In search of a Chinese School:
Ghostly encounters with the parochial/global
discipline of international relations

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the
degree of PhD in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

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List of Contents

List of Illustrations ............................................... 4
List of Abbreviations .............................................. 5
Abstract ........................................................................ 6
Declaration ..................................................................... 7
Copyright Statement ................................................... 8

Acknowledgements ..................................................... 9
Ghosts and fellow journeyers

Introduction ................................................................. 14
A (not-so) gentle provocation:
Ghostly hauntings in international relations discourse

Chapter 1 Creation myths and international relations discourse:
A parochial discipline’s founding fables ......................... 28

Chapter 2 The (seemingly) absent (yet ever-) present ‘non-west’:
Situating non-western knowledge in a parochial discipline .. 68

Chapter 3 The ghostly haunts of modernisation and Marx:
Creation myths in Chinese international relations discourse .. 100

Chapter 4 A haunted house(hold) of international relations?
Chinese encounters with the parochial/global discipline .... 134

Chapter 5 The Chinese School according to Yan Xuetong:
Hierarchy, pre-Qin thought and China’s global rise ........... 171
| Chapter 6 | The Chinese School according to Qin Yaqing: Relationality, hybridity and Chinese dialectics | 207 |
| Conclusion | Situating ‘China’ in the Chinese School: Identity matters in Chinese international relations discourse | 239 |
| Bibliography | | 258 |

Word Count: 86,557 (including footnotes)
## List of Illustrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.1</td>
<td>Barthes’ semiotics of myth</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.1</td>
<td>Stages of development of ‘the discipline’ of IR in China</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.2</td>
<td>Articles about ‘IR theory’ in Chinese IR journals</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.1</td>
<td>Yin-Yang diagram</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2</td>
<td>Qin Yaqing’s relational theory and mainstream approaches to IR</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South East Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN + 3</td>
<td>Association of South East Asian Nations plus China, Japan and South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASS</td>
<td>Chinese Academy of Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCTP</td>
<td>Central Compilation and Translation Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCTV</td>
<td>China Central Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFAU</td>
<td>China Foreign Affairs University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CICIR</td>
<td>Chinese Institute for Contemporary International Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNP</td>
<td>Comprehensive National Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTP</td>
<td>Chinese Theoretical Paradigm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPE</td>
<td>International Political Economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISA</td>
<td>International Studies Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEAT</td>
<td>Network of East Asian Think Tanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEZ</td>
<td>Special Economic Zone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

Linsay Cunningham-Cross, The University of Manchester
A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of PhD in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, May 2014.

In search of a Chinese School: Ghostly encounters with the parochial/global discipline of international relations

This thesis explores recent trends in Chinese international relations scholarship from the perspective of post-colonial and critical international relations theory. It begins by interrogating the now widespread view that ‘the discipline’ of international relations is profoundly Eurocentric. The claim to parochialism in international relations discourse is explained and substantiated through a critical re-reading of enduring myths in international relations discourse, which shape not only what we know to be international relations but how we might know it and who indeed the ‘we’ is that does the knowing.

This research adopts a methodology of ghost hunting inspired by Avery Gordon’s work on ghosts and hauntings in the sociological imagination (Gordon 2008). It follows the meandering trail of a ghostly journey through international relations discourse, telling of multiple and conflicting encounters between Chinese international relations and the wider parochial/global discipline. In particular it examines recent debates surrounding the need for a distinctively Chinese approach to international relations research: a Chinese School of IR.

Debates about the place of Chinese international relations research in the wider (parochial/global) discipline remain the focus of this research project. A close (re)reading of these debates reveals the many ways in which Chinese international relations discourse actively constructs ‘the discipline’ of international relations, singing it into life, whilst simultaneously unsettling the myths that make international relations possible.

These trends are explored further through the use of two case studies of leading scholars – Yan Xuetong and Qin Yaqing – and the enduring debate between them (and between Chinese scholars in general) over whether or not China needs its own theory of international relations. The work of these two individuals has had a huge impact on wider trends within and about Chinese international relations.

The thesis concludes with a return to the question of identity in international relations discourse and questions who is Chinese in the Chinese School and what are the implications of constructing ‘Chineseness’ through international relations discourse. I argue that the Chinese School project is perhaps best understood as an expression of contemporary Chinese nationalism.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institute of learning.

A version of Chapter 3 appeared as:


Versions of Chapter 5 appeared as:


‘Using the past to (re)write the future: Yan Xuetong, pre-Qin thought and China’s rise to power’ China Information, 2012, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 219–233.


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Acknowledgements

Ghosts and fellow journeyers

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to all my colleagues including, in particular, Kelvin Cheung, Maya Zehfuss, Shogo Suzuki and Julia Welland.

There have been many workshops and conferences and scholarly interactions that have helped to shape this research project over the years. Of particular value was the ‘Chinese School of IR and its Critics’ conference, which was held in Beijing in July 2013. I wish to say a special thank you to Zhang Yongjin of Bristol University for organising the workshop and for inviting me to participate in it. The research has also benefited from input from the workshop ‘China’s Futures and the World’s Future’ held in February 2011 in Manchester; The International Studies Association (ISA) Annual Convention March 2012 in San Diego, Joint Conference of BISA-ISA June 2012 in Edinburgh, British International Studies Association (BISA) Conference Spring 2011 in Manchester, and a number of meetings of the China Postgraduate Network (CPN). I wish to thank in particular L. H. M. Ling, Nele Noesselt and Barry Buzan for helpful comments on my work in progress.

A special thank you is also owed to Qin Yaqing of China Foreign Affairs University and Xu Jin from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my research on their respective contributions to building a Chinese School of international relations theory. I also wish to thank Song Xinning, Ren Xiao, Wang Yiwei, Zhang Feng, Shi Yinhong, Shih Chih-yu, Chen Yudan, Chang Teng-chi and Zhang Xiaoming for comments, feedback and numerous conversations that have helped to shape this thesis.

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and of this thesis even though it was conceived long before she was. To my parents, siblings and extended family for their unconditional love, help and support in getting me here: thank you for your unending interest in this and all that I do. To Kerron, thank you for being there, despite everything; for being a constant sounding board and for proof-reading endless chapter drafts. Finally, I wish to say a special thank you to Lindsay ‘di-di’ Clayton, Helen Gant and Tamara Robinson for providing me with the space and time to write.

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And, perhaps most importantly, my sincere and enduring thanks to Catherine Eschle at the University of Strathclyde for unwittingly starting me on this journey and first alerting me to the presence of ghosts in our midst.
Dedicated to Blythe,
the only two-year old I’ve met who knows what a thesis is
and who longed for this one to be completed.

