this but originally the idea can be traced via James Tully's work on Quentin Skinner back to R.G. Collingwood's *Essay on Metaphysics*.

⁵⁷⁸ Feng Zhang 2012, 83-85.

⁵⁷⁹ Barabantseva 2009, 130.

program including China's past *and* present with an orientation toward empirical analyses focused on modern China.⁵⁸⁰

This critique seems adequate, but Yan would provide an easy and effective defense against it because historically contextualized understanding is simply not relevant for Yan in his research methods. Instead of attempting to understand the ideas behind texts of pre-Qin thinkers, they serve “as an intellectual repository for meeting contemporary theoretical and policy needs”, as Zhang interprets Yan, “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’ (...).”⁵⁸¹ The difference setting Yan aside from Zhao and Qin is his epistemological approach, which Jackson would probably categorize as neopositivist or critical realist.⁵⁸² This school supposes that there is an objective, perception-independent world and theory is a neutral tool to understand this world. Ancient Chinese literature on statecraft, for Yan, provides enhancements with which to develop this tool further. In spite of this clear strategy towards classic sources, “[b]y attempting to apply strict positivist methods to ancient literary traditions (...) Yan risks seriously misunderstanding and/ or misrepresenting those philosophical traditions or even (ab)using them for his own ends.”⁵⁸³

Tianxia and the world in Chinese IR theory

“The general principle of *Tianxia* (...) is that relations between units or actors determine the obligations corresponding to their network ties”, as Mações explains, further pointing out that “[r]elations are based on mutual benefit (...) and once established they should take precedence over individual choices.” He also mentions an aspect that could be interpreted both positively and negatively in explaining that the “Western mode of association, which presumes the autonomy of individual units and consists of clear boundaries between the Self and the Other, is excluded.”⁵⁸⁴ Given the complexity of the *tianxia* concept it might easily be argued that Mações is wrong. The public both in China and in the West have debated *tianxia* vividly ever since Zhao Tingyang popularized *tianxia* with his theory and imaginations of its meaning have emerged plentifully. The brief introduction at the beginning of this paragraph might serve to convey a general understanding that will be deepened in the remainder of this section.

The cornerstone of Zhao's *tianxia* is the “world-internalizing principle.” *Tianxia*'s cardinal axiom is the idea that the political world is a whole, a political cosmos that does not

⁵⁸⁰ Rošker 2021, 21.

⁵⁸¹ Feng Zhang 2012, 81.

⁵⁸² Jackson 2011.

⁵⁸³ Cunningham-Cross in Horesh and Kavalski 2014, 42-43.

⁵⁸⁴ Mações 2018, 27.

work with outside-inside dichotomies, nothing is external to the political world. Globalization, according to Zhao, has transformed the world so fundamentally that modern (Western) politics as a whole has lost its “explanatory and interpretative power” to address contemporary problems. The world-internalization of *tianxia* however, is the solution because its elemental mechanism is compatibility, which is “the capacity to transform enemies into friends within a pluralistically inclusive order of political security and peace.” Earlier he explains that coexistence is the precondition for existence and this ontology of coexistence bears with it the possibility of a “virtuous circle” of trustworthy relations between units. Trust, as in *A Relational Theory*, is key here. Zhao’s system needs universal rules, but he criticizes the Western claim to implement universal values and norms, opposes democratic ways to establish them and the legitimacy eventually lies in determining the *Minxin*, the feelings or aspirations of the people elaborated above, in his esoteric undemocratic way.⁵⁸⁵

A conventional idea of *tianxia* outside analytical scholarship might be that it “was key to the governance and self-understanding of over two millennia of Chinese empire (...).”⁵⁸⁶ As long as the Chinese understanding of the world, Liang Qichao criticized, oriented itself towards *tianxia* as political entity above the state, this concept led to problems in a world of nation states.⁵⁸⁷ Phrasing it as key to Chinese governance and self-conception does indeed underline the salience of the concept *tianxia* and, insightful is also to point out that Chinese thought up until modern times took place on a level where nation states were regarded as inferior units of global politics. Zhao explains *tianxia* by pointing out three different levels of meaning of the term. Of course, the geographical aspect is the most obvious and it is even worth for the future of great power competition to think about the question whether a “world” according to *tianxia* also encompasses Mars and Moon in respect of mining operations, territorial claims and the implications that would have for Chinese theories of IR, or IR theories in general. But *tianxia* not only has a geographical but also a psychological and an institutional meaning by also containing the humanity as a whole and the world institution.⁵⁸⁸ Psychologically, *tianxia* means “that the hearts of all the world’s peoples are unified, like a big family” and the world institution is “a world government with the power to ensure universal order (...)”, which are all ideas that also more or less belong to the legacy of Kang Youwei.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁵ Zhao 2016, 18-19.

⁵⁸⁶ Callahan 2008, 749.

⁵⁸⁷ Danial A. Bell, “Realizing *Tianxia*: Traditional Values and China’s Foreign Policy” in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 46.

⁵⁸⁸ Callahan 2008, 751.

⁵⁸⁹ Bell in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 48.

For Bell, such universal claims breaking down attachments belong to *imported* traditions like Christianity, Buddhism or Marxism. “[A] Confucian-inspired defense of the ideal of *tianxia* would not involve a world government that has ethical and political priority over national states” he clarifies, even though obligations to people outside the borders exist, they would not be as intense as those towards the citizens.⁵⁹⁰ The Confucian model promotes culture to attract people beyond the borders, the international political aspect seems not as strong as in the world institution of *tianxia* in this form of “peaceful expansion (...) that is also far more humane than the expansion by force, which is a common strategy among nation-states.”⁵⁹¹ Yan Xuetong himself also advocates for this idea of convincing smaller states to follow an attractive example. It is naive however, to believe there would be no power politics behind this strategy. The normative goal of *tianxia* is to transform the actors, the *self* as well as the *other*, to become one and thus turn chaos into order.⁵⁹² The ideal of China as cultural entity open to anyone, irrespective of ethnicity, was often betrayed by Han Chinese racism, so prominent Confucians suggested that Confucianism as China’s leading culture “should prove its universality by first trying to take root outside of China before returning as leading belief system in China.”⁵⁹³

Callahan addresses Zhao’s idea of complementarity without mentioning it. Concerning conquering or convincing others, he has a closer look at the way different groups end up under the all-encompassing *tianxia*. He criticizes that “hierarchical cultural relations where the goal is to transform enemies into friends follows the logic of the other technique of imperial violence discussed above: conversion.” As for different images of cultures it seems “popular to see traditional China as a benevolent and magnanimous empire that provided peace and stability for centuries before the arrival of Western imperialism” but “this comparison of a war-mongering Westphalian Europe with a peace-loving imperial China” does not depict historical reality. As he contends “the Chinese state was often engaged in violent interactions with states and semi-states along its frontiers.” Callahan states his point explicitly in a later paragraph:

“(...) not everyone wants to be included. Some people want to stay different and outside. China’s imperial and contemporary history in Tibet, Taiwan and Xinjiang is instructive for what happens to difference that prefers to stay outside and not be transformed into a ‘friend’—it is redefined as a terrorist separatist threat that warrants military action.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 48-49.

⁵⁹¹ Bai in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 73.

⁵⁹² Callahan 2008, 752.

⁵⁹³ Bell in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 57.

China's *legal* claim to these territories is strong, but Zhao's point is to stress the *ethical* legitimacy of the *Tianxia* model, which is lacking."⁵⁹⁴

This is not the only problem however with contemporary incarnations with *tianxia*, owed to the environment of the PRC political system in which the theory's main publication emerged. Stability and order are the dominant themes of the current *tianxia* discourse, making it one of the "expressions of official nationalism in China, which stress that the existing political structure of the Chinese state, one-party rule, is essential for achieving the socioeconomic goals set by the leadership."⁵⁹⁵ Taking care of the feelings of the people as a part of morality in political rule reappears here. *Tianxia* presents itself as a superior way to democracy in judging the people's needs, which is the responsibility of a Confucian-Leninist elite, as Callahan explains, determining the condition for moral governance and political, social success and progress not to be freedom, but to the main theme of Chinese thought: order. It needs to be pointed out however, how contradictory it is from Callahan to define order as "main theme of Chinese thought" after criticizing cultural essentialist Chinese exceptionalism. Zhao's *tianxia* nevertheless "values order over freedom, ethics over law, and elite governance over democracy and human rights" and is supposed to solve all the world's problems through the establishment of a universal master institution.⁵⁹⁶ Barabantseva contrasts *tianxia* against *shijie*, another Chinese concept derived from Buddhism, and is also of the opinion that *tianxia* represents "order, stability and hierarchy" but does not account for change, contingency or inconsistencies and "ignores a multiplicity of formulations of the world and China's place in it."⁵⁹⁷ This critique might be overzealous since Zhao's *tianxia* is not as rigorous as depicted here. Although not connected to *tianxia* directly, Zhao elaborates that thinking and understanding in a Daoist way means a "creative seeking out of the very 'propensities' (*shi* 勢) latent in the transformations" of things and situations, and these propensities "involve[s] incompleteness, contingency, and openness."⁵⁹⁸ He clearly paints an image of fluidity and relationality here and opposes the analytical understanding of things as discrete entities endowed with attributes and characteristics that seeks out categorizations and classifications. Zhao however subjects his idea of change consistently to the continuity of the *tianxia* system, so eventually Barabantseva does indeed have a point in her criticism.

⁵⁹⁴ Callahan 2008, 755-756.

⁵⁹⁵ Barabantseva 2009, 133.

⁵⁹⁶ Callahan 2008, 752-753.

⁵⁹⁷ Barabantseva 2009, 132-134.

⁵⁹⁸ Zhao 2016, 53. In the German edition, *shi* 勢 is translated as "Konstellationen".

Zhao considers his *tianxia*-system legitimate because it supposedly coheres with *mínxīn* 民心 (mín: people, citizens - xīn: heart, mind) the “people’s shared aspirations”, as he translates the term. He addresses the interesting point that politics not only has to account for the rational aspects of life but also for desire, spirit and affectivity. In an argument against democracy as basis for legitimacy. He explains how a global institution can neither attain the consent of the entire world population nor even of a majority so the benchmark for legitimacy must be the “people’s shared aspirations”. *Minxin*, in his definition, are what “through a long-term process of practical reasoning, has proven itself to be beneficial to all” they are not however, “a collective body of desires, but rather a conveyance of the common understanding of a set of possibly shareable experiences, traditions, and histories.”⁵⁹⁹ He goes on arguing that universal values can be values for individuals or for relations and that the former needs *universalization* and *common consent* while the latter requires *universal benefit* and *universal compatibility*. An interesting way to weaken the Western concept of universal values. Of course, we do not live in a world where it is possible to ask everyone for their consent concerning values, but who in Zhao’s world decides what “benefit” is and to whom something benefits how? The concept of Western values is also more of an example against which he makes his argument since he cannot argue that “the West” has come to a consensus in what it defines as values. To Western eyes, reading this section sounds a lot like a strong belief in rationalism, “practical reasoning” that has proven to be beneficial. Measuring the aspirations of the people through values of relationality oriented towards benefit for all carries with it strong associations of, for example, Singaporean technocracy, I would argue. Furthermore, Zhao mentions *minxin* twice in his book. Once as “people’s aspirations” in the section about legitimizing *tianxia* and another time as the “feelings of the people” when talking about morality of governance. Even though both diverge in the way they are discussed in their respective paragraphs, the element of benefit and livelihood to the people is present in both and it seems to be more of an expansion of the concept than introducing two different concepts with the same name.

His discussion of economy and politics echoes all of these ideas. Daoism, according to Zhao, teaches us the simple truth that “the intention of existence is to persist, the meaning of existence lies in its ‘futuraity.’”⁶⁰⁰ For this simple reason, existence is driven by securing resources for its persistence. *Economy*, he explains, is merely seeking for the resources of survival and refers only to the relationship between human and nature. *Politics*, he argues

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., 31-35 This was translated as “Volksseele” in the German edition.

⁶⁰⁰ Zhao 2016, 55.

further, is planning ahead and “seeking for a sustainable future” and this involves the relationships among humans since here “the question of who is benefiting from certain arrangements gives rise to the problematics of power (...).” He provides an interesting definition in explaining that power is “the establishment of social order and is concerned with taking available resources and transforming them into controlled resources.” Implementing order to control the future is an elementary manifestation of the political and “[w]henver any order attempts to determine the future it necessarily follows that such order will be creating a history.”⁶⁰¹ Apparent here is the confluence of his idea of moral governance concerning the livelihood of the people and knowledge production as power resource in his reference to the creation of history.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 128.

5. Second Generation Chinese IR

This chapter ventures beyond the horizons of theory visited in the last chapter. The idea is to show that transcultural contributions to global IR, as opposed to essentialist ones, also can originate, or be developed with Classical Chinese intellectual sources. Practicing Chinese IR does not mean to propose alternative systems of world order founded on distinct cultural essences but can also mean to provide insights from different experiences and uncover the West's Chineseness and China's Westness. Postcolonial scholarship does not lend itself to a discussion along the lines of Confucianism, Morality, Norms/Rules and such. While the three previously discussed authors also deal with the concept of identity, the research about to be discussed engages the concept in more insightful way as it is examined by L.H.M. Ling, Shih Chih-yu and his co-authors and others. Since the last chapter showed that attempts of defining the cultural essence of an element of theory are either too programmatic or outright futile, fluid concepts might prove to yield more insight. De/essentialization will continue as a topic of debate. Shih Chih-yu's idea of post-identity, I would argue, is a way to turn the concept from a mere critique into a productive narrative. The purpose of this chapter is to trace where the paths, opened up by Zhao Tingyang, Yan Xuetong and Qin Yaqing, continued into the present day outside their own publications. Although there is invaluable merit in their groundbreaking projects, there are certain weaknesses as well, like I discussed in the last chapter. I argue that the ideas of the following chapter formulate a more applicable and contextualized Chinese perspective on IR since they deal more methodical and critical with the classical sources and refrain from attempting to define cultural essences (in most cases). The reason for this is the approach via ideas of hybrid identities, transcultural relationality, de-/essentialization or postcolonial feminism. All of these provide insightful filters and lenses through which the Chinese cultural heritage utilized as source for the scholarship can shed new light on world politics and China's significant role in it.

Shih Chih-yu et al. name the feminist ethics of caring, Bourdieu's conception of field and network sociology as predecessor.⁶⁰² Ling lists social constructivism, postcolonial feminism and dialectical IR as her main inspirations.⁶⁰³ It often seems to be the case that critique on the remains of Eurocentric belief systems in IR scholarship is voiced as a powerful appeal, which is unfortunately not followed up by an equally effective scholarly enterprise. L.H.M.

⁶⁰² Chih-yu Shih et al., *China and International Theory: The Balance of Relationships* (Routledge, 2019), 6.

⁶⁰³ L.H.M. Ling, *The Dao of World Politics: Towards a post-Westphalian, worldist International Relations* (Routledge, 2014), 28-34.

Ling develops her arguments in ambitious and daring ways. Partially due to her embrace of the ‘aesthetic turn’, she forcefully jumps beyond conventions and incorporates areas previously deemed outside proper scholarship into her research. As we will explore below, she addresses questions of spirituality, emotions/the heart, profane aspects like food or including two complete chapters in *Dao of World Politics* that are written as plays, to disrupt the audience’s reading-experience while expecting an academic text yet, still providing scholarly insight into international relations. I presume the force and zeal of her attempt to deconstruct classical principles of IR research is owed to the fact that she really intends to open up new spaces of thinking and practicing IR, which requires a profound undertaking. I see myself unable to follow her more pioneering thoughts argumentatively but the possibilities she reveals for innovation are invaluable contributions to IR.

To anticipate some content of the following pages, Lings “worldist dialogics” that enable Multiple Worlds in critical complementarity to “Westphalia World” could be related to Shih Chih-yu’s research. Ling defines relationality, resonance and interbeing as core features of her concept. For the Balance of Relationships, post-hybridity/identity, resemblance and self-restraint seem to be the cornerstones. Both consider themselves relational approaches. In the last chapter, norms/rules were addressed and values as dispositions of actors were debated under the heading of morality, both contribute directly to the present understanding of institutions and world order as the English School presents. This chapter will provide a transcultural perspective on the practices that define institutions through Shih’s, Ling’s and other authors’ approaches to relationality and transcultural hybridity.

One aspect that needs to be addressed is the manifold use of terms relating to gender in all varieties. Ling refers to a conversation between Ann Tickner und Robert Keohane in explaining that “[f]eminists have long noted that the category of gender need not pertain to ‘women’ or ‘sexuality’ only. Nor does gender refer exclusively to ‘social constructions of sexual differences’.”⁶⁰⁴ On a more abstract level Ling also argues that there could not be femininity without masculinity or vice versa in scholarship based on Daoist philosophy, moreover femininity and masculinity contain each other. It is hence obvious that a complex and adept concept of gender underlies her arguments. Femininity is loaded with different meanings by different scholars. It is used, not uncontroversially, by Shih to criticize Western imperialism that “femininizes” states in the global south, but he does partially use a negative association with the term ‘feminizing’. That is not because he considers femininity inferior, but because

⁶⁰⁴ Ling 2014b, 458.

the behavior of Western colonial powers mirrors a deficient and misogynist view on femininity that was acted upon domestically, abroad and was also transferred to the behavior between states. Shih attempts to observe the way misguided understandings of gender shaped the behavior of states under imperialist-colonialist relations of violence and exploitation and a valid argument can be made in this line of thinking. On the other hand, labeling certain characteristics of contemporary IR scholarship, current policies or political behavior as ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ however, is a different method and far more prone to misunderstandings. The most prominent example is Ling’s criticism of hypermasculine Eurocentric whiteness in anglophone IR, where the use of ‘masculine’ is deeply embedded in her argument about a certain mind set in research designs that exclude ‘non-Western’ IR scholarship. This is not supposed to turn into a debate on such issues, but simply serve as a disclaimer that I am aware of the controversies surrounding these topics and that I try to handle them with sensitivity and care.

Part I – Relationality

The following section introduces relationality as it is conceptualized by Shih Chih-yu and his co-authors, as well as L.H.M. Ling and Qin Yaqing respectively. This might represent what is termed ‘relational turn’ in *Balance of Relationships* and since a number of authors address this idea, it is worth examining in detail. Even more because it appears regularly in literature that draws on Classic Chinese philosophy, as shown in the present thesis. Although the three scholars approach the topic each from an angle of their own, I will try to point out similarities and cross-references between their research. Prior to that, however, I want to refer to Qin Yaqing in pointing out two crucial aspects of relationality in IR. He names *immovability* and *durability* as two features distinguishing international society from domestic society. This means that states as main actors in global politics “cannot move one another away and have to live together in long-lasting relational webs.” Hence, he shows that states “can only be actors in relations, and as relators they have little choice but to relate and be related.”⁶⁰⁵ In Daoist dialectics adds that agency is no capacity of an individual. “All individuals have agency as an ontological premise but it arises creatively in conjunction with others”, Ling clarifies, “whether human or animal, in man-made or natural environments.”⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰⁵ Qin 2018, 226.

⁶⁰⁶ Ling 2014a, 44.

5.1. Balance of Relationships

Shih et al. define relationship as process of mutual constitution and build the idea of ‘Balance of Relationships’ on that as complement to Balance of Power. The concept of Balance of Relationships (BoR) is defined as “systemic commitment by states to avoid disorder under anarchy by seeking long-term reciprocal IR, regardless of prior differences in values, institutions, and power status”. Although the English School emphasizes common values, the overall depiction of BoR seems not too far from international society as it was described by the English School. The systemic commitment of BoR necessitates practice, self-restraint and bilaterality. BoR, the authors also argue, serves as guiding principle of Chinese foreign policy. A basic mechanism of BoR is the proactive kind of self-restraint in the form of an offering of benevolence. This investment in relationships “is called gift-giving in the Sinosphere, but we argue that BoR transcends Chinese conditions.”⁶⁰⁷ Gift-giving can be material and immaterial, a demonstration of goodwill can be gift-giving in the same way material gifts might be exchanged. Closely linked to self-restraint is the second important element of BoR: the greater social self. Confucian relationality constitutes self-identity by restraining or even renouncing self-subjectivity in favor of a greater social self.⁶⁰⁸ Qin Yaqing addresses the practice of gift-giving in his discussion of reciprocity and relationship-mechanics.⁶⁰⁹

Stephen Angle can even link this idea of relationality back to the topic of morality in the previous chapter based on his discussion of the works of the influential 20th century Confucian Mou Zongsan (1909-1995). The connection between politics and morality is described as an indirect one and termed ‘self-restriction’ because it is based on the idea that personal ethics should be restricted to the individual so that the political sphere enjoys a certain independence. Although the political sphere is comprised of people who aim to realize moral goals, self-restriction is supposed to form a more impartial and objective public framework for debate, though politics at large of course still strives for goals that are deemed virtuous.⁶¹⁰ The important point here is that Mou Zongsan and Shih et al. share the idea of self-restraint as integrating oneself into a larger intersubjective social structure. Self-restraint is ultimately characterized less as abstinence from something but embedding one’s own subjective dispositions into the structure of a superior cognitive system. It would be interesting to explore similarities with Navari’s ‘cognitive-symbolic structures’ or the ‘internalized social structures’

⁶⁰⁷ Shih et al. 2019, 19.

⁶⁰⁸ Shi et al. 2019, 8.

⁶⁰⁹ Qin 2018, 282.

⁶¹⁰ Angle in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 95.

mentioned by Swartz from the earlier chapter on methods. In the case of state-actors, I propose to consider this structure as world order and further argue that this structure is subdivided into primary institutions, each governing the main principles of international relations. This idea will be developed further in the next chapter.

Shih et al. explain further that the relational turn in IR “supports studies of international institutions” through a focus on nations’ practices, which produce “processual relationality”. The main characteristic of the interaction among institutionally connected nations is consensual self-restraint. Relationality, however, is something that must be reproduced, maintained and sometimes enforced and this is where disagreements can arise because the practices of institutions express sophisticated belief systems and matrices of norms and values. Hence disagreements in the operation and execution of institutions sometimes represent value conflicts. The authors suggest that the questions the next phase of the relational turn should focus on derive from this analysis: uncovering the belief systems institutions are based on, examining the way conflicts emerge and explaining how institutions are operated. This is, first of all, a statement that relationality *is basically able* to explain all these things, which is a development of promising prospects in IR theory that should be promoted. Second it follows the alignment of English School and part of Chinese IR in focusing on institution⁶¹¹, which I will explore in more detail in the last part of this chapter. Concerning relationality’s need for maintenance is something Qin Yaqing would agree to, insofar as relational power, for him, is also a kind of power that needs to be proactively used to increase.⁶¹²

Shi et al. consider a “focus on processual analysis in order to understand how practices reproduce, evolve, and change” as a central characteristic of relational IR theory. They argue that all structures are generally “constituted by imagined prior/unowned resemblance”, which illustrates the link between structure and actor, who moves in an intersubjective space that “in itself is composed of multiple practices of relationship-building”. In other words, the actors, individuals and states alike, “are conditioned by the prior relationships”. This is especially salient for the concept of resemblance, because states “will invariably incorporate, consciously or unconsciously, imagined resemblance as it defines the parameters of their self-understanding, self-expectation, and self-enactment.”⁶¹³ The present thesis will also return to this idea of process-focused IR in the next chapter.

⁶¹¹ Shih et al. 2019, 190.

⁶¹² Qin 2018, 259.

⁶¹³ Shih et al. 2019, 6-7.

Shi et al. also defend the *tianxia* theory in Balance of Relationships. Although realism is still prevalent in Chinese IR, “relation has emerged as a plausible alternative to the extent that morality is becoming a prominent element in Chinese realism.” This development, however, met criticism and suspicion both from Chinese and Non-Chinese scholars. Not only Anglophone IR regards the “notion of *tianxia* as an ontological device to control, but the Sinophone IR also regards it as the CCP’s legitimating discourse.” Especially Taiwanese IR experts remain firmly realist in their assessment of the China threat. *Balance of Relationships* also quotes an article by Chang Teng-chi and Chen Ying-shi, which due to language barriers is not accessible to me so that I rely on the content Shi et al. provide. Chang and Chen’s article “reveals caution against China-centric ontology”, which describes Chinese scholarship that draws on Chinese Classics and diplomatic experiences and the idea “that the rise of China is relevant for the development of new schools, ontologies, and methodologies for IR theory”. The controversy seems to arise from the universalist claim of *tianxia* calling “for the peaceful coexistence of plural civilizations and different political systems” without a hegemony of liberal capitalism. Chang and Chen argue “that PRC officials did not engineer the rise of the present *Tianxia* discourse as an exercise of Chinese soft power”, rejecting criticism voiced by, for example Callahan as shown in the previous chapter.⁶¹⁴ *Balance of Relationships* later again criticizes William Callahan and Martin Jacques for misrepresenting *tianxia* and categorizes their work as problematic discussion of non-Western IR contributions. “*tianxia* either represents an exotic access to understanding a distinctively Chinese practice of hegemony” in Jacques’ case, “or it colludes to reproduce exclusively for China the same hegemony elsewhere” for Callahan.⁶¹⁵

Shi et al. clearly state that *tianxia* “is pertinent to the practice of the BoR”, since it expresses “the belief that all are bound to relate.”⁶¹⁶ Consequently, *tianxia* “is inside the roles of all nations”, referring to the idea that international relations manifest themselves in role playing as states “improvise practical relationships”. This is a rejection of the idea that states behavior is the pursuit of fixed interests or the expression of some fixed identity. Relationality is part *tianxia* because any action affects many nations, transforming both their identities slightly each time as well as the rules and norms. “[T]he West’s paradigmatic ignorance of its own partiality”, the authors explain, “cannot exclude the repercussion of its all-round interventionary governance from feeding back to the very existence of its own identities.”

⁶¹⁴ Shih et al. 2019, 211-216

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 238-239.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., 237-239.

Eventually, Shi et al. unsurprisingly hand the responsibility to establish *tianxia* to China, who, alongside its neighbors, needs to act with self-restraint to embody *tianxia*. This is the only way how China “exemplifies the inevitable and ubiquitous relational couplings for the rest of the world to appreciate their own relational necessities.” The universality of *tianxia* is only credible if China conducts its relations according to *tianxia*, so that “everyone else can see their relational roles with China and everyone else under *tianxia* to ensure their long-term interests”.⁶¹⁷

5.2. Multiple Worlds

In a 2013 presentation of L.H.M. Ling’s book *The Dao of World Politics*, hosted by the Milano School of International Affairs, Management, and Urban Policy and the India China Institute at The New School, she elaborates on aims and intentions of her research program. *The Dao of World Politics*, she explains, asks the central question how to deal with hegemony in world politics, which for her is the singular logic of violence both in the practice of international relations as well as how we think about it. Multiple Worlds, the alternative she conceptualizes, is about negotiation and particularly about how to negotiate across multiple logics, especially if they conflict. This negotiation rests on the ‘dialectics of dialogue’ expressed in ‘creative listening and speaking’, meaning that unless all actors in a dialogue speak *and* listen to each other, hegemony is maintained and not transformed.⁶¹⁸ Creative listening and speaking of course refers to postcolonial studies and involves the relationship between dominant and subaltern actors.

L.H.M. Ling considers relationality, resonance and interbeing as cornerstones of her idea of ‘Multiple Worlds’, which represent the relational, plural, diverse multitude of the global human community. Multiple Worlds exist next to and in complementarity with what she calls ‘Westphalia World’, representing the traditional idea of a system of sovereign nation states under the logic of hegemony. Relationality, resonance and interbeing, I suggest, should not be considered strictly delineated, separate analytical categories. Each contains the others to a certain degree, so that the three should be regarded as explanations of the main characteristics of the concept of Multiple Worlds. Critique on the rather pronounced opposition between violent Westphalia World and the benevolent Multiple Worlds has been expressed and she addresses this critique throughout her wider research activity. Ling’s intention here, however, indeed seems to be the development of a clear alternative to the Westphalian international

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 239-240.

⁶¹⁸ Ling 2013 (Details in Chapter 8 - References), circa minutes 5-9.

system and its deficiencies she diagnoses, instead of a nuanced and meticulous survey of the qualities of the current world order.

The first aspect, relationality, “gives us a view of who’s in charge, who’s not, the rationale for both, and whether or not we can or should accept it.”⁶¹⁹ For her explanation of relationality, Ling addresses the “China threat” sentiment within USA-PRC competition, how Westphalia World entrenches this idea and how PRC scholars, Yan Xuetong among them, absorbed the “hypermasculine nationalist competitiveness, along with its Self/Other binaries.” Considering this aspect in historical dimensions, I argue, one might even ask whether the Yellow Peril/China threat is a defect of the contemporary international system or indeed one of the very pillars on which the system rests. Qin Yaqing, representing relational IR on the contrary, is mentioned as rare example of opposition to ‘Mainstream’ IR that suffers from logics of conflict, competition and self/other binaries. Ling even goes so far as to postulate that “coming from Chinese dialectics, Qin’s approach literally has no referent in Westphalia World”, which is a surprisingly strong cultural argument. She offers three relational moves to approach the case of US-China-relations in IR scholarship: to “place China and the US in yin/yang relationality”, “identify the co-implications within each pole” and “see beyond bilateral relations between the US and China to consider the whole: that is, world politics.”⁶²⁰ Relationality, I would hence argue, is all about finding out who the actors are and how they relate to each other. In her case: Who do China and the US think they are themselves and to each other and what relationship emerges from that situation? She does not stop there, however, but embeds the search for solutions to tension in this relationship in her idea of relationality. The formation of actors’ identities beyond subjectivity and identity is a part of this argument, which will be discussed further below. As argued above, however, relationality does not stand separate from resonance and interbeing but can rather be considered one among three aspects of Multiple Worlds.

Resonance as the second aspect leads us “[f]rom hierarchy to fluidity” in our imagination of international relations. With the inclusion of alternative discourses, Ling argues, “resonance recognizes the formation of new relationalities and their potential for creative transformation”, these relationalities “involve *normative* and *emotional* linkages across disparate sites (...) but which, nonetheless, signify immanent transnational solidarities” [original italics], solidarities she calls ‘Transcultural Asia’. Resonance, relationality and interbeing are all intimately interlinked, as we can see here. Resonance asks about sites,

⁶¹⁹ Ling 2014a, 62.

⁶²⁰ Ling 2014a, 87-102.

positions and locations: where can alternative discourses be found and where can they be integrated into mainstream IR? But in finding and including such discourses, new relationalities emerge, here in the case of Asia, where disparate sites find themselves connected by new linkages, which will eventually also encompass a new relationship among all actors termed ‘interbeing.’ Transcultural Asia expresses itself, as Ling lists, in trade and investment, transportation and tourism, popular culture, family ties, religious bonds, academic exchange and the revival of Confucianism. “Transcultural Asia indicates the shape of things to come normatively and emotionally”, as Ling explains, continuing that it “touches the ordinary citizen physically in daily life but also, as a consequence, in the heart, the mind, and the spirit.”⁶²¹

Interbeing⁶²², I argue, can be regarded as the core of Multiple Worlds. It is mentioned in several of Ling’s works and developed with considerable scholarly effort and methodical ambition. In *The Dao of World Politics*, she draws on a wealth of references to conceptualize interbeing. These include the Buddhist Master Thich Nhat Hanh, the documentary *The Legend of Fat Mama* about a famous cook in Calcutta’s Chinatown, Ayurveda and Zhongyi (traditional Chinese medicine), the practice of chatting as solution to India-China relations, which are also addressed via references to the monk Xuanzang and *his Journey to the West*; furthermore J. Robert Oppenheimer as example of denied interbeing as well as environmental talks about China and India as positive example of interbeing. She quotes the Buddhist Master Thich Nhat Hanh in explain that interbeing basically “means extending oneself to a larger community and thereby, a larger consciousness”⁶²³, reminiscent of *Balance of Relationships*’ greater social self.

The theme of India-China relations runs through her chapter as an example of an urgent case where a relationship could benefit tremendously from interbeing and the ‘dialectics of dialogue’. This is why empirical sources for this chapter include the history of Chinese communities in India, Ayurveda and Zhongyi and literary heritage of India-China-relations in the form of *Journey to the West*. An interesting addition is Oppenheimer, he “drew moral and spiritual sustenance from the *Gita*”, which refers to the *Bhagavad Gita*, an episode from the ancient epic *Mahābhārata*, but he misunderstood its meaning. “One possible explanation is that Daoist/Sāṃkhya dialectics were not part of Oppenheimer’s daily life or consciousness”, Ling argues. She further assumes that “he did not have the benefit of experiencing, on a daily basis, the four injunctions of *ayurveda/zhongyi*”. These four are “balance amid change,” “maintenance of multiple flows,” “internal and external resonance,” and “progress through

⁶²¹ Ibid., 103-118.

⁶²² This section mainly refers to Ling’s chapter on interbeing: Ling 2014a, 119-137.

⁶²³ Ling 2014a, 120.

knowledge and a cosmic consciousness.” These precepts, she explains, encourage explorations and exchanges across borders, foreclose self/other binaries in favor of self/other co-implications as in the yin/yang diagram and, lastly, enable memory, communion or solidarity to represent resonance and cosmic consciousness. The lines between relationality, resonance and interbeing blurring again here.

The power of knowledge was already mentioned in the previous chapter, yet in a widely different context. In Callahan’s interpretation of Zhao, knowledge power leads to rethinking and consequently restructuring the world in terms of *tianxia*. Given the spiritual depth of the *tianxia* concept, this idea, I argue, is not so far from progress through knowledge and a cosmic consciousness. “Progress thus demands a commitment beyond oneself and the knowledge that such worldly compassion brings”, Ling explains.⁶²⁴ For Zhao Tingyang, commitment beyond oneself and compassion are also linked to the cosmic consciousness. He expresses this by saying that “*tianxia* corresponds to the existence of heaven above, the way of heaven and the human way have a certain symmetry.” The cosmic consciousness he calls heaven intends “for all existents to realize compatibility and coexistence”, in other words worldly compassion, and because of the above-mentioned symmetry “the intention of *tianxia* must also be that all persons realize a compatibility and coexistence.”⁶²⁵

Progress towards a *tianxia* world order of coexistence and interbeing seems to rest both for Zhao and for Ling on cosmic consciousness that can be experienced by compassion. Thinking back to Jackson’s definition of science in the chapter on methods, cosmic consciousness admittedly barely fits into his last criterion of ‘worldly knowledge’. Science, repeating his definition, is the production of knowledge that follows a *systemized logic*, is presented in a way that enables and invites *public criticism* and refers to *earthly, mundane knowledge* in opposition to divine revelation, visions or prophecy. This is one of the more obvious examples of the many ways in which Ling can surely be considered an innovator.

Memory as another, more profane, aspect of knowledge, furthermore, connects Multiple Worlds and Balance of Relationships. For Shih et al. memory is a core element of post-hybrid trans-subjectivity, as will be explained in more detail below. Cultural memory as a shared identity resource is a way for different actors to relate, resemble and resonance with each other.⁶²⁶ “Let us own our subaltern memories”, Ling claims in the same line of thinking, addressing all Asians. Common art forms, technology like tea, silk or agriculture and legacies

⁶²⁴ Ibid., 122-123.

⁶²⁵ Zhao 2016, 56.