And to Catherine,
for setting me off on this journey.
君不见青海头
古来白骨无人收
新鬼烦冤旧鬼哭
天阴雨湿声啾啾

*Have you not seen on the border of Qinghai,*

*The ancient bleached bones no man's gathered in?*

*The new ghosts are angered by injustice, the old ghosts weep,*

*Moistening rain falls from dark heaven on the voices' screeching.*

From ‘Song of the Wagons’
(Du Fu, 750)
Introduction

A (not-so) gentle provocation:
Ghostly hauntings in international relations discourse

Or when the lawn
Is pressed by unseen feet, and ghosts return
Gently at twilight, gently go at dawn,
The sad intangible who grieve and yearn;

When the familiar is suddenly strange
Or the well known is what we yet have to learn,
And two worlds meet, and intersect, and change;
(T.S. Eliot 1948)

A number of recent studies have made the claim that the discipline of international relations (IR) is profoundly Eurocentric (e.g. Smith 2000, Bilgin 2008, Jones 2006). Scholars from a wide variety of backgrounds and theoretical persuasions have contributed to the growing acceptance within the field that ‘international relations’ has been and continues to be astonishingly parochial in terms of its choice of subject matter, its approach(es) and its self-image or understanding of its purpose (Hoffmann 1977, Tickner 2003, Hobson 2007). The now widespread claim – that international relations is Eurocentric – has given rise to a burgeoning field of research into alternative approaches to global politics originating from or inspired by cultural or political traditions and ways of thinking of different peoples and places (Tickner and Wæver 2009, also pp. 73-78). This research project began as a straight-forward case study into one such
research programme: the search for a Chinese School of international relations theory. It was a project seeking to understand various competing claims about the contribution Chinese tradition, culture, political thought and international relations research might make to a parochial or Eurocentric discipline of international relations. However, as is so often the case with such research projects, it became clear that such a straight-forward case study would be impossible. The inherent complexity of the multiple and competing claims made about Chinese contributions to international relations and the underlying claim that international relations is a parochial discipline soon became apparent and it became necessary to delve deeper into these claims.

In order to better understand the claim that international relations is Eurocentric, I began to immerse myself in international relations literature and in particular studies of ‘the discipline’ or what Gerald Holden calls “discourse about IR discourse” (Holden 2002). International relations literature/discourse is extensive and extremely diverse; nevertheless, there are a number of common themes or stories that continue to appear and reappear as one encounters the world of international relations. I explore these stories, about the nature, purpose and self-image of the discipline, in my opening chapter (and throughout). The more time one spends with such stories, the more evident the gaps and/or absences in them become. In investigating claims to Eurocentrism in the discipline of international relations, the apparent absences in IR’s disciplinary narratives became clearer. The simple stories told and retold about international relations – its origins and motivations – leave so much out. What is left on the cutting room floor, despite its absence, often becomes apparent to the reader. It is that nagging feeling that something has been forgotten or missed out. These apparent absences became my object of study and I sought to find a language with which to explain them and their role in understanding and shaping the discipline of IR, past, present and future.

Avery Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters* provides a helpful starting point for investigating “how that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence” (Gordon 2008: 17). Her work on hauntings in the sociological imagination provides a framework and, importantly, a language in which to talk
about that nagging feeling that something has been left out, what Gordon
describes as an instance of haunting. It is that moment when one encounters in
a text the ghostly presence of something or someone that has been written out
of that text. In my study of Chinese contributions to international relations
research I have encountered many such ghostly beings and therefore the thesis
that follows is perhaps best understood as an exercise in ghost hunting. I have
sought to acknowledge and understand the ghostly beings that are ever-present
in international relations discourse, both Chinese and not. Avery Gordon has
written powerfully about the experience of being haunted and what it means to
hunt for ghosts:

> Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes
you and refashions the social relations in which you are
located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague
memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to
look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that
not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to
understand the conditions under which a memory was
produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the
future (Gordon 2008: 22).

Writing ghost stories changes not only the story but the author. Writing this
story has changed me. This thesis tells my story; the story of my journey
through a parochial discipline and my encounters with its many ghostly beings. I
am certain that my story is haunted by its own ghosts and has its own blind
spots and erasures. Yet, it is a story that I believe still needs to be told. In what
follows, I hope to demonstrate the messy, complicated life of the discipline of
international relations and the ghostly beings that haunt it in an effort to start
“putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to
those who bothered to look” (Gordon 2008: 22).

**Discourse and disciplinarity in international relations**

Leong Yew, in his study of the discipline of international relations, begins with
the observation that; “in virtually all aspects of western knowledge, things come
to be known as real and essential through the reification and the imposition of
boundaries” (Leong Yew 2003: 17). It is through drawing boundary lines –
between self and other, inside and outside, China and west, humanities and science – that those (id)entities come to be known as real and distinct. Similarly, it is through the drawing of such borders that a coherent and distinct discipline of international relations emerges and is made ‘real’. This type of boundary-drawing may or may not be limited to western knowledge – indeed the claim that there is such a thing as ‘western knowledge’ relies upon the production of such boundary lines – and this claim will be explored later in the thesis (see chapter 6). For now, it is sufficient to highlight the importance such boundary-drawing practices have in forming identities in and for ‘the discipline’ and explore the ways they play out in international relations discourse. Yet such boundaries and identities are neither fixed nor stable. Ghostly haunts alert us to the fragility of seemingly real identities and borders: in Welland’s words, “hauntings remind us of the ‘ghostliness’ of the borders we cannot help but mark” (Welland 2013: 887).

In order to gain a better understanding of how the concept of IR as a discipline came into existence, how it operates and how it has come to be seen as real, stable and powerful even, I turned to Continental philosophy; to the writings of Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes. Both Foucault and Barthes were influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure’s work on semiology, though both later parted ways with Saussure’s structuralism. What remains significant to their work, and mine, is Saussure’s principle argument that the meaning of a word, text or image is not granted by nature but rather socially ascribed. “Words achieve their meaning from an association in the mind, not from any natural or necessary reference to entities in the real world” thus “language is a system of signs whose meaning is relational” (Loomba 1998: 35). Saussure’s work was concerned with understanding how meaning is constructed through social structures and processes. Even accepting Derrida’s critique (that no text can fully convey its whole meaning and there is always a slippage between the sign and its meaning), the underlying concern of Saussure’s work is still relevant. That is, it seeks to provide an understanding of how language, as a system of signs, functions to ascribe meaning and how such meaning shifts over time and why. Foucault’s early work on madness demonstrates this most clearly
(Foucault 2006). In The History of Madness, Foucault explores how ‘madness’ is produced as a category of human identity. Foucault believed that there was nothing natural or given about the definition of madness and the distinctions made between it and sanity/normalcy. His work clearly demonstrates how, over time, understandings of these terms and the distinctions drawn between them varied enormously and were shaped by the operations of various systems and procedures. These systems are what Foucault termed the ‘order of discourse’. “Discourse in this sense is a whole field or domain within which language is used in particular ways” (Loomba 1998: 38). It governs what can and cannot be spoken of, what can or cannot be said about it and who can and cannot speak.

Discourse is rooted in human practices and institutions. In Foucault’s study of madness, discourse is located in institutions such as the madhouse and practices such as psychiatry. In the case of international relations, we can look to institutions like the university, academic departments and professional organisations and practices like publishing, (sharing) research and teaching. We can consider these institutions and practices collectively as a culture within which international relations discourse is embedded. Returning to Saussure for a moment, we find that signs “need a community with shared assumptions to confer them with meaning; conversely a social group need signs in order to know itself as a community” (Loomba 1998: 35). Thus in thinking about how meaning is assigned in international relations discourse, it is helpful to think of the discipline of ‘international relations’ as a community with shared assumptions that confers meaning on certain signs (words, ideas, concepts). These assumptions evolve and shift over time, however, even the use of the term ‘international relations’, as opposed to ‘global politics’ for example, foregrounds the importance of inter-state relations to the field and confers meaning on the concept of state and related ideas about sovereignty and territoriality. In addition, whilst there may be disagreement amongst IR scholars about the nature of power in international relations, there is a shared assumption that power is a key consideration in IR research. Similarly, issues of war and peace (or violence more broadly) are assumed to be a key importance to international relations research. Thinking of international relations as a set of
discursive practices also highlights the importance of signs in creating a sense of belonging and purpose for the discipline and even in creating and sustaining the discipline itself. Cynthia Weber adopts a similar approach when she describes international relations theory as a site of cultural practice. For Weber, IR theory “is a place where stories that make sense of our world are spun, where signifying practices about international politics take place, where meanings about international life are produced, reproduced, and exchanged” (Weber 2005: 182). It is important also to recognise our own place situated within this culture of international relations theory/international relations discourse. We must approach international relations as a culture of which ‘we’ ourselves are a part – all of us who participate one way or another in the production and diffusion of international relations discourse. This will be the starting point for my own critique: in much the same way as Barthes criticised a French bourgeois culture that he tried to resist yet remained a part of, I recognise my own place within the culture of international relations, always working within the constraints of ‘the discipline’ despite my attempts to de-centre, circumvent or deny it.

When thinking about the discipline, therefore, it is best to conceive of it as a set of discursive practices, rather than a “sovereign territory” held together by common terminology, paradigms, or methodologies (Beier 2005: 58-59). International relations is not merely a collection of scholars, theories and research that self-evidently ‘fit’ together, nor does it consist of all that can truthfully be said about the subject of international politics, however (ill-)defined. Rather the discipline is best understood as a system of control; as a set of discursive practices of inclusion and exclusion. Those discursive practices are responsible for setting limits both on what can legitimately be studied in international relations and who can legitimately speak about it. The borders that mark out ‘the discipline’ exist only as a result of discursive processes of (re)enactment; in other words, “disciplinarity must be performed in order to be” (Beier 2005: 59). Such performances are never straight-forward or simple but rather are messy, complicated and often incomplete.
Story-telling, myth and parochialism in IR

One key set of discursive practices through which the discipline of international relations is performed is story-telling. Story-telling is a powerful feature of social life and its importance in shaping/creating international relations is difficult to overstate. In the cultural sphere of international relations discourse, stories about the world and about the discipline are spun and thus meanings about international life are produced, reproduced and exchanged. One particular type of story-telling – myth – has been exceptionally important in creating and sustaining the notion of a defined discipline of international relations. Myths in international relations discourse, specifically the discipline’s creation myths or myths of origin, are the subject of my opening chapter. Here I draw on the work of Roland Barthes to demonstrate how IR’s myths – their constant telling and re-telling – powerfully shape possibilities for thinking about international relations and/or the world. I argue that IR’s key disciplinary myths function so as to obscure certain aspects of international life. Cynthia Weber’s work, which also draws upon that of Roland Barthes, highlights the vital role story-telling plays in bringing to life the discipline of international relations. Crucially, however, she argues that it does so in such a way as to favour some and marginalise or obscure others (Weber 2005). Steve Smith’s Presidential address to the International Studies Association (ISA) in 2003 highlighted this same issue when he urged each of us who participates in the practice of international relations discourse to recognise our own role in ‘singing our world into existence’ (Smith 2004). Smith’s address draws upon “the practice of Australian Aboriginal people who, during their period of ‘dream-time’, sing their world into existence” (Smith 2004: 499). He uses this idea to demonstrate how international relations discourse “constructs the categories of thought within which we explain the world”, in a manner that reinforces the particular (cultural) biases of those authoring the discourse (Smith 2004: 499).

Story-telling is a violent process. Being haunted and writing from such a position makes this clear; it forces us to recognise “the exclusions and the sacrifices required to tell a story as the singularly real one” (Gordon 2008: 42). What has to be excluded or ignored in order to tell the story of international
relations is in many respects far more important than that which is included or required to tell that story. Put differently, “a discipline’s silences are often its most significant feature. Silences are the loudest voices” (Smith 1995: 2). Interrogating the discipline’s creation myths makes clear many of the exclusions that are required to make those myths, and therefore the discipline, possible. The effects of these exclusions are felt/known in the ghostly beings that haunt international relations discourse. It is the ghostly haunt that makes it possible for us to see IR’s myths for what they are – one possible history masquerading as the truth about the (international) world and how it came to be. As Beier writes; “all knowledge is violent” (Beier 2005: 18). The process of drawing boundaries necessarily excludes. Avery Gordon urges us to begin by seeking that which has been lost, excluded or obscured. Writing from a position of being haunted means recognising and paying attention to those ‘ghostly matters’ that trouble us at every turn. It is such a position that allows those exclusions and sacrifices, the discipline’s so-called “screaming silences” (Booth 1996: 330), to be rendered visible. One such “screaming silence” in IR is the role played by imperialism and/or colonialism in shaping the world over the past four centuries or more. Throughout my journey through international relations discourse, I have been confronted with the absent presence(s) of IR’s colonial past and present: the unspoken histories of the majority of the world’s peoples that are actively written out of the script of ‘international relations’ and the stories it tells about the world past, present and future. This thesis is my attempt to follow the colonial ghosts IR’s myths leave in their wake in an effort to think beyond parochialism in international relations discourse.

And so to China

I followed IR’s colonial ghosts to China, a part of the world that is often ignored by (traditional) post-colonial scholarship, which tends to focus on peoples and places with more direct (or more obvious) experience of colonial rule (notable exceptions include Ling 2002, Anand 2007). Yet China is certainly not ignored by contemporary international relations scholarship in a more general sense. At the more populist end of the market, books about China and the world have
proliferated in recent years as the pace of China’s economic growth has captured the world’s attention. Titles such as *Charm Offensive* (Kurlantzick 2008), *China Shakes the World* (Kynge 2009), *When China Rules the World* (Jacques 2012) and *Is China Buying the World?* (Nolan 2013) reflect a certain anxiety amongst American or ‘western’ commentators about the future of the world and about China’s growing influence in and on it. This recent scholarship follows a wave of publications in the late 1990s and early 2000s that have been labelled ‘China Threat’ literature (Bernstein and Munro 1997, Timperlake and Triplett 1999, Gertz 2000, Menges 2005). This literature propagated a highly pessimistic view of the impact of China’s ‘global rise’ on the international system and US security interests in particular. It sparked a number of responses from Chinese scholars, including the widely debated and highly emotive *China Can Say No* (Zhang et al 1996) and the follow-up title *Unhappy China* (Song et al 2009). These works reflect a new patriotism amongst China’s younger scholars that is firmly located in opposition to ‘the west’ and/or US.

In international relations scholarship more generally there is a growing awareness of China and the need to understand the world from Chinese perspectives. This is reflected in the growing demand in American and European institutions for courses and research on China’s international relations as well as an increasing presence of China-related papers and panels at the discipline’s leading conferences and in key publications. Indeed this thesis has been made possible through the generous support of the British Inter-University China Centre (BICC), which was set up with the explicit aim of increasing the scope and impact of high-quality social science research on contemporary China, backed by leading UK research councils and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). This growing interest in how China’s global rise will influence the rest of the world has been accompanied by a growing interest in what China thinks about the world. Books such as Mark Leonard’s *What Does China Think?* (Leonard 2008) have become popular, adding to a few available studies by Chinese scholars such as Deng Yong and Wang Fei-Ling’s (1999) exploration of China’s worldview and national identity and Hao Yufan and Huan Guocang’s (1989) portrayal of *The Chinese view of the world* during the Cold War. In June
2013 *Time* magazine led with a cover article titled ‘The World According to China’ (Beech 2013), which set out over six pages how China sees the world and its role within it. Princeton University have recently launched a translation series, the Princeton-China Series, which through publishing translations of works by contemporary Chinese scholars from the humanities, social sciences and related fields seeks to “foster an understanding of China on its own terms” (see Yan Xuetong 2011a). Despite this, however, knowledge and understanding of China and Chinese perspectives on international relations and world order amongst international relations scholars in the so-called western world who are not China specialists remains limited and superficial and Chinese approaches and perspectives are not (yet) integrated into international relations discourse as a whole.