⁶²⁶ Shih et al. 2019, 203.

of commerce represented by the Silk Roads are just as much relevant as cultural heritage in medicine in the form of Ayurveda/Zhongyi, religions like Buddhism or philosophies Daoism and Sāṅkhya. She even refers to Takeuchi Yoshimi's idea of Asia as Method to emancipate Asia from remnants of colonialism in patterns of thinking, who is also mentioned by Shih Chih-yu regarding post-hybridity in a later part this chapter. Bringing all of this together, Ling imports these ideas into IR in the following way:

“(...) the heart connects the lower chakras of safety, sexuality, and nourishment with the higher ones of creativity, intuition, and cosmic consciousness. So far, the leaders of India and China have focused on the first three (e.g. national security, hypermasculine posturing, resource competition) at the expense of the latter three (e.g. worldist interbeing). Yet only the latter could help the peoples and states of India and China in the long term.”⁶²⁷

On a more practical level, Ling proposes two analytical moves that derive from the dialectics of dialogue and Multiple Worlds. The first one “draw[s] on the resonances of Transcultural Asia to register where normative changes may be taking place” and the second one “could decipher the kind of relationalities emerging in the region and their significance for the future.” As example for increasing transcultural Asian awareness, she lists several regional organizations that were founded recently or were being built at time of writing. These examples are not naively presented as evidence per se. She admits that their “resonances and relationalities may not match, causing tensions, if not conflicts, between state and society”, but also points out that “these are the very catalysts that propel change and transformation” in her framework of Daoist dialectics.⁶²⁸

Shannon Brincat joins a dialogue with Ling in their article “Dialectics for IR: Hegel and the *Dao*” and articulates some points of criticism. He first cautions against “raising the dao to a universal system”. Expanding on this critique, he points out that “the tendency towards absolutizing, as in the claim that ‘water benefits everything’, leads to inaccuracies posed as generalities that seem contradictory to the importance you [Ling] attach to context and contingency elsewhere.” His second criticism “concerns the return to the ideational, abstracted from relations, to explain and judge social relations.” Considering social relations as mere thoughts *or* being trapped in their categories are both deficient processes, “one where successful (re)conceptualization creates a mental chimera of contentment; the other a failure to (re)conceptualize resulting in fixity”. Within the complex of oppression, imperialism, racism,

⁶²⁷ Ling 2014a, 136.

⁶²⁸ Ling 2014a, 129.

and patriarchy, the contradiction “comes from relations themselves, not from how they are thought, conceptualized, or represented”. In such cases of “asymmetrical opposition” he points out, “the vagaries of Daoist complementarity are weakest” because “taken from specific vantage points, complementarity can be seen everywhere and anywhere amid relations, so that it lacks analytical purchase as a category.” Brincat warns that understanding will remain deficient if we regard “[c]omplementarity in social life denuded of social relations and replaced by thought”, instead he wants “to go far more into these relations to explode [*sic*] their tension, rather than merely reconceptualizing them.”⁶²⁹

Ling’s responses unfortunately, remain rather esoteric. “Any Daoist opposition is always transitory and in motion” she answers, “precisely because they are not just mutually constructed but also mutually embedded” and “exemplify the notion of ‘interpenetration’.” With a quote from Ames and Rosemont’s translation of the Analects, she declares that “a world of events, seen as persistently episodic, will perhaps be different from experiencing a world of things, seen interactively.” A world of events in which oppositions are always transitory yet seems to be a good picture of her basic ontology. I propose to summarize her concept in the following way: identifying the actors and their relational networks with relationality, charting the discursive spaces and potentials in which they move with resonance and drawing attention to practices of coexistence through interbeing. Another tripartite concept of viewing international relations and is the way Holsti describes institutions as combination of practices, ideas and/or beliefs and norms.⁶³⁰ The relationship between knowledge on several levels, be it beliefs, ideas or cosmic consciousness on the one side and practices, patterned behavior or routinized conduct of international relations seems to be significant to both.

5.3. A theory of Relationality

Qin Yaqing first characterizes the actors of his relational world, who are defined by coexistence, co-identity, and co-interest. He prioritizes neither relation nor actor but considers all elements constituted simultaneously. Hence, he concludes, “[s]elf-existence is simultaneously coexistence”. His idea of co-identity describes how “the identity of an actor is formed and reformed through relations with other actors in society”. The third characteristic for relational actors is co-interest, derived from the idea that “self-interest always shares with other-interest as well as with collective interest.”⁶³¹ Of course, this brief summary cannot do justice

⁶²⁹ Shannon Brincat and LHM Ling, “Dialectics for IR: Hegel and the Dao,” *Globalizations* 11, no. 5 (2014): 19.

⁶³⁰ Holsti 2004, 21-22.

⁶³¹ Qin 2018, 122.

to the elaborate and insightful discussion of the three terms but it must suffice here in this overview of Qin's concept of relationality. There is a subtle parallel to these three aspects that appears in *The Dao of World Politics*. Ling characterizes the masculine and the feminine principle as defined by co-creativity, co-responsibility and co-power, which bears a certain resemblance to Qin Yaqing's wording here.⁶³² What can be concluded from these ideas at least, is that the relationship between two actors in an imagination based on Chinese philosophy is complex and intimate.

In another similarity to Ling, who he also directly references, Qin dives deep into the topic of dialectics and presents one image of Western Hegelian dialectics and another image of Eastern 'zhongyong' dialectics which he compares and juxtaposes. He bases this discussion on the ideas of inclusivity and complementarity, which are also two of the most important terms for Zhao Tingyang's *tianxia* theory. Inclusivity describes two poles, represented by yin and yang, that "participate and join in each other", this idea rejects Western dualism and instead "establishes a worldview grounded on the concept of correlativity for any pair of opposites."⁶³³ Afterwards, he introduces complementarity to describe the relationship between both poles, an idea of mutualism, which "denotes that each relies on the other for existence and development." This "co-generative process works as co-becoming dynamics along both the temporal dimension and the spatial dimension."⁶³⁴ This depiction is intriguingly similar to Zhao Tingyang's basic Daoist "principle of political ontology: that is, ceaseless procreativity or 'let all things be in their becoming' (*shengsheng* 生生)."⁶³⁵

Qin defines the *yin-yang* relationship of his *zhongyong* dialectics as "constantly and continuously harmonizing process", describing "the fundamental non-conflictual and harmonious nature of all relations", which means that harmony "is the state where the world is in and of its true self." A detailed discussion of Qin's use of the term harmony and its salience for his overall work was provided in the precious chapter, so it will not be repeated here. Shannon Brincat supports Qin's depiction of harmonizing here via an article in collaboration with L.H.M, by drawing a distinction between contradiction in dialectics and in actual relations. He clarifies that "in relations 'real' contrariety between persons, contradictions (or social antagonisms) are essentially unsuccessfully mediated problems of intersubjectivity", which

⁶³² Ling 2014a, 53.

⁶³³ Qin 2018, 174.

⁶³⁴ Ibid., 180.

⁶³⁵ Zhao 2016, 56.

could be solved (or sublated).⁶³⁶ A harmonizing process, thus seems to be realistic. Qin continues, arguing that “inclusivity and complementation of the polarities provide the necessary conditions for harmony”, but these conditions require human agency for harmony to be achieved and maintained. This human agency is not only the implementation of policies. He also mentions “inward-oriented human agency, or self-cultivation, through which the self realizes its harmonization with the other, with the social world, and with nature.”⁶³⁷ This definition of self-cultivation is rather close to Ling’s idea of interbeing, understood as extending oneself to a larger community and thereby, a larger consciousness. Instead, this section will continue with Qin’s argumentation about the logic of relationality.

Three aspects are crucial for the concept of relationality, according to Qin. First, Actors in international relations “are aware of the reality of coexistence, knowing that their existence depends on their connectivity with others.” This is reason why an actor’s “interests, desires, and preferences, which motivate her action, are not fixed” but “change as the nature of a relationship changes.” Consequently, he describes actors as **relators**, who understand “that interest is best achieved by joint efforts and through social relations.” Second, he imagines the social to be constituted by **relational circles**. Starting from the self as it perceives itself in the center, these circles are the totality of all “multilayered concentric relational circles”, where greater degrees of intimacy also mean greater influence over a circle. For the last aspect, he takes a step further to the **relational context**. One relator’s relational circles overlap with several other relators’ circles, so “[a]ll these relational circles together compose a multidimensional and multilayered relational complexity”, which he calls relational context.⁶³⁸

Two dynamics animate the interaction of relator and relational circles and context. The first and more important one is the **contextual effect**, which describes the instance when action is caused by the relational context. Relations gain meaning not only from being relationships with other but also in their totality and “meaning thus gained leads the self toward appropriate actions accordingly.” The **agential effect** on the other hand describes the way actors utilize their relations in a more proactive way. Qin explains that “relators pursue their self-interests and seek tangible and material gains through the relational circles by asking for and exchanging favors.” In other words, “their pursuit of interests tends to be through managing, manipulating, and expanding their relational circles.”⁶³⁹

⁶³⁶ Brincat and Ling 2014, 12.

⁶³⁷ Qin 2018, 185-190.

⁶³⁸ Qin 2018, 208-211.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 221-223.

Summary

A Relational Theory of World Politics remains on a more conceptual level and develops ideas more abstract compared to *The Dao of World Politics* or *Balance of Relationships*. Qin Yaqing certainly does not venture into the realms of cinema, literature or food like L.H.M. Ling does. His ideas benefitted a lot from Ling's and Shi et al.'s more vivid perspectives on relationality, who also bring a lively richness of empirical examples into the research program of relationality. Ling's many sources were already mentioned and Shih et al.'s observation of the PRC-Taiwan-USA relationship helps to animate the discussion further as well. In sum, relationality based on resemblance and animated by interbeing is what develops Qin Yaqing's concept further. These two approaches to relationality, hence, complement Qin's diligently developed framework, which might otherwise remain more of a meta-theory. Qin's previously discussed detailed exploration of morality should also be taken into consideration here. It awards his abstract discussion of dialectics and relational structures with the crucial aspects of meaning(-making), practice and subjectivity. As already hinted at, inter- and trans-subjectivity, individual dispositions and/or identity exist in close conceptual vicinity to relationality in these IR theories. So, the next logical move is to take a deep dive into subjectivity.

Part II - Subjectivity

As addressed in the previous chapter, searching for the essence of Chinese culture is a phenomenon of political philosophy in IR. A deeper look into the phenomenon of *essentialization* however, can serve as a means to transition from mere critique towards further *de-essentializing* Chinese scholarship productively, which in turn might lead to a worlding of Chinese IR. Such a transcultural, postcolonial process might not have been Beijing's idea of an alternative world order but could still provide invaluable impulses for future IR research. This section will first examine the tensions that exist between the factual diversity and imagined unity of Chinese subjectivity. Attempts to provide a coherent, unified – sometimes monolithic – view of China, serve a valid function in the right context, but in order to understand the metamorphosis of world order in the 2020s, it is necessary to deconstruct these attempts and approach the twin question “Who is China/What is order?”.

This part will first describe the quest for a hybrid yet unified Chinese ideology and or identity. Afterwards this identity will be examined with the use of the sinocentric subject concept. The next step will be to contextualize this matter by elaborating on the political and scholarly environment in which China develops its international identity. I will then proceed to depict what might be called inconsistencies or productive contradictions surrounding this whole

field. Chinese discourse on gender/sexuality as well as China's historical role in East Asian or global political systems will be mentioned just as much as Chinese scholarships increasing internationalization. The direction of this section then will change slightly and address concepts I sum up under the headline of trans-subjectivity. Shi et al.'s above mentioned resemblance will be explained more detail as well as post-Chineseness as example of post-identity. Finally, non-synthetic post-hybridity as a concept will be analyzed and explored as possible solution to deficient essentialization strategies.

5.4. Searching for continuity and homogeneity

Yan Xuetong proposes that China needs to establish “a global dominant ideology” but the prerequisite for that is “the existence of a popular ideology pursued by both the government and its people at home.” That is why the Communist Party “is trying to establish a universal ideology that combines Chinese traditional values with Marxism.”⁶⁴⁰ Yan, who assumes a new bipolar world, might be caught in ideas of the ideological conflict that characterized the Cold War and hence stresses the need for China to establish an ideology. This aspiration is the pursuit of what Shih Chih-yu would call the construction of a “synthetic subject”, a hybrid identity created from diverse parts, which is nevertheless artificially contrived as whole and united subjectivity under Western imperatives of progress and modernity. A deeper discussion of the concept will follow below. What national Chinese scholarship claims to pursue, however, does not always match its actual research results. Nationalism and patriotism have been set up as pillars of legitimacy for the PRC government for decades⁶⁴¹ and in the last twenty years “China's identity politics have gone global, using traditional Chinese ideals to order the world”⁶⁴². IR theory in the PRC is no longer strictly focused on China's foreign policy, but developed into an academic attempt to define China's position internationally and provide an alternative framework for IR.⁶⁴³ A development that in part parallels American theory building during its rise to hegemony and therefore not only opens criticism towards allegedly authentic elements in the content of Chinese IR theory but also questions the uniqueness of the endeavor to establish original Chinese IR theories.⁶⁴⁴ Despite the vivid presentation of and reaction to China's assertiveness in the 2010s, both in foreign policy and IR scholarship, a new Chinese

⁶⁴⁰ Yan 2019, 138.

⁶⁴¹ Noesselt 2010, 324.

⁶⁴² Callahan 2012, 34.

⁶⁴³ Nele Noesselt, *Alternative Weltordnungsmodelle? IB-Diskurse in China*. (VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), 325.

⁶⁴⁴ Callahan 2012, 50.

world order is yet to materialize. It is, however, remarkable to see such a strong revival of Confucian values in a society that experienced several instances of destructive revolutionary opposition against tradition.⁶⁴⁵ According to a 1994 definition of Chinese IR theory, “[i]n addition to being based on China’s version of socialism, it has to serve China’s national interests” and “draw[s] its main assumptions from traditional Chinese philosophy”.⁶⁴⁶ These claims are not entirely without foundation. Ling criticizes the label ‘Beijing Consensus’ for simplifying its origin, which required from China “hybridizing Marxist–Maoist socialism with Asian Capitalism, and precedential learning, drawing on the successes and mistakes of its capitalist neighbours.”⁶⁴⁷ The official picture given in the definition is that of a unified Chinese ideology forged out of socialism, capitalism and traditionalism, when the reality is far more complicated and dynamic.

The energy that drove Chinese IR theorizations and foreign policy projects and still animates the subsequent political projects and research programs originates in the rediscovery of Chinese cultural heritage for political and academic narratives both within the PRC and abroad. Zhao Tingyang, Qin Yaqing and Yan Xuetong belong to the most prominent theorists of a Chinese school of IR⁶⁴⁸ and thus have drawn attention and criticism for “misunderstanding, misinterpretation, or romanticization of Chinese political thought and history, which leads to problematic essentializations of ‘Chinese culture’.”⁶⁴⁹ Even the anti-essentialist concept of *Balance of Relationships* “is made possible by revisiting Chinese cultural resources”, according to its authors.⁶⁵⁰ Noesselt mentions David Kang’s hypothesis that Western IR schools are not able to explain “historical and cultural particularities of the region”⁶⁵¹ and in a later paper elaborates further that the demand for Chinese theories of IR serves to conceptualize China as a unique system on which Western categories of IR are simply unapplicable.⁶⁵² The concept of *tianxia*, for example, “presupposes a singular, timeless China (...) as the only authentic universal civilization.”⁶⁵³

⁶⁴⁵ Nele Noesselt, “Die Grenzen »nicht-westlicher« Theorien der Internationalen Beziehungen: Eine Rekonstruktion der Metaebene der chinesischen Theoriedebatten,” *Zeitschrift für internationale Beziehungen* 21, no. 1 (2014): 90.

⁶⁴⁶ Noesselt 2012, 15.

⁶⁴⁷ Ling 2019, 42.

⁶⁴⁸ Yih-Jye Hwang, “Reappraising the Chinese School of International Relations: A postcolonial perspective,” *Review of International Studies* 47, no. 3 (2021): 312.

⁶⁴⁹ Hwang 2021, 318.

⁶⁵⁰ Shih et al. 2019, 195.

⁶⁵¹ Noesselt 2012, 9.

⁶⁵² Noesselt 2014, 100.

⁶⁵³ Sinan Chu, “Whither Chinese IR? The Sinocentric subject and the paradox of Tianxia-ism,” *International Theory* 14, no. 1 (2020): 74.

Yan Xuetong and other scholars of the Tsinghua approach, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, face the accusation of constructing an anachronistic, romanticized history of ideal Confucian international politics for their concept, which does not match reality.⁶⁵⁴ The “view of an Eternal China”, however, has not only seduced theorists and political thinkers of the PRC but also those outside China.⁶⁵⁵ Callahan criticizes a whole number of authors on a variety of unscientific arguments regarding the role of Chinese culture for their analyses, a kind of writing he calls ‘Sino-Speak’. He mentions Martin Jacques’ (2012) over-emphasis of a Chinese unity which “is not simply political, but also ontological and epistemological: there is one China, one Chinese identity, and one proper way to understand China.”⁶⁵⁶ In his view, David Kang (2010) however, pushes the argument even further with “not just an Eternal China (like Jacques), but an Eternal East Asia where identity, interests, beliefs and borders did not change for six centuries.”⁶⁵⁷ This situation describes the core of the present thesis, the twin question “Who is China/What is order?” in their expressions both within the Chinese epistemic community and outside. Indeed, the space of encounters between these two spheres (artificially constructed as it is) is a source of tremendous insight into international relations as a political practice and how it shapes actors and structures around the globe. In other words, scholars try to answer the question who China is either by searching for China’s essence or for China’s postcolonial experience and surveying the field between those two approaches is an insightful endeavor.

5.5. Intervention I: The Sinocentric Subject

Hwang and Chu both provide a deeper analysis drawing on postcolonial thought for their examination of Chinese Schools of IR. By referring to Homi Bhabha, Hwang explains that “attempts to reinvigorate traditional Chinese concepts (that is, humane authority, the *Tianxia* system, and relationality) are mimicking Western mainstream IR”. Hence, he considers Yan as realist, Zhao as liberal and Qin as constructivist through “Yan’s reconception of power, Zhao’s reinterpretation of cosmopolitanism, and Qin’s rearticulation of relationality.”⁶⁵⁸ He regards this as a strategy of cultural resistance against hegemony of Western mainstream IR.⁶⁵⁹ Unsatisfied with this approach, however, he proceeds to Spivak’s strategic essentialism and

⁶⁵⁴ Hwang 2021, 318.

⁶⁵⁵ Callahan 2012, 40.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁶⁵⁷ Callahan 2012, 42.

⁶⁵⁸ Hwang 2021, 323.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., 312.

descriptions of subject positions for his analysis of Chinese Schools of IR. Chu Sinan clearly mentions Spivak's warning that "the construction of an undivided Sovereign Subject against the colonial power often comes at the expenses of continuing and further oppression of women and other marginal subjects."⁶⁶⁰ In his negotiation of the subject however, Hwang accepts strategies in which "the subject can be moored, at least temporarily, into a particular subject position within which it becomes identifiable and intelligible so as to, at times, resist hegemony."⁶⁶¹ Essentializing Chinese culture should not be discarded entirely, he argues, but instead "we need to use it *strategically* and *critically*."⁶⁶² [original italics] and through "judicious use of strategic essentialism, it can still be an important local discourse in a wider effort to contest diffused and decentred forms of Western domination."⁶⁶³ On the contrary, Chu concludes that the *tianxia* concept has not yet produced a truly cosmopolitan theory of IR but instead created what he calls a 'sinocentric subject position' based on "the notion of a singular, fixed 'China' as a peaceful civilization throughout the history."⁶⁶⁴

Although originated in the *tianxia* concept, the sinocentric subject position is not limited to theorists of this approach. Chu diagnoses that many Chinese writers within the global IR-discourse "base their theory-building on a rigid notion of China as an essentialized, singular, timeless entity" and criticizes that this "perpetuates the marginalization of dissenting voices to the Sinocentric narrative."⁶⁶⁵ Such a dynamic "might close down the creative space needed to imagine a different way of engagement as Bhabha has proposed"⁶⁶⁶, i.e. a way "that blends different cultures and is full of tension; it can create new ideas and things through 'negotiation'."⁶⁶⁷ The main audience for such a narrow theory of IR would then only be the Chinese public, to strengthen the belief in a particularistic Chinese development trajectory.⁶⁶⁸ Against all claims of resistance to Western epistemic hegemony, contributions to this narrow understanding of Chinese IR theory simply cannot provide opposition or alternatives to Western perspectives⁶⁶⁹, but exhaust their functions in national identity building and stabilizing political rule, while actual "Chinese foreign policy (...) relies on rational cost-benefit calculations and

⁶⁶⁰ Chu 2022, 77.

⁶⁶¹ Hwang 2021, 326.

⁶⁶² Ibid., 328.

⁶⁶³ Ibid., 313.

⁶⁶⁴ Chu 2022, 74.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁶⁶ Hwang 2021, 327.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 324.

⁶⁶⁸ Noesselt 2014, 92.

⁶⁶⁹ Noesselt 2014, 101,

often operates with assumptions drawn from ‘Western’ IR.”⁶⁷⁰ From this point on, the justification for global Chinese hegemony seems a logic conclusion since, in this reading of history, “the problem with ‘Western imperialism’ is not ‘imperialism’ itself, but only its Western variant; the solution is not universal justice, but China’s benevolent hierarchical empire.”⁶⁷¹

Encouraged through romanticizing research projects which ignore “the asymmetric use of hard power and soft/normative power, downplaying the actual primacy of the former in Chinese history”⁶⁷², the solution for theories which essentialize Chinese culture is not turning toward postcolonialism, feminism, and critical theory to pluralize global IR but instead “privilege a particularistic reading of China.”⁶⁷³ A China eternally existing in Confucian pacifism and having passed through the traumatic century of humiliation only to rise again as benevolent hegemon. In Callahan’s words: “Chinese intellectuals now not only seek to save China, but also see themselves as responsible for saving the rest of the world.”⁶⁷⁴ Chu describes the official narrative so precisely that it deserves to be quoted in full length:

Thus, to speak of and for a China that has recovered from its victimhood due to the ‘rupture’ and is ready to help the world with the wisdom retrieved from its historical ‘continuity’ is doubly empowering, because it not only makes China the benign savior and the civilizing agent of the world but also establishes the unquestionable moral quality of its actions. The invocation of the past victimhood of the same Sovereign Subject simultaneously implies that it would be impossible for China to enact the same evil.⁶⁷⁵

The idea of a benign Chinese empire is not only an academic discourse, but also of such high importance because it “is increasingly deployed by China’s elite foreign policy analysts.”⁶⁷⁶

5.6. Intervention II: The context of Chinese identity discourses

The previous chapter already drew parallels between Qin Yaqing’s culturalist taxonomy of theories and the Asian Values Debate. The new embrace of competitiveness between Western and Chinese politics and philosophies might not be the same as the debate in the 1990s

⁶⁷⁰ Nele Noesselt, “Revisiting the debate on constructing a theory of international relations with Chinese characteristics,” *The China Quarterly* 222 (2015): 444.

⁶⁷¹ Callahan 2012, 40.

⁶⁷² Hwang 2021, 318.

⁶⁷³ Chu 2022, 80.

⁶⁷⁴ Callahan 2012, 37.

⁶⁷⁵ Chu 2022, 74.

⁶⁷⁶ Callahan 2012, 40.

but certain aspects have re-surfaced.⁶⁷⁷ Positions defending the essentialization of Chinese culture in general not only “look[s] to culture to explain war, peace, and world order” according to Callahan, they repeat Japanese discourses from the 1980s in addressing topics such as Confucian values or an adequate global position for China.⁶⁷⁸ Broadly speaking, Chinese theories of IR criticize the current global system and work out strategies to upgrade China’s global position.⁶⁷⁹ From the perspective of critics of Chinese theories of IR, this carries the risk of providing a theoretical basis for Chinese hegemony⁶⁸⁰, or as Callahan states: “Sino-speak employs a new vocabulary and grammar of naturalized civilization and essentialized identity and to describe—and prescribe—China’s rejuvenation to greatness.”⁶⁸¹ “Cosmopolitanism” he explains later, becomes a “means through which China’s national culture is transmitted around the world.”⁶⁸²

Ling provides some sobering thoughts to balance out these critiques in reminding us of the Westphalian principles on which the international system rests and its salience for mainstream IR. In an environment perceived as anarchic system of self-help, China’s rise is easily considered a threat and Chinese “analysts may disagree with this thesis but not its analysis, thereby justifying their own realist ambitions.” Westphalian IR, she argues, considers China a threat unless it assimilates, “that is, comply with, and preferably internalise, the norms, institutions, and practices of the Western, liberal order.” Yet Ling tends to overemphasize certain characteristics of the antagonistic Westphalian system she argues against, which develops an argumentative momentum in the process but unfortunately sacrifices a bit of precision in her critique. Depicting the age European expansion as “five centuries of horror and shame and annihilation”, would be one example, where one could also ask if Europe is, if nothing else, awarded too much agency in such a forceful judgement. The normative pressure of the capitalist liberal world order, however, cannot be denied and how to deal with this pressure is a topic in much of critical scholarship. Liberal capitalism, however, is less her concern than the realist zero-sum logic of mainstream IR. Ling quotes several diaspora scholars, who are compelled by antagonistic ideas of international relations even though they argue that China’s cultural, political, military and/or economic power can never develop far enough to threaten US hegemony. These scholars are trapped within Self/Other binary logic and absorbed

⁶⁷⁷ Ling 2019, 40.

⁶⁷⁸ Callahan 2012, 51.

⁶⁷⁹ Noesselt 2015, 445.

⁶⁸⁰ Hwang 2021, 312.

⁶⁸¹ Callahan 2012, 49-50.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, 51.

hypermasculine-nationalist competitiveness of Western realism, hence arriving at the conclusion that the West never understood China and never will.⁶⁸³ Reaching a peaceful conclusion from such a mindset might prove to be difficult, which serves as core motivation for Ling to develop an “epistemology of compassion”.

After addressing Ling’s critique, the next two paragraphs shed light on Chinese and Westphalian IR’s standing in Taiwan by summarizing a chapter from *Balance of Relationships*. De-essentializing IR scholarship from the PRC is the security policy of Taiwanese IR, according to Shih et al., as they discuss Taiwan’s survival as an epistemic issue more than a military one. Furthermore, what it means for a state to exist is derived from American IR because the US guarantee its existence. There are of course obvious reasons why Taiwan subscribes to this “Westphalian” IR in its precarious security situation. Calling into question the universal validity of American meanings-systems would be the same as calling into question Taiwan’s existence. Just as much as many scholars attempt to enshrine the essence of Chinese culture, Taiwanese scholars seem to be on a mission to prove the universality of American IR to prevent China from becoming an epistemic and ontological challenge to the USA. This is not only at the very core of the “world power is knowledge power”-argument mentioned in the previous chapter but also at the twin question “Who is China/What is order?”.

Shi et al. conclude this chapter by trying to find a solution how Taiwan could engage with Chinese IR discourses and introduce three Asian approaches. First, Takeuchi Yoshimi’s proposal of “Asia as a method of constantly becoming a different entity”, mentioned already above when discussing Ling’s Multiple Worlds. Second, Mizoguchi Yuzo, who argues that Japan studies China “to learn how to understand a different nation based on the latter’s own historical subjectivity”. Lastly, Tsai Pei-huo, who tried to transcend Chinese and Japanese nationalities by developing a theory of becoming East Asian, which he could not implement in his own life by virtue of serving in the KMT government in the early 50s. Tsai’s approach is still treated as valid insofar as it supports the idea of post-hybridity, no identity formed from different parts but contrivedly coherent but a multilayered subjectivity able to adapt constantly to different roles. This will be discussed in depth below. It is Taiwan’s memory from the time as Japanese colony and the Cold War, and the cultural memory of its indigenous population that enable Taiwan to attain a post-hybrid subjectivity, which gives it an insightful angle on

⁶⁸³ LHM Ling, “Worlds beyond Westphalia: Daoist dialectics and the ‘China threat’,” *Review of International Studies* 39, no. 3 (2013): 549-554.

Chinese IR theory. Yet Taiwan refuses to engage with this legacy because it does not want to compromise its resemblance with the US.⁶⁸⁴

5.7. Intervention III: Inconsistencies in China's synthetic identity

Although the PRC presented its paradigms for world as *alternatives*, there can be legitimate doubt about whether ideas based on imperial Chinese traditions aim to replace hegemony or the hegemon.⁶⁸⁵ One can feel the need of some authors to give China a second chance to enter modernity or simple longing for “imperial greatness”⁶⁸⁶. Chu identifies three problematic aspects, explaining that when “China reemerges as a global power in the 21st century, there remain persisting problems that point to the ‘underbelly’ of its nation and state-building process.” Those three being, first, reinforced “patriarchal family structures and gender inequality (...) which is also reflected in the marginal position of feminist scholarship in China’s indigenous IR”⁶⁸⁷, “demands for cultural and political autonomy” of minorities which “are perceived as a security threat by the state” and finally “territorial disputes and other interstate frictions.”⁶⁸⁸ In line with official statements⁶⁸⁹, Callahan quotes Liu Mingfu who postulates “realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation requires the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’s martial spirit.”⁶⁹⁰ A sentiment which provides clear insight into the way marginalized communities suffer oppression from the creation of an essentialized, singular nation, echoing Chu’s above mentioned warning against unidimensional subject construction. Rising popularity of ‘Wolf Warrior Diplomacy’ and simultaneous censorship against ‘Sissy men’ in Chinese media show one of the most classic conflicts in this field. Due to the tremendous success of the action blockbusters *Wolf Warrior* and *Wolf Warrior 2*, increasing assertive Chinese diplomacy earned the title ‘Wolf Warrior diplomacy’.⁶⁹¹ At the same time China’s National Radio and Television Administration published a new guideline to end the presentation of ‘deformed aesthetics’ of ‘sissy men’ in media⁶⁹². Cheng et al. quote an editorial

⁶⁸⁴ Shi et al. 2019, 219-225.

⁶⁸⁵ Noesselt 2010, 330.

⁶⁸⁶ Callahan 2012, 51.

⁶⁸⁷ see Eric M. Blanchard and Shuang Lin, “Gender and non-western “global” IR: where are the women in Chinese International Relations Theory?,” *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 48-61.

⁶⁸⁸ Chu 2022, 76.

⁶⁸⁹ See Amelia Cheatham et al. “Excerpt: The Third Revolution“ Council on Foreign Relations, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/excerpt-third-revolution>.

⁶⁹⁰ Callahan 2012, 39.

⁶⁹¹ Zhiqun Zhu, “Interpreting China’s ‘Wolf-Warrior Diplomacy’,” *The Diplomat* 15, March 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/interpreting-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>.

⁶⁹² alternative male beauty standards popularized by Korean and Japanese popular culture.

of the Central Committee's Guangming Daily newspaper, propagating that the patriotic wolf warriors on Chinese TV screens embody the ideal of masculine aesthetics and "this is what young people should look like."⁶⁹³

Popular discourses about masculinity are only the very surface of the meaning of queerness to China's foreign policy. First to mention is the topic of family, which is one of the central elements of corporations in the framework of the East Asian Bureaucratic Development State that produced the economic success of post-war East Asia. Zhao Tingyang mentions family as part of *tianxia* in his theory and the repopularization of Confucianism will surely associate debates about family. Second there are economic aspects as addressed by Petrus Liu's materialist analysis of gendered and sexualized groups capitalism creates and marginalizes in order to exploit cheap labor. A totally different aspect here is the ensuing modernization capitalism carries with it and the social transformations this entails in diversifying lifestyles and gender roles. Lastly, there are numerous references in Chinese IR theory. "The problematization of the signifier of China rests at the heart of Chinese queer theory," as Petrus Liu clearly argues in line with the question "Who is China/What is order?". Qin Yaqing's term of life-producing power and *renqing* as affective exchange mechanism for this life-producing power, as well as Zhao Tingyang's mentions of procreativity and vitality are rather direct references to procreative sexuality. L.H.M. Ling's work with gender and Petrus Liu's publications on Chinese Queer Theory are just two obvious examples, who represent others like Huang Chiung-Chiu, Shih-Chih-yu, Howard Chiang and many more working in this field.

One insight taken from their research is that "[t]he proliferation of sexual identities and categories in modern China has always been conceptually merged with the imperatives of national survival and sovereignty against a long history of Western encroachments."⁶⁹⁴ Concerning the Beijing Consensus, Liu also explains that "[s]exuality emerges in this context as a powerful framework for understanding the production of affect and subjectivities under regimes of capital accumulation and colonial plunder."⁶⁹⁵ Ling writes that the Silk Road Ethos "dissolves dichotomies by revealing the mutualities, liminalities, and inbetweenness (...[and]) not only break[s] down categories that are supposedly intractable (e.g. masculinity vs femininity) but also re-constitute them into a new, hybrid third domain (e.g. queerness)."⁶⁹⁶ In

⁶⁹³ Cheng et al., "Beijing's crackdown on 'sissy' men could lead to a rise in gender-based violence, experts warn," ABC News, October 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-10-30/china-reshape-gender-culture-sissy-men/100548584>.

⁶⁹⁴ Petrus Liu, *Queer Marxism in two Chinas* (Duke UP, 2015), 44.

⁶⁹⁵ Petrus Liu, *The Specter of Materialism: Queer Theory and Marxism in the Age of the Beijing Consensus* (Duke UP, 2023) 162.

⁶⁹⁶ Ling and Perrigoue 2018, 208-209.

another article she repeats the idea that “Daoism articulates an ancient version of contemporary queer theory.”⁶⁹⁷ Queer theory in IR, I argue, is about how one perceives and relates to the *other* both within and without the *self* and the salience of power in these relations. China, specifically, is a prime example of the intricacies of this relation, in the way humiliation, desire, violence and intimacy have been affects that imbue the meaning of power in its foreign affairs.

With all these inconsistencies in China’s self-conception addressed and their conflicts with claims of a universal popular ideology for the whole of China if not the whole world uncovered, the crucial question eventually can be asked following Chu Sinan: “(...) wouldn’t the crucial test for New *Tianxia*-ism be precisely its ability to recruit those listed above into its political project”, i.e. people marginalized by conservative social structures, cultural minorities and China’s regional neighbors becoming the victims in recent territorial disputes.⁶⁹⁸

The sober approach to China’s history, or better phrased: the sober approach to the histories of the past and present Chinas is to accept the contradictions in its subjectivity and the interdependence between the three elements of history, geopolitical environment and China as an actor, that all interact in their roles on the stage of East Asia. “In thought”, Brincat and Ling write, “contradictions pertain to logical incompatibilities; in social life, however, they are relations.”⁶⁹⁹ Referring to the concept of non-synthetic post-hybridity below will shed more light on ways how to productive deal with contradictions. Callahan praises Charles Horner’s *Rising China and Its Postmodern Fate* and Anthony Reid’s and Zheng Yangwen’s *Negotiating Asymmetry* as nuanced and differentiated research on the topic of China’s current position in global politics and its historical background. Situating the Chinese experience in a global history is the first step to avoid an essentializing view on China. “Horner points to the Yuan and Qing dynasties as examples of China’s rich experience in world systems that were not of its own making.”⁷⁰⁰ This example shows the continuing role of China not as exceptional and unique but as part of world history and Asian history. As further elaborated by Reid: “Neighboring countries were not simply submissive ‘vassals;’ they played an active role in shaping East Asian politics.”⁷⁰¹ Callahan reminds the reader that an understanding of China’s embeddedness in international networks was far more prevalent in the 1990s, until ‘Sino-speak’ has re-centralized the image of East Asia as hierarchical system dominated by the PRC.⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁷ Ling 2019, 37.

⁶⁹⁸ Chu 2022, 76.

⁶⁹⁹ Brincat and Ling 2014, 7.

⁷⁰⁰ Callahan 2012, 45.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, 50.

But as much as we should not consider Chinese IR theories simple mirrors to Western IR theory, it should also be avoided to abuse non-Western scholarship as mere epistemological quarry for post-Western IR theory.⁷⁰³ With that in mind the story of internationalization of Chinese IR theory was most fruitfully conducted in recent years via hybridization of English School and Chinese contributions to IR research. Intended or not, this led more to an enhancement and further development of the English School than an international consolidation of a ‘Chinese School’.⁷⁰⁴ John M. Hobson (2004 and 2020) drafted a world history of which China has always been a part, being shaped by and shaping international politics, leading to a research program that champions transcultural hybridization as a guiding idea.

The problem of essentialized ideas of Chinese culture in IR theory will decrease the more Chinese IR research internationalizes. Expectations to find original alternative frameworks of world order in Chinese philosophy are already proven to be unfulfillable.⁷⁰⁵ Nielsen and Kristensen also explain that “Chinese IR scholars have been conscious about the pitfalls of essentialism” and prefer hybrid theories to “radical Chineseness”. Earlier in their paper, they examine that “the Chinese innovational drive is neither a product of Westernisation and globalisation nor Sinicisation and localisation only, but rather a hybridisation of Western and Chinese knowledge resources.”⁷⁰⁶ Hwang also expects from scholars of Chinese IR theories to “make novel and innovative contributions to the literature of IR through hybridization(…)” and concludes that “post-Western IR including the CS is actually a sort of ‘Third Space’.”⁷⁰⁷ But in the hybridization of IR theory, we should mind Chu’s argument that we must not only look outside Eurocentric scholarship but also turn to sources which “lie outside the Sinocentric story about the ‘reconsolidation’ or ‘rejuvenation’ of China.” He recommends to “be reflective of issues of race and ethnicity, gender and politics of knowledge production (...)” and hopes “[d]oing so will hopefully help to move the discussion of global IR beyond the ‘two-way dialogue’ toward a multidirectional and multilevel dialog of greater plurality and reflexivity.”⁷⁰⁸ This is the reason why the works of Petrus Liu, Howard Chiang, L.H.M. Ling or Tse Shang Denise Tang and others are of exceptional salience to research on China in international relations.