The fascination with China’s global influence I have detailed above often fails to translate into the wider research about the discipline of international relations and how it is discursively constructed in and beyond ‘the west’. Scholarship calling for greater influence for non-western knowledge in international relations discourse remains quite detached from debates about what China’s rise might mean for the world. Within Chinese-language scholarship, however, this is certainly not the case. The question of China’s global rise is an integral part and, as I argue in my conclusion, a key driver of debates about the contribution Chinese scholarship can/should make to the global study of international relations (see chapters 4-6). Neertheless, in English-language material, serious consideration of such debates is more often than not consigned to the realm of area studies, to be conducted by Chinese Studies specialists and not of concern for the discipline as a whole. Generally speaking, the surge of interest in China’s international politics has thus far failed to have any major impact on the world of international relations theory or theorising and on our collective understandings of what constitutes ‘the discipline’ of international relations. One notable exception is the recent publication by Hung-Jen Wang (2013), which attempts to bridge the gap between studies on China’s growing influence in the world and the discipline of international relations.
This thesis attempts to go further through a close reading of contemporary Chinese international relations scholarship conducted within the context of a critical engagement with ‘the discipline’ and the manner in which it is narrated into life. I critically engage with debates amongst Chinese scholars about the place their work might occupy in a discipline that seems to be dominated by western scholarship, ideas and ways of knowing. I use these encounters with international relations discourse in and about China in the first instance to deepen my understanding of how international relations discourse operates; how its violent story-telling processes necessitate certain exclusions and sacrifices in order to tell the story of international relations. I hope that by seeking a deeper understanding of international relations discourse in and about China we might arrive at a better understanding of some of the consequences of those boundary-drawing processes. In my engagement with Chinese international relations scholarship, however, I am also interested in what this work can tell us about China, its place in the world and indeed how that world(s) might be conceived of and understood. I am seeking not so much to “understand China on its own terms” as the Princeton-China series claims to do, but rather to allow the Chinese scholarship I encounter to inform, shape and even to change my (and my readers’) perspectives of what constitutes international relations and indeed what constitutes ‘China’.

An obvious but as yet unanswered question remains: why China? There are many reasons why China makes an ideal starting point for unpicking a parochial international relations. As the world’s most populous country and one of its oldest civilisations (arguably the last surviving ancient civilisation, with a 5000 year long history), China offers a rich and diverse cultural, political and philosophical heritage from which to draw. The PRC is also one of the world’s last remaining communist states and currently the subject of rapid and seemingly unstoppable economic growth and cultural and political change, which likewise presents a wealth of knowledge and experience from which to draw inspiration. According to a survey conducted by Alistair Iain Johnston, the majority of US IR scholars believe East Asia is and/or will become the area of greatest strategic importance in global politics in coming years and therefore is
worthy of far greater attention from the discipline (Johnston 2012: 54). Perhaps even more crucially, however, is the richness of current debates within Chinese academic circles about how Chinese scholars should understand and approach ‘international relations’. The search for a Chinese School (or Chinese approach) to IR that initially sparked this research project is well documented and extremely important to contemporary international relations both within China and beyond. Nevertheless, my own bias, interests and ‘identity’ as an IR scholar have also influenced my choice of subject matter and therefore must be acknowledged. Certain paths I have followed in my own life have led me to encounter ‘China’ in many ways and develop a fascination with the places, peoples and ideas of China. I could have gone anywhere following IR’s ghosts but I chose to go to China. This choice has presented both challenges and opportunities. It has also created its own blindesses and exclusions, I’m sure. But it has led me on a challenging journey of discovery that offers an extremely valuable and timely contribution to the question/problem of Eurocentrism in international relations.

**A roadmap for the journey**

I begin with a deeper exploration of the discipline of international relations, specifically two of the creation myths that make it possible. I interrogate these powerful myths, employing “a radical antagonism toward received history” in an effort to “break the chains of established theory (the recognised image of the past)” (Malloy 2006: 12). Through my re-reading of IR’s creation myths I seek to denaturalise the apparent, the given in international relations discourse and to understand how the discipline is consistently (re)produced through the telling and re-telling of its powerful creation myths. My second chapter turns to the question of Eurocentrism. I interrogate the image of the discipline as thoroughly parochial; telling its story of the world from a (western) European perspective. I attempt to dig below the simple assertion that international relations is “an American social science” (Hoffmann 1977) and provide a more productive conception of parochialism in international relations discourse. Against this background, I assess the possibilities and limitations of situating so-
called ‘non-western’ knowledge within this parochial discipline and identify two competing desires amongst IR scholars engaging in this type of work – desires to assimilate or to exoticise. The challenge for those interested in moving beyond parochialism in the discipline is to encounter knowledge from the so-called ‘non-west’ without treating it as profoundly exotic or attempting to assimilate it into a Eurocentric meta-narrative of progress and modernisation.

In chapter three I turn specifically to Chinese international relations discourse, which I define as scholarship that is produced predominantly (although not exclusively) by scholars working in institutions within mainland China and/or those engaging with Chinese-language publications, participating in conferences in mainland China or anyone who engages with the dominant questions and debates arising out of such scholarly endeavours. I examine the key creation myths that persist in international relations discourse in and about China, which enable a Chinese discipline of IR to be consistently narrated into life. I identify the ghostly beings of modernisation theory and Marxist thought that haunt these creation myths and remind us of the exclusions and sacrifices that are necessary in order to tell this particular story about the creation of IR in and for China. The fourth chapter examines the relationship between ‘Chinese IR’ and the wider discipline, by focusing on debates amongst Chinese scholars about whether and how they should develop their own Chinese theory of international relations. I return to many of the questions raised in this introduction about how ‘international relations’ is sung into existence both within and beyond China. I highlight the complicity of many Chinese scholars in shaping and sustaining the image of a global discipline (a “House of IR”) that is hierarchically ordered, in which western theorists occupy positions of privilege and Chinese scholars are treated as subordinate, backward Others. Yet these debates also bring to our attention some of the ghostly beings that haunt international relations discourse, undermining the myth that such a house (a discipline) exists at all.

Finally, I present two case studies, which explore in greater detail some of the key dynamics of contemporary Chinese international relations discourse. I focus on the debate about the possibility and desirability of a Chinese School
of international relations theory by examining the work of two scholars: the Chinese School’s most prominent advocate Qin Yaqing and its most consistent and vocal critic Yan Xuetong. My study of Yan Xuetong interrogates his attempts to enrich existing IR theories with insights from traditions of thinking about global politics – specifically ancient Chinese philosophy – that have not previously been incorporated in international relations discourse. Yan’s ‘Chinese School’ presents a (realist) theory that is both familiar and not. It gives life to some IR’s ghosts – notably that of hierarchy – but is also haunted by its own ghosts. The final chapter focuses on the efforts of Qin Yaqing to build a Chinese School of IR theory or at least lay the foundations upon which such a school can be built. Qin’s theory of process and relations claims to offer an alternative way of thinking about difference and change, which comes from a fundamentally different (Chinese) vision of the world and how it works. Qin’s theory, based on his reading of Chinese dialectics, presents an interesting potential for thinking differently about difference in world politics. Nevertheless, it is not free from its own ghostly haunts.

I conclude by returning to the beginning – to the search for a Chinese School of IR and the question of identity in international relations discourse. I question which scholarship is and is not included in debates about a Chinese School of IR, or put simply who is ‘Chinese’ in the Chinese School? What does this Chineseness represent? And, crucially, how does the pursuit of a Chinese School of IR reflect and inform wider questions about Chinese (national) identity and how this ‘China’ views itself and its place in the world? The poem I began with describes an encounter with ghosts, which perfectly captures my own experience of encountering ghosts as I journey through international relations discourse in and about China:

When the familiar is suddenly strange  
Or the well known is what we yet have to learn,  
And two worlds meet, and intersect, and change (Eliot 1948).

What once seemed obvious about international relations and about China must be interrogated anew. What was once certain, has been troubled, disturbed, mislaid. The ghostly haunt consistently reminds me to question and to doubt.
Chapter One

Creation myths and international relations discourse:
A parochial discipline’s founding fables

East is East, and West is West and ne’er the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgement Seat;
But there is neither East not West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, tho’ they come from the ends of the
earth!

(Kipling [1889] 1895)

We must conceive discourse as a violence which we do to things,
or in any case as a practice which we impose on them.

(Foucault 1984: 127)

This thesis tells a story of international relations in China. This seemingly
uncomplicated opening statement begs a number of questions: in it there are
several terms whose meanings are assumed by both author and reader.
Nevertheless, I intend to demonstrate that each of these terms – ‘international
relations’, ‘China’ and indeed ‘story’ – can have different meanings at different
times and for different purposes. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the
contingent and changing nature of the term ‘international relations’, specifically
the academic discipline that bears its name. This chapter also introduces the
concept of myth as a particular type of story-telling and explores its role in
understanding what ‘international relations’ is and how it is constructed. Later
chapters provide interesting insights into the concept of ‘China’ and its multiple
and ever-changing meaning(s), which form the basis of my conclusion.
This chapter seeks to provide a framework for thinking about Chinese international relations research; a framework that appreciates, celebrates even, the complexity (and complicity) of international relations discourse and its encounters with ‘non-western’ sources of knowledge about the world. This chapter (and the thesis it introduces) takes seriously Pinar Bilgin’s urging that “those who are interested in thinking past ‘Western’ IR should take an additional step and inquire into the evolution of the latter” (Bilgin 2008: 6). Like Bilgin, I argue that it is not sufficient to merely look to new sources of knowledge about international relations from outside of the dominant ‘west’ without first understanding how and why the discipline of international relations is and has been seemingly hostile to the inclusion of such knowledge. I explore and justify this claim in far greater detail in the chapter that follows. Here, my main aim is to demonstrate the parochial (Eurocentric) nature of the discipline of international relations and develop an understanding of how ‘west’ and ‘non-west’ discursively interact in this Eurocentric world of international relations discourse. I do this by providing a critical account of IR’s own disciplinary history, which engages with the stories IR tells about itself and demonstrates the power such stories (myths) have in shaping the discipline and singing it into life. I first identify two enduring myths in international relations discourse before providing a more detailed analysis of myth and how it functions in international relations. I then turn my attention to critically re-telling each of these two myths, noting the historicity of these ‘timeless tales’. In telling/re-telling these myths, I am most interested in what it is they leave out. Or rather what they try to leave out. As will become clear, these myths of origin are haunted by ghosts or absent presences; or what Hobson calls the “dark underworld of international theory” (Hobson 2012: 30). These absent presences haunt the discipline of international relations and such hauntings help us to see the violence that persists in IR’s seemingly rosy creation fables. They also help to reveal the many and varied roles the ‘non-west’ has played (and does play) in the creation of an ostensibly ‘western’ discipline and the ways in which such narratives create and sustain those very categories. Despite attempts at consciously and actively writing them out, these ghostly beings are never
completely absent from IR’s disciplinary myths, nor are they entirely innocent of its disciplining powers (Gordon 2008: 5). Nevertheless, it is only by acknowledging such ghosts that we can begin to develop a better understanding of how international relations discourse disciplines knowledge and knowledge-production in ways that privilege the ‘west’ and denigrate, discount and/or co-opt its ‘non-western’ Others.

**IR’s creation stories**

Within international relations discourse it is not difficult to find accounts about the evolution of disciplinary international relations or ‘IR’. The most significant of these stories are those that tell of the discipline’s origins and, by extension, its purpose. Such stories are vital in constituting ‘the discipline’: they give it structure, form and ‘life’. They tell us what international relations is and how it came to be, how world politics is and has been studied, why and with what effect(s). They set limits on what is legitimately considered ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the scope of international relations. They create and sustain the very idea that a distinctive discipline of international relations exists and, more importantly, *should* exist. They create for IR a common history and tradition, which justifies its existence as an academic field of study (Said [1978] 2003: 272-3). Yet that common history and tradition comes infused with its own cultural biases and peculiarities.

There are several such creation stories that one finds within international relations discourse. Throughout the chapter (and the thesis) I focus on two of these stories in particular, although there are others, and refer to them as IR myths in order to capture the power such stories have in international relations discourse. Following Carvalho et al, I refer to these discipline-making myths as: the myth of 1648 (the myth of Westphalia) and the myth of 1919 (the myth of Aberystwyth) (Carvalho et al 2011). These tales are separate but related and are vital for understanding why and how international relations, as a defined ‘discipline’, exists. Myths of origin are arguably the most powerful myths in any culture because they explain both why and how a particular culture came into being. This is true also of the culture of
international relations. The first of these myths – the Westphalian myth – tells of the origins of the ‘international’ system. It informs us of when and how international politics came into being and in what form and therefore shapes many, arguably all, understandings of ‘international relations’. The second tells of the founding of the discipline itself, of the independent academic study of ‘International Relations’. In a sense we could refer to them as the myth of international relations (as the object of study) and the myth of International Relations (as the field of study). This distinction, between the academic discipline of IR and the everyday practice of international politics, is one that is frequently made by scholars writing about disciplinary international relations (Noesselt 2012: 4, Kristensen and Nielsen 2013). It is also one that I argue is actively encouraged and kept alive by these two myths. Nevertheless, it is an entirely unhelpful distinction and one that, from this point onward, I endeavour to avoid making. Drawing such a stark distinction, between descriptions of the world and the world(s) they are said to describe – between theory and practice – has been strongly opposed by critical scholars of international relations over the past two decades or more (George and Campbell 1990, Ashley and Walker 1990). I will return to this discussion over the theory/praxis distinction in the next chapter as it has been particularly influential in debates about Chinese IR and non-western IR more generally.