⁷⁰³ Noesselt 2014, 80.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., 100.

⁷⁰⁵ Noesselt 2014, 101.

⁷⁰⁶ Peter Markus Kristensen and Ras Tin Nielsen, ““You need to do something that the Westerners cannot understand”: The Innovation of a Chinese School of IR,” in *Chinese Politics and International Relations: Innovation and Invention*, ed. Nicola Horsburgh, Astrid Nordin and Shaun Breslin (Routledge, 2014), 104-109.

⁷⁰⁷ Hwang 2021, 323-324.

⁷⁰⁸ Chu 2022, 78-80.

5.8. From sinocentric subjectivity to trans-subjectivity

China exposed the conceptualization of its world view, its idea of world order and its position in this imagined world order to the plenum of international actors by announcing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This invited the whole globe to take part in China's nation building and identity formation even more than ever before and the world embraced this invitation. The intensification of attempts to "explain China" have increased tremendously since then. The BRI, it seemed, was Beijing's official plan of China's rise, or so a lot of scholarship interpreted it. This might even be true in part. Chinese attempts to present an alternative world order, however, have given way to nuanced contributions to global IR or approaches to define IR concepts of smaller scale from non-western perspectives, for example *multilateralism*. In the way Beijing went through an intense process of learning grand scale foreign policy with the BRI, the Chinese School of IR (CS) mirrors this foreign policy learning process on the academic side. It underwent a process of adaption and transformation as well, giving up the monumental claims to revolutionize the ontology of world order in favor of a more practical work with elements of global governance. This is an important development of the Chinese School of IR and a step towards the globalization of local scholarship. One of these directions that develops Qin Yaqing's relationality theory further and attempts to "globalize" the Chinese School of IR, is Shih Chih-yu's relationality approach.

According to *Balance of Relationships*, the relational turn in IR derived from the three traditions of feminist ethics of caring, Bourdieu's conception of field, and network sociology.⁷⁰⁹ In the case of China, he explains that relationality was introduced to local scholarship by Qin Yaqing,⁷¹⁰ who is one his main points or reference, together with Zhao Tingyang and Yan Xuetong. L.H.M. Ling points Qin Yaqing out even more for promoting relational IR. For Shih Chih-yu the *tianxia* concept of Zhao Tingyang and Qin Yaqing revolve around the assumption that all actors are related and *tianxia* constitutes their identity. This network of relations and identities causes actors to shape their relations according to the position they take within this network which requires improvisation, reciprocity, and self-control.⁷¹¹ A conceptualization with strong similarities to Bourdieusian field concepts. Recent progress in the Chinese School of IR has been happening in close exchange with Bourdieu-inspired practice theory, which has not only had an impact on the Chinese School but also on the English School. The English School in turn, has been serving as inspiration for Chinese Scholars as well, so that those three

⁷⁰⁹ Shih et al. 2019, 6.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., 41.

⁷¹¹ Chih-yu Shih, *Post-Chineseness: Cultural Politics and International Relations* (SUNY Press, 2022a), 24.

intellectual traditions have been mutually developing in the past years. This will be discussed in further detail below.

According to Shih et al., China rejects “[a] grand strategy that enforces a self-centric and often universally applied order and its role expectations of nations upon others” and instead follows a foreign policy better termed as role playing “embedded in ritual, face culture, and group orientation (...), as well as gift giving.” This leads to Chinese grand strategy in which China’s role and the role of the interacting party are mutually constituted.⁷¹² Nonetheless, China’s self-described “terminology for its national role is specifically ‘a responsible major power’ (yige fuzeren de da guo)”. The authors, however, further complicate this self-description by quoting Xi Jinping’s nationalist rhetoric: “We are closer than in any other period of history to the goal of the great revival of the Chinese nation.” Additionally, a deeper insight is presented by a quote from an official statement of the Central Party School: “The Chinese traditional culture praises perpetual self-strengthening and deep virtue to accommodate varieties. It simultaneously advocates everyone owning all under-heaven in order for all under-heaven to reach great harmony”.⁷¹³ Just as the Central Party School quotes ancient Chinese classics, Socialism and Confucianism are combined in China’s idea of a ‘harmonious world’. In such a ‘harmonious world’ “values, institutions, and ideologies are secondary to reciprocal relationships among nations” as the authors of *Balance of Relationships* explain.⁷¹⁴

5.8.1. Intervention IV and solution: Resemblance and Post-Chineseness

In *Post-Chineseness* and *Balance of Relationships*, Shih and his co-authors postulate that “no relation exists without some imagined resemblance” because actors need to believe in a resemblance with their counterpart to begin, sustain or restart a relationship.⁷¹⁵ Rošker explains further that the relationality of Classical Chinese civilization was “a form of social interaction pattern which can be identified neither with individualism nor with collectivism” but with the “relational individuals”, who “came to view themselves as a part of their group and in which *patterns of commonality* among individuals brought legible unity to interhuman relations.”⁷¹⁶ [my italics] Rošker also refers to Mencius, according to whom humans resemble each other in their heart-minds (*xin 心*), which defines them and enables interaction.⁷¹⁷ One of

⁷¹² Shi et al. 2019, 59.

⁷¹³ Shih et al. 2019, 65-68.

⁷¹⁴ Shih et al. 2019, 71.

⁷¹⁵ Shih 2022a, 21.

⁷¹⁶ Rošker 2021, 63.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid, 88.

Hedley Bull's more pronounced anxieties was the weakening cultural common ground on which international society rests in his opinion. Shih Chih-yu's idea of resemblance might address an aspect of the English School that even Hedley Bull never realized was present in its concept of international relations. Understanding international society surely benefits from resemblance as a new way of perceiving the dispositions, values, affects and subjectivities of individual actors that are shared, inter- or even trans-subjective identity-resources.

Moving "[a]way from China-centrism" is Shih Chih-yu's headline for the first chapter of *Post-Chineseness*, which I will refer to in the next paragraphs. The construction of resemblance among actors functions to "constitute the identities of the actors and allow the actors to build networks to address collective concerns, recruit and train new members, (...and) gain confidence in the goodwill of the resembled others." Shih assumes that a common cultural background establishes prior resemblance, but every actor must be ready to improvise resemblances outside of the sphere where they have common cultural references.⁷¹⁸ Resemblance, hence, describes a process of relational identity constitution by utilizing shared "identity resources". Prior resemblance alludes to the approach that relations come before states and identity strategies include enforcing and defending the norms of the preexisting environment. Whereas improvised resemblance "subjugates oneself to many rituals as well as role-play in order to link with a variety of others."⁷¹⁹ Such impossibility of merely being autonomous and self-centric is exemplified through the substitution of post-identity for identity in his terminology.⁷²⁰ Attempting to overcome Eurocentrism, on the one hand, and avoid committing self-centrism, in the present case China-centrism, while engaging in self-empowerment to resist Eurocentrism, on the other hand, poses somewhat of a dilemma. That is the reason Shih relies "instead on 'post-Chineseness' as an epistemological wedge to open all varieties of self-centrism". In his criticism, Shih Chih-yu points out that Qin Yaqing, as leading scholar of Chinese relationality, "specifically advocates a relativist quest for a Sinocentric reinterpretation of Chinese uniqueness." His use of the terms relationality and relativism as antonyms unfortunately is hardly helpful in clarifying his point. Shih approaches the topic carefully by saying that Sinocentrism "is more about discovering neglected history" than cultural relativism, similar to strategic essentialism. But relationality, he explains, suffers from too much substantivist Chineseness in Qin's concept and that is why Shih attempts to "restore its processual sensibilities through the approach of post-Chineseness".⁷²¹

⁷¹⁸ Shih 2022a, 21.

⁷¹⁹ Shih 2022a, 26.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷²¹ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

Shih conducts the rather bold and productive move to turn Sinocentrism into a positionality of actors, which yields scholarly insights. It is undeniable that “being Chinese” shapes the self-perception of the government in Beijing as it engages in international relations. Drawing from Chinese cultural characteristics is also what drives a considerable part of Qin’s theory. For Shih, however, this is not invalidating their practices because it represents the ultimately futile search for the essence of China. It is, on the contrary, the basic structure of the cognitive system through which to perceive China’s counterpart and relate to them, in his words: the lens through which to understand others. This thesis’ chapter on methods resonates strongly with this idea because it is our positionality which enables us to link events/experiences and values in order to create significances and meanings. The most important part of Shih’s concept here, however, is to take the step from identity to post-identity.

“In international relations, it is about the Beijing authorities improvising a resemblance to the other national actors by discovering their Chineseness or the potential to have it. (...) Chineseness can only exist in ‘post-Chineseness’ due to its negotiable nature as well as its context- and actor-driven peculiarities. Given that Chineseness is highly uncertain, contextualized, and agentially based, even Beijing, on behalf of the entire country, cannot enforce a coherent resemblance between those considered Chinese.”⁷²²

5.8.2. Ambitious Deconstructions: Non-synthetic, post-hybrid trans-subjectivity

Shih refers to Chineseness as the conditions of being Chinese, while post-Chineseness as the on-going processes of becoming differently Chinese through self as well as mutual de/recognition. Recognizing is inevitably mutual and relational. Understanding, confronting, and promoting China is all about practicing Chineseness alongside the other constituents of self-identities, for example, Christian, capitalist, exceptionalist, patriotic, and colonial, so Chineseness, intertwined with other constituents, does not stand alone. That is why all Chineseness must be, simultaneously, post- Chineseness.⁷²³ Post-Chineseness supports the BoR system that obliges nations to practice self-restraint and reciprocate benevolence to enable other nations’ interests. The stronger the perceived resemblance between nations, the more obliged they are to engage each other using self-restraint, and the more secure they all are. BoR not only advocates for resemblance being intentionally constructed in less conflictual relations but

⁷²² Shih 2022a, 21.

⁷²³ Ibid., 4.

also in strained relations. Regardless of their power level, states will continue to invest in resemblance to repair a broken relationship or will react to a collapsing relationship by breaking it up and restarting the cycle with improvised resemblance.⁷²⁴

Complementary to this idea of resemblance, Ling discusses trans-subjectivities as part of her Daoist Yin/Yang-dialectics that describes how even opposing polarities are part of each other. Europe and the US have made China into what it is today, just as China has been doing for the West. She points out “the fact that China’s latest generation of IR scholars receives its training primarily in the US” and speaks “the same hypermasculine-nationalist language of Westphalian IR” as their American counterparts. Conversely, she mentions “a vibrant and longstanding Chinese community in America” comprised of groups, who “cover a spectrum of interests, ideologies, languages, ethnicities, memories, social classes, and relations to Chinese culture and civilization”. Hence, she shows that the US is a Chinese country as much as China is an American country. Apart from the bilateral relation between USA and PRC, “a taste for common cultural products through film, music, literature, TV drama, food, (...) suggest an emerging regional, trans-Asian subjectivity”, so much that scholars speak of an “Asian epistemic community”, in which an “Asian school of IR” is already reality.⁷²⁵ Identities, so much can be concluded from Ling’s arguments are at least hybrid, if not post-hybrid. Qin arrives at similar conclusions when discussing yin-yang-dialectics, which for him also interpret everything in co-dependent polarities. Change and progress are not conflictual in nature, however, “but rely on the harmonizing process of the yin-yang transsubjective mutuality.” Inclusivity and complementarity are parts of this dialectics but merely as conditions that require the self-restraint of actors for the actual implementation of harmonious relations.⁷²⁶ Qin actually moves in the vicinity of Zhao Tingyang by referencing inclusivity and complementarity, which are the two primary tenets of *tianxia*. He also describes self-restraint, which later is developed further by Shih Chih-yu. Post-Chineseness is treated as an example of trans-subjectivity in the following paragraphs.

Post-Chineseness, most crucially, is non-synthetic and post-hybrid and what this means will be explained in the following section. “[M]ultilayeredness, memory, and resemblance” are the three factors that distinguish post-hybridity from hybridity by serving as counterparts to the “major tenets of hybridity, which are subjectivity, uncertainty, and difference.” In post-hybridity, the multilayered set of identities shapes the way units interact insofar as it “pushes

⁷²⁴ Ibid., 20-26.

⁷²⁵ Ling 2013, 563-566.

⁷²⁶ Qin 2018, 182-183.

essentializing identity into inessential role-playing.” Shih et al. also emphasize the temporal aspect of relating-by-resemblance, in explaining that “[t]he post-hybrid capacity for resemblance informs the non-synthetic dialectics of a site, person, or history to switch identities as the constituting relations shift. (...)”⁷²⁷ Another aspect of temporality can be pointed out with the help of Bourdieusian sociology. Pouliot refers to Bourdieu in explaining that “practices are the encounter of the history in body (dispositions) and the history in things (positionality).” He further elaborates that “[a]n agent’s dispositions are historical traces of her occupying various positions in the past” and “[p]ast trajectories, which are in important ways shaped by positional logics, engender dispositions characterized by a variable degree of path dependence.”⁷²⁸ Summed up, actors improvise resemblance to other actors in order to interact and coexist. The multilayered set of identities that serves as a portfolio of identity resources for actors enables actors to improvise resemblance in the first place. This perspective on relationships is characterized by naturally switching identities as positions shift and time passes.

Post-hybridity also intends to uncover the pressures multi-cultural capitalism exerts on actors to create an identity as end-result of hybridization and synthesization.⁷²⁹ Ling explores the relation between seemingly contradictory identity resources further. “Although maleness (*yang*) differs distinctively from femaleness (*yin*)” she argues, “each is incomplete without the other. More than that, *each retains the other within.*” [original italics] This mutuality constitutes not only individuals but also societies and the cosmos as a whole, none of which is exclusively masculine or feminine, or for that matter exclusively any one thing *or* the other. Even more so, an identity that would consist of such exclusivities would be defective, broken and incomplete.⁷³⁰ For Cynthia Weber “the *and/or* exceeds this binary logic because it appreciates how the meaning of something or someone cannot necessarily be contained within an *either/or* choice.” She teaches us that “understanding can require us to appreciate how a person or a thing is constituted by and simultaneously embodies multiple, seemingly contradictory meanings”.

According to Weber, the prime template for state identity as origin of cognition, perception, knowledge etc. is ‘man’. “The state's sovereign authority that had previously been vested in the monarch”, Weber elaborates, “is now vested instead in 'modern man: To be sovereign, then, every sovereign nation-state inscribes a particular sovereign man as an always already existing domestic presence, as the foundation of its authority domestically and internationally”. This is what Richard K. Ashely meant by saying “modern statecraft is modern

⁷²⁷ Shih et al. 2019, 203-204.

⁷²⁸ Pouliot in Adler-Nissen 2013, 47.

⁷²⁹ Shih et al. 2019, 197.

⁷³⁰ Brincat and Ling 2014, 5.

mancraft". Figurations of 'modern man', 'modern state' and 'international order', however, are unstable, so "that various invested actors – from citizens to states to formal international institutions – constantly attempt to stabilize these unreliable hierarchies and the figurations that authorize them". Weber builds her argument on Ashley, but ultimately concludes that he missed the opportunity to show that the "plural might function as a possible or even necessary *foundation of meaning* in a logocentric system, rather than always in opposition to the singular (presumptively normal) logos."⁷³¹ [my italics] This is what Ling and Shih et al. realize in their concept of a trans-subjectivity that rests on yin/yang-dialectics, which in turn connects their IR research to Queer Theory in IR.

Synthetic, that is *artificial* or *fabricated* hybridity in IR is criticized for reiterating hegemonic narratives in its hybridization methods, which is to say that hybridization that uses strategic essentialization, creating a site to secure identity and criticism is not sufficiently persistent in its implementation of in-betweenness. Non-synthetic actors are multilayered, spatially *and* temporally in-between. The two dimensions of spatial and temporal in-betweenness are used to illustrate this alleged deficiency. Synthetic hybridity is accused of remaining in a spatial in-betweenness without temporal in-betweenness because the Western notion of modernity and teleological progress is still reiterated. Shi et al. propose to stress cyclical temporality in subjectivity. The core of this is improvised resemblance, since in our identity we try to resemble others with which we maintain relations, but we do that again and again to adapt and adjust to new situations. A sited, even just a *strategically* essential subjectivity fixed in spatial in-betweenness would not suffice to address this temporal dimension. It even could be drawn upon to question the idea of progress of high technology as belief system.⁷³² This is similar to the difference in approaches among Hwang and Chu mentioned above.

Ling unconsciously presents a good example of reiterating hegemonic narratives with hybridity by discussing an episode from the fourteenth-century epic *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* about Zhuge Liang, "renowned in Chinese history as a master strategist". In this story, Zhuge Liang as Prime Minister of Shu is tasked to conquer the southern barbaric tribes under King Meng Huo, who refuses to accept Shu rule. Ling concludes: "After Meng Huo accepts Shu rule, Zhuge enacts a policy that draws on the *yang-within-yin*: that is, having local, 'barbaric' talent – including Meng Huo himself – serve in the administration of the new territory

⁷³¹ Cynthia Weber, *Queer International Relations: Sovereignty, Sexuality and the Will to Knowledge* (Oxford UP, 2016), 35-39.

⁷³² Shih et al. 2019, 198-199.

(...)." She also describes this new administration as 'harmonious governance', which "also draws on the *yin-within-yang*". "Zhuge orders his men to transfer important technical knowledge regarding agriculture and construction, salt and metals, to the local people", she explains, "[i]n this way, he improves their material lives while leaving alone their customs and traditions, lifestyles and religions."⁷³³ In my opinion, Ling falls into a trap here. Of course, she uses the example of Zhuge Liang to make a certain point, but this anecdotal use of classic thought is not without its inaccuracies. She draws on this passage to bolster her argument of progressive Daoist dialectics in international relations, but this could be flipped easily to the opposite.

The story seems to communicate rather openly how the barbarians were civilized by the Chinese despite lip-service of untouched local customs and traditions, which in my view is just an example of colonialism. Furthermore, convincing the barbarian King of the civilizational superiority of China is an act of epistemic violence that leads to assimilation, the same thing she accuses the Westphalian system of in its behavior against China. Additionally, Chinese culture, abstracted in Classical literature and abstracted as a philosophical anecdote, can only yield proof in favor of normative arguments for Chinese IR, it seems to possess a sacrality that turns it inherently morally superior towards Classical Western philosophy, which in Ling's opinion also includes the root of all epistemic evil with Hobbes and Locke. That is the reason why *non-synthetic post-hybridity* is such a productive line of thinking and opens up analytical avenues that might be more complex but also more differentiated. Shi et al. cannot fall into such traps because they categorize not as antagonistically as Ling does.

It feels like Shih et al. emphasize relationality and Ling emphasizes identity, maybe to the extent that Shih et al. could be utilized to point out Ling's shortcomings in remaining too abstract and with a tendency to present ideas as universal or absolute. The proposal of post-hybridity could be turned into an argument against Ling, or at least a significant further development of her ideas. She speaks about trans-subjectivities, which I argue, could be considered very close to post-hybridity, but Shih et al. discuss the matter from a different perspective with some more insights into its potential and developed more consequentially towards post-identity.

Shih et al. go into the detail of what the problem with synthetic subjectivity is. Trying to present one's identity as a diverse yet *consistent* set of elements leads to a contrived construction of a "synthesized" identity, which denies the contradictions among the elements

⁷³³ Ling 2013, 562.

from which this identity is created, or *improvised* in the term of *Balance of Relationships*. The problem is not the diversity of the elements out of which an actor constitutes their subjectivity but omitting the contradictory relationship between these elements. Shi et al. point out that temporality serves to shed light on this diversity. Ling partially supports this idea in describing a phenomenon she calls “the unrelenting movement of the *dao*”, continuously in motion, “[b]ecause the other exists inside the self, and *vice versa*, nothing can stay still or the same, even if one wants it so.” *Balance of Relationship* describes a more mundane aspect in explaining that identity is a tool for relationship maintenance that is adapted by the agent to fit ever changing situations and thus cannot stay the same. Both however, refer to the productive tension within the relationship between the self and other, see the remarks on Queer Theory above.

Starting from the simple insight that “no identity is a tabula rasa in the geographical and cultural sense”, non-synthesis is defined as the multilayeredness of “coexisting strings in our identity”, which “can be a discontinuous construct.” Although “the power of hybrid identity comes mainly from discourse”, the discontinuity of identity and the need of post-hybrid identities to be *practically* re-incurred lead to the insight that “identity cannot be fully understood through discourse analysis.” Furthermore, multilayeredness also differs from plurality “in the rejection of the synthesis premised upon a sited subjectivity” and in proposing “that our identity and existence belong to more than one temporal dimension”.⁷³⁴

Summary

This section showed that authors draw on Chinese heritage to search for China’s cultural essence just as much as other authors draw on Chinese heritage to conceptualize ambitious theories of deconstruction. The idea of post-hybridity is not without some flaws of its own and is less a manual of how to construct identities than a research device to examine subjectivity formation. The Chinese attempt to merge Communism, Capitalism and Traditionalism is an outstanding example of such a subjectivity formation that draws on diverse sets of resources. Still the claim remains to shape a unified, ‘popular ideology’, this diversity notwithstanding, bridging the contradictions and in the ideal case even turning this ideology into soft power. The result is the ‘sinocentric subject’ that sacrifices plurality, diversity and multilayeredness in favor of national unity and a powerful image of China among public intellectuals.

Chinese and non-Chinese scholars alike have been trying to depict China or even entire East Asia as homogenous, consistent entity with varying success. These endeavors have produced a ‘sinocentric subject’, an idea of China that is unified and consistent – synthetic, as

⁷³⁴ Shih et al. 2019, 201-202.

Shi et al. would say. In a world of sovereign nation-states and a mainstream IR discipline that perpetuates this idea, such a quest to define China as a nation of its own is not all extraordinary but it invites justified criticism. The construction of the sinocentric subject causes conflicts with minorities of gender, sexuality and ethnicity as well as geopolitical neighbors. Closely linked with this problem is the need of presenting oneself as sovereign, autonomous nation both internationally and domestically and the pressures this need builds up. The complexity of the relationship between Self and Other within an actor as well as outwardly is clearly discernable. China's rich history is both a curse and a blessing concerning the search for identity. The core of Han-dominated China, surrounded by Tibet, Xinjiang, Manchuria, Mongolia, Taiwan and the southern regions with some degree of autonomous identity, comprises a colorful whole that already depicts a post-hybrid non-synthetic subjectivity in all their separate and connected histories, societies, ethnicities, cultures and polities. Capitalist modernity with its proliferation of different lifestyles and globalization with its internationalization of identities add to this in innumerable dimensions and layers. Leaving the sinocentric subject behind to embrace non-synthetic trans-subjectivities indeed seems to be imperative.

Trans-subjectivity seems to emphasize the first part of the twin question "Who is China/What is order?". This intense engagement with concepts of identity, subjectivity and recognition, however, reveals that world order is indeed a part of the actors as much as actors are a part of world order. Shi et al. replace identities and interests as behavior motivators for international relations that express themselves in role playing around recognition and coexistence as end in itself. The identity of actors is not constructed from just any parts, it is co-constituted with the counterpart, the other. What is also stressed is the temporal dimension. From these aspects follow dynamics of learning, adaption and readjusting behavior. The core of trans-subjectivity as it is presented above, I argue, is a specific understanding how world order, culture and the self are connected and not only accepting one's identity as the multilayered configuration it is, but also the creative energy this aggregate generates, which enables actor's agency-as-relationality. World order as an organism consisting of states requires a system of circulation, distribution and transmission in which states are organs that belong to the whole. One of the main tasks of the system is to produce and circulate meanings since they guide perception and action. Meanings enable actors to recognize each other, trade with each other and go to war with each other.

Ideas of the greater social self, resemblance and the co-constitution of identities already express this trans-subjectivity and for that matter we might also add Ling's cosmic consciousness. All of these refer to a part of the Self that is actually a part of something greater

that lies outside of what would conventionally be considered “the Self”. The question is whether one is following a philosophy that maintains and defends the sovereign self or a philosophy of relationality and interbeing. Existence as self seems to involve role playing through utilization of identity resources that are continuously exchange and circulated (some call that ‘culture’). That is why I advocate to understand *tianxia* as basis of resemblance in the way Shih et al. depict is as the solution to the English School dilemma of decreasing common cultural ground in international society.

What is striking in the last part of Balance of Relationships is how the theory is positioned internationally. Qin Yaqing delineates his relational, moral theory clearly from the rational, utilitarian Western theories. Yan Xuetong takes every effort to present his thoughts as part of the global, universal realist discourse. Shih et al. discuss, first, how their theory is post-western, afterwards what it is that makes their theory Chinese and finally how their theory is part of Western IR theory making. In line with their overall criticism against contrived artificial identities, they reject to treat their work as representation of a specific side in an epistemic dichotomy and instead embrace its multilayered nature.

5.9. Transcultural Hybridizations of Chinese and Western IR

Shih et al. address the general mobility of narratives in theory but also where there is a lock thereof. He lists two obstacles, the first one is “the Orientalist tendency in contemporary social sciences to consider non-Western theories as scientifically irrelevant” given their supposed inadequacy in methodology. The other obstacle are non-Western theories that actively try to set up cultural borders to distinguish themselves. They also conclude however, that “the Western world for centennials received and appropriated non-Western theories just as the non-Western world did with the Western theories”, but non-Western contributions to theory in general still must be “functional to the overall enhancement of analytical and explanatory capacity.” Balance of Relationships is thus presented “as a non-Western theory that comes from a distinctive cultural, philosophical, and historical trajectory”, but at the same time also as “a Western theory in accordance with the social science discourse.” The aim for BoR is to be “a translation of Confucian intellectual legacy into contemporary social science.”

What hinders relationality in the cross-fertilization of theory, they continue, still is not so much orientalism but “paradigmatic ignorance characterized by usual parochialism”. Shi et al. mention that post-Western theory usually empowers subaltern intellectual sources by

‘Worlding’ them and in a second step thus provincialize the West. Contrary to that, however, the authors try to show that “[b]y treating the West as another non-Western site, one deconstructs Euro-centrism and Orientalism” and exposes the Worlding-strategies of the West itself. Shi et al. point out that Orientalism itself is fragmented, highly context-dependent, unsystematic belief system. Hence, they argue, “Orientalism without a fixed form suggests that cultural ignorance does not immediately determine the intellectual capacity to learn or exclude.” Ling supports this idea in her article about John Hobson’s research project. She praises his insight that “Asia’s ‘resource portfolios’ consisting of ‘Eastern ideas, institutions, and technologies’ helped to make the rise of the West possible” and that Europe “depended on numerous discoveries, big and small, made by non-Europeans.” The only thing missing in his reconstruction of the relation between East and West, she points out, is the dimension of gender.⁷³⁵ Unfortunately, she never had the opportunity to read his 2020 book *Multicultural Origins of the Global Economy*, which was a meaningful next step in his work.

Rethinking the West as another non-Western site with intellectual resources that need Worlding “prompts a process of re-Worlding to allow the West to become more tolerant culturally and more comprehensive scientifically”. This might even be considered an example of Ling’s epistemic compassion. Worlding can only happen through the encounter with the external, thus *Balance of Relationships* breaks down the ways in which the West reacted to non-Western knowledge, be it by denying its value, treating it as exotic, absorbing it or via collusion, the last one referring, for example, to authors like Martin Jacques, who reproduce the essentialist sinocentric subject position.⁷³⁶ The crucial aspect Shi et al. emphasize is “the lack of universal perspective on the Western side”, as illustrated in the way Western scholars cannot agree on whether Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* is typical Chinese strategy or universally applicable. The difference is made clear by describing the way *The Art of War* entered Western knowledge as *translation* but in the case of *tianxia*, on the other hand, as *appropriation*.⁷³⁷ The argument is quite complex but pointing out the fact that the West needs to *construct* its knowledge as world knowledge (to use a more lenient term than ‘universal’) is a valid point. This idea reveals hybridization strategies on all sides and deep-seated permeability of systems of science and knowledge.

So much of Western science after all, I argue, emerged out of a European colonialist desire to classify and categorize what the colonizer found on ‘the edges of the world’ or in the

⁷³⁵ LHM Ling, “Hobson’s Eurocentric World Politics: The Journey Begins,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 42, no. 2 (2014b): 456-463.

⁷³⁶ Shi et al. 2019, 227-230.

⁷³⁷ Shi et al. 2019, 231 ff.

‘heart of darkness’. (Neo)realism might have been conceived as much in the ‘barbarian’ Vietnamese jungle as in cozy offices of Chicago University. Behind King, Keohane and Verba with their parsimony, rigor and scientific diligence lurks Colonel Kurtz, unmasking these principles as defensive reflexes of academic rationalism against its own irrational savageness, queerness and ‘primitiveness’. In Ling’s words, “the real purpose of parsimony, rigor, and autonomy is to emancipate both body and soul from sin and temptation.” She designates this in a rather adamant verdict as ‘Hypermasculine Eurocentric Whiteness’ (HEW) in IR. Drawing a line from John Locke’s protestant educational principles to disciplinary IR, Ling diagnoses that Mainstream IR considers itself on a mission to educate and discipline the Other, especially the savage Other. Similar to the argument made by Cynthia Weber above, this drives HEW to “concentrate all its efforts and resources on maintaining the Self” and “to reduce or contain or, best of all, erase the Other”.⁷³⁸

In a more conciliatory tone, Shih et al. caution Mainstream IR to engage with alternative conceptions in earnest to avoid misunderstandings and legitimacy crisis of the field in general. Additionally, they also remind Chinese scholar to seek dialogue with Western IR and not set up entirely separate discourses. *Balance of Relationship* itself endeavors to bring Chinese, especially Confucian IR and Western IR together. Shi et al. attempt to promote a research program that involves “bilateralism, historiography embedded in cyclical view, relational role, order as the state of nature, cultural memory, and post-hybridity.” This research program intends to not only promote understanding but also to help address “those puzzles in Western IR that are currently either left unexplained or incorrectly explained.”⁷³⁹

The case for non-synthetic trans-subjectivity I want to explore further is the hybridization of English School and ‘Chinese School’ of IR. With the English School of IR (ES), yet another Western tradition has found a way into Chinese academia, as Zhang Yongjin (2003) elaborates in his “Travelogue of Ideas”. Zhang Yongjin is indeed one of the main protagonists, who bring Chinese IR and English School together and he can thus not serve as a verification of the hypothesis that a hybridization is happening *somehow*. Instead, his work is an intentional, purposeful research program, that nevertheless shows and exemplifies the scholarship that merges these two spheres. There are three main contributions to Chinese IR stemming from the adoption of ES paradigms. First, the over-emphasis on the state in Chinese IR could be overcome by the concept of *international society*. Second, the framework of

⁷³⁸ LHM Ling, “DON’T FLATTER YOURSELF: World Politics As We Know It Is Changing and So Must Disciplinary IR,” (Essay for the 50th Anniversary Celebration of IR Studies at Sussex University, “What’s the Point of IR?” 10-11 December 2015), 6-7.

⁷³⁹ Shi et al. 2019, 241.

primary institutions of international society provided by the English School can also enhance discourse on IR by broadening the research on, for example, regimes, by re-introducing questions of culture into IR research, as well as by building bridges between realist, liberal and constructivist theories of IR. The English School's third main contribution to Chinese IR is the discussion about *norms, justice and ethics*.⁷⁴⁰ Several aspects contribute to a popularization of the ES in China. The importance of history in its research agenda is attractive to Chinese IR scholars and an alleged poverty of IR theories despite twenty years of engagement with Western research fuels an increasing demand for a diversity in theoretical sources. Furthermore, the close relation between Chinese IR and English School is founded on a common "aversion to scientific and quantitative approaches still deeply entrenched in social sciences research in China today."⁷⁴¹

There seems to be an increase in cases of hybridization of English School and Chinese IR concepts. Zhang and Buzan's 2012 article "The Tributary System as International Society" and the volume *Contesting International Society in East Asia* for which they served as editors in 2014 for instance; also Zhang Yongjin's 2001 article "System, Empire and State", as well as Zhang Xiaoming's 2011 essay "China in the conception of international society", to name just a few examples. Buzan and Zhang problematize that the "most influential, theoretical perspective in the study of East Asian international relations remains that of the realist" and position the English School as an essential complementary program, which "explores the complex social constitution of the regional order (...) offering a contextualized social structural view of the region."⁷⁴² Even those who take multilateral arrangements serious but only do this insofar as such arrangements serve to constrain great powers make three big mistakes in Alice Ba's view. First, by prioritizing technical concerns of security management, this approach takes attention away from crucial normative aspects. Second, the agency of smaller states, a decisive factor in East Asia, is de-emphasized. These two problems lead to the third one: an unintentional uncritical acceptance of US ordering principles obscures the unreliability of the US as security provider in East Asia.⁷⁴³ What Alice Ba did not mention as critical characteristic of the East Asian regional international society, but Buzan and Zhang even draw as their main conclusion is "that 'East Asia' is both more diverse and more divided than other regions."⁷⁴⁴ Researchers

⁷⁴⁰ Zhang 2003, 95-98.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., 99-100.

⁷⁴² Barry Buzan and Yongjin Zhang, "Introduction: interrogating regional international society in East Asia," in Buzan and Zhang 2014, 14-15.

⁷⁴³ Ba 2020, 262-263.

⁷⁴⁴ Buzan and Zhang in Buzan and Zhang 2014, 220.

should caution themselves to treat neither East Asia in general nor China in particular as homogenous let alone monolithic elements of the political cosmos.

The crucial aspect at this point, I argue, is that English School and Asian IR, in the particular case of this work *Chinese IR*, have been experiencing a certain hybridization because the East Asian regional international society requires complex social institutions due to its high internal diversity and plurality, which lend themselves to analysis through a locally adapted English School framework. Through re-associating multilateralism with diplomacy (a primary institution of international society in English School terms) and treating it as a social practice, Ba reveals how norms of pluralism, sovereignty and equality have been institutionalized in East Asian multilateralism.⁷⁴⁵ Buzan and Zhang also point out how state (trans)formation has been informed by particular understandings of sovereignty and nationalism in the region.⁷⁴⁶ Even conflictual dynamics often still serve to “heighten the importance of multilateralism’s diplomatic purposes and functions (...).”⁷⁴⁷ Stressing the uniqueness of East Asia’s development, Buzan and Zhang diagnose “regionally distinctive attempts to achieve order, security and prosperity”, which have been successful in increasing cohesion despite fragmentation in the region.⁷⁴⁸ Even more so, notwithstanding current challenges, multilateral diplomatic networks that ensure dialogue and contact between plural actors seem to meet a growing demand and therefore can be predicted to remain a major factor in East Asian international relations.⁷⁴⁹ I suggest to extend the line of thinking of Buzan and Zhang in their description of East Asian distinctiveness and Ba in her illustration of the deeply rooted, layered and sophisticated East Asian multilateral diplomatic networks. The diverse and plural nature of East Asian international society both studies discern, I argue, is the reason necessitating and benefitting the constitution, resilience and adaptability of the region’s identity as highly social and relational international system.

Switching from an East Asian regional perspective to a national Chinese perspective complicates the circumstances of foreign affairs even further. The realist theory of international relations often serves the role of the USA in their unique geopolitical position, which neighbors Canada and Mexico and still maintains the Monroe doctrine according to which, simply speaking, no foreign power should be allowed to develop a dominant position in the western hemisphere. One might describe this as a rather straightforward geopolitical setting. The

⁷⁴⁵ Ba 2020, 263.

⁷⁴⁶ Buzan and Zhang in Buzan and Zhang 2014, 18.

⁷⁴⁷ Ba 2020, 271.

⁷⁴⁸ Buzan and Zhang in Buzan and Zhang 2014, 15.

⁷⁴⁹ Ba 2020, 275.