Throughout the thesis I attempt to overcome this distinction by choosing to talk about international relations discourse. This offers a wider (if somewhat messier) understanding of the scope of my research, specifically in terms of its subject matter. It allows me to include research which is self-consciously described as theoretical and that which is not. More importantly, however, it allows me to dig deeper into the meanings these labels can have and the wider consequences of such labelling practices. In addition, I use the term discourse to (consistently) remind the reader of my theoretical starting point, as set out in my introduction. By choosing at the outset to talk about international relations discourse, rather than international relations theory or

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1 The ‘us’ I refer to here is necessarily ambiguous. Here it means those who read, contribute to, and/or interact with international relations discourse.
research, I am foregrounding the importance of a critical understanding of language and knowledge production, acknowledging their intimate relationship with power relations and the exercise of power/control. This thesis begins with an acceptance that the way ‘we’ talk about ‘international relations’ shapes what ‘international relations’ turns out to be and critically questions who that ‘we’ is or can be (Spivak 1988). Put simply, it begins with an acknowledgement that “all knowledge is violent” (Beier 2005: 18) and therefore it is incumbent on us to dig deeper into the processes by which we know what we know. Likewise, it is imperative that we remain critically aware of our own roles as producers and consumers of knowledge of/about/in the world.

**Myths and myth-making in IR**

One of the ways in which knowledge-production in international relations is shaped is through the functioning of powerful creation myths. IR’s creation myths tell us what to study, why and how such that we don’t or can’t question those assumptions. “The *myth function* in IR theory is the transformation of what is particular, cultural, and ideological (like a story told by an IR tradition) into what *appears* to be universal, natural, and purely empirical” (Weber 2005: 7). To explore how myths function so as to make historically contingent concepts or stories appear as common-sense facts about the world I turn to Roland Barthes (Barthes [1954, 1957] 2009). Barthes writes in the preface to his collected *Mythologies*[^2] that the starting point for his reflections “was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the ‘naturalness’ with which newspaper, art and commonsense dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history” (Barthes 2009: xix). The subjects Barthes chooses to tackle are diverse and seemingly unrelated but the common feature of each of his short essays is his identification of the ways in which “myth takes a purely cultural and historical object ... and transforms it into the sign of a universal value” (Allen 2003: 36). For example, in his essay on wine and Frenchness Barthes explores the ways in which the mythical character of wine

[^2]: The collection *Mythologies* was originally published as a series of journalistic essays in *Les Lettres Nouvelles* between 1954 and 1957.
plays out in French society. Wine is not only a drink that is consumed in France but, in the context of contemporary French society, “wine comes to signify something, a comfortable, domesticated and yet social French cultural identity (drink wine and be French!), which hides the historical reality and tensions within and around the nation of France” as well as the link between the production of wine and French processes of colonisation (Allen 2003: 36).

The manner in which myth functions is a deeply ideological one. Ideology, in this sense, refers to “a shared and accepted ‘vision of the world’ which serves to describe, interpret and justify the place of a particular group or society in the grander scheme of things” (Ribière 2002: 9). Myths serve the ideological function of naturalisation, that is they make what is historically-contingent seem natural or given. In each of his essays Barthes is concerned with the history behind “what goes without saying” (Barthes 2009: xix), which closely reflects my own desire to better understand “what goes without saying” in international relations discourse and what the consequences might be. Barthes’ concern was with how myths functioned in French society and (mass) culture to transmit and reproduce (that is, to naturalise) the ideological positions of the petite bourgeoisie. I am concerned with the ways in which myths function in international relations discourse to transmit and reproduce (naturalise) an imperial (or colonial) ideology that privileges the so-called ‘west’ over and above its non-western Others. I seek to understand how one culturally-specific reading of international relations is transformed into the way of knowing ‘the world’ (Agathangelou and Ling 2004: 21).

Myth, for Barthes, is a specific type of discourse. Barthes draws upon semiology to provide a robust account of how myth functions. In Saussure’s semiology, a sign is the relation between a signifier (a sound or mark) and a signified (a concept). For example, roses are a sign of romance in our culture because “when used, say, in a love poem or pictured on a Valentine’s Day card, they combine a signifier (the word or image) with a signified (the cultural concept of roses) to produce the rose as a sign of romance, passion and love” (Allen 2003: 42, emphases added). Or to take an example from international relations discourse; The nation-state as an actor in international relations,
combines a *signifier* (the word ‘nation-state’) with a *signified* (the concept of ‘nation-state’ as understood in international relations discourse) to produce the nation-state as a *sign* of sovereignty, power and governance acting in the international system. What sets myth apart as a distinct type of discourse is the “duplicity or doubleness of such signs” (Allen 2003: 42). As Barthes explains:

> in myth there are two semiological systems, one of which is staggered in relation to the other: a linguistic system, the language, which I shall call the *language-object*, because it is the language which myth gets hold of in order to build its own system; and the myth itself, which I shall call *metalanguage*, because it is a second language, *in which* one speaks about the first (Barthes 2009: 138).

This is set out in the table below (figure 1.1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>MYTH</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Signifier</td>
<td>2. Signified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sign (meaning)</td>
<td>II. SIGNIFIED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. SIGNIFIER (form)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. SIGN (signification)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

For Barthes, myth is a “second order semiological system” (Barthes 2009: 137). “Myth acts on already existent signs” and uses them for the basis of a new system of meaning (Allen 2003: 42-3). What this means is that the signifier in myth can be seen in two ways: as the final term of the linguistic system – which Barthes labels *meaning*, or as the first term of the mythical system – which he labels *form*. As meaning it is already the product of a linguistic system of signs (meaning is ascribed through cultural processes of signification). As meaning it is complete – it has a history and its own value. Myth takes hold of that signifier and empties it of its meaning and thus its historical contingency is left behind. “Myth, as it were, hijacks meaning and turns it into a second-order meaning or what Barthes calls *signification*” (Allen 2003: 44).
Barthes demonstrates this through the use of several examples, including that of a schoolboy opening his Latin grammar book and reading the phrase *quia ego nominor leo*. The (first-order) meaning of the phrase is quite clear; it is the English translation of the phrase: “because my name is lion”. Yet it is also clear that this phrase is intended to signify something else: “I am a grammatical example” (Barthes 2009: 139). When put in a purely linguistic system this phrase *quia ego nominor leo* has a richness, a history, which Barthes provides in some detail: “I am an animal, a lion, I live in a certain country…” it goes on (Barthes 2009: 141). This rich and historical meaning is emptied or deferred when the phrase becomes a second-order signifier it becomes, simply, a grammatical example. In turning signifier from meaning to form, myth therefore “evacuates the image of any real history and presents it [the signifier] as unquestionable” (Allen 2003: 45). The signifier (meaning) ceases to be a culturally or historically-contingent construct and becomes a given (form); a fact that forms the basis of a functioning myth. This is the ideological function of myth – making natural what is culturally-contingent; making ideas or beliefs about the world appear as indisputable truths. But, vitally, this process is never complete. Barthes writes that the signification of the myth is constituted by a “constantly moving turnstile, which presents alternately the meaning of the signifier and its form” (Barthes 2009: 147). Barthes likens this function to looking out of the window of a moving car whereby at any one time one can choose to focus on the landscape outside or on the car window itself.

At one moment I grasp the presence of the glass and the distance of the landscape; at another, on the contrary, the transparence (sic) of the glass and the depth of the landscape; but the result of this alternation is constant: the glass is at once present and empty to me, and the landscape unreal and full (Barthes 2009: 147).

The same occurs in the mythical signifier: “its form is empty but present, its meaning absent but full” (Barthes 2009: 147). This account of the duplicity of myth is vital for understanding the way in which creation myths function in international relations discourse to obscure (but not hide) the role of the ‘non-west’ in an ostensibly western discipline.
The myths that function in international relations discourse work by naturalising what are mere representations of one particular world-view such that they are treated as facts that are universally true. However, this is not the same as denying alternative world-views or histories altogether. As Barthes writes:

myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact (Barthes 2009: 169-170).

For example, English School scholarship often talks about international history as European history, claiming that is simply the way things are (Bull and Watson 1984, Buzan and Lawson 2013, Buzan and Little 2014). The spread of international society is often portrayed as the only history of the world that matters, betraying a reliance on IR’s Westphalian myth within such scholarship. Myths about international relations tell of the discipline’s past (and present) in such a way as to distort, justify or explain away the violence that exists/persists there. Myth is thus “depoliticized speech” (Barthes 2009: 169).

Myths and ghosts

Barthes’ approach to images and ideas in French society was not simply to “expose the mythology behind them, but perhaps more importantly [to] expose the fact that we were somehow aware of the mythological character of such images and ideas all along.” (Allen 2003: 37, emphasis added). The key to Barthes’ understanding of myth is thus its duplicity; identifying a meaning and form that is both absent and present at the same time. Nevertheless, one of the limitations of his model is that it is too clean; a little too simple and straightforward. Barthes separates out the two roles (manifestations) of the signifier in myth; meaning and form (form is empty but present, meaning absent but full). Yet drawing such a stark distinction between the two is potentially misleading: there is no innocent ‘meaning’ and complicit ‘form’. But rather, as Avery Gordon writes: “even those who haunt our dominant institutions and their systems of value are haunted too by things they
sometimes have names for and sometimes do not” (Gordon 2008: 5). Life, in other words, is complicated. Barthes’ understanding of the myth function is still very useful for seeing how international relations discourse functions to obscure the ‘non-west’ (through its perpetuation of colonial ideology), but it must be tempered with an acknowledgement of the complexity of (international) life. Throughout the thesis I try to be mindful of the complexity and complicity of international relations discourse (and the ghosts that haunt it). We should not be seeking an innocent non-western voice that is waiting to be reclaimed but rather recognising that west and non-west have always been intertwined in a complex web of (unequal) relations and that those categories are in themselves constructed as a means of privileging one over the other. Disrupting some of IR’s dominant myths and acknowledging the ghosts that haunt them may aid us in this endeavour, but it is a messy business that can lead us in unexpected directions.

My approach in this chapter, therefore, is not to demystify or attempt to escape the myths in international relations discourse – Barthes himself warns against this (Barthes 2009: 158-162) – but rather it is to identify these stories as myth and to interrogate them as such. It is to take on these apparent truths about international relations and call them out for what they are: reifications of culturally-specific ideas presented as if they are timeless truths that apply across all of space and time (Weber 2005: 8). “The role of the mythologist, therefore, is to expose, or often simply remind us, of the artificial and constructed nature of such images” (Allen 2003: 38). This follows, in a sense, Foucault’s approach to the history of ideas (myths) such as ‘madness’ or ‘sexuality’. Foucault did not set out to formulate the ‘truth’ about them or to expose the ‘falsehoods designed to conceal that truth’ but rather he set out to “understand the will to knowledge that shapes and supports what are taken as truths and falsehoods about sex [madness, etc.]” (Prado 2000: 92). So rather than attempting to ‘demystify’ international relations, I set out to celebrate its contradictions; to acknowledge the ghosts that haunt IR’s myths and reaffirm their existence whilst also questioning the reasons for their marginalisation in
the first place. My purpose is to re-historicise and thus re-politicise some of international relations’ originary myths and it is to this effort that I now turn.

The Westphalian Myth:  
States, sovereignty and the inter-national system

Where is Westphalia anyway?
Arguably the most pervasive and powerful myth told and retold in contemporary international relations discourse is the Westphalian Myth, or as Carvalho, Leira and Hobson (2011) refer to it, the Myth of 1648. Westphalia features in many, perhaps even most, introductory textbooks and courses on international relations (Carvalho et al 2011) and is, or at least ought to be, known to all scholars and students of international relations even if most would have difficulty finding it on a map. The term ‘Westphalia’ is widely used in contemporary international relations discourse. For example, “The Westphalian System” was chosen as the theme for the 1998 Annual Convention of the ISA in recognition of the 350th anniversary of the signing of the Westphalian peace treaties (Sørensen 1999). The terms “Westphalian model” (Caporaso 1996, Acharya and Buzan 2007, Barnett 2001, Grovugui 2002) and “Westphalian system” (Kayaoglu 2007, Lawson 2000, Hayman and Williams 2006) are frequently employed for describing certain aspects of (contemporary) international order. Some scholars who are critical of the Westphalian myth continue to use the term as shorthand to describe the world order they are critiquing (Ling 2013) and others have used is as a form of parody, for example Susan Strange’s (1999) ‘The Westfailure System’ and Simon Philpott’s (2006) ‘East Timor’s Double Life: Smells Like Westphalian Spirit’ (Stirk 2012: 641). The place ‘Westphalia’ itself holds a sort of mythical quality for many IR scholars. It is a place where something very significant once occurred but, to us as

3 ‘Westphalia’ is transliterated into Chinese as 威斯特伐利亚 (wei-si-te-fa-li-ya) and appears in most Chinese IR textbooks: it almost certainly means nothing to Chinese students; indeed as a non-native speaker I was unable to translate the term when I first encountered it.
scholars/students of international relations, it is a place that only really exists in the stories (myths) about what happened there.

Despite widespread references to Westphalia in international relations discourse, there are few who would consider the German region itself to be of any real significance in contemporary international politics. It is rather the treaties that were signed there more than three and a half centuries ago that ascribe Westphalia its mythical importance. There were two major treaties signed in 1648, one by Protestant delegations at Osnabrück the other by Catholic representatives in the city of Münster (both in the German region of Westphalia). Taken together they are often referred to as the peace of Westphalia, which, after several years of negotiation, signalled the end of the Thirty Years’ War in Europe. During this period of European history there were many treaties signed by the states, principalities and various rulers of the day, yet few others (if any) are known to scholars of international relations and none is ascribed the same mythical quality in international relations discourse. The peace of Westphalia is said to be so important to international relations because it was definitive in shaping the modern ‘international’ system. It is said that the peace of Westphalia, by ending the Thirty Years’ War in the Holy Roman Empire, brought about a new era of world politics marked by more peaceful relations between what were increasingly coming to resemble modern nation-states. As Steve Krasner notes, the peace of Westphalia is generally understood as “a critical moment in the development of the modern international system” (Krasner 2001: 17). It was, in international relations terms, an epoch-defining moment: the moment that marked the beginning of the ‘international’ system and international relations as we know it. Thus the Myth of 1648, as the original myth of origin, is vital to the operation of international relations discourse.

In many historical writings that sit outside international relations the peace of Westphalia is also described as an epochal shift. Many such studies begin in the year 1648 although they select a variety of end points (McKay and Scott 1983, Treasure 1985, Stoye 2000, Birn 2005, Blanning 2008). Blanning accepts that any date one selects to begin a history book is arbitrary, but argues
that “some dates are more arbitrary than others” (Blanning 2008: xxiii). He justifies his choice to begin in 1648 because the peace of Westphalia that was concluded in that year marked the beginning of a new way of governing Europe. This stemmed from the acceptance of the stalemate between the Catholic and Protestant factions in Europe and the need to allow self-determination of religious conviction. As Stoye explains, the Westphalian settlement “altered the general framework of Europe... This was one reason why what followed proved to be a half-century of rivalry between states, rather than of social or intellectual upheaval” (Stoye 2000: 2, my emphasis).