People's Republic of China on the contrary, has an entirely different starting point. Russia, India and Japan as major players of global politics rest in closest vicinity to China. The same is true for North Korea and Afghanistan, two major global conflict zones. The highly complex state groups of Central Asia and Southeast Asia, with the demographically big local player Indonesia, are also still in proximity to China. Eventually, even Beijing's *local* foreign policy enterprises inevitably also clash with the regional presence of the US, which has decisive infrastructure for effective power projection over the Pacific to surround China strategically. As Vasilis Trigkas explains, "(...) with India and Vietnam to its West and the Southwest, Japan to its East and Indonesia to its South and Australia lurking from the back, a balancing coalition out-populating China may be formed."⁷⁵⁰ Most of these are all just geographical realities without much interpretation or theorization. This account just serves to strengthen the picture of diversity and plurality in the global neighborhood of China and the complexity of the regional international society it has to conduct its relations in. This results in a regional pattern resembling the "concert of powers" in 19th century Europe. China, India, Japan, Russia, the US and the secondary powers can never be considered separately in Eastern Eurasia.

Zhang and Buzan offer a historical perspective on the complex nature of East Asia as geopolitical region. "The Tributary System as International Society" deals with the puzzle of the Tributary System's longevity and resilience on the one hand but also its adaptability and malleability on the other hand. The tributary system existed as a discourse that transcended culture to include non-Chinese cultural impact and it was, furthermore, contingent and always subject to the wider political, cultural, economic, social and strategic context.⁷⁵¹ From a social understanding, the Tributary System was not only a particular set of discursive, but also of institutional practices that defined, governed and regulated the so-called Pax Sinica.⁷⁵² It was an articulation of East Asian international society because it was a complex of shared institutional practices and it was constitutive of, as Zhang and Buzan express it, deep rules of the game of East Asian international relations.⁷⁵³

Ling presents another perspective on the English School, one that is quite contrary to the voices, who merge Chinese IR and English School. First, she points how ES scholar still call for an assimilation or conversion of China into the mainstream value system to achieve China's peaceful rise. The English School was indeed founded on the belief that a certain cultural common ground is necessary for international society. This Eurocentric tendency has been

⁷⁵⁰ Trigkas 2020, 8-9.

⁷⁵¹ Zhang and Buzan 2012, 23

⁷⁵² Ibid., 7

⁷⁵³ Ibid., 34

rectified but it seems, not to Ling's satisfaction. *tianxia*, described by Shih as the dynamic of all being bound to relate, might be a non-Western common ground, a transcultural ES could imagine to be the basis of international society. Second, she refers to Qin Yaqing, whose work on the co-production of identity expresses the idea that international society reflects a complexity of relational networks. On this basis, she argues that the agenda for world politics is determined by the way China engages this relational context and not by the norms and practices of primary institutions. Lastly, she returns to her critique in the Westphalian belief system and accuses states with a 'Westphalian Self', to be trapped in a logic of antagonism both politically and epistemically. It seems that "[o]nly the Westphalian Self can theorise about the rest, not the other way around." Her arguments lead me to ask the question again whether the Western-led world order can even exist without an element of Yellow Peril/China threat because, in Ling's words, "Westphalian IR entrenches the China threat thesis". Liberal world order, she repeats is just another Western hegemonic project that needs to be overcome to reach a truly inclusive international system. This seems partially reminiscent to Zhao Tingyang's claim that the UN is dysfunctional and therefore should be replaced by a *tianxia* system.⁷⁵⁴

5.10. Summary

Ultimately, there are three standpoints here: Shih et al. want Western mainstream IR to appropriate their 'Balance of Relationships' theory, the English School has been appropriated by Chinese IR and this starts to resonate back so that a transcultural feedback loop is developing, the third is Ling's conviction that nothing short of an epistemic transformation will bring progress in the discipline. The common idea of all three positions is the inevitable dynamic of exchange. Ling's research program, ironically, seems to lend itself more to a dichotomous thinking. Others leave more space for ideas of transcultural communication, transposition and hybridization (or post-hybridization). An aspect addressed rarely is how much the West learned from Eastern societies and how prominent Eastern influences have been on Western societies, research, politics and culture.

At the heart of the issue of de/essentialization is my argument that world order is a constant condition of the world to which every element of the global political cosmos has been contributing for quite some time. Of course, it would be another research project to identify what makes agents 'global' and how an element becomes a global political force, irrespective of how small a force that might be. This is, however, not the intention of my argument here.

⁷⁵⁴ Ling 2013, 552-557.

There is an epistemological current towards transculturization of elementary cognitive meaning-making. In other words, a current that causes human knowledge to constantly gather in hybrid, pluralist supersystems of knowledge. The counter-force is a dynamic that works against this current in assigning a certain power capacity to knowledge. In other words, knowledge from the global south is less powerful in international discourse than knowledge from the US. This is a, if not *the*, basic insight of postcolonial theory. A third aspect to this is the power potential of knowledge. Nationalism was once a subaltern force wielded by communities in their struggle for independence from oppression. Yet, the power potential of this belief system has proven to be overwhelming. A question that appears on the sidelines of the present thesis might thus be how strong the power potential of *tianxia* or Confucianism is for future global politics.

6. Practices, Fields and Cycles of International Relations

This chapter makes explicit what the present thesis has been conducting so far: mapping the creation and contestation of spaces of legitimate action, spaces that are termed institutions in English School and the practices that arise from the encounter between subjectivities and norms-systems. The most important concepts of Practice Theory will be elaborated alongside their relevance and similarities with English School or Chinese IR concepts. The rationale for combining these different sets of theories is that they complement each other while sharing a number of fundamental concepts and lines of thinking. Chinese theory requires an understanding of hegemony and conflict, while Practice Theory benefits from incorporating Chinese influence to enhance its grasp of change, transformation and evolution. Eventually, this chapter will conclude with the presentation of the model of a ‘double-cycle of international relations’, which is based on propositions of *renqing*-habitus and *li*-institution as they will be developed in the remainder of this chapter.

A discrepancy persists between Chinese and Western IR. Chinese IR seems to hold the conviction that most actors in international relations intent to coexist peacefully, work together in maintaining stability and order and naturally gravitate towards harmony and clemency. Western IR, and of course especially neorealism, is more preoccupied with the use of force, power struggles, survival and security under anarchy. Practice theory, I argue can be the link between those two very disparate approaches. This is not because it represents a philosophy that stands in the middle between them, but because it is situated on a level where the two other approaches can be connected on a conceptual-functional level. Theories of hegemony as they are popular in Western thought and the prevalent theme of dominance in Practice Theory suffer from a difficulty to understand change and transformation in systems. The ‘relentless movement of the dao’ as described in the last chapter might offer a solution to this blind, or at least blurred, spot.

Bourdieu’s weakness in domestic environments is his greatest strength in international environments: the pervasiveness of the themes of hegemony and struggle. He might propose a relational approach but “[t]he relations he constructs are invariably competitive rather than cooperative, unconscious rather than conscious, and hierarchical rather than egalitarian. The recurring image of social life one finds in Bourdieu's work is one of competitive distinction,

domination, and misperception.”⁷⁵⁵ His “thought is at its core a theory of domination”, as Pouliot and Mérand explain, demonstrating how international relations are constituted by fields of forces, which themselves are sets of objective power relations imposed upon all those who enter them.⁷⁵⁶ Following Bourdieu’s method “aims to reveal this ‘deep structure’ of domination and subordination (...).”⁷⁵⁷ In short, Bourdieu’s strength in analyzing international contexts lies in his focus on hegemony and struggle. Although he advocates for a relational approach, his work predominantly portrays relationships as competitive, hierarchical, and rooted in unconscious power dynamics. His approach views relationships as competitive and hierarchical, focusing on how domination shapes social life and international relations as their own form of social life.

An important aspect, which distinguishes Practice Theory from Realism in IR, is the meaning of culture in struggles for hegemony. In contrast to theories only concerned with material power, here it can be observed that, in the social war, culture provides the weapons⁷⁵⁸ because “Bourdieu’s notion of rules (or *nomos*) is traversed with power,” again emphasizing that his “theory is predicated on the ubiquity of social domination.”⁷⁵⁹ “Culture, then, is not devoid of political content but rather is an expression of it.”⁷⁶⁰ This will be elaborated in some detail below. It is also important to note, however, that “he also sees his concept as distinct from views that stress total domination (...) fields are *fields of struggle*,” since they can be described as “sites of resistance as well as domination”.⁷⁶¹ Bourdieu hence allows us to account for the struggles among actors of global politics but not fall into the trap of reductionist materialistic conceptualizations of power, but widen the analysis towards a comprehensive understanding of meanings of power as well as powers of meaning, within – most importantly - a relational ontology. One central pillar of Bourdieu’s work is the question how legitimation works, a crucial question in the conduct of international relations, which touches the whole range of global politics from great powers to transnational actors and is at its core a cultural, value-laden issue.

There is a link back to the previous chapter and the issue of Taiwan-PRC relationships concerning the political power of culture in the case presented here. The PRC promotes Chinese cultural heritage as raw material from which to build a new universal world order, Taiwan needs

⁷⁵⁵ Swartz 1997, 63.

⁷⁵⁶ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 36.

⁷⁵⁷ Swartz 1997, 85.

⁷⁵⁸ Frédéric Mérand and Amélie Forget, “Strategy,” in Adler-Nissen 2013, 100.

⁷⁵⁹ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 33.

⁷⁶⁰ Swartz 1997, 7.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

to prove that this cultural heritage is not universal even though it shares this heritage, non-Chinese scholars from around the world, as a third faction, have taken up this discourse and occupy a whole breadth of positions from falling in line with Chinese universalism on the one pole to criticizing cultural essentialism as unscientific on the other. The fact that we have two distinct Chinese actors in this intellectual field is highly fascinating, since they both have to refer to the same cultural background, albeit with widely different scholarly conclusions. The approach introduced in this chapter may prove instrumental in elucidating this dynamic further.

The salience of norms-systems might be illuminated by separating system and order, as the English School initiated, and follow Yan Xuetong's discussion in this matter. Yan, interestingly, refers to trade norms as one example thus supporting the idea that trade can be considered as an international institution. He also calls the tributary system an international system on par with the contemporary "sovereignty system". Yan's system consists of *norms*, *actors* and their *configuration*, which is the exact definition of Bourdieu's fields. The concept of order in his definition consists of the same *norms*, but different to a system, order contains the two elements of *institutional arrangements* and *values*. Since "international norms are formed under the guidance of international mainstream values" as Yan explains, "the former will change along with changes in the latter." This implies that, according to Yan, order is not a result of the systemization of international relations, given that norms are derived from values. It seems more that system and order co-constitute each other. Values and the coexistence of actors result in a particular institutional arrangement and a social configuration of positions. Something similar can be inferred from *The Anarchical Society*. Hedley Bull also does not diagnose a simple cause-and-effect-chain from rules to order either. Instead, he suggests that order as a constant condition of international relations causes rules, rather than the other way around. It is worth pointing out that Yan Xuetong depicts a complex arrangement of system and order in the same section where he makes an explicit reference to Hedley Bull.

Yan clarifies the distinction between system and order with the explicit objective of discerning the ramifications of shifts in international leadership on the global political landscape. One might propose that the international system, led by the Netherlands, Britain or the USA in succession from the 17th century onwards, never changed its fundamental character of capitalist, rules-based order in general. However, the particular institutions underwent significant changes in response to shifts in the global political environment, including the outlawing of slavery, the growing prominence of environmental concerns, and the modernization of trade regulations. Systemic threats on the other side appeared in the form of Napoleonic France, Nazi-Germany or the Soviet Union, all of which tried to transform the most

fundamental principles of the global political cosmos far beyond merely adjusting the normative features of the international order contained within the super-structure of the international system.⁷⁶²

This brief introduction touched upon several aspects of the present chapter. It is crucial to demonstrate that Western and Chinese IR are not distinct and disparate approaches. This chapter is designed to achieve this objective through an ambitious discussion of several sources. These diverse scholarly sources collectively represent a transcultural approach to IR that does not restrict the understanding of international order to superpower competition or poststructuralist constructivism. This approach is able to perceive both the force of conventional power and the influence of ideas and beliefs in the same analysis and acknowledges the role of actors in their cultural diversity for the reproduction of international order. First, the general nexus of relationality and power will be explored. Second, the subjectivity of states will be represented by habitus, reinterpreted through Chinese IR as '*renqing*-habitus'. Third, the social environment of states will be recast as fields, which will be expanded by a specific Chinese idea of norms and thus termed '*li*-institutions'. Eventually, the development of these concepts results in an attempt to propose an idea of a 'double-cycle' of international relations, not as an examination device or method, but as a model or change of perspective to look at international relations.

6.1. Relationality and Power

Pointing out the similarities between Bourdieusian philosophy and contemporary Chinese philosophy of IR is not a self-serving exercise. It is a practice in transculturality that contributes to IR by placing the development of theory on a level where claims for cultural essence disappear in order to implement a synthesis of separate schools. No longer merely fixed on the interplay between structure and actor, field and habitus are introduced to enhance the conceptual instruments with which to examine international relations. Bourdieusian Practice Theory enables a researcher to examine "relations that shape action rather than properties"⁷⁶³ as Swartz elucidates. Actors voluntarily or involuntarily work together to create and/or maintain fields and draw their motivation from the social structure of a field and their strategies from their relational web. Their emotional, social, economic or political 'investedness' in each other constitutes the world they life in.

⁷⁶² Yan 2019, 75-77.

⁷⁶³ Swartz 1997, 119.

In the context of IR, this means that the level of analysis is “not focused on substances, such as the state and state actors, or essentialized concepts such as politics or globalization, but instead on the ‘totality of relations’” in which “there are no privileged actors as such, but rather relations of dependence, contestation or distinction (...) that depend on the positions occupied by agents in the field.”⁷⁶⁴ Practice Theory diverges from Western mainstream thought by eschewing the prioritization of individual agency but proposing “instead to begin with the middle, with the relations between (in)dividuals.”⁷⁶⁵ The notion of relational webs and the concept of the totality of relations bear striking resemblance to those put forth by Qin Yaqing. Power concepts must be adapted to this relational ontology because simple ideas of capabilities and coercion no longer function here.

Practice Theory complements the concept of actor with the concept of habitus as socialized, creative subjectivity, as explained below. Together with the idea of fields, Practice Theory thus constructs a relational ontology. Consequently, practices motivated by such a habitus are neither structural nor agential and are not immediately directed by interests or norms but instead by a practical sense for the environment, making social action *relational*.⁷⁶⁶ Perhaps Qin Yaqing proposed a good compromise in speaking of relators instead of actors, to keep in mind the relational nature of actors. Competence in social behavior forms through a certain regularity in encounters with other agents⁷⁶⁷, which supports Qin’s idea that the power resources from a relation increase by the frequent use of that relation and decrease by neglect⁷⁶⁸. Not only Bourdieu and Qin, however, founded their philosophy on a relational ontology. Navari reminds us that one of the fathers of the English School, Charles Manning, postulated in the 1930s that international relations constituted a set of social relationships. Furthermore, he also considered shared rules to be important part of international activity in a similar way to Bourdieu’s ‘rules of the game’.⁷⁶⁹

Didier Bigo astutely summarizes Practice Theory: The basis for the behavior of actors is “neither emotion, nor rational choice and strategic thinking; it is the result of their habitus, of their dispositions.” The two most crucial factors that shape habitus are *relations* to others and past *experiences*, an aspect where Shi’s utilization of *memory* as a key concept should be pointed out as a striking similarity. He also makes the relationality in Practice Theory

⁷⁶⁴ Pouliot and Mérand 2013, 32-33.

⁷⁶⁵ Bigo in Adler-Nissen 2013, 124.

⁷⁶⁶ Pouliot 2008, 274-276.

⁷⁶⁷ Mérand and Forget 2013, 97.

⁷⁶⁸ Qin 2018, 266-267.

⁷⁶⁹ Navari 2010, 611-612.

unambiguously clear: “Their identities, personalities, even bodies are not autonomous points, but points in relation to other points.” The practices here are “practices of distinction positioning the individuals and groups in regard to other groups”. The need to act from a certain position in a social configuration, in combination with particular dispositions, produces practices. That is why “the ‘middle’ (i.e. the relation), forms the extremities (the points), not the reverse.” In order to become an actor, one must occupy a position within the social configuration of a field and this position is always defined by its relation to dominant and subaltern positions.⁷⁷⁰ I will approach the nexus of relationality and power through the two aspects of cultural systems and capital as power resources.

6.1.1. Norms and Rules as Cultural Systems

The interconnection of relationality and power is best represented by norms- and rules-systems, but to comprehend such a complex interconnection an analysis must proceed gradually and step by step. The powers of meaning-making, expressed in the concept of culture elaborated in this section, are the key to the present thesis and effectively bridge the English School, “Chinese School” and Practice Theory. This connection is evident in the shared belief of scholars such as Ling and Zhao in the transformative potential of knowledge—a notion that also finds resonance in Bourdieu's work. Moreover, this approach is a way of examining Chinese contributions to IR and their impact on international IR scholarship. Confucianism, the predominant cultural system in the literature reviewed by this research, is central to this discussion and has become *the* national symbol per se, as was already mentioned in chapter four. According to Rošker, Chinese philosophers “also stressed that in order to make our relational capacity operational, an elaborate symbolic system, such as human language, was necessary.”⁷⁷¹

For the Chinese case, there is a domestic example of the power of norms-system in party doctrines, which function as politically imposed cognitive frames. Feng Zhang explains that the leadership's worldview, main political objectives and desired mode of rule are the three main components of party doctrines and aim at cohering the practices and dispositions of the ‘party-state’. He continues elaborating that doctrines define and transform the rules and norms of behavior because they interact with cognitive frames and belief systems that “shape actor's views of themselves and the world.”⁷⁷²

⁷⁷⁰ Bigo in Adler-Nissen 2013, 124.

⁷⁷¹ Rošker 2021, 96.

⁷⁷² Feng Zhang, “The Xi Jinping Doctrine of China’s International Relations,” *Asia Policy* 14, no. 3 (2019): 10.

Cornelia Navari is one of the most prominent advocates for a connection of Practice Theory and IR studies, particularly English School. One reason might be that both of which share Bourdieu's interest in intersubjective "sense-making systems (culture, symbols, ideology, education, taste)".⁷⁷³ She mentions that "Martha Finnemore and Peter Katzenstein, have recorded their indebtedness to the English School as a forerunner in the idea that norms influence behaviour" and the concept of norms can indeed be a fertile ground from which a synthesis emerges. English School concepts such as system, society and community are also intimately related to norms, values and cultural facts. In contrast to American scholarship, however, the English School does not consider cultural facts such as norms direct causes for behavior.⁷⁷⁴ By drawing on symbolic systems from Practice Theory, Chinese scholarship, and the English School, this section seeks to develop a more sophisticated framework for understanding the impact of norms on behavior. Navari, referencing Reckwitz, highlights the importance of cultural perspectives, noting that they introduce symbolic systems and the "collective cognitive" as shared bodies of knowledge. Social order is embedded in these systems and their "socially shared way of ascribing meaning to the world" thus legitimates the norms of a specific order. Consequently, the methodological insight emerges that "social action should be understood (and explained) by reconstructing cognitive-symbolic structures."⁷⁷⁵ Culture, therefore, should not be treated as independent variable that determines the behavior of actors but rather as "the context of social relations that provides them with symbolic resources (such as military doctrines) and practices".⁷⁷⁶

Symbolic systems naturally connect to norms and morality. They also relate to trans-subjectivity by elucidating how a habitus influences practices because habitus as set of dispositions is shared among individuals but non-synthetic. Shattered, fractal, and contradictory are the words used to describe habitus in the section on subjectivity below, which aligns with Shih et al.'s idea of 'non-synthetic'. This forecloses images of habitus as coherent causal source for practices. Aspects of recognition, capital and cultural power, I argue, represent keys to access valid insights into the constitution and maintenance of relationships and, in a second step, social order. The crucial aspect is that social order, even world order, thus rests on cultural systems, which include systems of norms and rules. Therefore, any examination of world order must incorporate an understanding of these systems. A research program focusing on the question(s) "What is order/Who is actor?" is especially attentive to the inter- or trans-subjective

⁷⁷³ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 25.

⁷⁷⁴ Navari 2010, 612.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid., 618.

⁷⁷⁶ Mérand and Forget in Adler-Nissen 2013, 100.

aspects of these systems. Rules-systems are also systems of communication, circulation and hegemony that exist inside as well as outside of each actor, weaving them into a complex web of shared symbols, norms and dispositions, they can be referred to as ‘culture’ as well.

For the present thesis, the emphasis on culture means that “social life needs to be understood in the contexts of rules, norms, and structures that provide part of its coherence and, often, its regularities.”⁷⁷⁷ Here, again, a link to the English School can be found. Navari points out that Chales Manning developed a “games approach” to inter-state relations in which “he treated games as purposive and rule-following activities which were intelligible as systems of meaning.” Additionally, she mentions that Martin Wight claimed that IR “should include the cultural conceptions behind diplomatic practice”.⁷⁷⁸ It thus already becomes clear how norms are seen as much more than simple causes for behavior. Swartz locates Bourdieu in a tradition with Durkheim in considering “symbolic systems as classification systems that provide both *logical and social integration*”, but contrarily to the latter, for Bourdieu the result of this integrative force is not a consensual order but domination⁷⁷⁹, what in IR terms might be called hegemony.

According to Derek Gregory, culture is “the production, circulation, and legitimation of meanings through representations, practices, and performances that enter fully into the constitution of the world.”⁷⁸⁰ He arrives at this conclusion after engaging with Edward Said’s work on the concept of culture. Embedding this idea into the theoretical framework of this thesis leads to an interesting speculation. If culture is the production of meanings through practices and institutions are practices, then culture is the production of meanings through institutions. Conversely, the process of meaning-production through institutions thus is culture. Translated into Practice Theory, institutions would then “simultaneously perform three interrelated but distinct functions: cognition, communication and social differentiation.”⁷⁸¹

Two additional points merit attention. First, the systems described are specific to certain games with their own history, trajectory and genesis to which even the basic justification of all categories in the cognitive system is tied to.⁷⁸² In Didier Bigo’s words: “Categories are the results of power relations in the world, they are not neutral or transhistorical ‘concepts’, a central lesson for anyone who wants to work on ‘security’.”⁷⁸³ Second, Practice Theory enriches

⁷⁷⁷ Williams in Adler-Nissen 2013, 132.

⁷⁷⁸ Navari 2010, 614-615.

⁷⁷⁹ Swartz 1997, 48.

⁷⁸⁰ Gregory 2005, 8.

⁷⁸¹ Swartz 1997, 82-83.

⁷⁸² Bigo 2011, 230.

⁷⁸³ Bigo in Adler-Nissen 2013, 125.

the understanding of recognition by integrating the dispositions of habitus into the system. Recognition here is not simply a conscious consent but a mobilization of “dispositions, which agents have internalised in and through their practices”.⁷⁸⁴

This introduction to cultural symbolic systems also needs to refer back to ‘*minxin*’, the ‘feelings of the people’ or ‘shared aspirations of the people’ as it appeared in Zhao Tingyang’s and Yan Xuetong’s work. *Minxin*, in Zhao Tingyang’s definition, are what “through a long-term process of practical reasoning, has proven itself to be beneficial to all” they are not however, “a collective body of desires, but rather a conveyance of the common understanding of a set of possibly shareable experiences, traditions, and histories.”⁷⁸⁵ Experiences, traditions and histories conveyed in a common understanding cannot refer to anything other than the shared bodies of knowledge and cognitive symbolic structures mentioned as part of Practice Theory and English School. *Minxin* is the basis of both Zhao’s and Yan’s morality, which thus proves to have a striking familiarity with Practice Theory, especially for Zhao due to his definition of *minxin*. Essentially, these Chinese scholars construct an idea of order similar to that in Practice Theory, grounded in a habitus that arises from intersubjective belief systems (such as *minxin* or *renqing*) on one hand, and on social actor configurations guided by moral codes that function like rules of the game in a field that is shaped by Confucian rituals (*li*), on the other hand. This construct of order becomes even more pertinent in Confucian governance, as it will be explored under the headline “Norms-systems in fields” later on, in the form of Qin Yaqing’s theory against the background of its own similarities to Practice Theory.

Both Yan’s and Qin’s works also explicitly highlight the role of values in establishing order, particularly in their connection to norms. Yan’s ambitious proposal to “combine” Confucian and liberal values to create a more solid foundation international relations is one example of this very explicit work with such concepts. Observing how laboriously Qin and Yan work through the content of virtues and values in trying to build a model of a good Confucian international order, however, demonstrates how challenging it is to aim one’s research program at the content of morality rather than its processes and structures. Despite the specific values they discuss, the key insight is that both scholars identify a layer of governance beneath formal norms, a cultural system of dispositions underlying the conscious system of official rules. This sensitivity to culture and the rejection of the simple idea of norms as causes of behavior links their theories to Practice Theory.

⁷⁸⁴ Guzzini in Adler-Nissen 2013, 81-82.

⁷⁸⁵ Zhao 2016, 31-35; this was translated as “Volksseele” in the German edition, implying a spiritual aspect.

Power is not a field or force unidirectionally influencing people but conversely independent from human individuals. The existence of power is contingent on the existence of human relationships. Hence, symbolic systems themselves possess no power of their own, they exert power by virtue of representing powerful social structures. The social configuration within a field forms a hierarchy that legitimizes certain positions and the actors who occupy them. Consequently, legitimacy is what ultimately determines power, more on that below. Power that “is not understood as a cause, but as a disposition (capacity), in which its character is constituted through social relations” of “legitimate domination that cannot be understood in terms of consent or contract.”⁷⁸⁶ Actors internalize social structures into their cognitive systems and “then unwittingly reproduce the social order by classifying the social world with the same categories with which it classifies them.” Cultural systems can always be traced back to particular groups and their interests, who constructed the system with the intention to legitimize a particular hierarchy.⁷⁸⁷

In *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, Yan Xuetong refers to the Confucian principle according to which a ruler is obliged to employ worthy, capable and skilled ministers, as already mentioned in the corresponding chapter of this thesis. Similarly, Practice Theory clarifies that social hierarchies, cultural systems and power are interconnected. The employment of skilled and worthy ministers, therefore, proves that Confucianism possesses a profound understanding of the way the interconnection of these subtle power structures work. Moreover, it illustrates that power is contingent upon the capacity of an order to legitimize itself through the reproduction of cultural-symbolic systems. A political elite with a seemingly natural authority is of course the most effective way of consolidating and maintaining order. This addresses both the notion that power represents the social configuration of a field and the idea that cultural systems depend on human individuals, thus linking the subjectivity of habitus with the topography of fields.

The fundamental mechanism through which the power of symbolic systems operates is the *misrecognition* of arbitrary structures as legitimate structures. “Actors misrecognize the arbitrary character of their social worlds when they take for granted the definition of rewards and of ways of obtaining them”, as Swartz explains, “though they may contest the legitimacy of rewards given by fields, nonetheless reproduce the structure of fields.”⁷⁸⁸ He elaborates that “the principal mode of domination has shifted from overt coercion (...) to forms of symbolic

⁷⁸⁶ Guzzini in Adler-Nissen 2013, 86.

⁷⁸⁷ Swartz 1997, 86.

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

manipulation”, which justifies the “focus on the role that cultural processes, producers, and institutions play in maintaining inequality in contemporary societies.”⁷⁸⁹ Cultural power is the force applied to “define reality itself” when actors seek to impose a certain vision of their world, a vision “expressed in dispositions, in the positions that actors take” and in the “common sense” that legitimizes a certain order. This misrecognition and naturalization, as effect of symbolic power, becomes part of actor’s dispositions in their habitus.⁷⁹⁰ It can be described as a “cultural matrix that generates self-fulfilling prophecies” and “legitimizes economic and social inequality by providing a practical and taken-for-granted acceptance of the fundamental conditions of existence.”⁷⁹¹ The core of the cultural power of a particular social order is the ability to gain consent from then supposed subjects of that order. “The adherence by strong states to global ‘norms’ might not be an end in itself”, as Go elaborates, but instead serve to establish legitimacy, even the legitimate use of violence to uphold violators of norms.⁷⁹²

The fact that actors on the top of the hierarchy adhere to the rules serves the naturalization of the social order that keeps those actors in power, linking legitimization and naturalization. One shared aspect among the scholarship mentioned here and Queer Theory is this notion of *naturalization*. Regarding the example of gender, Jabri phrases “the discursive construction of the international and its inequalities” as an “embodiment of subordination”, which is “perpetually implicated in the reproduction of structural continuities that generate inequality.”⁷⁹³ Order, understood as the naturalization of arbitrariness or the misrecognition of synthetic social configurations as natural hierarchies, is a common thread between these theories. Shih Chih-yu even proposes to apply the insights from this research not only to external orders but to endogenous subjectivities and advocates for a non-synthetic subjectivity. The shared criticism of naturalization can enhance the understanding of international relations through a Queer International Relations Theory (QIR) that blends with English School and progressive Chinese IR ideas. Confucianism is a special case, representing an idea of moral, social order that is *identical* with nature and the cosmos, the mundane application of which is expressed by the concept of *li* 禮 that is elaborated in its modern translation below.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid., 82.

⁷⁹⁰ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 38-39.

⁷⁹¹ Swartz 1997, 104-105.

⁷⁹² See Julian Go, “Global Fields and Imperial Forms: Field Theory and the British and American Empires,” *Sociological Theory* 26, no. 3 (2008): 208-209.

⁷⁹³ Jabri in Adler-Nissen 2013, 154.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy is “a systematic acceptance by the subordinated”⁷⁹⁴, of a particular order, and the question for legitimacy is the question how hegemonic systems reproduce “without powerful resistance and without the conscious recognition of their members.” The answer is that hegemony rests on “cultural resources, processes, and institutions” because “successful exercise of power requires legitimation.” Legitimacy is hence also a key to the creation and especially the contestation of spaces of legitimate action. Concerning China, this raises the questions to which degree it still takes part in reproducing order and to which degree it disrupts the order it is existing in, and why legitimacy has broken down in certain areas to enable criticism and transformation. Symbolic systems, culture, norms and values serve “as resources that both constitute and maintain power structures.”⁷⁹⁵ Culture is a power resource because all power requires legitimation and Practice Theory “stresses the active role played by taken-for-granted assumptions in the constitution and maintenance of power relations.” The core mechanism for this is misrecognition, which “denotes ‘denial’ of the economic and political interests present in a set of practices.”⁷⁹⁶

This idea of subtlety may seem out of place in the context of open power struggles among states as typically discussed in IR. A counterexample would be the claim that the present “rules-based international order” benefits everyone even though it is dominated by the US. In international context, proponents of that order do not disguise their adherence to that order as altruistic and disinterested entirely, yet the effort to gain legitimacy follows a similar pattern. Practice Theory terms this behavior ‘symbolic practices’ and defines their purpose as to “deflect attention from the interested character of practices and thereby contribute to their enactment as disinterested pursuits.” This misrecognition of self-interest as disinterest, of strategy as benevolence, hence “legitimizes these practices and thereby contributes to the reproduction of the social order in which they are embedded.” Legitimacy determines the effective exercise of material and political power because force and material resources alone cannot maintain any order. Institutions produce power “by transforming relations of interest into disinterested meanings and by legitimating arbitrary relations of power as the natural order of things”.⁷⁹⁷ This conceptualization can be linked to the English school’s idea of institutions, as will be

⁷⁹⁴ Guzzini in Adler-Nissen 2013, 81.

⁷⁹⁵ Swartz 1997, 6-8.

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 90-93.

elaborated below. The way Confucianism is presented in some of Chinese IR is a prime example of representing the conduct of foreign policy as disinterested practices to gain legitimacy.

Competitions for legitimacy take place in fields as “*arenas of struggle for legitimation: (...) for the right to monopolize the exercise of ‘symbolic violence’*”, symbolic violence being synonymous with symbolic power, the power over symbolic systems and thus over misrecognition.⁷⁹⁸ Returning to the way fields influence institutions further illuminates the concept of legitimacy because legitimate practices are also determined by actor’s positions within a social configuration. Hence, analyzing the creation of institutions and their practices in particular, “allows understanding of their deployment, the limited repertoires that each social universe constitutes, and also permits the unpacking of strategies of legitimisation of any durable institution.”⁷⁹⁹ Through this approach, the attention shifts to culture as expressed in systems of norms, rules and values as institutions in the explanation of legitimate hegemony in international relations. I quote Swartz to summarize Bourdieu’s idea of “worldmaking power”, which clarifies the link between legitimacy, institutions and power:

“(...) every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to those power relations. (...) Bourdieu understands ideology (...) as the capacity to impose the means for comprehending and adapting to the social world by representing economic and political power in disguised, taken-for-granted forms.”⁸⁰⁰

Regarding power and hegemony, Yan argues that the role of leadership is to provide stability through the implementation of norms and rules. This can be interpreted in two ways: either as a benign act where the hegemon offers a stable environment, or as a strategy where norm systems serve as another tool for maintaining hegemony. Zhao Tingyang, Qin Yaqing and Yan Xuetong in particular employ Confucianism as symbolic-cultural strategy to frame power-driven foreign policy as universally benevolent global politics. An additional point is Yan’s insistence that the ability to implement reforms is the moral obligation of a legitimate government, as it was mentioned in the section on morality in Chinese IR theories. Yan equates reforms with progress, which he unambiguously deems normatively superior to retrogression.⁸⁰¹ The unconditional belief in teleological progress, however, is criticized by Shi et al. as surrender to dominating Western belief systems and part of the construction of synthetic

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid., 123.

⁷⁹⁹ Bigo in Adler-Nissen 2013, 124.

⁸⁰⁰ Swartz 1997, 89.

⁸⁰¹ Yan 2019, 24.

subjectivity. This should not be surprising since Yan already demanded a unified ideology for the Chinese nation with which to gain global approval for a Chinese world order.

It is striking that Confucianism seems to be the prime case of a governance philosophy, which exemplarily practices Bourdieu's core idea of misrecognition, yet research in this direction is scarcely found. Structuring this examination with the help of the English School's concept of institutions further helps to design a research program. A recent example would be China's vaccine diplomacy, which helped China gain a significant influence through a foreign policy that could easily be portrayed as explicitly not guided by self-interest. Global health cooperation might even evolve to become a new primary institution of international society as a field of practices, rules and stakes. This would be an especially fascinating case, since classic power capabilities are not directly applicable and the size of a state or the magnitude of its power do not directly correspond to the way a state can handle a pandemic. Additionally, a pandemic is a particularly 'human' threat since it directly targets every single human individual's body in a population, which is affected by a variety of factors of health preconditions, lifestyles and habitus of certain groups.

These complex workings of cultural systems so far addressed aspects of relationality, norms-systems as externalized power structures, dispositions as internalized power structures and the salience of the human element in power relations. This mechanism of legitimation through symbolic practices that promote misrecognition and naturalization has an origin. Bigo attributes this role to what he terms "transnational guilds." While this term suggests a conceptual framework that may be more expansive than the reality it describes, it remains a valuable notion for analysis. The concept of transnational guilds also underpins the significance of IR scholars for this thesis, providing a rationale for focusing on the work of IR theorists.

Bigo states that "security and especially global (in)security is the stake of a specific game, of a specific field, which has as agents all the professionals dealing with the management of fears and unease".⁸⁰² Intellectuals take a central role because their work "produces symbolic power by transforming relations of interest into disinterested meanings."⁸⁰³ The field of politics revolves around a stake that "is intellectual, since it is about the way the world is made sense of, how it is classified", as Guzzini concludes. His ideas are similar to Bigo's and refer to intellectual enterprises of knowledge production. Guzzini also identifies a group of people as object of research because for him, this "explains the closeness of the political field to, and the

⁸⁰² Bigo in Adler-Nissen 2013, 121.

⁸⁰³ Swartz 1997, 44.

inclusion of, social actors who handle ideas and who also give them authority, like scientists.”⁸⁰⁴ In short, specialists, so called cultural producers, have always played an important role in legitimizing social order.⁸⁰⁵ Consequently, individuals like Zhao Tingyang or L.H.M. Ling are crucial sources for data in a research program on international relations. Even though the Confucian focus on worthy ministers refers to a national government and not to transnational networks of specialists and experts, the human aspect is still something that indirectly links Confucianism and the idea of transnational guilds in Practice Theory.

For Confucians, legitimacy is contingent upon morality, thereby establishing a connection between the individual and the system. Morality, as far as it can be inferred from the sources of this thesis, is both a personal capacity but also a condition of a social order. It is a subjective phenomenon that is also manifest at the level of social interaction. However, morality must originate with the individual human being, which is what makes it a part of the individual's habitus. It is not primarily a condition of a field like the social configurations of actor-position, rather it represents a force joining field and actor together by existing in both of them. Rules- and norms-systems, of which morality in the Chinese IR literature is one example of, express relationality because they are manifestations of relations and relationships, charged with power inequalities and misrecognition of arbitrariness as naturalness.

At this point, it is useful to recall Bourdieu's idea of worldmaking power as the power for meaning-making and Callahan's interpretation of Zhao Tingyang's "knowledge-power", both of which describe the same dynamic. Integrating Confucianism into the field of IR brings in a good example of how interested practices can be presented as disinterested ones. This is due to the fact that Confucianism places a strong emphasis on morality, which is often regarded as the most prominent symbol of disinterested practices. The question would be if a Confucian international order would bring about unique institutions and which institutions they would be. Sets of ideas such as moral leadership or harmonious society already exist and the question whether they can be developed further into global institutions, like the balance of power, diplomacy, territoriality and others, is a fascinating one that should be pursued in future research projects. Additionally, the discourse around Chinese IR gains momentum and serves as one of the best examples of cultural power in a Bourdieusian understanding. The utility of Practice Theory for a research program, which aims at Chinese IR, is thus obvious.

⁸⁰⁴ Guzzini in Adler-Nissen 2013, 84-85.

⁸⁰⁵ Swartz 1997, 94.

6.1.2. Resources in Social Power Relations

Power is the force that animates social order, but it does so in a way that goes beyond coercion and violence or the threat thereof. In a complete congruence with Chinese IR, Practice Theory regards power as a social relation. Moreover, I propose to follow Bourdieusian IR and regard the power of legitimacy as a resource that actors compete for. Such resources manifest the relationships between competing actors. Resources do so by virtue of being the very stake at play in this competitive relationship and represent a form of externalization of relationships. The concept of resources as relations mirrors the ‘relations as resources’ concept found in Qin’s *Relationality*, along with another parallel in which he refers to leadership as power resource that links him to Yan Xuetong.⁸⁰⁶ Although Qin disagrees with Practice Theory in explaining that power as relation and power as resource are *not* identical, he still adheres to the idea that they sustain and complement each other and discussing both separately would be futile.⁸⁰⁷ Whether it is military strength, economic wealth, cultural influence or diplomatic weight, summing up all these different power resources as capital helps to examine and understand the complex relations among states in a framework that can account for the multiple dimensions of relationships and the various forms power can take.

Power, as previously stated, is not understood as a cause, but something that capacitates social relations and this social character is the reason why culture contains such a huge potential for power. Qin clearly states that “[v]alues, cultures, institutions, and policies are all considered resources of soft power.”⁸⁰⁸ Culture is relational and contains a certain “economy of communication”, which is a crucial part of social power because “power is not to be found in ‘objective’ resource but in relations of recognition”. Considering power resources as capital maintains notions of fluidity and (inter)convertibility, which would be lost when just regarded as material capabilities. Speaking of capital has two other benefits, firstly rejecting “the attempt to read any single capital as the most ‘fundamental’” and secondly, not looking for power in the resources as such but in the role and recognition of certain types of capital in a specific field.⁸⁰⁹ Yan Xuetong has his own take on the interdependence of different forms of power. He invented the formula $CP = (M+E+C) \times P$. This means that comprehensive power (CP) is produced by adding military (M), economic (E) and cultural (C) power and multiplying it with political power. Translated into Bourdieusian parlance, Yan subjects the value of military,

⁸⁰⁶ Qin 2018, 258-259.

⁸⁰⁷ Qin 2018, 244.

⁸⁰⁸ Qin 2018, 252.

⁸⁰⁹ Guzzini in Adler-Nissen 2013, 85.

economic and cultural capital to the value political capital (alternatively termed symbolic capital).

Taken a step further, I argue, that violence, in this line of thinking, might simply be seen as the most universal form of communication and thus just another form of capital. Capital that sometimes comes in the form of an aircraft carrier or an atomic bomb, both instruments of violence and meaningful symbols of communication. Atomic bombs are one of the best examples of the *interconvertibility* of capital. Physical military power in their case, quickly became converted to the cultural power of the doctrine of mutual assured destruction and the deterrence theory, which arguably is more powerful than the weapon and its physical force itself. Both these concepts defined the relation between the dominating superpowers of the 20th century, thus not only illustrating power resources as capital but also power as a social relation.

The idea of capital as a social relation of power was adapted and integrated into IR literature and also matches with Chinese concepts of power, relations and order. Swartz explains that actors “draw upon a variety of cultural, social, and symbolic resources in order to maintain and enhance their positions in the social order.” These resources are social relations of power “when they become objects of struggle as valued resources.” Symbolic systems, as far as they represent the legitimation of a dominating group and therefore serve as a power resource for that group are as much capital as economic resources. Swartz also points out Practice Theory’s rejection of Foucault’s “extreme diffusion of power”, understanding power as “more concentrated in particular institutional settings”. The character of capital as a relation becomes clearer by explaining that actors employ strategies of “accumulating, investing, and converting various kinds of capital in order to maintain or enhance their positions in the social order.”⁸¹⁰

Culture falls into the same category of resource and capital for power relationships. Williams clarifies that “[t]he relationship between practice and culture (...) is about how frameworks are produced, reproduced, and modified, as well as how they operate in different fields of practice”.⁸¹¹ Governments engage in “structured arenas of conflicts”, which are defined as fields of “production, circulation, and consumption of various forms of cultural and material resources.” Norms, rules and culture as aspects discussed in the previous section thus immediately reappear in the discussion of capital. Bourdieusian IR theories draw attention to “the production and consumption of symbolic goods, the pursuit of symbolic profit, the accumulation of symbolic capital, and the modes of conversion between symbolic and other

⁸¹⁰ Swartz 1997, 73-79.

⁸¹¹ Williams in Adler-Nissen 2013, 135.

forms of capital or power.”⁸¹² The terminology around ‘symbolic’ concepts here is less important than the core argument, which can be clarified further in pointing out that “[c]ultural capital takes many forms, but it can broadly be understood as ‘legitimate’ status or authority”.⁸¹³

In a later chapter of *Culture & Power*, Swartz takes up the discussion again. He illustrates that “[f]ields denote arenas of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate and monopolize these different kinds of capital.” He continues explaining that fields are “organized around specific types of capital”.⁸¹⁴ Political fields are organized around legitimacy, which is the most important power resource in these fields, and legitimacy is closely connected to the powers of meaning-making. The actors involved in competition and cooperation in East Asia struggle to answer the question “Who is China/What is order?” and use their cultural capital to formulate answers and give these answers weight and value. China thus becomes a stake at play in addition to being an actor involved in the relationships of the field.

It becomes apparent from the previous paragraph that the social order of a field revolves around the production and exchange of material, cultural and legitimating capitals, which can be seen as manifestations of the relational networks within a field as actors all take part in their production, circulation and consumption. Additionally, and crucial to later arguments of the present research program, “[c]apital functions as an *investment*”.⁸¹⁵ [my italics] Capital is not only produced in fields but “invested, exchanged, and accumulated.”⁸¹⁶ Investment can also be more broadly understood as the basis of motivation, actors follow their “emotional and corporeal investment in the social game” and “applying this terms to IR, one could say for example that the notion of ‘national interest’ captures the illusion [investment] involved in diplomatic practice”.⁸¹⁷ Regarding governments in international relations, “all are capital holders and investors seeking profits.”⁸¹⁸ Taking a step further in emphasizing the fluid nature of capital, Bourdieu even speaks of capital as “energy of social physics”, an “image of capital suggests a conceptualization of power where no one form is given theoretical priority over the other.”⁸¹⁹ This sounds strikingly similar to Qin’s principle that “life-producing power” governs

⁸¹² Swartz 1997, 92

⁸¹³ Adler-Nissen 2013, 136.

⁸¹⁴ Swartz 1997, 117.

⁸¹⁵ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 36.

⁸¹⁶ Swartz 1997, 44.

⁸¹⁷ Pouliot and Mérand 2013, 33.

⁸¹⁸ Swartz 1997, 82.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid., 78.

social relations⁸²⁰, as well as Zhao Tingyang's remarks on the importance of procreativity for healthy social orders⁸²¹. Terminology that also resonates with Queer IR theory.

6.2. Institutions in English School and Practice Theory

The concept of practices from Practice Theory and institutions of the English School share a certain familiarity, which shall be explored to a certain degree in this section. Cornelia Navari defines practice as a socially established action, which is defined by certain standards and eventually equates practice with the term 'procedural norm'.⁸²² Bourdieu's model of practices conceptualizes action as the outcome of a relationship between habitus and field.⁸²³ The underlying logic of practices is able to organize all thoughts, perceptions and actions by means of a few generative principles, based on a sacrifice of rigor for the sake of simplicity and generality.⁸²⁴ Navari elaborates further on the concept by referring to Ted Schatzki, who will become relevant again in the next paragraph, and defines practices with the three following aspects: practical understandings which means the know-how of an action; rules as principles on which to act and, lastly, a coincidence between goal and motivation of a practice.⁸²⁵ The crucial point here is that the concept of practice serves as the junction of Bourdieusian sociology and English School of IR, turning Practice Theory, English School and "Chinese School" into a tripartite current in the discipline of IR that warrants further development.

Hedley Bull speaks of institutions as sets of "practices shaped towards the realization of common goals" which are "an expression of the element of collaboration among states (...) and at the same time a means of sustaining this collaboration."⁸²⁶ Barry Buzan develops this approach further defining institutions as shared practices among members of interstate society "embodying a mix of norms, rules and principles", which "play a constitutive role in relation to both the pieces/players and the rules of the game."⁸²⁷ Later he summarizes this via the example of mercantilism as "a shared practice constituting legitimate behavior"⁸²⁸, which bring legitimacy mentioned in the context of norms-systems previously back into the discussion. For Holsti, an institution must meet three criteria: patterned practices; a set of ideas and/or beliefs; and finally, institutions need to reflect norms that prescribe under what conditions agents can

⁸²⁰ Qin 2018, 288.

⁸²¹ Zhao 2016, 56.

⁸²² Navari 2010, 614.

⁸²³ Swartz 1997, 141-142.

⁸²⁴ Williams in Adler-Nissen 2013, 134.

⁸²⁵ Navari 2010, 616-617.

⁸²⁶ Bull 2002, 71.

⁸²⁷ Buzan 2004, 181.

⁸²⁸ Buzan 2014, 137.

do certain things.⁸²⁹ The English School uses those concepts of social practice to theorize customs, norms and values that guide international conduct. Navari illustrates how the notion of a practice has given a theoretical basis to Hedley Bull's notion of 'institutions'⁸³⁰ and eventually elaborates:

“(...) what Keens-Soper initially identified as a practice was later inscribed by Hedley Bull as an ‘institution’. Bull’s ascription of order in international society to the ‘institutions’ of law, war, diplomacy, the balance of power and the great powers actually means the regulative standards, routines and repertoires which belong to the activities of law-making, war, diplomacy and so on. In fact, Bull’s concept of an ‘institution’ is identical to Schatski’s conception of a practice.”⁸³¹

Practices like diplomacy, trusteeship, the ‘standard of civilization’ in colonialism and maybe even war can be seen as examples of activity as result of following certain principles of procedure. Each of these concepts of the English School “establishes some sense of a standard which ought to be obeyed, if the practice is to be accomplished”.⁸³² I conclude that it is justified to speak of institutions when referring to sets of practices in a context of English School/Practice Theory informed IR.

Practice Theory seems to leave little room for change and transformation, but the possibility is not ruled out entirely. As mentioned earlier, habitus allows for improvisation and creativity, so that behavior can be adapted to a changing environment, but “through a process that Bourdieu calls *hysteresis*, may sometimes be out of sync with those structures”⁸³³. This can be described as a mismatch of habitus when the conditions of a field gradually change, since habitus draws on past experiences. Once hysteresis is overcome, however, Bourdieu’s work can account for change in a habitus, which is eventually adapted to new situations.⁸³⁴ Sometimes this capacity of invention is not linked to resistance but provides a sheer necessity for reactions to indefinitely varying situations and although rules of the game pose limitations to the actors, they still allow for an infinity of inventive and improvised moves.⁸³⁵ Habitus is an “art of inventing” that provides a basis for the generation of practices; but depending on the context, the social configuration in relation to the habitus, the same disposition can lead to different

⁸²⁹ Holsti 2004, 21-22.

⁸³⁰ Navari 2010, 613.

⁸³¹ Ibid., 619-620.

⁸³² Ibid., 614.

⁸³³ Adler-Nissen 2013, 31.

⁸³⁴ Swartz 1997, 213.

⁸³⁵ Mérand and Forget 2013, 99.

practices.⁸³⁶ Habitus originates “from the inner knowledge of the field and the hysteresis of the behavior concerning the transformation of its boundaries” as Bigo summarized, further ascertaining that habitus and field in their interaction generate creativity.⁸³⁷

There is a habitus-side of institutions and a field-side of institutions, they represent the intersection of both spheres. With *renqing*-habitus and *li*-institution, I try to make clearer how institutions emerge out of the encounter of these matrices of dispositions and matrices of positions in showing that institutions have these two sides, which belong together and, in their interaction, constitute international life.

6.3. Habitus and Renqing

The core question, which brings us onto the trail of the concept of habitus, is best articulated by David Swartz: “How is action regulated; how does action follow regular statistical patterns without being the product of obedience to rules, norms or conscious intention?”⁸³⁸ Habitus is generally understood as a system of durable, transferable dispositions, which generate and organize practices that can be adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends.⁸³⁹ In the shortest possible form, habitus is socialized subjectivity, a matrix of dispositions guiding perception and creative strategies⁸⁴⁰, and since states are eventually represented by people, habitus is applicable and relevant for IR. Several aspects need to be emphasized. First, the dispositions of habitus are acquired through socialization and second, habitus is made up of inarticulate, practical knowledge. Habitus is relational, its dispositions are embodied traces of intersubjective interactions and fourth, habitus is dispositional so that it inclines or disposes, and not determines, actors to do certain things.⁸⁴¹ “Behavior, then, is *strategic* rather than rule or norm conforming” as Swartz ascertains, continuing that “actors (...) move through a maze of constraints and opportunities that they grasp imperfectly through past experience and over time.”⁸⁴² He also describes it as “a ‘grammar’ for practices but never the text (...) a repertoire but not a melody” and thus it is “a *generative principle of regulated improvisations.*”⁸⁴³ [original italics]

⁸³⁶ Pouliot 2008, 274.

⁸³⁷ Bigo 2011, 241-242.

⁸³⁸ Swartz 1997, 95.

⁸³⁹ Ibid., 100-101.

⁸⁴⁰ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 29.

⁸⁴¹ Pouliot 2008, 273-274.

⁸⁴² Swartz 1997, 99.

⁸⁴³ Bigo 2011, 242.

Habitus seems like a part of interbeing. It functions both as the sensory capacity of an actor and at the same time as the means to put perception into reaction. It is a rope or a transmission belt that connects us to the rest of society and that runs right through us. Habitus is both a part of us and a part of something greater, the greater social self as Shih et al. termed it. Chinese IR draws heavily on philosophical traditions that emphasize the link between individual and society, relator and relations as Qin Yaqing might express it. It is therefore necessary to explore the synergies between Chinese IR and Practice Theory on the basis of habitus and inquire which elements of both concepts run parallel in explaining behavior.

In essence, the concept of habitus does not imply that all our actions are merely instinctive reactions devoid of any underlying significance, rather, habitus requires dispositions to be organized (not necessarily logically systematic) as a matrix of dispositions, not simply a collection of reflexes to external stimuli. Viewing the issue from the perspective of what actions are discouraged, rather than promoted, further clarifies this point. Navari mentions that the code of international conduct not only promotes but also restrains behavior to maintain and reproduce international order. Similarly, Shih et al. argued in the same general direction by emphasizing self-restraint as crucial behavioral principle. From the background of Practice Theory, I argue that self-restraint as a behavior has to be grounded in a pervasive underlying cultural system. Staying with Shih et al., resemblance as one of the most important elements of their theory is particularly notable, as it implies a fundamental desire for connection among actors. Especially where resemblance is placed close to *tianxia* as some thin, basic, collective layer of relation among all states, as actors of their specific society, it aligns closely with the Practice Theory's emphasis on the intersubjective nature of habitus.

6.3.1. Dispositions

Within the habitus concept, dispositions play a major role and will be defined further here. Actor's strategies are practical and dispositional, "reflecting the encounter between the accumulated capital and corresponding dispositions from past experience and the present opportunities and constraints of fields where they act."⁸⁴⁴ The prereflective interests are defined by an actor's position in the social hierarchy, but "[i]nterested action is not a means-ends mode of organizing action."⁸⁴⁵ Dispositions are master patterns of practice because they "cut across cognitive, normative, and corporal dimensions of human action" and express their diverse forms "in language, nonverbal communication, tastes, values, perceptions, and modes of

⁸⁴⁴ Swartz 1997, 78.

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid., 71.

reasoning,”⁸⁴⁶ hence constituting their practical nature. In short, dispositions are an integral part of practices that distinguish the intricately motivated practices from behavior narrowly driven by immediate interests.

The term ‘master patterns’, however, must not tempt us to take them as pure deterministic. The dispositions of habitus organize and guide actor’s behavior, but it still allows for creativity since habitus is “not rule-following, but rule understanding.”⁸⁴⁷ Instead of rule-followers, Swartz describes actors as *strategic improvisers*, who respond to opportunities and constraints of situations based on a “sense of the game”. Because of this sense of the game actor’s strategies are neither intentional nor fully determined.⁸⁴⁸ This practical sense is a “prereflexive, infraconscious mastery that agents acquire of their social world by way of durable immersion within it.”⁸⁴⁹

This sense of the game, in Vincent Pouliot’s words, “follows neither a structural nor an individualistic logic, but a relational dialectic”, quoting Bourdieu in describing this dialectic as “the internalization of exteriority and the externalization of interiority.”⁸⁵⁰ Interestingly, Ming-huei Lee refers to the prominent 20th century Confucian Mou Zongsan, who also introduces a “dual process of internalization and externalization” through which individuals “form a union between Subject and Object”.⁸⁵¹ Since the conditions for rational choice never truly occur, the principle of action must be a practical sense of the game instead of rational calculation, even though this sense of the game often appears as rational choice.⁸⁵² The aspect of time is picked up again in the emphasize on “the notion of game, which competent agents learn to play well through *regular* encounters with other agents.”⁸⁵³ [my emphasize] In short, dispositions are the directives according to which the habitus acts as generating and structuring mechanism of practices. They are the capacities, limited and enabled through the physicality of an actor (be it an individual human or a state), to translate certain knowledge elements as action into ongoing situations. Habitus provides a configuration and context within which these pieces of knowledge are organized. They are based on physical abilities combined with an intelligibility with which the requirements of the specific context can be perceived in order to apply them.⁸⁵⁴

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid., 108.

⁸⁴⁷ Mérand and Forget 2013, 98.

⁸⁴⁸ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 29.

⁸⁴⁹ Pouliot 2008, 276.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid., 276.

⁸⁵¹ Lee in Stapleton and Hon 2017, 84.

⁸⁵² Mérand and Forget 2013, 100.

⁸⁵³ Ibid., 97.

⁸⁵⁴ Christoph Mautz, „Disposition und Dispositiv,“ in *Konstruktion und Geltung: Beiträge zu einer postkonstruktivistischen Sozial- und Medientheorie*, ed. Joachim Renn et al. (VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2012), 164-170.

6.3.2. Subjectivity

The way biological systems reproduce creatures, socio-cultural systems analogously reproduce people. An elaborate bio-ecological system is necessary to reproduce life in general and human beings in particular. The same is true for the reproduction of human beings as instances of cognition and knowledge. Both are acts of reproduction, which is why Queer Theory with its inquisitive perspective on reproduction connects them. Vivienne Jabri points out that the core of Bourdieu's philosophy is how every social order, domestic or global, promotes "the naturalization of its own arbitrariness" and the naturalization of gender is the prime example for this.⁸⁵⁵ As I argued earlier, Queer theory in IR is about how one perceives and relates to the Other both within and without the Self and the salience of power in these relations. The categories perceived as natural determine self- and other-perception.

It is an undercurrent of IR that can shed light on interactions and connections between actor and structure in a new way and questions if this separation makes sense to begin with, leading to the embrace of field and habitus as alternatives to structure and actor. Queer IR draws attention to "questions relating to how we might think subjectivity beyond a rationalist instrumentalism", which enables scholars to understand security in gendered social and political relations or rethink foreign policy in terms of queer theory.⁸⁵⁶ This idea widens the common ground between the different schools presented in this project, since Chinese authors would agree wholeheartedly on the goal to understand subjectivity beyond rationalist instrumentalism. Feminist and Queer Theory, as discussed in the last chapter, is also an inherently Chinese scholarly enterprise, as shown in the works of Petrus Liu, or Tse Shang Denise Tang, Adam Chen-Dedman and others.

Individual and society are not opposites but constitute each other "'relationally' as if they are two dimensions of the same social reality" as Swartz further elaborates, adding that "the socialized body (which one calls the individual or person) does not stand in opposition to society; it is one of its forms of existence."⁸⁵⁷ This is one way to understand the relation of nation and individual and the parallels IR scholars draw between both, often unconsciously, in their research. I argue that Qin Yaqing's *Relationality* also helps to bring IR studies and Feminist/Queer studies together regarding the embodied nature of practice. Qin explicitly promotes an "emphasis on the humanness of relations", explaining that "[i]nternational society is first of all a human society" and "the social world is what it is because of human relatedness".

⁸⁵⁵ Jabri in Adler-Nissen 2013, 154.

⁸⁵⁶ Jabri in Adler-Nissen 2013, 149.

⁸⁵⁷ Swartz 1997, 96.

In his theory, “[h]umans are the most vital and most meaningful.”⁸⁵⁸ Furthermore in a Chinese context, the PRC has a tradition of policing the bodies of its citizens. After all, it is here where the one-child policy was implemented – where the question how the percentage is distributed between men and women concerning forced sterilizations would be an interesting one to ask; “sissy men” are banned from media and in Xi Jinping’s doctrine of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation, the term rejuvenation is loaded with bodily associations.

Stefano Guzzini also inspires us to understand subjectivity beyond a rationalist instrumentalism “through the concept of the habitus, which functions like a depository of the collective memory in the field, going through and constituting agents in their social behaviour.” The concept, however, can provide an even wider understanding of subjectivity because agents move in a variety of fields, necessitating the formation of multiple *habiti*.⁸⁵⁹ Another way of developing the habitus concept further is opposing the view of habitus as a monolith and going further beyond rationalist instrumentalism. Bigo insightfully explains here that the “habitus is ‘split,’ shattered, more often contradictory than systematic, and has multiple and heterogeneous facets coming from its exposure to multiple fields.” Using the image of trajectories specific to single agents, he further shows how each “has simultaneously lived in many fields, and has a unique practical sense”, as he elaborates further, however:

“(…) this uniqueness is not an absolute singularity, as each habitus connects an individual with other specific agents and represents the transposition of the objective structures of power a person has in the multiple fields that s/he lives in, by enacting them into the subjective structures (…)”⁸⁶⁰

The idea of a habitus that is split and contradictory relates easily to non-synthetic post hybridity as Shih et al. defined it in chapter five. The objective structures mentioned here only *seem* objective, but they appear so convincing that Bigo uses the term “objective”. At the same time, both of these concepts are similar to Weber’s idea that the main characteristic of queer subjectivity is to be one thing *and* another thing *and* another thing as well as one thing *and* another thing *or* another thing. An idea that rejects the image of individuals as singular beings.

Even the concept of institutions, which already appeared in nearly every scholarship that serves as intellectual source for this project, is present in Queer International Relations theory (QIR). Cynthia Weber (2016) takes up Donna Harraway’s concept of figurations as a device to link sexuality and international relations. Figurations are based on cultural systems described

⁸⁵⁸ Qin 2018, 115.

⁸⁵⁹ Guzzini in Adler-Nissen 2013, 86.

⁸⁶⁰ Bigo 2011, 241.

in a similar way to what I already referenced as “distillations of shared meanings in forms or images”, these figurations become synonyms for institutions in their definition as combinations of “knowledge, practices, and power”, also in identical fashion to earlier definitions mentioned in this thesis. Weber shows how temporality is a part of institutions in categorizing some representations and practices as progressive and thus worthy of support and others as regressive and in need of “modernization”. She refers to performativity as part of institutions in “illustrating a tension between IR conceptualizations of norms as uniformly beneficial (e.g. Finnemore and Sikkink 1998) and (antinormative) queer critiques of norms/normalization.” Finally, she describes how institutions go through the process of worlding, in which they are implemented and reproduced in systems of knowledge, practices and power. Change and transformation, however, continuously reshape the field in which institutions are reproduced and thus subjects them to dynamics of contestation and competition.⁸⁶¹ Concerning critique on norms, one might think of the Taiwanese queer community, who is fighting over indigenous concepts of sexuality and “queerness” as associated with foreign Western culture. The issue here being whether the Taiwanese queer community contribute to Taiwan’s survival by strengthening its unique cultural identity or by linking their struggles to international demands for LGBTQI+ rights.⁸⁶²

Another direction of QIR is tracing pathological concepts of sexuality in inter-state relations. With the image of states being “feminized”, that is being victim to instituted inequalities, Jabri transposes the individual experience to a collective level.⁸⁶³ Ling supports this idea by criticizing capitalism in its Asian variant, which in her opinion “internalized these inequities by feminizing and exploiting its own labour force, depriving it of voice or solidarity through low wages, non-unionization, and stereotypes of women workers”.⁸⁶⁴ According to Shih, “feminizing refers to the use of gendered discourse and division of roles to establish or reproduce naturalness of dominance and exploitation, self- feminizing (in contrast) refers to engaging in understanding and caring to oblige interdependent relations.” Shih differentiates self-feminizing and self- orientalism as two different IR strategies. Self-feminizing is more fluid and relational than self- orientalism in the way it constructs “a role relation that is improvisational, since dependent relations arise in practice”, and it also “adapts to coming forces without premising upon an allegedly innate identity”. The two, however, do have

⁸⁶¹ Weber 2016, 28-33.

⁸⁶² See Adam Chen-Dedman, “Seeing China differently: National contestation in Taiwan's LGBTQ (*tongzhi*) movement,” *Nations and Nationalism* 28, no. 4 (2022): 1212-1229.

⁸⁶³ Jabri in Adler-Nissen 2013, 155-156.

⁸⁶⁴ Ling 2019, 41.

synergies if self-orientalism “functions to oblige the duty of the dominant side to care and to transcend the binary identity.” However, he opposes tendencies to use this concept to “relegate postcolonial societies to the inferior alter ego” and instead asserts that “self-feminizing crafts a certain relational identity that re-constitutes the self-identities of all relevant sides.”⁸⁶⁵ The danger of this approach is reproducing harmful, obsolete or deficient images of gender and scholars need to reflect on this issue when working with it. There might be, on the other side, a potential benefit in uncovering hypermasculine (Eurocentric white) behavior from certain states when examining international relations and foreign affairs.

One of the predecessors of QIR is Richard K. Ashley for proposing to understand “statecraft as mancraft” in his 1989 chapter “Living on Border Lines: Man, Poststructuralism and War” for Der Derian and Shapiro’s book *International/Intertextual Relations*. Briefly summarized, he states that the nucleus or kernel of modern sovereign nation states is the idea of a sovereign man, who modern sovereign nation-states mirror, represent and embody. In other words, the legitimation of the states is their claim to represent their citizens, who can individually be traced back to the idea of a man as singular, preexisting, ahistorical, elementary unit of social order. Sovereignty is of paramount importance to China and, following Ashley, I argue that Xi Jinping embodies the sovereign Chinese man. One explanation for the concentration of power in his person is the desire for a powerful China that is represented in its president and that on another level, as a surrogate for its citizens, represents the Chinese people, who can thus also feel powerful as parts a powerful nation. Additionally, the communist party has always attempted to become synonymous with the state of China itself and has propagated the virtues of patriotism for decades. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, a recent development is also the turn to traditional cultural heritage in Chinese public discourse. This will entail Confucian family ideals, which may result in rising conservatism regarding concepts of gender and sexuality, which would represent another link between Chinese nationalism and sexuality/gender, reminding us of Chu Sinan’s criticism on Chinese nation- and state-building processes from the last chapter. Promoting traditional culture in an essentialist way is of course a strategy of (synthetic) identity building to increase sovereignty. It is an attempt to increase the value of China’s own symbolic capital. Taiwan, on the other hand, has another and more diverse set of memories, which are part of the knowledge systems we have been encountering throughout this whole chapter. It could develop a habitus that is more flexible and adaptable to

⁸⁶⁵ Shih 2022b, 1-8.

new situations and is able to accept its queer subjectivity and construct a more inclusive and plural national identity.

6.3.3. 人情 *renqing* – economical, affective, political and social investment

Minxin was already mentioned as part of habitus and expanding the idea further with the concept of *renqing* will make the relational side of habitus even clearer. It is self-evidently futile to pursue the ‘true’ meaning of *minxin*, *renqing* or *li* in etymology, linguistics or literature studies for the present thesis. The scholars I quote, who include these concepts into their theories of international relations, are not linguists or professors of philosophy, their work aims instead on the politics among nations. It is my understanding that the intellectual strategies to include classic Chinese ideas intent to uncover and label gaps in mainstream IR, promote non-Western contributions to the discipline or serve to represent autonomous belief systems outside the core of Western culture. Most importantly, these terms convey a system of thoughts and concepts the same way, for example, ‘anarchy’ transports Hobbesian ideas of society. Connecting with ideas outside a researcher’s immediate cultural sphere supports the establishment of transcultural, intersubjective belief systems in political science that will help to develop IR further. The concepts of *renqing* and *li* as they will be discussed are of particular salience, since the Chinese authors themselves link them with Western, Bourdieusian philosophy and thus build bridges and intersections between cultural spheres that are perceived as separate. This scholarly endeavor itself is a significant scientific phenomenon and the content that potentially emerges from it can yield valuable insight into IR.

The English School has been benefitting from Chinese contributions for several years⁸⁶⁶, yet there is a far deeper level to this exchange. Fierke and Jabri present an interesting addition to this line of thinking. They explain that “emotions are not purely psychological dispositions but involve an investment in social norms”, leading to the question “how they come to be experienced as both meaningful and natural, thereby shaping the space of intra-action.”⁸⁶⁷ According to *Balance of Relationships*, actors must “acquire the skill to adapt, thus ensuring their continuous belonging to the same and known greater self, whose boundary and scope are usually unclear”, referencing Bourdieusian habitus as skill of improvisation in a field that has contested boundaries. “The reproduction of the greater self relies on improvised relations between members”, the section continues, increasing the similarities to Bourdieusian sociology

⁸⁶⁶ Noesselt 2014, 100.

⁸⁶⁷ Fierke and Jabri 2019, 522.

by alluding to the way a field is created through the improvised practices of the actors within.⁸⁶⁸ Qin Yaqing's theory of relationality, which is closely related to BoR, is founded in large parts on a firmly Bourdieusian basis, referring to communities of practice⁸⁶⁹ or the logic of practicality⁸⁷⁰ and also utilizing a number of authors from Bourdieusian IR for the development of his theory, like Emanuel Adler or Vincent Pouliot. The most interesting and outstanding section, however, is where he equates the nearly untranslatable term of *renqing* (human emotions / social relationship / friendship) with habitus:

“(...) *renqing* is a social practice, characterized by reciprocal human feelings and obligations through the norm of ‘*bao* (roughly meaning ‘reciprocity’).’ In fact, it is more like the *habitus* in Bourdieu’s terminology and embedded deeply in the background knowledge of Chinese communities. (...)”⁸⁷¹

In his own fieldwork in Algeria, “Bourdieu encountered a social order in which social solidarity is based on *sentiment* and honor rather than on codified rules and regulations.”⁸⁷² [my italics] Identifying the salience of sentiment in social order thus seems to be a similarity between Qin Yaqing and Bourdieu. Qin continues explaining that “the norm of ‘*bao*’ constitutes the key part of *renqing*. It is in general quite similar to reciprocity, even similar to the ‘tit-for-tat’ strategy in game language.” It has, however, analogous to Bourdieu (and counterintuitively to his terminology), “much less emphasis on an exchange relationship in the economic sense”.⁸⁷³

What was called gift-giving in the context of *renqing* in *Balance of Relationships*, later appears as the term investment, where the authors explain that even without immediate gains obtained from these investments, actors continuously improvise benevolence and hence prove that they are willing to invest in the formation of a long-term bilateral relationship, which brings more stability into the relationship.⁸⁷⁴ In other words, the interest of agents is far more than a calculating strategy but a way to describe agent’s emotional and corporeal investment in the social game.⁸⁷⁵ *Renqing*, it follows, is a far richer and articulate way to describe the social, material and affective investment practiced by actors as basis of relationships. Resemblance, in addition, is an innovative way to approach and emphasize the intersubjective character of

⁸⁶⁸ Shih et al. 2019, 44.

⁸⁶⁹ Qin 2018, 38 ff.

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid., 199 ff.

⁸⁷¹ Qin 2018, 281.

⁸⁷² Swartz 1997, 98.

⁸⁷³ Qin 2018, 281-282.

⁸⁷⁴ Shih et al. 2019, 52-53.

⁸⁷⁵ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 33.

habitus. The term habitus itself might be a good synonym for Shih's post-identity in chapter five. "Improvising resemblance" adds a certain agency to the way we can imagine habitus. So, Shih might help the concept to include more agency of individual actors while not losing its intersubjective nature.

Chinese scholars introduced the idea of affective investment among actors that is expressed with the concept of *renqing*. Under "Resources in Social Power Relations" above, Practice Theory was referenced in notions about production, circulation and investment of cultural, social and political capital. I argue that Chinese authors add affective investment, resemblance as a form of intersubjective agency and morality as powerful cultural-symbolic system to the existing idea of habitus and thus enable researchers to develop the idea significantly further. Approaching actor's subjectivity through *renqing*-habitus prevents us from fixating on exclusively individualistic, rationalist actors but instead perceive the complexity of their trans-subjectivity as they coexist with other actors, or relators, in the international society. The basis for international relations is hence the 'investedness' of *renqing*-habitus of actors into each other. In other words, the overall economic, political, cultural and social investment in global politics.

6.4. Fields and Li

Habitus is not forming in a social vacuum, since the constitution of social reality is not only an individual but intersubjective enterprise.⁸⁷⁶ That is the reason why fields are important to the analysis. The first image I propose for an understanding of fields is "a bundle of structured relations within which agents are variously positioned."⁸⁷⁷ In order to avoid deterministic visions of the field, it is important never to oppose actors against fields because fields exist only through the properties that actors invest in them.⁸⁷⁸ The concept of field refers to the configuration of actors and the rules of the game that define how actors can compete for better positions within the hierarchy.⁸⁷⁹ Additionally, a field is characterized by the stakes at play and distribution of capital that defines the positions and hierarchy among the players and "[a]s a site of struggle, the field authorises what can and cannot be said, not in a repressive model of power,

⁸⁷⁶ Williams in Adler-Nissen 2013, 133.

⁸⁷⁷ Pouliot 2008, 276.

⁸⁷⁸ Bigo 2011, 239.

⁸⁷⁹ Go 2008, 207.

but in a generative, constitutive model.”⁸⁸⁰ Institutions are not identical with fields but their relation is very intimate, as the following section will show.⁸⁸¹

These structuring structures are not balance sheets or simple systems of meaning, but topographic spaces as well, and the competition within also turns the field into a “vector of power”, not just a social space where actors share a set of rules and norms, it is bisected by conflict between status quo powers and those who aim at change.⁸⁸² Swartz clarifies this by describing the competition taking place between “those who are able to exercise some degree of monopoly over the definition and distribution of capital and others who attempt to usurp the advantages.” Within this struggle, he further explains, “Bourdieu in fact speaks of three different types of field strategies: conservation, succession, and subversion.”⁸⁸³ Society consists of many intertwined fields, in this social universe a field is a “network with boundaries that create effects” as Bigo illustrates, conceptualizing fields as phenomena in which:

“(…) the circulation of power / struggles has a centripetal relational force that attracts agents toward each other while maintaining their distinctive deviations (...) This centripetal force is provided by specific stakes for which different agents act / play in order to win or to resist. The centripetal force needs to be stronger than the centrifugal forces dispersing the individuals toward other stakes.”⁸⁸⁴

This understanding of field, sometimes up to the point where they appear “fractal”, explains why “the dynamic of fields is the rule, stability is the exception”.⁸⁸⁵ The interaction of adjacent fields occurs because the global political cosmos, as much as the domestic, is a whole ensemble of fields related to one another.⁸⁸⁶ Didier Bigo further emphasizes “to understand how agents position or distinguish themselves in that game, along what lines, what kinds of positions are taken in relation to others, and what kind of resources in terms of power they can mobilize in order to play.” He continues to explain how a field is constituted “by distributing and hierarchizing the struggles for positions inside the boundaries between the oldest agents invested into the field (...) and the newcomers (...) challenging the older dominant positions”.⁸⁸⁷

⁸⁸⁰ Jabri in Adler-Nissen 2013, 155.

⁸⁸¹ Bigo 2011, 248.

⁸⁸² Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 33.

⁸⁸³ Swartz 1997, 124-125.

⁸⁸⁴ Bigo 2011, 239.

⁸⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 239-240.

⁸⁸⁶ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 35.

⁸⁸⁷ Bigo 2011, 240.

6.4.1. Norms-Systems in fields

Fields as competitive systems of social relations are constituted by, among other elements, a specific logic, or rules of the game so that “entry into a field requires the tacit acceptance of the rules of the game, meaning that specific forms of struggle are legitimated whereas others are excluded”⁸⁸⁸. That is the reason why institutions, understood as rules-systems are so close to fields. Linklater and Suganami refer to Manning’s discussion of the relationship between sovereign statehood and international legal obligations in elaborating on the social nature of norms-systems even in the case of system as officially codified as law. International law, they explain, “is no more than a matter of conventional assumption”. They further clarify however, that “the realm in which this set of assumptions prevailed – the society of states – was at the same time the realm which this very set of assumptions made possible.”⁸⁸⁹ One is again reminded of the cycle of externalization and internalization. In other words, the norms-system creates the environment which reproduces the same norms-system, resulting in a spiral of co-constitution or co-reproduction.

For Practice Theory, the concept of norms-systems “encompasses the set of ideas, norms, and other types of knowledge that are generally accepted as axiomatic”⁸⁹⁰ within a certain field. This system, however, includes the “multidimensional objective configurations of positions and the subjective dimensions that serve as the ‘rules of the game’ and as cultural or symbolic capital”, instead of simply focusing on norms themselves or as simple causes for behavior.⁸⁹¹ According to Epstein, a norms-system “stakes out the possibilities of acting within a field” and comprises an “underlying matrix of norms regulating the practices, or ways of doing and seeing, pertaining to a particular field”.⁸⁹² Norms-systems include the symbolic systems mentioned above and due to their relational, transsubjective nature thus also help us examine states’ self-interests by helping us to understand what it means to “have a self”.⁸⁹³ The norms-system “involves the very basic structures of the field, the categories by which the field and the world are understood” as Berling explains, and “is the unspoken, common knowledge that constitutes social reality”.⁸⁹⁴ To both orthodox and heterodox positions in a field, the

⁸⁸⁸ Swartz 1997, 125.

⁸⁸⁹ Andrew Linklater and Hidemi Suganami, *The English School of International Relations: A Contemporary Reassessment* (Cambridge UP, 2006), 48.

⁸⁹⁰ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 30.

⁸⁹¹ Go 2008, 209.

⁸⁹² Epstein in Adler-Nissen 2013, 170-171.

⁸⁹³ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁸⁹⁴ Trine Villumsen Berling, "Bourdieu, international relations, and European security," *Theory and society* 41 (2012): 455.

norms-system represents a deep and tacit shared agreement on and acceptance of the stakes and of the fact that the struggle is worth fighting to begin with.⁸⁹⁵

Beyond this tacit agreement, however, as Epstein explains, “the normative order, far from constituting an ethically neutral space or a level playing field”⁸⁹⁶ consists of power relations that determine the way in which particular practices, institutions in IR, take shape⁸⁹⁷. Actors possess an intimate understanding of the rules of the game and, consequently, of their position in the field, but this does not mean that they recognize the distribution of resources as legitimate all of the time.⁸⁹⁸ This is why “[e]ven the most ritualized forms of conduct permit strategies to some extent” because “[w]hether or not actors conform to norms or follow prescribed rituals depends on their interests.”⁸⁹⁹ Change can also take place in the interaction among fields. External shocks like a military defeat or the takeover of the political field by a new coalition are two examples, endogenous sources on the other hand, like “the advent of game theory in US strategic studies” represent changes in knowledge and belief system that lead to transformations.⁹⁰⁰

Echoing the above under “Dispositions” mentioned relationship between internalization and externalization, it is important to remember that the rules of the game are shaped by institutions, actors regard these rules as sensible and transform them into dispositions.⁹⁰¹ This dynamic relationship between institutionalized practices and rules or norms also addresses Qin’s critique on Western “rational” governance theories. Pointed out in a previous chapter, Qin criticizes Western theories for allegedly postulating that “norms make practices and not the other way around”. Examining the social genesis of institutions is important to understand practices because it shows the initial – now normalized and forgotten – violence or arbitrariness of specific reasons for setting rules, revealing the strategies through which institutions are legitimized. “Norms neither follow rational interests nor emerge from shared beliefs and attitudes”, as Bigo elaborates in an attempt to provide a more complex view. For him, they are produced through “historical trajectories of an immanent set of actions incorporated into an ethos and a habitus.”⁹⁰²

⁸⁹⁵ Swartz 1997, 125.

⁸⁹⁶ Epstein in Adler-Nissen 2013, 171.

⁸⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁸⁹⁸ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 36.

⁸⁹⁹ Swartz 1997, 99.

⁹⁰⁰ Mérand and Forget 2013, 111.

⁹⁰¹ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 33.

⁹⁰² Bigo 2011, 228.

Yan Xuotong proves to understand these processes in his discussion of norm formation. “The formation process of a new type of international norm”, he explains, “is often a combination of internalization and socialization through interactions between new leading states and other states.”⁹⁰³ He also defines norms “as behavioral principles in regard to the rights and obligations accepted by the majority of states in an independent international system.”⁹⁰⁴ Practice Theory is not the only school that refers to internalization in regard of the spreading of norms, however, the fact that Yan phrases his ideas in the same terms as Practice Theory illustrates interesting parallels. In pointing out the role of new leading states he additionally shows a sensitivity to power structures and power changes concerning norms systems. This could be linked to Practice Theory’s idea that norms are not inherently beneficial but instruments of power for dominant actors in a society, which is a specific characteristic of Bourdieu-inspired theories and thus salient as a similarity between Yan Xuotong and Practice Theory.

Qin Yaqing’s description of morality is actually a very good example of norms-systems and how they work towards maintenance and reproduction of their respective field. Instead of repeating the entire discussion of his theory I will briefly point out the intersections of *A Relational Theory* and Practice Theory as they occur. Since he fails to convincingly distinguish Western norms/rules from Confucian morality, I argue that they can be treated as equivalent. For Qin Yaqing norms such as trust are a *self-enforcing safeguard*, more effective than formal rules. Trust, to briefly also insert Yan Xuotong’s opinion, is what *authority* is based on, which he contrasts against the brute force of power. This is not true for a legalistic understanding where norms/rules are discussed in close proximity to issues of international law or treaties signed to establish international organizations such as NATO or SCO. For the way norms-systems appear in Practice Theory and English School, however, Qin Yaqing could be treated as representative of both, who transculturalizes Chinese philosophical heritage in synthesis with the English School and Practice Theory. As mentioned above, he defines morality as governance by “codes” and “principles” that are based on moral norms. Morality not only provides norms that govern society, but it also provides a deeper meaning for society in Qin’s theory. This deeper-meaning is the most crucial aspect.

Whether this meaning is a pervasive ideology as in the case of North Korea or just a way of life like the ‘pursuit of happiness’, it provides an orientation for a society that is regularly not questioned or reflected upon. Actors enter into a field because they are convinced that a

⁹⁰³ Yan 2019, 123-124.

⁹⁰⁴ Yan 2019, 108.

certain stake is worth competing for and the rules of the game organizing this competition make sense. For Qin Yaqing, fields have a natural tendency towards the harmonization of the totality of relations, “a meaningful collectivity of worthy human beings”, which ought to be supported moral governance. This becomes even clearer by recalling that relational governance for him, means “to produce order so that members behave in a reciprocal and cooperative fashion with mutual trust evolving over a *shared understanding of social norms and human morality*.”⁹⁰⁵ [my italics] Shared norms that build trust on which to establish order, in addition to an idea of morality as inherent human quality, thus seems to summarize Qin’s idea of international relations. Qin furthermore explicitly opposes the idea of trust as a way of reducing transaction costs in full congruence with Bourdieu, who also opposes notions of humans as homo economicus.

In sum, a field (or cluster of fields) represents a certain order. It contains a norms-system, a social configuration of actors and a distribution of capital. Action occurs in encounter between the conditions of a field, being norms, positions and resources and the demands of the habitus, being dispositions, knowledge and subjectivity. What has to be pointed out here, are the mirror images of a field as ‘matrix of norms’ and habitus as a ‘matrix of dispositions’. This differentiation has occurred in the study of international institutions as well. Holsti contrasts ideas/beliefs as parts of institutions against norms as other parts of institutions. Ideas/beliefs describe a need and a justification for action. Norms, for Holsti, are rules and etiquette. They prescribe under what conditions actor can do certain things. They can get internalized as habits but also be contested because they are dependent on values, which he unfortunately does not elaborate further on. The ideas/beliefs introduced here are not entirely congruent with the matrix of dispositions but could be taken as an expansion of the concept, since there is nothing inherently contradictory among the two concepts. The norms mentioned by Holsti, however, directly reflect Practice Theory’s norms and the crucial point is the distinction between the social layer of norms on the one hand and the subjective layer of ideas/beliefs/dispositions in the other. I argue that the current debate about rules-based world orders, especially in the discussion of Chinese IR, can be better understood with this distinction in mind and question of actor-structure divisions can be broken up productively.

⁹⁰⁵ Qin 2018, 335.

6.4.2. The state within the concept of fields

The concepts of state and field are closely related to each other, and Practice Theory enables IR to develop a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the state's role within social orders compared to what Realism has traditionally provided. The question of whether the state itself constitutes a field is a subject of debate, it might instead be regarded as a mere platform from which operations in the international arena get launched. However, in this discussion, I will entertain the notion that the state is a field by referring to several authors who argue for this. Following their view, it is an arena of struggle for a number of different actors, possibly a field of institutionalized power and an expression of relations among several other fields. As it is with all fields, its content and boundaries are contested, which probably led to the idea that the state could also be seen as “the game's main stake more than it is an institution.”⁹⁰⁶ In this understanding, the state is itself not an actor but provides actors like bureaucracies, professionals and private individuals the power to exert control over other fields.⁹⁰⁷ This is possible, as Adler-Nissen explains, due to the state's influence in all other fields and reference point for social life. She further shows that the state “renders social division, privileges and domination universally valid within a given territory and for a given population”, an instance of symbolic power and the powers of meaning – making, which alongside physical force belongs to the prime capacities of the state.⁹⁰⁸

For Pouliot and Mérand symbolic power is exerted when a state “naturalizes or universalizes arbitrary constructions”⁹⁰⁹, including, I would emphasize, itself. In Guzzini's opinion, the state not only holds the monopoly over physical and symbolic power, it also influences, if not even determines the conversion rates between all kinds of capital, bet it economic, social or cultural capital.⁹¹⁰ Actors from all social fields thus have to refer to the state in one way or another, to struggle over the value of their investment in different forms of capital as the state is the only field where conversion rates are set.⁹¹¹ This notion is reaffirmed by understanding the state as “a structure that provides resources and stakes to social agents”⁹¹² and conceptualizations of the state as field of power in which holders of capital try to increase the value of their investment⁹¹³.

⁹⁰⁶ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 36.

⁹⁰⁷ Bigo 2011, 248 [the members of the communist party of China, the party-state China].

⁹⁰⁸ Rebecca Adler-Nissen, „Sovereignty,“ in Adler-Nissen 2013, 183.

⁹⁰⁹ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 39.

⁹¹⁰ Guzzini in Adler-Nissen 2013, 85.

⁹¹¹ Bigo 2011, 246.

⁹¹² Mérand and Forget 2013, 96.

⁹¹³ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 34-35.

Even “the various critiques of sovereignty point indirectly to the symbolic capacity of states” as Adler-Nissen shows, explaining that transnational factors in world politics might be strong, but dismissing sovereignty in toto will not help us to understand international relations.⁹¹⁴ Sovereignty as a set of historically rooted institutionalized practices, as she illustrates further, is “a fundamental institution with rules, agencies and offices” that, additionally to its practical and material aspects, “also exists in people’s minds” and eventually “implies that the state has pre-eminence over other areas of society”.⁹¹⁵ Of course, the state’s role beyond the domestic domain is just as powerful since it “constitutes a key point of reference in each field that composes the global landscape”⁹¹⁶.

Hierarchy between states is determined by the complex distribution of all kinds of capital among them, which enables states in the upper hierarchy to force their rules of the game on states in lower strata, in a way discussed above.⁹¹⁷ According to Swartz, however, actors always need to demonstrate the ‘rightfulness’ of their dominance,⁹¹⁸ as discussed in previous sections, power requires legitimacy through symbolic systems. Inventing and adhering to norms is thus not an end in itself but a way of strengthening one’s dominant position in the international arena, especially when these norms support a world order that benefits some major powers more than the majority of smaller states.⁹¹⁹ The discussion about the rules – based international order is one example. China presents itself as a reformer, critical yet reasonable towards the current order, but is accused of undermining an order that supposedly benefits every state while at the same time ensuring the status quo of power hierarchies in a cultural, political struggle for legitimacy and global influence.

6.4.3. 礼 li – Norms-Systems of Social Order

Another idea worth mentioning is the redefinition of the concept 礼 *lǐ*, which has the meaning “rite”, “ritual” or “custom”, but also appears as the Confucian cardinal value “propriety”. Recently however, several authors use this term in the meaning of “norm(s)” when speaking about international relations. This could be interpreted as an attempt to promote non-Western content in IR and to open up avenues for non-Mainstream IR to enter the discipline with less barriers. For Western scholars, rephrasing familiar terms with new labels that entail

⁹¹⁴ Adler-Nissen 2013, 182.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid., 179.

⁹¹⁶ Pouliot and Mérand in Adler-Nissen 2013, 37.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁹¹⁸ Go 2008, 208.

⁹¹⁹ Go 2008, 208-209.

new ideas, contexts or cultural heritages can help to innovate the understanding of classic IR concepts. I would like to discuss the different levels on which *li* is mentioned in the literature relevant to my research in order to shed light onto the migration of the concept from classic Confucian philosophy into contemporary IR studies. Jabri explains Bourdieu's *rites of institution*, alternatively termed *rites of legitimation*, which consecrate that which is arbitrary and thus naturalize artificial power structures as social order.⁹²⁰ This reference goes to show that not only Chinese sources link rites and institutions but find a familiar line of thinking in Practice Theory, even in such a culturally specific point of argumentation. On a more abstract level, fields could also be described as fulfilling similar functions to *li*, because they also “mediate the relationship between social structure and cultural practice.”⁹²¹

Li is discussed, among other instances, as part of the human nature, as principle for the organization of society and as the basic idea of a norm-based international order. Furthermore, imperial Chinese governments from the Song to the Qing dynasty also add to the importance of *li* for international relations through the structure of their ministries. First, for Angle, *li* is part of the nature of human beings and “as a virtue is part of a capacity to attune to and care for our relationships with people, which is a necessary capacity for a flourishing community.”⁹²² For Rošker, *li* “rationalizes the instinctual essence of human natural feelings” so that humaneness can be cultivated and learned throughout our lives.⁹²³

Li has not only a personal dimension but also a social dimension. For Qin, an administration with *li* expresses itself as a fiduciary community based on mutual trust.⁹²⁴ Trust, as Qin was quoted above, evolving over a shared understanding of social norms and human morality. In a section of *A Relational Theory* preceding the chapter in which *li* is linked to the fiduciary community, he depicts *li* as a norm within Confucianism that emphasizes its relational and social nature. *li* “implies that harmony is achieved if everyone respects everyone else in society” he explains, “and therefore is the *regulating mechanism for harmony* (...).”⁹²⁵ [my italics] Berthrong also includes *li* in the modern discourse of New Confucianism and regards *li* as “the question of social praxis, or what the previous Confucians would have called *li* 禮, ritual propriety and civility.”⁹²⁶ A fiduciary community that is based on a social practice with *li* as

⁹²⁰ Jabri in Adler-Nissen 2013, 155.

⁹²¹ Swartz 1997, 9.

⁹²² Angle in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 93.

⁹²³ Rošker 2021, 34-35.

⁹²⁴ Qin 2018, 345.

⁹²⁵ Qin 2018, 191-192.

⁹²⁶ Berthrong in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 232. (禮 is the traditional version of 礼).

guiding principle is interpreted as implementing a moral standard “to establish social order so that members of the society will have a clear moral orientation and a firm moral commitment.”⁹²⁷

Referring to Xunzi, Yan contends in a less moralizing way “that the way to reinforce the rationality in the mind is to establish social norms (rites).” This is also, on a side note, a clear break with Qin Yaqing who categorizes everything Western as rational and everything Eastern as relational and would not arrive at the idea that *li* reinforces rationality. Yan continues to explain “that rites are the norm for directing politics” and elaborates the commonalities of Xunzi’s Confucianism “with contemporary neoliberalism, since both hold that norms are to be found in the human mind and that the norms in the human mind can control people’s selfish pursuit of their own interests.”⁹²⁸ This point is even further explored by subsequently quoting Keohane and Nye in this section of *Ancient Chinese Thought*, presenting the most ambitious use of *li* in IR literature by bringing it in close proximity to Neoliberalism.

Entering further into IR, Zhang argues that “the rules, norms and accepted behaviours and the institutional practices discussed above (...) were conceptualized in Ancient China as *li*, meaning rituals.”⁹²⁹ Zhang also draws on one of the leading 20th century Chinese philosophers to advocate for his argument by quoting Feng Youlan (1895-1990). “These peacetime and wartime *li*, as observed by one state in its relations to another” Feng Youlan explains, “were equivalent to what we now call international law.”⁹³⁰ In a final comment, I would like to point out that the salience of *li* for international relations is supported further by the fact that the actual foreign affairs of imperial China from the Song to the Qing dynasty were managed through the ministry of *rites* (礼部 *libu*), which further shows the importance of *li* in the conception and social practice of Chinese diplomacy.⁹³¹

Shi et al. also take up the Confucian concept of *li*, which serves the function to stabilize mutual expectations and is mostly applicable to bilateral relations. This concept is elaborated in some detail. The importance of self-restraint and the obligation for reciprocity are repeated and emphasized in their salience to *li* but the true meaning of institutions is argued to be in symbols and rituals and not in a shared understanding of rules, since a mere common adherence to rituals enables the improvisation of resemblance on which, as discussed in some length in

⁹²⁷ Hong et al. in Hon and Stapleton 2017, 216.

⁹²⁸ Yan 2011. P. 93-94.

⁹²⁹ Yongjin Zhang, “System, Empire and State in Chinese International Relations,” *Review of International Studies* 27, no. 5 (2001), 49.

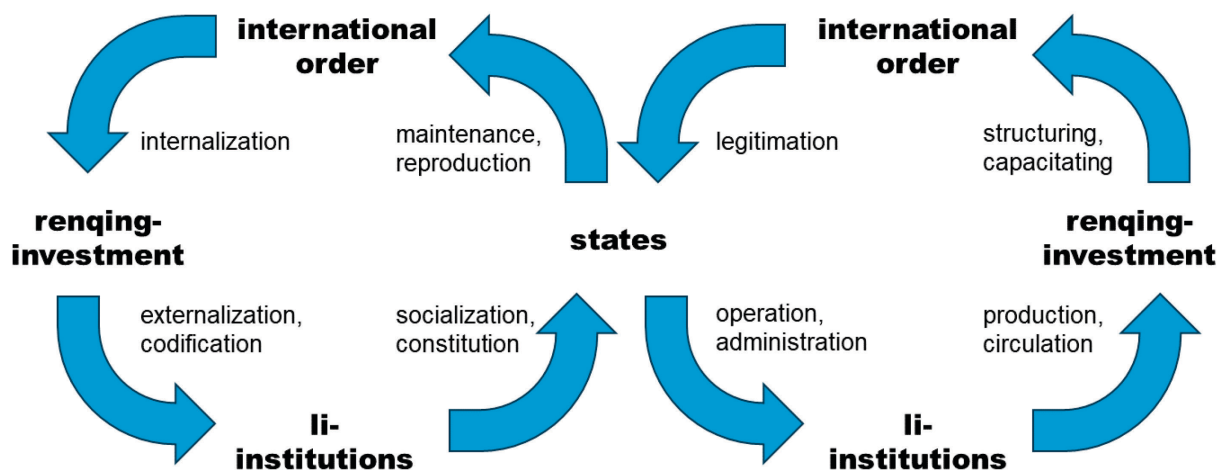
⁹³⁰ Yu-lan Fung, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (Macmillan, 1953), p. 178, quoted in Zhang 2001, 49.

⁹³¹ Menzel 2015, 198.

the last chapter, relations are based. The elementary basis for this resemblance is *tianxia* as a thin layer of relatedness among the actors. It is not clear, however, if *tianxia* is supposed to be an institution itself from the explanation. One way of improvising resemblance in rites and symbols is gift-giving, material or immaterial, which represents a ritual that serves as “a show of sacrifice to reproduce a ‘greater-self’ consciousness.” The use of consciousness is similar to many mentions of cognitive systems or shared knowledge in the previous sections. The authors conclude again from this perspective on the improvised nature of relations “that Chineseness is constituted by dynamic processes rather than by any stable contents” and further clarify “that all identities are post-identities that evolve and bifurcate through practices.”⁹³²

Li is the term that summarizes ritualistic behavior, norms-systems of international relations and the actual life of human individuals in official positions as they conduct foreign affairs, and it enables IR scholars to understand international society as fiduciary community. ‘*Li*-institution’ expresses the further development of English School/Practice Theory understandings of norms-systems and practices, since there is no other term as adequate to encompass the combined ‘normopraxis’ driven by both affective *and* strategic motivation within a field that can be articulated by *li*-institutions.

6.5. A double-cycle of international relations



⁹³² Shi et al. 2019, 243-245.

6.5.1. Modeling international relations

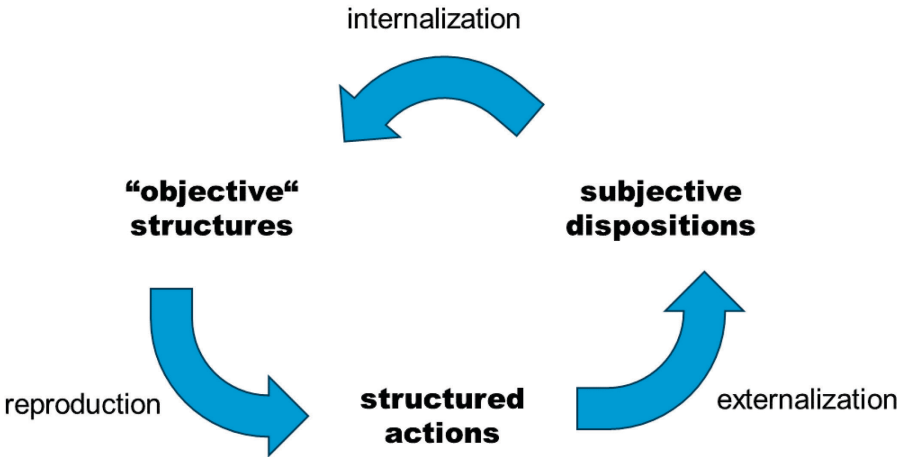
The Silk Roads opened a discussion for which I convened Chinese IR, English School and Bourdieusian philosophy, aimed to map the creation and contestation of institutions, the spaces of legitimate action in international society. The enhanced understanding of order, subjectivity and their interaction achieved in this project, prompts a change in perspective on international relations, culminating in the model I propose here. A proposition rooted in the connections among Practice Theory, Chinese IR and English School revealed during this thesis. Chinese contributions to the conceptualization of the social order of international relations elucidated the workings of norms-systems that are located as an influential layer between the official codex of international law and the behavioral automatisms associated with the security dilemma, which theories referencing “survival under anarchy” regularly emphasize. The three intellectual strands of this project were brought together for the further development of norms as cultural, symbolic systems, ultimately positioning them among the four major elements of the model in the form of institutions.

Some aspects, which do not appear in the model, still provide some relevant context. Throughout this project, the traditional notion of the 'actor' was expanded by promoting subjectivity as an additional dimension of actors, offering a deeper explanation of the relationships, capabilities, intentions and dispositions of individual units in international relations. The elemental forces that drive and propel the processes of both social order and subjectivity are the powers of meaning-making. It is these cultural and relational powers that are shared among the sites of investment, institutions, actors and order and that are employed to create and contest legitimacy. Regarding the environment in which actors exist in addition to the previously mentioned aspects, two other debates demonstrated a significant synergy. The first one started with several Chinese authors. They pointed out the importance of the human individual, of relationships as connection among humans and of the classical Confucian idea that the leadership of skilled, capable elites in society are decisive features for hegemony, domestic as well international. The second one concerns Practice Theory, which maintains the idea that the social configuration of actors is one defining dimension of fields, emphasizing Practice Theory's own inherently relational view. Moreover, an impactful group for the constitution of norms-systems is what Bigo called “transnational guilds” of scholars who invent the categories that determine behavior. These two discussions approach the wider, shared question of social, hierarchical configurations of actors and their cultural power, their legitimacy, within a specific field.

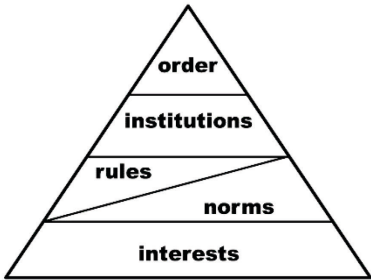
This double-cycle model does not exactly represent the research results of this project, rather, it is a map of the creation and contestation of the spaces of legitimate action. It is also an attempt to approach the question “Who is China/What is order?” and respond that both are, to a certain degree, the stake at play in global power struggles. The development of the model takes several steps as this section of the chapter progresses. Firstly, a circular movement taking place in social order as it was inspired by Bourdieu will be introduced. Second, a rough sketch of international society as it is defined by the English School will be presented. The next part will go into detail about the model and the last section will summarize the discussion of the model. The model implies a horizontal axis of states and investment and a vertical axis of order and institutions. Order and rules-systems are connected via the actors themselves, primarily states, and the investment among actors. Conversely, investment and actors are connected through order and rules-systems. Institutions, after all, define what the pieces are and how the game is played, so the pieces can only emerge from institutions. I hypothesize that the ‘order-institutions’ axis represents the structural dimension, while the ‘investment-actors’ axis embodies the dispositional dimension.

The interaction of practices, fields and habitus is described through the way in which “[c]hances of success or failure are internalized and then transformed into individual aspirations or expectations; these are in turn externalized in action that tends to reproduce the objective structure”. This is a circular relation, which unites practices and structures because “objective structures tend to produce structured subjective dispositions that produce structured actions which, in turn, tend to reproduce objective structure.”⁹³³ These objective structures are not truly objective but possess such a power to *seem* objective that scholars call them objective. The loop presented here offers an explanation for the relations among practices, structures and subjectivity that ventures beyond simple cause and effect ideas. This complicates the understanding of international relations methodologically but might be utilized to develop a model that enables IR to gain new insights. The most important aspect here is that the double – cycle model of this thesis takes its idea of circular movements between the elements from this Bourdieusian concept and translates it into the realm of international relations. There is no starting point but rather a perpetual reproductive cycle in this movement. The circular relation that unites practices and structures could be illustrated like this:

⁹³³ Swartz 1997, 103.



Second, international society as it is conceptualized by the English School, with its relevance to the present thesis, is briefly summarized. Common interests establish the basis for international society. Hedley Bull theorizes that security for survival, the right of property in the sense of sovereign territoriality and truth expressed in the binding nature of international contracts are the three basic shared interests of all states. This is naturally debatable but can serve as example what common interests could look like. Shared interests must be organized by rules/norms so that different states can cooperate to prioritize and pursue their interests. These rules/norms lead to a structure of international relations that can be described as order. Bull points out that order could also be established by oppression through autocracy or by psychological conditioning. The real international order is probably a tripartite combination of rules/norms, power and the unconscious influence of ideas, but the model developed in *Anarchical Society* stresses rules. The complex organization of practices in norms-systems specific to certain fields of international politics, for example sovereignty, environmental stewardship or world trade, is termed institution. In order to differentiate international organizations such as ASEAN, NATO or the UN from these norm-practice-systems, the former can be called *secondary* institution and the latter *primary* institution. Eventually, ‘international order’ according to the English School, is the entirety of norm-guided practices in *goal-oriented activity patterns*. I depict this model in the following way:



International society according to the English School

These two, admittedly very disparate, sets of ideas are brought together to form a model of international relations. The model has of course other sources from which it is created but the start will be the combination of these two concepts. This will not be possible without a certain degree of abstraction, so the model will be elaborated in some detail in the remainder of this chapter. I argue that four elements are necessary to model international relations: investment as basic animating force, institutions as norms-systems for practices, states as primary actors and global order not as some kind of superstructure but as an adaptable condition. The concepts of investment and institutions included here are identical to the concepts previously discussed under *renqing* and *li*.

6.5.2. Investment, Institutions, States and Order

Renqing-Investment

A model of international relations should account for relationality, one of the aspects apparent in nearly all literary sources of this research program. I argue that the best way to express and describe this foundational dynamic between actors (or relators) is to explain it as mutual investedness in each other in the form of economic, affective, social, political, cultural, strategic and any other forms investment that binds individuals. Without awarding it priority over the other three, I start with investment based on 人情 *rénqíng* (reciprocal investment), substituting national interest or the drive for survival as basic motivational drive of interaction. This investment as shared resource of cultural capital for the co-constitution of identity provides the elementary resources for international relations.

The concept of social and political investment is a continuation of Qin Yaqing's equation of *renqing* and Bourdieusian habitus. *Renqing* as described in *A Relational Theory* includes reciprocity and gift-giving as a form of social practice. Shih Chih-yu also speaks of investment in respect to reciprocity and gift-giving. Investment, be it economic, political, social, cultural, affective or – probably in most cases – a combination of all, can be intentional and conscious but can also be caused by another actor who expects reciprocity from a gift given or help previously provided. Investment can be initiated by oneself or by someone in whose social web an actor is located. International society is unique insofar as states as its primary actors possess the capacity, and to a certain degree even duty, to be invested in the relation to every of the nearly two hundred other primary actors through extensive diplomacy and foreign affairs bureaucracy. The intersubjective aspects of investment become rules/norms-systems as these social investments or relational obligations are externalized and codified into institutions, establishing norms and rules that govern international behavior. Investment has a structuring

function by providing the stakes at play and the goals for which to strive, so that order in a way is also the externalized side of the totality of the investment among actors. These social investments, supported by institutions, structure and capacitate the international order, thereby reinforcing its stability and continuity.

Li-Institutions

Practice Theory helps to understand both the way norms-systems serve as a power resource and the integration of such systems into social power configurations. The relation between the institution of trade in the current world governance and the Belt and Road Initiative is the perfect example for the utilization of economic, cultural and political resources in order to contest and transform institutions. The social interaction, meaning-making and negotiations or conflicts within institutions also produces and circulates mutual investment among actors further. The move to bring practices from Practice Theory and institutions from the English School together in one concept is supported by redefinitions of the Chinese classic idea of *li*, which also merges rules/norms with the actions and behavior they are guiding. This project attempted to enrich the understanding of norms- and rules-systems in international relations with Practice Theory by highlighting the intimate connection between these systems and the culture they are derived from. Institutions encompass the entire discussion of norms- and rules-systems in this thesis, including the examination of Chinese concepts of morality in chapter four. There was also speculation about specific Chinese institutions in this thesis. Examples would be the Tributary System as former institution of Chinese world order, the Developmental State as contemporary institution of the East Asian regional international society, or Moral Leadership as a potential institution for global order derived from the works of Chinese IR scholars.

The spontaneous, informal type of investment becomes codified and externalized into *li*-institutions, which embody the ‘normopraxis’ within specific fields of international politics. A core assumption of the English School is that international cooperation is grounded in the shared sense of obligation to intersubjectively created rules.⁹³⁴ Investment also legitimizes the existence of such rules by simply necessitating standards of behavior and codes of conduct. States, particularly dominant powers, recognize the costs of anarchy and the mutual benefits derived from rules-based relations.⁹³⁵ According to Bull, rules “provide the means whereby international society moves from the vague perception of a common interest to a clear

⁹³⁴ Tim Dunne, *Inventing International Society: A History of the English School* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

⁹³⁵ Linklater and Suganami, 2006.

conception of the kind of conduct it requires.”⁹³⁶ The matrix of norms in Practice Theory expands on this idea of rules by adding aspects of power and suggesting that rules themselves exert power and/or can be used as instruments of hegemony. Moreover, beyond being a mere collection of rules, institutions like world trade function as sites where norms are contested, practices acquire new meanings, and the fundamental structures of global politics are administered, all of this to maintain and reproduce international order. While investment is an intersubjective dynamic between actors, institutions are the seemingly objective, externalized structure on which this investment rests. On the one side, institutions socialize states by internalizing these norms and rules, shaping their behavior and roles within the international system. On the other side, institutions facilitate the production and circulation of investment, reinforcing social obligations and relational norms within the international order.

States

A model of international relations should also account for the nature of subjectivity as it was discussed above. Subjectivity was developed further towards trans-subjectivity with the help of ideas like the split, contradictory habitus or non-synthetic post hybridity and Queer IR theory. This is of course a characteristic of the individual actors in a social order. States are placed at the heart of this model but the state as the actor is not an autonomous, independent unit. Actors, or relators, were defined in chapter two as subsidiary nodes of an intersubjective matrix of dispositions. They possess the ability to act through a particular distribution of political, economic and cultural resources at their specific position within a social field. This field provides the norms and rules that give actions their meaning so that acting out practices makes sense to begin with rather than remaining inactive. The existence of actors is thus defined by these intersubjective, distributional and social dimensions, turning them into mere nodes in the social webs, which would not exist without the threads that bind them. States, however, are not the preexisting basic building blocks of international society, they can be better described as organs that emerged out of a greater whole. The system of sovereign states, organized in primary institutions, unsurprisingly also further legitimizes the existence of states. Even though the English School never seems to agree on whether states are institutions or not and there remains some doubt whether states are proper fields or something like ‘meta-fields’ in Practice Theory, I argue that it is justified to treat them as separate element of this model.

⁹³⁶ Bull 2002, 68.

Although the idea is contested⁹³⁷ as I just mentioned, Holsti and Bull⁹³⁸ go so far as to claim states themselves to be “foundational” or “principal” institutions of international society. Despite his skepticism, Buzan in his depiction of the market as an institution contends that “[i]t is the market that makes the state and the state that makes markets”⁹³⁹, remaining somewhat in a nexus between the phenomena of state and institution. States are still considered prime actors in international relations in this model, even though there are of course many more players in the international arena. Multinational corporations, NGO’s, terrorist groups, powerful individuals like Elon Musk or Greta Thunberg all take part in global politics alongside states. Although the processual nature of the model does not prioritize any element above the others, states are not coincidentally placed at the center. States are socialized into the international society by institutions and internalize the principles and goals of the international order. States, influenced by these institutions, contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of the international order by aligning their actions with the established norms, thus perpetuating stability and order in the international system. On the other side, order also legitimizes the existence of states that, empowered by this legitimation, operate and administer institutions, enforcing and maintaining the norms and rules established by these institutions.

International Order

International order is the totality of the structured social activities that pursue the goals of international society, suggested by Hedley Bull to be security, truth and property. Since the goals of international society constantly change, it is impractical to name a definitive list here. These goals define directives for the actors, typically states in most contexts of international relations, and are also expressed in norms-systems. Among all the elements that contribute to a certain order, trade is the core mechanism around which order emerges. The reader may recall Ulrich Menzel’s unambiguous clarification of the critical role of trade in the context of hegemony, concluded from his comprehensive typology of hegemonic global systems throughout history. Historically, institutions such as slavery and colonialism were created to serve certain goals of former international societies, however, the Paris Agreement or the idea of nuclear nonproliferation pursue different objectives. By carrying out these directives through institutions, states externalize dispositions, for example dispositions towards nonproliferation, environmental stewardship or sovereignty, thereby transforming them into

⁹³⁷ Buzan, 2004.

⁹³⁸ Holsti, 2004; Bull 2002.

⁹³⁹ Buzan 2004.

objective rules for international order. In this understanding, rules implemented by powerful agents or influential dynamics do *not result* in the formation of order, rather than the other way around, the constant condition of some degree of order *causes* the formulation and enforcement of rules.⁹⁴⁰

To clarify this specific idea of order further, order does not emerge when states have agreed to sufficient rules to stabilize interstate activity enough so that one can speak of ‘order’. Order is a constant condition of global politics that exists continuously, although varying significantly in degree. This fact complicates the characterization of order tremendously. A political system of international relations might be separated into three layers to provide a better access to the idea of its overall constitution. First, the actors and their mutual investment as the foundation; second, institutions that organize specific dimensions of international life like sovereignty, trade or environmentalism above the basis as level of governance and finally global (or regional) order understood as the entirety of all structured activity that pursues the goals of society. Actors, investment and institutions seem to be a part of that order but at the same time need to be considered as distinct entities. Actors, investment, institutions *and* order as four sites work together in global social life and that is why the double-cycle presents them as four separate aspects while they are still interconnected.

The idea that actors’ investment in each other animates the activities of order at the most basic level addresses the English School’s fundamental puzzle: the fact that “the interactions of states exhibit a degree of order that could not, under anarchy, normally be expected.”⁹⁴¹ Investment among actors gives their collective social activity the capacity to identify, pursue and actualize the goals of society, in the sense that states are enabled but also required to act as a society. In this way, global order also facilitates and perpetuates the mutual investment among actors, which they again internalize as part of their self-conception. Moreover, international order supports the internalization of norms and values back into the social investment process, ensuring that these relational norms continue to inform the practices and interactions between states. Regarding actors, the existing international order legitimizes the actions and roles of states, providing them with the authority and structure necessary to function effectively within the global system.

⁹⁴⁰ See Bull 2002, 6-8 and 52.

⁹⁴¹ Linklater and Suganami 2006.

6.5.3. Summary

Thinking these three diverse schools of thought in conjunction produces a result that is evidently neither easily operationalizable nor straightforward, but rather complex yet incomplete. From a pessimistic perspective, this model might be regarded as a mere symbolic representation for the productive common ground that intersects the various intellectual sources addressed in the present thesis. Hopefully it can serve as a launchpad for new ideas because transculturalized, queer and progressive IR studies are an essential avenue to revitalize and innovate the discipline. There is already ample scholarship following the traditional path of great power competition, particularly as China and the USA are framed, or perhaps intellectually constructed, as new adversaries in the current realist imagination of the battle for hegemony. The pitfalls and many limitations of quantitative methodology are a deficiency and a challenge within the discipline. Fortunately, this can be mitigated by robust qualitative research, which delves deeply into the complexities of international relations and produces results and insights such as the double-cycle model presented here. The utility of this particular intellectual endeavor for the analysis of international relations remains to be seen, but this thesis might as well represent an example for the promising, fertile new directions IR can take by incorporating a more diverse range of cultural heritages into research on international relations.

The focus of this model is on interpreting the world in a relational and processual way. Field and habitus are caught in a continuous cycle of mutual constitution (a process reminiscent of the simultaneous formation of actors and relationships in Qin Yaqing's theory), and similarly, the concept of *li*-institutions is dynamically interconnected with *renqing*-investment in international relations. Additionally, the habitus-field-cycle also generates on its top end a world order based on norms/rules-systems and on its bottom end produces individual subjectivities, thereby linking every single individual to the overall world order. Mutual investedness is the fundamental prerequisite for the coexistence of actors and delineates the boundaries within which international relations can be sustained. Institutions provide the platforms upon which order, as comprehensive system of goal-oriented activities, occurs. Yet institutions are even more than that, since terrorism, piracy, the illegal narcotics industry, human trafficking or cybercrime might as well be considered international institutions. Such outcast, 'criminal' institutions have norms of their own, actors of their own and a meaning-making systems of their own, a promising direction for further research. Returning to the present thesis, the prime actors, states come into being through a kind of global political 'organogenesis' as subunits of the global political cosmos. This connects states intimately to

the ecosystem of international life, global actors and global rules-systems, in addition to the global economy all are inevitably part of.

The four sites of this model – investment, institutions, actors and order – propel international relations as a dynamic organization of coexistence. The two parts of habitus are the subjectivity of the state and the intersubjective elements of mutual investment. The elements of habitus can be contradictory, split and fractured as Practice Theory explained to us. The same is true for the seemingly ‘objective’ structures: institutions and order, which depict the fractal and composite nature of fields equally elaborated in Practice Theory. Overall, they comprise a horizontal dispositional axis and a vertical structural axis. The elements of the global political cosmos are just as much subjected to laws of movement as the elements in the physical cosmos, and it is movement that defines their existence. Elements are drawn to centers of attraction and sometimes torn between several of them. China’s continuous search for a balance between sovereignty and independence and economic success on a world scale is just one example. The double-cycle model is not a tool for analyzing international relations in a traditional sense, as it cannot provide dependent and independent variables. Instead, it serves as a model that encourages scholars to adopt a new perspective on global politics and illustrates the relational and processual nature of international relations.

7. Summary and Inconclusion

This chapter will be summarizing the thesis so far and repeat the central arguments in order to present the whole picture, condensed into the most important elements. As a summary, this chapter might be a bit longer than expected but the depth in which the sources were explored and the complex connections forged between them require more steps to retrace, especially when the details of argumentation and logical conclusion are shortened. This thesis set out to examine China's role in the reproduction of international order. The background here is the idea that international order, or maybe better world order, has existed for a very long time. World order is not something that emerged after World War II or after the fall of the Soviet Union or after the Peace Treaty of Westphalia. This assumption rests on a methodical decision that stands at the beginning of this thesis. The decision to concentrate neither on the laws and official rules, the codex of international society, nor on mechanistic ideas that naturalize short, causal links between anarchy and self-help to the Thucycides Trap and the Security Dilemma.

Instead, I concentrate on norms, unofficial rules and belief systems, possibly termed the 'canon' of international society as opposed to its official codex. This canon is a dynamic, fluid site of which all elements of the global political cosmos are part. European states and the US now follow the trend of de-risking and de-coupling and have been caught in waves of resurgent nationalism, all these had been associated with China. In an ironic twist from the 90s it seems that China is not becoming more Wester after all, but it is the West who is becoming more Chinese. Of course, it is trivial and unscientific to wonder who is becoming more like whom, but this example shows how deep-seated belief system truly are and how they shape even rigorously quantitative, rationalist political science like neoliberal IR. The BRI is this thesis' launchpad to bring together Western and Chinese IR in a synthetic way and create new insights from transcultural methods. Before summarizing the previous contents, however, I provide a framework and reference which shall guide and carry the summary of my arguments thereafter.

7.1. The End of History and the Last Confucian – Part II

A research project targeted at world order is well advised to anchor itself in existing traditions surrounding the topic and thus the present project understands itself in the spirit of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*. His work was an attempt to map the creation and contestation of spaces of legitimate action and a closer look at the position Western value systems inhabit globally, as well, and he even debated the role of Asian states in the reproduction of world order, just as the present project does. Analyzing the unquestioned nature

of some elementary but still constructed belief systems on which almost all societies or collective psychologies are based is one way to examine transcultural encounters in the course of globalization. Additionally, Fukuyama spoke about the challenge authoritarian Asian modernizers posed to the West when many scholars still considered the transformation towards liberal democracies an automatic process within economic successful societies and predicted the inevitable democratization of China.

The End of History is an easily misunderstood concept. It means that “we cannot imagine a world substantially different from our own, in which there is no apparent or obvious way in which the future will represent a fundamental improvement over our current order” and thus “we must also take into consideration that History itself might be at an end.”⁹⁴² Is Beijing still advocating for a substantially different world that represents a fundamental improvement after entirely abandoning revolutionary communism? It does not, I follow Fukuyama, closing the present thesis. The results of the project resonate with the idea of the End of History in two dimensions. First, Confucianism is able to align with liberal democracy and does not necessarily pose an alternative or even threat to liberalism, allowing it to remain a social ideal without serious alternatives. Beijing authorities promote diverse forms of Confucian renaissance in an attempt to construct opposition to ‘Western culture’ but they cannot draw on an essentially different belief system because Confucianism is a multifarious and manifold plenitude of ideas and affects. The second dimension is China’s firm internalization of fundamental (potentially Western) belief systems: technological progress, market-oriented development, rational bureaucratic administration, capitalist economy and the need to rationalize human desires. These are the basic cognitive-symbolic systems on which most of the societies around the world are organized, according to Fukuyama.

Although these systems are culturally tied to Europe and socially constructed, there seem to be no alternatives to change, let alone improve, the basis of society beyond these elementary pillars. The fatal flaw of the clash of culture concepts is its error to understand culture as fixed and discrete and ignorance of the inherently fluid, transsubjective, mercurial nature of culture. In line with this sense of fluidity, Fukuyama diagnosed some deeply seated forces for homogenization around the globe. Especially relevant for international relations is that “the threat of war forces states to restructure their social systems along lines most conducive to producing and deploying technology.” The capitalist economic development also “produced certain uniform social transformations in all societies” and “rational bureaucratic

⁹⁴² Fukuyama 2020, 51.

organization” will sooner or later also “pervade every aspect of society in an industrialized country”.⁹⁴³

Liberal economy and liberal democracy are by far not equated in *The End of History*, to the contrary, Fukuyama explicitly points out that there is no essential connection between both but merely a certain coincidence between the two systems. (And China would certainly agree that there is no essential connection.) Following this caution, he also clarifies that it “is not so much liberal practice, as the liberal idea”, which is gaining ground because “for a very large part of the world, there is now no ideology with pretensions to universality that is in a position to challenge liberal democracy”. Despite the crises of liberalism in Europe and America, I argue that this is still true, as elaborated above with the example of China’s rejection of revolutionary ideologies. For the Western societies he also reaffirms that “we cannot picture to ourselves a world that is *essentially* different from the present one, and at the same time better.”⁹⁴⁴ [original italics] Even in 2024, after a financial crisis, a pandemic, a great scale war in Europe and the growing threat of climate change, this is true. Eventually, Fukuyama’s conclusion is the “question at the end of history”, which is whether “the recognition provided by the contemporary liberal democratic state adequately satisfies the human desire for recognition.”⁹⁴⁵

He gave us a pretty good measuring standard against which to evaluate the validity of any given world order in asking if liberal democracy “adequately satisfies the desire for recognition”, even though his was not exactly his intention.⁹⁴⁶ He explained that “the historical process rests on the twin pillars of rational desire and rational recognition,” as domesticated forms of the drives of desire and recognition, and he wondered whether “modern liberal democracy is the political system that best satisfies the two in some kind of balance”.⁹⁴⁷ The basis of society is not so different in Chinese and Western imaginations. Shi’s self-restraint is another expression for being ‘rational’ about desire and Yan Xuetong even quoted Xunzi to stress the need to rationalize desires. Fukuyama often refers to Hegel throughout his entire book, especially when debating recognition, which he refers to as *thymos* in a political context. The need for recognition can be *isothymia*: equal and mutual and in this form similar to *renqing*; but it can also be *megalothymia*: the craving to surpass one’s peers and be recognizes as greater than others.

⁹⁴³ Fukuyama 2020, 73-78.

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid., 45-46.

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid., 207.

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid., 289.

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid., 337.

The struggle for recognition is “at the core of what is human” and “preserve[s] a certain moral dimension to human life that is entirely missing in the societies conceived by Hobbes and Locke.” The Last Man is the human who has “no desire to be recognized as greater than others” but “without such desire no excellence or achievement was possible.”⁹⁴⁸ Fascinatingly, Confucianism seems to be a similarly strong mechanism enforcing isothymia as the societies both British philosophers conceptualized, contrarily to liberal, capitalist democracy, however, with totally different contents and values. Directly linked to the powers of meaning-making is the human need to place value on things, themselves in the first place, which derives from the struggle for recognition, a concept also mentioned before in the present thesis. Fukuyama defines the desire for recognition as “the most specifically political part of the human personality”.⁹⁴⁹ That is the reason why a “good political order needs to be something more than a mutual non-aggression pact”, it also has to “satisfy man’s just desire for recognition of this dignity and worth.” A society following Hobbes and Locke that purely rests on a “combination of desire and reason” without *thymos*⁹⁵⁰ would thus not be possible. It seems that Fukuyama would agree with Qin, that a human community needs principles that not only regulate the social interaction but also provide a deeper meaning beyond pure rationality.

The profound open question of Fukuyama’s work originates in the debate about the desire for recognition and is articulated following Nietzsche. His “central concern in fact might be said to be the future of *thymos* – man’s ability to place value in things, and in himself”, which Nietzsche sees threatened by the spread of democracy. “[T]o the extent that liberal democracy is successful at purging *megalothymia* from life and substituting for it rational consumption”, Fukuyama concludes, “we will become last men.” The picture, however, is overall not that simple, especially in international relations. According to Fukuyama, the desire for recognition is also the origin “of two extremely powerful passions – religion and nationalism.” This connection “explain[s] why conflicts over ‘values’ are potentially much more deadly than conflicts over material possessions or wealth”, since “[u]nlike money, which can simply be divided, dignity is something inherently uncompromisable”.⁹⁵¹ The conflict about Chinese claims in the South and East China Sea come to mind when reading these thirty year old passages, but the sentiments Donald Trump mobilizes, for example, are feelings of dignity and recognition as well, turning *The End of History* into a highly contemporary work of scholarship. After the ‘century of humiliation’, Chinese foreign policy is determined by the struggle for

⁹⁴⁸ Fukuyama 2020, xxii.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid., 161-163.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid., 168-185.

⁹⁵¹ Ibid., 214.

recognition and the defense and confirmation of its dignity. The Communist Party identifies itself with these tenets and is devoted to their observance. Apart from the promise of economic and social progress, this is the ultimate legitimization of the CCP's reign.

7.2. Method

Before summarizing my findings about the BRI, Chinese IR and China's role in the reproduction of international order, I would like to briefly recall the research design of this project to direct and orient this summary. In order to grasp China's role in the reproduction of international order, the chapter on methods proposed to map the creation and contestation of spaces of *legitimate* action, guided by the twin question "Who is actor/What is order?". The English School, Practice Theory and Confucianism all revolve around questions of order, and all emphasize cultural aspects instead of simple power mechanisms or plain rationalism. Theories like this pay attention to rules and norms and relate cognitive-symbolic systems to behavioral patterns. After all, knowledge originates neither in objective reality, as Patrick Jackson pointed out, nor in the mind alone but in social practices as "rule-governed activities, and the rules provide an impersonal standard against which to evaluate particular acts" to achieve scientific insights. In short, international order is considered given, generalizable principles of world order are intermediary variables and causes for order are considered unknown in this method.

Regarding the empirical data sources for such methods, Robert Jackson suggested to "interrogate the evidence that statespeople leave in their tracks: the record of their policies and actions and the statements by which they attempt to justify them." This pointed the data gathering technique in the direction of textual and discourse analysis. Discourse was defined as the interactions that manifest the positions of actors in a social space and the categories of understanding. One example followed here is Bull's structural-functionalist method, which theorized causes for order from the purposes and requisites of that order. Navari suggested that an explanation for causal relationships requires to examine three elements: institutions as condition-creating, rules that become internalized and material conditions. China's new Silk Road, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the discourse around it represent the initial puzzle of this thesis because the new Silk Road is quite literally the evidence that statespeople leave in their *tracks* and part of Navari's material conditions that explain causal relationships.

Cornelia Navari explained that studying societies in this way requires explanatory devices, which shed light on actor's dispositions through "the identification of a social construction that is shaped by a value orientation." Vincent Pouliot summarized this method

aptly: observing actor's *practices* enables a research design to reconstruct their *dispositional logics*, which results in the construction of actor's *positional logics*. In short, to understand China's dispositions, the position it takes in the international field and the relation between both. For this task I was inspired by Patrick Jackson, Margaret Levi and Edward Keene. The process referred to is called ideal-type, analytical narrative or evaluative interpretation respectively in various different terms but always describes a way to understand the relations between actors, institutions and systems. This means that the puzzle to be examined is regarded as a 'value-event-link'. The event here is the BRI with its infrastructure and political projects, the values are apparent in the debates about Confucianism, *tianxia* and Daoism, surrounding the BRI. The core of this process is uncovering the powers of meaning-making and the values at work in these relations to find out which parts of a phenomena are worth knowing.

The power resources marshalled to change China's position in the field of international politics are Confucian culture and values, geopolitical concepts of regions such as 'Eurasia versus the Indo-Pacific' and identities/subjectivities themselves. These are the 'weapons' used to create and contest spaces of legitimate action and in China's case also expand spaces of legitimate action. As I already quoted William Callahan, *tianxia* "provides us with a heuristic device for understanding how Chinese elites view their role in the world, and the world itself". The picture that emerged from the empirics of the textual analysis was a relational world of social webs, predisposed towards a harmonization of relations. The theories with a national focus implied China at the center of these webs, whereas others constructed a stronger image of overall rhizomatic webs.

Primary institutions of international society are the spaces of legitimate action contested here and world trade, I argue, is the most pervasive and powerful among them. I further argue that this is the reason why China targeted world trade with the BRI. Mapping China's advances in the transformation of this institution in this thesis led to a juxtaposition of conventional and Chinese concepts of world order. This resulted in a model of international relations that can be utilized to answer the twin question "Who is actor/what is order?": Order is embedded in a dynamic double-cycle of investment, norms-systems and actors and actors are queer, transsubjective agents as nodes in a social network. The remainder of this summary will elaborate on this in depth but the crucial point here is the insight achieved into the way China attempts to transform institutions with its own values and norms-systems and the way this illuminates the understanding of Chinese international identity and world order as collective pattern of activity, contributed to by all elements of the global political cosmos.

7.3. The Belt and Road Initiative and World Trade

The Belt and Road Initiative was inaugurated in 2013, at that time under the name ‘One Belt One Road’ (OBOR) as an initiative including a transcontinental dimension and a maritime dimension. It is known mostly as infrastructure initiative, involving transportation, telecommunication, energy infrastructure, financial integration and so on. According to “Vision and actions on jointly building Belt and Road”, the official document outlining the BRI, the initiative brings together partner countries and aims to “set up all-dimensional, multi-tiered and composite connectivity networks, and realize diversified, independent, balanced and sustainable development in these countries.” It furthermore promises to “align and coordinate the development strategies of the countries along the Belt and Road, tap market potential in this region, promote investment and consumption, create demands and job opportunities, enhance people-to-people and cultural exchanges”.

The discourse around the BRI can be placed in a wider popular political debate about economic development and systemic rivalry, which emerged after the idea of ‘convergence’ has lost its credibility. According to this idea, developing countries in general and China in particular will adopt a liberal democratic system as they become economically successful and modernized. As these particular illusions of an End of History waned and China seemed not to democratize despite a growing middle class, new ideas of alternative development models or hybridization became popular. The terms ‘Beijing Consensus’ or ‘China Model’ described an increasingly assertive promotion of China’s own economic model toward the global south and Xi Jinping’s speeches announcing the BRI as a next step in this process caused a lot of resonance around the world. The short-sightedness of the West was often contrasted against the alleged grand strategy of the Chinese government and indeed, the year 2049 as 100th anniversary of the PRC appeared in official communication around the BRI. The initiative was described as international example of China’s hybrid economic-model combining state-guided and free market elements in its economy.

Self-evidently, the BRI was confronted with innumerable challenges. The institutional and legal framework of some of China’s partner countries is unreliable, which leads to political, social and economic risks. Environmental damage seems unavoidable in infrastructure projects and the land-grabbing of Chinese firms are further large points of criticism. Two aspects that led to considerable backlash was the conflict between Chinese corporations and local population and what was termed ‘debt-trap’ diplomacy. The first aspect refers to cultural arrogance of Chinese entrepreneurs and the lack of job opportunities created by China’s

companies, which often imported their own labor force. The second aspect describes the financial risks accompanying large infrastructure projects, of which Sri Lanka's Hambantota port is often named as prototype. After the Sri Lankan government defaulted on its debt, China took over the port and was accused of consciously creating such 'debt-traps' for financially weaker countries. China lost the support for the BRI from countries like Malaysia, Thailand or Indonesia because of such issues. Despite setbacks like these, the BRI does include several success stories. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is generally considered as one of its more prominent and successful outcomes and valuable addition to Asia's financial institutions to promote infrastructure. Trains that arrived at Germany and Spain from China should also not be underestimated as publicity successes that contributed to the perception of a more powerful and globally proactive China.

Motivations for the BRI include domestic and international political factors. The 2008 financial crisis and Obama's pivot to Asia were named as crucial events in the conception of a large scale Chinese international political initiative. China intends to create and secure a stable and favorable international environment and counter US containment by 'deepening its strategic space' or 'broadening its strategic hinterland' as it was described in some articles. Although China is firmly characterized as a land power with a continental strategic culture in many publications, it can yet make use of its vast coastline to turn containment doctrines against it impractical. The concept of the 'Indo-Pacific' was revived for the purpose of countering the BRI and is a direct response to China's promotion of the geopolitical regional idea of 'Eurasia'. Without the new Silk-Road there might be nobody around the world thinking in regional terms of an 'Indo-Pacific'. The irony being that the idea of the Indo-Pacific in its original form explicitly excluded the USA as geographically separated from the region. Although the US seems to conceptualize the Indo-Pacific as a condominium of India, America, Australia and Japan, obstacles remain for example in India's reluctance to fully embrace an 'anti-China alliance'.

Economic corridors and 'international industrial capacity cooperation' are the two main elements of the BRI's economic dimension. Economic corridors are an approach to development that regards trade hubs as nucleus of larger industrial zones growing around logistics networks. International industrial capacity cooperation is the political coordination of the industrial policies of several countries in order to create new supply chains and plan the division of labor accordingly. For the year 2016, Maçães quoted that "a progress report on the Belt and Road already enumerated eighteen border cooperation zones and fifty-two industrial parks as being operational across eighteen countries." With growing labor costs of Chinese

workers, Beijing attempts to secure a foothold in low-wage societies and open up, for example, Africa as China's new industrial subsidiary and is especially successful in cooperations with governments who reject European or American standards in democracy and human rights.

This is not only the case in Africa but also for Central Asia. Distant Central Asia might be forgotten by Western governments as part of a Russian economic sphere or even actively ignored after the disaster in Afghanistan. For Beijing, however, Central Asia is a space necessitating attention whether China is willing to invest resources or not. Economic, religious and ethnic cross-border networks cover the whole region, connect China tightly to its Western neighbors and make it vulnerable for every issue emerging there. Starting with the Qing conquest of Dzungaria, integrating Xinjiang into the Chinese state has been a challenge since the 19th century. The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps was established for this purpose during the Mao era and is still active in the region. After the Reform and Open period, plans to develop Xinjiang also changed and in the late 90s the campaign 'Open Up the West' started, which can be seen as predecessor to the Central Asian area of the BRI.

Among the many goals of the BRI are economic and political ones; concerning the geopolitics of Central Asia, Michael Clarke is of the opinion that China's pre-eminence in 'eastern Eurasia' is at the core of the initiative. Maçães, on the other hand, explains that unimpeded access to the South China Sea is a necessary condition for China's survival, at the very least to guarantee its energy security. Economically, Chinese companies appear as competitors in many areas where Western actors formerly dominated the market, but China also promotes its own industrial standards and tries to establish independent value- and supply-chains. The BRI thus challenges the West in the core issue of rules- and norms-systems that organize supply-chains on a basic level. This is the economic side of what Maçães called the "most singular and important fact about contemporary geopolitics", which is East Asian regionalism and the "competition about how this enlarged space is to be managed and defined." Buzan and Zhang seconded that in explaining that East Asia is not an alliance network of a predominant power, but a discursive space because the international society of East Asia as an "idea is manifested mainly in contestation over what such a regional international society should look like." Spaces of legitimate action are not only created and contested as primary institutions of international society it seems, but very tangible geographic spaces as well.

The BRI takes place on a political and on an economic level and shows that both cannot be separated. The activities in infrastructure, finance, logistics and commerce emphasize its economic nature and its impact on world trade. There is a specifically fitting approach to understand China's role in the reproduction of international society by mapping the creation

and contestation of spaces of legitimate action with the methods proposed above. This approach is the English School of International Relations (ES) with its vast repertoire of research on the topics of world order, institutions, shared culture and international society. Following the ES in categorizing world trade as primary institution of international order enables the present thesis to access the BRI on crucial levels of meaning-making, international legitimacy and the connection between economy and politics in international relations.

Primary institutions define what the pieces are and how the game is played and cover the fundamental parts of global politics: communication, conflict, membership and so on. These elementary spheres of interaction between states and the existence of states themselves are legitimized and organized through complex systems of norms, beliefs, practices and historical traditions. Sovereignty, diplomacy, trade and war are therefore termed primary institutions, each organizes basic existential dimensions of world order. Colonialism and slavery can be regarded as former institutions that organized other dimensions or organized existing dimensions differently. Institutions can thus change, become obsolete or emerge anew, as the example of environmental stewardship shows. The English School's attention focusses overwhelmingly on 'official' primary institutions but should consider 'unofficial', illicit institutions like human trafficking, piracy, cyber-crime, terrorism and the illegal narcotics industry in the future to develop the concept of primary institutions further.

Die Ordnung der Welt (2015) by Ulrich Menzel is unambiguously clear about the exceptional importance of trade for world politics in the conclusion of its impressively expansive study of historical international orders and the maintaining hegemons. All or almost all of them were concerned with the organization and protection of international trade and the related services of transport, warehousing, financing, insurance, clearing, provision of means of payment, weights and measures, translation and interpretation, accommodation for long-distance traders, security of law and property, nautical charts, globes, sailing manuals, and so on. Among these, innovations in transport and communications infrastructure need to be especially emphasized. The status of trade as primary institution, hence, seems proven.

These institutions are part of the second crucial concept of the ES: the international society. This concept describes a group of states that has developed beyond a primitive system of coexistence with minimal interaction and shares common values, rules and interests and faces collective problems, which also make cooperation each actor's self-interest. The idea of shared values in an international society, or shared culture, was actually a source of Eurocentrism in the ES, which got rectified in later writings. For Shih Chih-yu and this co-authors, *tianxia* is the thin layer of common ground between all states and thus might serve as an impulse for the ES

to update this idea. Hedley Bull suggest security, truth and property as basic shared interests, which means that states are interested in their own security, the principle of 'pacta sunt servanda' in international agreements and their own territory as sovereign property. Order is a constant condition that applies in greater or lesser degree but rarely disappears completely, social order is a pattern of activity that pursues particular outcomes. The goals of the current order are the preservation of the states' status as primary actors and the organization of world order as a system of states as such, the maintenance of peace and world trade can also be listed as further goals. Much of this feels natural but in reality, it is a complex cultural, social and economic construction that requires huge amounts of resources to maintain.

Trade and other economic factors that play into the political constitution of international orders reappear in the discourse around regionalization in general and Asian regionalization in particular, which is describe as a dominant trend in the coming decades. Therefore, the subject of analysis must be regional and sub-regional organizational activity that is driven by the interplay of socio-cultural norms, market structures and institutional politics. What Higgott described here under the heading of 'regional economic institutionalization of East Asia' can best be understood by examining the local political economy and its specific institutions. Several states of East Asia, with Japan as a pioneer, have adapted and adjusted economic models to suit their own situation and demands after World War II. This process is still ongoing with emerging economies in the region drawing on the experiences of the early industrializing states and developing their models further. The PRC itself belongs to one of the later generations and has an especially unique model with its 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics'.

The most prominent phenomenon of the East Asian political economy is the Bureaucratic Developmental State or short Developmental State (DS), and another example found in the literature are Asia's typical regional production networks (RPN). Mark Beeson and Shaun Breslin explained that RPN and the DS are important regional derivations from the global political economy and should be categorized as distinctive Asian primary institutions. These show how norms- and rules-systems and economic patterns are adapted and mixed with local cultural systems and models and thus help the ES overcome Eurocentric prejudice and develop better concepts of international order and primary institutions. The idea of primary institutions on the other hand helps to understand the function of DS and RPN in Asian regionalization.

Developmental State is the term used to describe the unique interwoven structure of political and economic spheres, first in post-war Japan, then in Hongkong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore as second generation and later on in other Asian states as well. The DS expresses a special relationship between state and market and a strong role of the government in

industrialization and economic development. For the BRI, the DS is important because it can bring development to regions in which economic risks are too great to be borne by private companies alone and larger initial investments are needed to create a base for market forces to access underdeveloped areas. For world order, the DS is crucial because it represents a regional primary institution that contributes to the definition states' subjectivities and their behavior.

Regional Production Networks address the network of states, but also direct attention at transnational actors like multinational companies or ethnic networks across the region. RPN determine how the region operates in economic terms and how the single developmental states interact with each other and what other elements have some influence on this interaction. Apart from the obvious connection to the Silk Road, the BRI is placed in the tradition of the Tributary System in some of the literature, which shows that such networks are also deeply embedded in Asia's cultural heritage. RPN might not work without significant investment by states but nowhere meet private market actors and governments more on a level playing field than here, since it is private companies that animate the networks with economic life, without which the roads and railways would only be industrial ruins in the middle of nowhere.

Economy and trade are the best examples of creation and contestation of institutions. They show most obviously which effects cultural systems can have both on material reality and on dispositions and subjectivities. The norms/rules-system of trade determines the behavior of actors as well as their identity and consequently has a massive impact on the current world order. Indicators for a change in world order, hence, also appear early in transformations of world trade. East Asian regionalism and especially China's role in it were once compared to the Hanseatic League and its influence over the formation and maturation of Europe's early international society. Imagining the East Asian states associated as a league, loosely cooperating around common issues in an open and flexible framework should indeed be pursued further as a future research project. Furthermore, given the population and economic power of East Asia, it is hardly surprising that changes there would be felt around the world. European international political heritage, the concept of primary institutions of international society and a sound understanding of distinctive Asian institutions comprise the framework in which the BRI is placed in the present thesis. With this case as starting point, several authors of Chinese IR can be examined for their own use of the powers of meaning-making, which increased alongside Beijing's foreign policy advances.

7.4. First Generation Chinese IR

The idea for a Chinese school of IR can be traced to back to the mid-80s but it took twenty years until a theory became widely recognized as such in the form of Zhao Tingyang's work on *tianxia*. The three great debates among Chinese intellectuals in the meantime revolved, first, around the nature of the international system and how China is supposed to relate to it, second, the question if China should pursue its goals through competition or cooperation and the last one about whether China can rise peacefully or not. The issue with mainstream IR in respect to this question runs deep and is scientifically highly problematic. The influence of American IR has been so pervasive, it basically tried to indoctrinate Beijing that competition is the only way for great powers to relate to each other. The same scholars then return to their research and verify that competition is the only way for great powers to relate to each other by testing their hypothesis on the case they and their colleagues have been constructing themselves all along.

The discourses in Chinese IR, however, can be illustrated with more depth and insight. First, Chinese IR is less interested in explaining the world rather than suggesting normatively good ways to govern the world. A second and far deeper level is the debate around Chinese identity. William Callahan argues that the perennial question transfixing the intellectuals and political elites of the PRC has always been: Who is China?. The debate about *tianxia* in the 21st century itself is a manifestation of this discourse and the unparalleled importance it takes within Chinese IR theories. It is therefore imperative for the present thesis to embrace 'Who is China?' in its research design as well. The question who China is cannot, however, be answered by searching for a cultural essence. Yong-Soo Eun criticizes that Confucianism, Marxism, *tianxia* and the Tributary System are an unsystematic pool of references for Chinese intellectuals. He contrasts that anarchy, survival, and the balance of power have been the "key operating principles" for China's foreign policy and thus places traditional Chinese strategic culture unambiguously in conventional, universal, mainstream IR theories. While it might not be as easy as that, Eun's conclusion of a neorealist Chinese legacy and the history of the Hanseatic League as European example of relational legacy make clear how fast cultural categories and demarcations disappear and give way to transcultural arguments.

Another example is Confucianism, which is having a remarkable comeback in China, being, however, a highly complicated phenomenon and instead of a simple popular revival of tradition. First, Confucianism never had been as dominant a belief system in Chinese statecraft as it is depicted to be. Secondly, Confucianism has suffered a cataclysm in the 20th century

comparable to few other belief systems, if not outright unique in its nature for Confucianism. A similar breakdown to Chinese civilization itself, one might add. In addition to the transformation over the course of the 20th century, Confucianism exists in a cultural environment inseparable from Daoism, Buddhism, Marxism and Chinese regional cultures. All of this intensifies the fact that Confucianism does not contain a singular, coherent system of meanings and narratives but highly dynamic example of the powers of meaning-making. The liberal, democratic, pluralist, progressive Confucianism of one scholar is as true as the conservative, authoritarian, elitist Confucianism of another scholar.

Attempts to control Confucianism and formulate an official, canonic version of it by the CCP mirror attempts to control China as a polity as a whole. Confucianism might thus be considered a meta-level of Chinese subjectivity, a resource that is shared among several countries like Japan, Korea or the US. Given the praise Hegel received from Chinese scholars, he might be regarded as an addition to the Confucian canon as well. The most tangible example is of course the figure of Confucius himself, who meanwhile can represent anything anyone wants him to, conveniently connotated with benevolence and harmony (whatever those two concepts mean). Taiwan must be a spiritual threat to Beijing again as a representative of classic Chinese culture outside the Communist Party's control. With such an outstanding importance of culture for Chinese politics, a research design was obliged to place it on a prominent position.

Culture is indeed a priority for the Chinese government, which links it intimately with China's sovereignty itself. This starts with defending China from the 'invasion of Western values' but goes far beyond that, as the global network of Confucius Institutes shows, which turned Confucius into *the* national icon of China. In order to foreclose an essentialist, monolithic idea of culture, however, it is helpful to consider it as a resource produced and consumed by different actors with different agendas. Cultural heritage like Confucianism and the history of China in general are resources produced, circulated and invested by a diverse variety of actors around the world. It would be totally wrong to think of Chinese culture as a Chinese property. The US utilizes huge amounts of their soft power to define China as a rival and construct a complex picture of all the elements this is supposed to entail. Confucianism is marshalled against this 'philosophical containment' both as a popular symbol, an empty signifier like Confucius, but also in ambitious endeavors like the Chinese IR of Qin Yaqing, Zhao Tingyang or Yan Xuetong. The desire to develop a program for the political application of Confucian philosophy is strong among Chinese intellectuals and their arguments often include large discussions of morality. Something Western scholars have been neglected in IR. Here again

certain elements in the ES resonate with Chinese IR, established by Hedley Bull's thoughts about justice in *An Anarchical Society*.

Morality is defined rather disparately in Yan Xuetong's and Zhao Tingyang's theories contrary to Qin Yaqing's work. Zhao Tingyang defines moral governance as an institutional arrangement that guarantees "universal provision of security and benefits" and later in his book repeats that morality means caring for the livelihood of the people. The classical texts Zhao draws from to make this point use the expression *minxin*, which captures the economic interests and needs of the population for him and is translated as 'feelings of the people'. The link between morality and *minxin* is shown with a direct refence to Confucius: Moral is what is constant in the feelings of the people and thus moral governance orients itself along those constant trajectories. Caring for the people as moral orientation, hence, gives legitimacy to a government on the one hand, but caring for the people in this way also maintains the 'heavenly inspired order'. The search for the constant elements of the feelings of the people reveals that there seems to be a deeper layer to morality than simply securing people's livelihood. Caring for the people as morally legitimized governance can of course lead to a paternalistic political system, in which the question how to identify the constants in the feelings of the people and who is in the position to do so is the key to power.

Yan Xuetong takes the discussion about morality from a domestic perspective to an international level. A government acts moral if it protects national interests and the interests of the population, possibly a reference to Zhao Tingyang, but it also needs to practice international norms and respect its alliances. Yan uses the three classic Chinese categories of the Way of the Tyrant, the Way of the Hegemon and the Way of the King, normatively set types of government of which the Way of the King is the best one. Yan Xuetong modernizes the term, translates it as 'humane authority' and treats it as the kind of behavior through which China can attain the authority to gain predominance in world politics. Vasilis Trigkas supported an understanding of Yan Xuetong's idea of morality as a consequentialist and not categorial one and explains that to Yan, a state gains authority by providing security to weaker states and abides by international rules. Irrespective of the Western conceptualization, morality here is a way to increase power and influence. Depending on the specific interpretation of the source material this would even justify Confucian interventions as counterpart to humanitarian interventions to uphold international norms and rules and maintain stability.

Yan Xuetong's concept of morality can be summarized in the following way. First, the protection of national interests and the interests of one's people. Second, to implement, enforce and practice norms, possibly with Confucian-humanitarian intervention. Third, strategic

credibility in alliances. Fourth, a government that is able to reform and employs skilled ministers. All of this rests on a capable, morally superior leadership that determines the military, economic and cultural power of a state through its ability and competence. The question with the concept of morality for both Yan, Zhao and Qin, however, is how easy morality as a condition *for* authority becomes the preexisting assumption that authority *is* moral.

Qin Yaqing provides a stark contrast to Zhao and Yan and claims that his morality is the complete opposite of rational utility-maximizing, rejects rules and norms as basis of behavior and even emphasizes that his idea of trust must be distinguished from a Western concept of trust as a way to reduce transaction costs. Qin clarifies that trust is “a way of life for virtuous persons, who trust one another because all of such people constantly engage themselves in self-cultivation toward moral perfection” and in this society of virtuous persons, “trust triumphs, relations are harmonized, and good governance prevails.” The background of his discussion is thus charged with a heavy load of normativity, which is ambiguous in its benefit for the arguments. Another interesting aspect is that Qin declares his morality as essentially Chinese and rational utility-maximizing, norms-based morality as essentially Western, while Yan and Zhao, to the contrary, derive exactly this consequentialist type of morality from classic Chinese culture.

Qin defines morality as a process that governs a society by codes and principles, which are based on moral norms and expressed through virtues of benevolence, justice, propriety, reason and honor. Apart from the structural function of governing a society it also works towards creating a meaningful collectivity of human beings. As lofty as his ideas might seem, there is a practical function and an accessible layer in this theory. Morality as a complex, intertwined system of behavioral codes, deeper meanings, virtuous practices and human individuals can be approached by a Bourdieusian sociology, as chapter six showed. There is an interaction between actor and structure, habitus and field that is worth paying closer attention to here. This might not be the utopian model Qin intends to set up, but still provides a deep insight into Chinese political philosophy of IR. This becomes apparent when he discusses the way morality actually operates in a society.

Qin later clarifies the relationship between the structural, organizational level and the creation of a meaningful community further. Moral governance is a negotiation of socio-political arrangements to manage relationships within a community that results in a certain order. The goal of that order is to enable members of this society to behave in a reciprocal and cooperative way to develop mutual trust through a shared understanding of norms. In short, governance is the management of relationships through shared understandings of norms to

guarantee peaceful coexistence. He further names four layers of moral governance elsewhere in *A Relational Theory*. *Morality* is the fundamental level because a Confucian society practices the rule of morality. *Trust* is build upon this level of morality as the elementary principle of behavior. The Confucian society then *harmonizes relations* based on that level of trust. These three lead to a *good order* on top, which cultivates virtuous individuals, who are in turn a precondition and basic driving force of moral governance in a society. The crucial elements in Qin's theory are of course relationality as basic ontology, the *affective* aspect of order and the values that give a deeper meaning to a community, which he terms norms.

For Yan Xuetong, morality involves the implementation of norms as well, but on a more organizational level. As long as a system of norms is implemented, which norms in particular are part of this system is secondary. For Qin, the norms not only have to organize society but also give it a deeper meaning. A deeper meaning from a Bourdieusian standpoint, however, is just a more powerful way to govern a society. This deeper level of morality can be accessed by looking at values. The topic of values is intimately linked with the discussion of norms in Chinese IR and sometimes norms and values appear as the same principle. The former shape the latter but it is never argued and explained how this takes place in detail. The typical cliché lists of 'good things' contains benevolence, righteousness, honor and so on. Humane authority, as Yan's general belief system of a new Chinese world order, rests on his superior traditional Chinese values. When forced to define norms, Yan only comes up with a reference to Krasner and the phrase of 'behavioral principles' but norms still play an important role in Yan's school of realism, as part of morality and as basis for legitimacy. Not even L.H.M. Ling, however, can do entirely without a reference to Confucian values in naming *ren* (benevolence) as a value linked to the Silk Road Ethos and translates it with 'mutual sociality'.

In *Leadership*, Yan argues that the establishment of norms is identical with attaining hegemony since the dominant state will build an international order that favors its supremacy. Norms, however, not only serve as an instrument of power but have a central role in Confucian ideas of order. The basic problems of human nature, Yan quotes Xunzi, are its unlimited desires and social norms are the only way to restrain desires by reinforcing rationality. Yan's concept of rationality reminds of relational rationality and self-restraint as it appears in the works of Shih Chih-yu, Qin Yaqing and Zhao Tingyang. Self-restraint thus seems to be a core goal of Chinese norms-systems.

Beneath that level of official norms, Qin and Yan locate the level of values and trust. 'Fiduciary community' even is the technical term characterizing Qin's model of society, this is a community that rests on institutions of trusteeship. Qin's idea of trust as basic moral norm

from which all conduct of relations derives, hence is a historical, cultural, social practice that defines a community and shapes behavior, which actors internalize as goal rather than means. Yan Xuetong also refers to internationalization and socialization when talking about the creation of new norms. Self-cultivation and education as roots of Confucian norms, I argue, are just different terms for internalization and socialization after all and represent a connection between Chinese IR theories and Bourdieusian philosophy. Hence, norms for Chinese IR seem to be the surface level of the deeper workings of trust and values that maintain relationships within a society, provide the goals pursued by that society and reproduce overall order, which is the exact definition of primary institutions as norms-systems in the English School as well.

If norms are such a basic element of world order and hegemony, the question what norms (and the deeper level of values they depend on) are made of becomes apparent and the answer to this is: knowledge and meanings. Knowledge production is the key to world power, turning the powers of meaning-making into the fulcrum of global politics. *Tianxia* contains a highly complex discussion of the powers of meaning-making and knowledge production. Zhao considers his *tianxia*-system legitimate because it supposedly coheres with *mínxīn* 民心 (mín: people, citizens - xīn: heart, mind) the “people’s shared aspirations”, as he translates the term. *Minxin*, in his definition, are what “through a long-term process of practical reasoning, has proven itself to be beneficial to all” they are not however, “a collective body of desires, but rather a conveyance of the common understanding of a set of possibly shareable experiences, traditions, and histories.” If world order is based on a shared understanding of experiences, traditions and histories, all of which artifacts of knowledge, then the powers of meaning-making are indeed the cornerstone of hegemony in this world order.

The discourse about the role of culture within Chinese scholarship is an insightful example, the ‘Beijing Consensus’, wrongly named as it is, seems to be presented as a way to ensure benefits for people around the world and in its manifestation of the new Silk Road even got an aspect of shared histories and traditions. The Chinese government indeed attempts to take on the role of a great power, which cares for people’s livelihood, propagates a ‘community of shared destiny for humankind’ and thus seems to take Zhao’s *tianxia* theory serious as a political program. Boundless relativism and Chinese exceptionalism would only lead to isolation and disruption of China’s aspirations of international influence and global power. Cultural essentialism after all rejects universal belief systems, which are necessary to create and maintain relationships with other actors around the world. The Western hegemony, criticized by many authors, rests on the assumption that Western values are universal, a Chinese world

order thus cannot treat its culture as inherently inaccessible to non-Chinese societies but to the contrary as universally acceptable. A different approach altogether is reprised in the next section. The incorporation of cultural heritage in Chinese contributions to global IR became far more differentiated and layered in recent years, as Shih Chih-yu, Chu Sinan or L.H.M. Ling and her legacy show.

7.5. Second Generation Chinese IR

What I call ‘second generation’ of Chinese IR are authors who are more independent from official political circles of the government in Beijing and the Communist Party of China. Shih Chih-yu from Taiwan or the late L.H.M. Ling, who was based in the US, are two examples. They approach Chinese cultural heritage in a more critical way and translate Chinese classical philosophy less direct into normative suggestions for governance, but instead follow a postcolonial tradition in criticizing the West or undertake to test prior (meta-)theories in the actual application on real foreign policy. This later generation is influenced by feminist ethics, Bourdieu’s conception of field and network sociology, as well as social constructivism, postcolonial feminism and dialectical IR. Disclosing the diverse traditions in that way sets them apart from the three previously discussed authors, who style their work more as based on Chinese philosophy and downplay foreign influence in their research.

Relationality is of paramount importance in IR because the state-collective is a very special kind of society, which offers no options to its members to leave the collective in any conceivable way. Although no country is forced to be a member of the UN, a country would of course remain unchanged in its immediate and extended international neighborhood after leaving the United Nations. This undeniable fact is part of the starting ground for Qin Yaqing to theorize about relationality and Shi et al. developed Qin’s approach further and define relationships as the processes of mutual constitution. Complementary to the *balance of power*, the *balance of relationships* is the systemic commitment among states to maintain some degree of order through reciprocal relations. Maintaining order is so important and beneficial to states that they actively engage in self-restraint in order to perpetuate international order and practice material and immaterial gift-giving in their relationships. Gift-giving is mentioned by several Chinese authors, who describe it as a ritualized way of engaging in relationships.

The two main pillars of the theory of a Balance of Relationships indeed seem to be self-restraint and improvised resemblance. The actors, individuals and states alike, “are conditioned by the prior relationships” as Shi et al. explain. This is especially salient for the concept of resemblance, because states “will invariably incorporate, consciously or unconsciously,

imagined resemblance as it defines the parameters of their self-understanding, self-expectation, and self-enactment.” The key to hegemony for China according to Shih et al. ironically seems self-restraint instead of a will to power as Western philosophy would argue. Self-restraint is ultimately characterized less as abstinence from something but embedding one’s own subjective dispositions into the structure of a superior cognitive system.

Shih et al. extensively reference *tianxia* in their theory of the Balance of Relationships. *Tianxia* enables the thin layer of prior resemblance among states. The role of *tianxia* as narrative of the PRC government is debated and questioned, criticism against *tianxia* is contextualized and confronted, and *tianxia* is eventually reclaimed as a productive concept for Chinese IR theories. In a society of roughly two hundred individual units, many of whom have been around for several generations, there is of course a lot of history from which both subjectivities and relationships are drawn. Shi et al. cautiously describe *tianxia* as *thin* layer of prior resemblance, but I argue that they could be bolder in their claim of a common experiences and memories among the members of the state-collective.

Multiple Worlds is the term used by L.H.M. Ling to describe her alternative to hegemony. The central question of her research program is how to deal with hegemony, which is defined as the singular logic of violence both in the practice of international relations as well as epistemologically. Both the fact that this logic is singular instead of pluralistic as well violent instead of compassionate are problematic to her. Relationality, resonance and interbeing are the cornerstones of Multiple Worlds and enable her to answer her central question with the demand for negotiation across diverse and especially conflicting belief systems. ‘Creative listening and speaking’ is her solution how to connect dominant and subaltern actors in international relations and overcome hegemonic logics. It is already apparent how she contributes to relationality in IR from this brief overview. In contrast to Zhao, Qin and Yan, she attacks the sovereign nation state as core idea of the Westphalian system of international relations, born in Europe and suffused with Western concepts of anarchy, survival and power. She opposes this world view with the relational, plural, diverse, queer, feminist multitude of the global human community: Multiple Worlds.

The first of her three aspects, relationality, is the dimension of the actors and how they relate to each other in Multiple Worlds. She criticizes PRC scholars for internalizing Western concepts of “hypermasculine nationalist competitiveness, along with its Self/Other binaries.” Instead, Ling proposes to overcome USA-PRC antagonism by identifying the co-implications among both as a manifestation of the yin-yang-principle and looking beyond the bilateral situation to understand their relationship from background of the whole of world politics.

Resonance is the search for and inclusion of alternative, subaltern discourses in international relations both politically and scholarly to break up hierarchies in favor of fluidity. She calls the emerging political, cultural, social, spiritual and economic rhizomatic network ‘transcultural Asia’ and explains that it already “touches the ordinary citizen physically in daily life but also, as a consequence, in the heart, the mind, and the spirit.” It is worth inserting a site note here and pointing out that Zhao Tingyang also addresses the issue that politics not only has to account for the rational aspects of life but also for “desire, spirit and affectivity”. Interbeing means “you are in me as I am in you”, it represents compassion and reappears throughout all of Ling’s publications. Similarly to Shih Chih-yu’s concept of a ‘greater social self’ it means extending oneself to a larger consciousness and community.

The identity of the actors in Ling’s concept of relationality, alternative discourses in resonance and cosmic consciousness in interbeing all relate to forms of knowledge and meanings. Shih Chih-yu et al. speak of memory as a postcolonial cultural resource shared by the Asian societies, which Ling wholeheartedly embraces as part of ‘transcultural Asia’. There is also a more esoteric level of Zhao Tingyang’s *tianxia* theory, which develops similar ideas. This is probably the deepest level on which this thesis asks “Who is China/What is order?” and maps the creation and contestation of spaces of legitimate action, but it also shows the diversity and innovative momentum Chinese heritage can contribute to IR as a discipline and international relations as a political practice. The representation of the idea of relationality in the broadest sense in the second generation of Chinese IR has thus been summarized, the other dimension this generation contributes significantly to is the identity and subjectivity of actors, which is highly relevant to a project that asks who an actor in general and China in particular is.

The idea that the PRC has forged or can forge an identity and a world ideology from Confucianism, Marxism and Asian developmentalism also claims that the Communist Party has mastered these spheres of knowledge. This is what Ling would call a hypermasculine epistemological drive and a remnant of colonialist Western understanding of knowledge, meaning-making and science. These ideas of a melting-pot identity, “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” prime among them, however, are the opposite of the way actual non-synthetic, post-hybrid trans-subjectivities develop and act in current societies. As the whole present thesis shows, if nothing else, Chinese heritage has been slowly but pervasively making its way into the broader source material for IR theories and informs, inspires and influences IR scholarship in all ways imaginable. This ranges from attempts to form a coherent, powerful ideology for the PRC’s global hegemony to postcolonial, queerfeminist criticism that lists Chinese

philosophy among its sources. There is no cultural essence behind and beneath all of this philosophy, only accessible to minds that mastered the Chinese way of thinking; but the doubts concerning the actual existence of universal human values are just as much justified as a limitation to IR theories. I argue that relationality and subjectivity, or better *trans*-subjectivity, are the most promising paths to follow in examining IR to avoid both cultural relativism and universalism.

Subjectivity becomes trans-subjectivity when the shared elements of identity are emphasized, this why Shih et al. speak of mutual *resemblance* as constitutive element of relationships. The construction of resemblance among actors functions to “constitute the identities of the actors and allow the actors to build networks to address collective concerns, recruit and train new members”. *Tianxia* involves this idea of resemblance for Shih et al. because it means that all actors are related and interact on the principles of self-restraint and reciprocity. *Balance of Relationships* clearly belongs to the same lineage as Qin Yaqing’s *A Relational Theory*, but there is also a certain criticism. Qin’s concept of relationality is burdened with too much “substantivist Chineseness”, this is the way Shih et al. introduced the idea of post-identity and especially Post-Chineseness to express processual and fluid concepts of identity and subjectivity. Beijing improvises resemblance to other nations and discovers resemblance or the potential for it in other nations, but this resemblance does not express Chineseness but Post-Chineseness. In Shih et al.’s words: “Given that Chineseness is highly uncertain, contextualized, and agentially based, even Beijing, on behalf of the entire country, cannot enforce a coherent resemblance between those considered Chinese.”

Ling’s example of Chinese-American trans-subjectivity is the individual connections between both societies. The latest generation of Chinese IR scholars received their training in US universities and shares the Neorealist, Westphalian, hypermasculine belief system of mainstream American IR scholars. America on the other hand is home to a vibrant, active Chinese community. Another example of trans-subjectivity is the intensifying intra-Asian cultural network of common shared film, music, literature, TV drama food etc., an Asian epistemic community that produced ideas such as ‘Asia as Method’. Shih refers to Chineseness as the conditions of being Chinese, while post-Chineseness as the on-going processes of becoming differently Chinese through self as well as mutual de/recognition. Recognizing is inevitably mutual and relational. Understanding, confronting, and promoting China is all about practicing Chineseness alongside the other constituents of self-identities, for example, Christian, capitalist, exceptionalist, patriotic, and colonial, so Chineseness, intertwined with

other constituents, does not stand alone. That is why all Chineseness must be, simultaneously, Post-Chineseness.

The concept of post-identity is further developed by the idea of post-hybridity. The three dimensions of multilayeredness, memory, and resemblance distinguish post-hybridity from hybridity by serving as counterparts to hybridity's three main characteristics: subjectivity, uncertainty, and difference. In post-hybridity, the multilayered set of identities changes the understanding of interaction between individuals from the expression a fixed identity into inessential roleplaying. Queer Theory serves as a failsafe against cultural relativism or essentialism in providing a type of *trans*-subjectivity itself that avoids concepts of identity and actorship, it could be seen as the *via media* between Western universalism and cultural relativism. Queer epistemologies are of course another challenge to hegemonic powers of meaning-making in world order. Additionally, it was also in a criticism against a nationalist, essentialist, heteronormative 'sinocentric subject', in which Chu Sinan emphasized that the true test for *tianxia* would be its inclusiveness towards marginalized and oppressed groups around the world. Usually, actors are *either* one thing *or* another thing, for Cynthia Weber and Queer Theory in IR, actors can both be something *and* something else *or* something else. For a true understanding of international relations, she argues, we must "appreciate how a person or a thing is constituted by and simultaneously embodies multiple, seemingly contradictory meanings".

This is not only part of post-hybridity but also of non-synthetic identities. Synthetic, that is *artificial* or *fabricated* hybridity in IR is criticized for reiterating hegemonic narratives in its hybridization methods, which is to say that hybridization that uses strategic essentialization, creating a site to secure identity and criticism is not sufficiently persistent in its implementation of in-betweenness. Shih et al. also go into further detail of what the problem with synthetic subjectivity is. Trying to present one's identity as a diverse yet *consistent* set of elements leads to a contrived construction of a "synthesized" identity, which denies the contradictions among the elements from which this identity is created, or *improvised* in the term of *Balance of Relationships*. The problem is not the diversity of the elements out of which an actor constitutes their subjectivity but omitting the contradictory relationship between these elements. Shi et al. point out that temporality serves to shed light on this diversity.

7.6. Practices, Fields and Cycles of International Relations

Chapter six was undoubtedly the very noisy and messy engine room of my thesis and benefits from a repetition and summary. The research design, to repeat once more, pursued the

twin question “Who is actor/What is order?” while mapping the creation and contestation of spaces of legitimate action (institutions) and thus explored how China has been taking part in the reproduction of world order. The relation between order, actor and institutions is thus at the heart of this thesis and the core assumption is that Chinese IR, English School and Practice Theory all revolve around this relation. Yan Xuetong himself, for example, developed a complex relationship between international system and international order and thus seems to follow in part the influx of English School in Chinese IR. This similarity between the three, I argue, is what neutralizes alleged cultural dichotomies and enables a transcultural research design to find insight in the hybrid space made up of diverse cultural sources.

Practice Theory guides both Chinese and Western IR towards a common goal of understanding international order and especially China’s role in the reproduction of international order. Bourdieu helps to examine culture not from its contents, which are conditional, potentially irreconcilable and subjective. This became obvious in Yan Xuetong’s attempt to ‘combine’ values in a theory of international leadership and derive ‘fairness’ from merging ‘benevolence’ and ‘equality’ or redefine ‘justice’ as combination of ‘righteousness’ and ‘democracy’. In order to contribute to IR, I argue, a scholar has to leave the level of cultural contents such as righteousness or democracy and take one more step of abstraction and the approach I proposed to use for this is Bourdieu inspired Practice Theory. The goal is to shed light on the ‘canon’ of international norms: the layer of governance between the codex of official international law above and the supposed mechanistic, subconscious self-preservation reflexes of Realist IR below.

The chapter first approached relationality and power as a topic by dividing the analysis into the two areas of *norms and rules in cultural systems* on the one hand and *resources in social power relations* on the other hand. A more tangible manifestation of relationality and power are institutions, which were discussed with the familiarity between Practice Theory and ES as one of the main emphases. Next, the link between Practice Theory and Chinese IR was exemplified on two pairs of concepts. The first one was habitus and *renqing*. This pair was linked through the factors of *dispositions* and *subjectivity*. The second pair was field and *li*, which were connected via the factors of *norms-systems in fields* and *the state within the concept of fields*. Eventually, the chapter attempted to show what a model derived from the confluence of Practice Theory, English School and Chinese IR could look like.

Norms and rules as cultural systems, as the first aspect examined, represent one aspect of the relation between relationality and power. The core of this specific aspect are the powers of meaning-making and the explicit example here is of course Confucianism. A relationship is

characterized by mutual recognition, circulation of capital (economic, political, social, ...), communication and cultural norms, which are not objective but represent power relations themselves, thus making cultural power an important factor in relationships. The symbolic systems of culture provide logical and social cognitive integration but this also enables consensual and hegemonic processes to work together to stabilize order through this integration, social order is thus not entirely consensual. The crucial aspect about cultural power is gaining some form of consent of the actors who are supposed to agree to a specific social order, what could be termed legitimacy. Norms and rules as cultural systems pointed out how similar certain authors from completely different cultural backgrounds describe the processes in which culture contributes to systems of domination and hegemony. Some of whom consider it constructive, others oppressive.

A rather salient aspect is the common ground between the Confucian emphases on a social elite that maintains culture and Practice Theory's dependence of hegemonic culture on the social hierarchy of actual actors. Confucianism addresses both the aspect of morality which mirrors Bourdieu's "misrecognition" and the idea of a social elite that carries cultural hegemony. Party doctrines can even be described as one of the rare modern examples where norms, not rules or laws, are constructed and expressed in an official manner. Furthermore, Confucianism is one of *the* philosophies of relationality making it of course highly relevant for the relational intellectual heritage within Practice Theory and English School. Actions need to make sense (to become practices), and this sense does not need to be rationally logic, indeed it seldomly is. Values such as benevolence, righteousness and honor provide plenty of sense for actions (interpreted as value-rationality by some). Confucianism emphasizes how an actor needs to adhere to norms and rules to attain a certain position in the social hierarchy, but Practice Theory in return pays attention to the degree in which a position legitimates certain actors, this is a blind spot in Confucianism, which can benefit from Practice Theory's sense of power relations. Confucianism describes morality as precondition for authority, Bourdieu describes the power of a position for the perpetuation of dominance through cultural systems. I argue that both describe the same phenomena. Morality means respecting a certain moral canon, which is nothing else then reproducing codes of behavior from which some benefit in their position of power.

The second aspect of relationality and power discussed in the chapter were the resources in social power relations. The concept of capital is especially helpful here, starting from the image of economic capital that is exchanged between actors and forms their relationship and expanding this idea to all other sorts of capital. In a complete congruence with Chinese IR,

Practice Theory regards the function of power to be both a social relation and a resource; power is thus not understood as a cause, but something that capacitates social relations. Such resources manifest relations between competing actors by virtue of being the stake at play in a game of power competition. Several terms expressed the fluid and relational way in which power is seen in Practice Theory: it is invested, accumulated, converted and produced. All of these processes describe actions to gain, among other sorts of capital, authority and legitimacy. Order can thus also be described as the very regulated competition of states for more power, which in a complex system of rules, norms and values means the legitimacy for actions. The legitimacy, for example, to station aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf or let them cross the Taiwan Strait or the legitimacy to invade Ukraine but also the legitimacy to establish work camps in Xinjiang. The power to categorize actions as legitimate or illegitimate, both of equal importance, is at the heart of great power competition. Military force is significantly less powerful if it cannot be deployed legitimately. The intellectual dimension of China's Belt and Road Initiative was an attempt to convert cultural power into political power, to develop an alternative world order from Chinese values and install parts of this world order as infrastructure around the globe.

The transcultural common ground was explored by a survey of the concept-pair *habitus* and *renqing*, as well as *field* and *li*. For *habitus* and *renqing*, this took place by shedding light on the two dimensions of dispositions and subjectivity. *Habitus* is relevant for IR because states are represented, after all, by people and despite the appearance on international summits, these are not only the heads of state but a network of politicians, officials and diplomats. All of these human individuals contribute to the representation of the state through a network-subjectivity they create in a collective effort. This is why the concept of *habitus* as socialized subjectivity and matrix of dispositions that allows for creative improvisation of practices is relevant. Chinese IR can help to emphasize the transsubjective relational part of *habitus* to avoid using it as a mere synonym for identity or subjectivity. *Renqing* stresses the connectedness and reciprocity of *habitus* and calls on the concepts of interbeing and greater social self that appear in Chinese IR. Another aspect in which this becomes clear is the idea that self-restraint is an important part of behavior and this self-restraint rests on cultural norms-systems as well, both in domestic as well as inter-state societies.

Dispositions are the directives according to which the *habitus* acts as generating and structuring mechanism of practices. They are the *translators* putting knowledge elements into action in ongoing situations, limited and enabled through the physicality of an actor (be it an individual human or a state). *Habitus* provides a configuration and context within which these translators are organized, and this is also where Queer Theory comes into play. Queerness of

identity is prevalent in the way Practice Theory describes the habitus as a split, fractured, incoherent and contradictory belief system within individuals but not contained in them and instead running through groups as a web of identity resources. Queer theory in IR, first of all, is about how one perceives and relates to the *Other* both within and without the *Self* and the salience of power in these relations. It contributes to a better understanding of subjectivity in general and revealing more layers of Chinese IR in particular. This starts with understanding subjectivity beyond rationalist instrumentalism and continues with Qin's emphases on the human individual that can be linked to aspects of embodiment. Habitus is part of a larger order as Cynthia Weber showed in equating Donna Harraway's "figurations" with institutions as combinations of "knowledge, practice and power", which are implemented into larger systems and reproduced and contested as, I would argue, spaces of legitimate action. The list of relevant dimensions of Queer Theory goes on from hypermasculine state behavior, feminized states, Ashley's 'statecraft as mancraft' and Taiwan's truly queer status among international actors. The core is that habitus in general and Queer IR in particular represent significant contributions for the understanding of state subjectivity and practices. Eventually, Chinese authors themselves equate *renqing* with habitus, Qin Yaqing and Shi Chih-yu most prominently. They add affective investment, resemblance as a form of intersubjective agency and morality as powerful cultural-symbolic system to the existing idea of habitus and thus enable researchers to develop the idea significantly further.

The concept pair field and *li* were explored through the two areas of norms-systems in fields and the idea of states themselves within fields. Three parts make up a field as 'bundles of structure relations': the social (and hierarchical) configuration of actors; the stakes at play and the rules of the game. Institutions are not identical but intimately linked with fields. Actors move in different fields, which supports the idea of relational identities since each field has its own logic and its own rules, so that actors have to possess many subjectivities at once to be able to take part in all fields they exist in. Shih Chih-yu et al. explain this with the term roleplaying as behavior of states. Fields themselves are also subject to transformation, with ever shifting boundaries and actor-configurations. Instability and change are the norm, stable fields are the exception. The rules of a game of a certain field represent the matrix of norms that shapes social reality within a field. Both orthodox and heterodox positions, status quo powers and rising powers, agree to this matrix of norms as the legitimate way of competition in the field for the stakes at play. Yet the rules of the game do not represent a level playing field but also echo the power structure and serve the hegemonic positions, actors need to accept these rules but must find ways to creatively improvise behavior that avoid being underprivileged.

This matrix of norms together with habitus' matrix of dispositions represents a complex dynamic of internalization and socialization. As actors enter certain fields and accept the rules, they get socialized into the rules and internalize them as dispositions. Practices occur in the encounter between the conditions of a field, being norms, positions and resources and the demands of the habitus, being dispositions, knowledge and subjectivity. What has to be pointed out here, are the mirror images of a field as 'matrix of norms' and habitus as a 'matrix of dispositions', which has been discussed in similar terms by Holsti. He lists practices, ideas/beliefs and norms as the three parts that make up institutions and thus also differentiates between a matrix of norms and a layer of ideas and beliefs that can be called a matrix of dispositions. Yan Xuetong explicitly also integrates these processes into his theory in the explanation how norms spread in international societies. Qin Yaqing also seems to have an understanding of the matrix of norms in connecting codes and principles of behavior with a deeper meaning of community and explaining governance as the management of relationships through shared understandings of norms to guarantee peaceful coexistence. In short, the Chinese authors build a similar idea of order to Practice Theory, based on a habitus that emerges out of intersubjective belief systems (*minxin* or *renqing*) on the one hand, and on the other hand on social actor configurations guided by moral codes that function like rules of the game in a field that is shaped by Confucian rituals (*li*).

As with *renqing*, there could be plenty of idle debates about the meaning and content of the term *li*, the crucial fact, however, is the decision to use it in describing international norms by certain Chinese authors, ranging from Feng Youlan to Shih Chih-yu. It is interesting to note that Practice Theory also speaks of the *rites of institution* or *rites of legitimation*, the context of course differs but both Chinese IR philosophy and Practice Theory seem to have a sensitivity for rituals, something that might be called a 'ritual choice theory'. Yan Xuetong, however, opened up another interpretation and explained that rituals reinforce rationality and considers it close to Neoliberalism in IR. Feng Youlan supports this rationalist argument in equating "peacetime and wartime *li*" with modern day international law. Qin regards it as "regulating mechanism for harmony" and for Shih it contributes to resemblance because ritualizing the conduct of foreign policy separates it from values and cultural content and helps strangers find a common ground. This spectrum from law via regulating mechanisms to rituals represents the multiple dimensions *li* addresses. It can thus be considered as a concept that expresses not only the norms or the practice but the synthesis, *li* is the 'normopraxis' of international relations.

Finally, I argue that reducing international relations to the essential elements results in four categories and their interaction: investment, institutions, states and order. Bringing a

classic English School model of international society together with Practice Theory's movements of internalization, externalization and reproduction will take these four categories and create a double cycle of international relations. The investedness, or investment, of one actor into another is the basis of international life. It becomes externalized and codified, one might even say ritualized, in international institutions. These institutions define what the pieces are and how the game is played. They socialize states into the international society through their definition of membership for actors and legitimacy for actions. The states maintain and reproduce the order that naturalizes and universalizes their otherwise constructed, arbitrary existence. The order of the coexistence of states and the need to coexist peacefully in turn internalizes the mutual, reciprocal investment among actors and the cycle continues. In the opposite direction, investment provides order with its capacities, and it structures the activity patterns of order. World order then legitimizes states as primary actors and these states operate and administer certain dimensions of global politics, like sovereignty, war, environmental stewardship and trade, through institutions. Institutions as sites where rules, values and practices meet produce and circulate the cultural, social, economic, political and emotional capital invested among actors and the opposite cycle thus continues complementary. Maybe this model can contribute to a more practical integration of culture into the study of international relations and to a more relational and processual understanding of international life.

7.7. Final Reflections and Prospects

Francis Fukuyama predicted that the three main axes of conflict will be oil, immigration and questions of world order⁹⁵² and here again proved to be a savvy prophet of political developments. I tried to approach the conflict around questions of world order differently and frame it as a collective activity in the tradition of English School, Practice Theory and Chinese IR. There truly are two layers: one abstract level, on which world order is indeed a collective effort, and a more material one on which world order is a struggle between beliefs, values and occasionally combatants. Desires, chief among them the desire for power, and rationality, however, are not the only forces that define human behavior. As Fukuyama argued, recognition and the struggle for it are also crucial to our understanding of a good social order. He further highlighted the volatile forces that emerge when the struggle for recognition escalates into a quest for national and spiritual dignity. There is a genuine danger that the Chinese fight for recognition could take this exact uncompromising path. Decades of Realist indoctrination

⁹⁵² Fukuyama 2020, 277-278.

among Chinese policymakers and intellectuals come into full effect with the growing tension between the PRC and USA. Some interpretations of Confucianism would certainly advocate for a supreme authority to preside over state and society as the ultimate political, moral and cultural hegemon and Beijing may aspire to assume this role globally. This authority, however, is solely attained by excellence in morality and self-cultivation not through coercion and war. The struggle for recognition and the salience of morality for hegemony will inevitably also challenge the government in Beijing in issues of individual private dignity and the tensions this topic creates in authoritarian states.

Several authors of Chinese IR list righteousness, benevolence and other virtues as core values, which may or may not be part of human nature and have arbitrary contents. Fukuyama to the contrary introduces the desire for recognition, takes extensive time in his work to elaborate on it and thus offers something that is both plausibly part of human nature and origin of values and virtues (and vices) of human beings. Confucianism was partially understood in the literature examined for this project as a value-guided order and Hedley Bull was not terribly far away from this idea in describing order as an activity-pattern that pursues certain goals. For Confucianism authority originates in morality, recognition as authority means that a human will gain recognition with moral excellence in this case. Fukuyama of course considers recognition as a desire that needs to be fulfilled through the constitution of a society, not as a source of authority. Drawing parallels between both ideas of recognition nevertheless works, I argue, because both describe a mutual, relational co-constitution of subjectivities. Morality, especially in the Confucian case is an intersubjective/transsubjective network that links individuals to a society. Confucianism is an interesting case because it rules that the people with the strongest desire to be recognized as greater than others need to be the people with the strongest morality, self-restraint and benevolence.

Yan Xuetong's Moral Realism outlines the steps to global leadership as protecting national interests, engaging in alliances and implementing norms. Qin Yaqing seems to advocate for a spiritual hegemony of Confucianism but appears to be a strong antagonist of political, let alone military, conflict and Zhao Tingyang proposes an overall revolution and establishment of an utopia in the legacy of Kang Youwei's (1858-1929) *Book of Great Unity*. However, beneath the surface, all three construct an opposition between the West and the East that could easily gain momentum, diverging from their presumably peaceful intentions. In contrast, Shih Chih-yu provided an attempt at a practical application of Qin's Relationality and utilized Chinese cultural heritage to point out hybridity (even post-hybridity) and trans-subjectivity among states instead of constructing cultural essences. Shih Chih-yu thus might be

the Last Confucian regarding political philosophers. Despite its Confucian cultural heritage, China seems to head towards a decidedly 'Nietzschean' direction, in Fukuyama's parlance. Chinese political philosophers recognized far earlier than their European counterparts that force alone cannot establish hegemony, but Beijing seems to be forgetting this crucial part of its own heritage. This thesis, however, showed that dispositions are transcultural (post)hybrids and China's Realism will not be a mere copy of American scholarship. China is not only an actor. China is just as much the stake at play given the struggle around the many answers to the question: "Who is China?". A regional organization that embodies what one might call a Confucian spirit in unifying diversity peacefully is the European Union, implementing norms and respecting alliances. The EU and its members might represent the best future for international relations taking all the insights of this thesis about global and regional orders into account. East Asia will never organize the same way but if China respects its own cultural heritage, a stable and peaceful regional order is possible. If China, however, is to adopt a truly Realist stance on international relations, the Last Confucian as far as leading states in the international society go, might end up to be Germany.

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9. Anhang

Eidesstattliche Versicherung

Ich erkläre hiermit, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit ohne unzulässige Hilfe Dritter und ohne Benutzung anderer als der angegebenen Hilfsmittel angefertigt habe; die aus fremden Quellen direkt oder indirekt übernommenen Gedanken sind als solche kenntlich gemacht. Die Arbeit wurde bisher weder im Inland noch im Ausland in gleicher oder ähnlicher Form einer Prüfungsbehörde zur Erlangung eines akademischen Grades vorgelegt.

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