The peace of Westphalia is thus said to have marked a shift in how Europe and, by extension, the world was governed. Clearly something did happen in a place called Westphalia in the year 1648; that something has come to be known as the ‘Peace of Westphalia’. However, to borrow from Barthes again, when the term ‘Westphalia’ appears in international relations discourse, it ceases to be simply a reference to an historical event and becomes instead the foundation upon which a very powerful discipline-making myth is built. It’s ‘meaning’ is deferred or set aside when the term becomes the basis (the signifier) for an IR myth: the Myth of 1648. When ‘meaning’ is emptied, the historical contingency of that term is left behind. ‘Westphalia’ no longer refers to a pair of peace treaties signed 350 years ago but rather it describes the contemporary ‘international’ system, when and how it was formed, how it functions and why. In IR’s narrative of beginnings;

the small towns of Münster and Osnabrück in Westphalia [are] presented as the place where the big modern idea of the sovereign state and the anarchic states-system [sic] exploded into being and where the life of empires and other hierarchical political formations ended (Calvalho et al 2011: 736).

Yet, as I mentioned above, the process of deferral is never complete and IR’s myths are not without their ghosts. The following section draws on revisionist readings of the treaties of Westphalia to interrogate the accepted IR narrative (the so-called Myth of 1648) to demonstrate the ways in which, as an IR myth, ‘Westphalia’ is emptied of all historicity and contingency. I interrogate the key
aspects of the peace agreement as identified by international relations
discourse – Westphalia and the modern (sovereign, nation-) state, Westphalia
and sovereign equality, Westphalia and the secular state – and demonstrate not
only the problems with these assertions but some of the consequences of
narrating international relations in this way.  

**Westphalia and the modern state**

Westphalia is celebrated by international relations scholars as the birth-place of
the modern, sovereign state. Hans Morgenthau, one of the so-called founding
fathers of international relations, writes that “the Treaty of Westphalia ... made
the territorial state the cornerstone of the modern state system” (Morgenthau
1985: 294). The role of the state as the key building block of international
politics is not unique to Morgenthau’s realism. As Krasner writes, the concept of
“Westphalian sovereignty” sits at the heart of all major theories of international
relations (Krasner 2001: 21-22). Carvalho et al provide yet more examples of the
pervasiveness of references to Westphalian sovereignty in “the IR canon” and,
in particular, in many of the textbooks used to introduce the subject to new
students (Carvalho et al 2011: 739). They argue that, despite the revisionist
scholarship of authors such as Osiander, most textbooks and teaching continue
to perpetuate IR’s founding myths. Despite some occasional hints to the fact
that the history of the time may be more complex than the Westphalian
narrative suggests, most continue to (re)tell this mythical story of 1648
(Carvalho et al 2011: 743). The following, for example, is from a textbook
published by the Oxford University Press: “The principle of sovereignty
recognized in the peace of Westphalia represents an essential element in the
creation of the modern nation-state” (Spiegel et al 2009: 59). And perhaps the
most widely used British IR textbook claims the following: “in codifying and
legitimating the principle of modern statehood the Westphalian Constitution
gave birth to the modern states-system” (Baylis et al 2008: 47). The myth of

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4 For fuller, in-depth studies exploring IR’s account of Westphalia as a myth see Osiander (2001),
Westphalia provides international relations discourse with its ontological foundation in the modern, sovereign nation-state.

Revisionist studies and the text of the agreements demonstrate, however, that the treaties signed at Westphalia in 1648 did little to promote the modern concept of sovereignty that the Westphalian myth assumes. Derek Croxton, for example, provides a detailed analysis of the treaties themselves finding that there is little if anything in the text that can be seen as an explicit endorsement of the concept of sovereignty (Croxton 1999: 572-577). Carvalho et al argue alternatively that, “the Peace of Westphalia constituted a step back from an already established idea (and to some extent practice) of state sovereignty” (Carvalho et al 2011: 740). The idea that a ruler might have the final authority over his own territory (at least in terms of choosing its religion) was introduced in the treaty of Augsburg, nearly a century before the Westphalian settlement. Yet even this idea was not fully set out in the Westphalian treaties and certainly did not look like what we call sovereignty in contemporary international relations discourse. Croxton rejects the claims of some IR scholars that the Westphalian peace can be seen to implicitly recognise sovereignty in the sense that it was a multilateral treaty among equals. “The peace of Westphalia was not in fact a multilateral treaty, but two bilateral treaties, one signed at Osnabrück between Sweden and the Emperor, the other at Münster between France and the Emperor” (Croxton 1999: 581-2). The signatories of the treaties were predominantly princes and rulers of the various principalities of the Holy Roman Empire. The treaties did set out provisions allowing those princes to sign treaties with other states, which many IR scholars read as a recognition of sovereignty and independence from the Empire. Nevertheless, those provisions were limited and only applied within the context of the Holy Roman Empire:

Above all, it shall be free perpetually to each of the States of the Empire, to make Alliances with Strangers for their Preservation and Safety; provided, nevertheless, such Alliances be not against the Emperor, and the Empire, nor against the Publick Peace, and this Treaty, and without
prejudice to the Oath by which every one is bound to the Emperor and the Empire (Article 65, Treaty of Münster, 1648).

The treaties are often misread by IR scholars as applying to Europe as a whole, when they applied only to the members of the Holy Roman Empire. Despite some new freedoms, the signatories still considered themselves part of that Empire to a greater or lesser degree and continued to pay taxes and send representatives to Rome (Croxton 1999: 574). As Krasner notes, the right to make treaties was given in one sentence in a section of the treaty dealing with the rights of states within the Holy Roman Empire to participate in the deliberations of the Empire and is accompanied by the caveat that no treaty should be directed against the Emperor and the Empire. “Only after the fact can this be read as an endorsement of the principle of sovereignty which rejects any external restraint on the way in which states might conduct their foreign policies” (Krasner 2001: 37).

**Westphalia and sovereign equality**

A related idea that is perpetuated by the myth of Westphalia is the concept of sovereign equality: the idea that states are equal in the international system, in a formal, legal sense at least. This comes from a reading of the treaties that claims; “there was a general acceptance that all states were independent and theoretically equal, at least if they were monarchies” (McKay and Scott 1983: 6, my emphasis). This leads to certain normative claims in international relations discourse about the ‘Westphalian system’ that upholds the principle of formal equality of all states. Claims such as the following:

Westphalian principles [constitute] the normative core of international law: [these principles are] (1) the government of each country is unequivocally sovereign within its territorial jurisdiction, and (2) countries shall not interfere in each other’s domestic affairs (Brown 1992: 74).

Thus we hear frequently in international politics references back to Westphalian principles that are said to enshrine the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of another state. Such claims are particularly prevalent in China, where the principle of non-intervention is enshrined into the constitution of the PRC
Thus, according to the myth, 1648 marked a shift in the ordering principle of Europe from one of hierarchy to one of (formal) equality. It is claimed that the treaties of Westphalia signalled the defeat of the Holy Roman Emperor’s universal aspirations (Carvalho et al 2011: 740).

However, once again we can see the myth function at work in this narrative. As Croxton demonstrates, “the Holy Roman Empire did not cease to exist in practice or in theory in 1648” (Croxton 1999: 574), nor did the concept of empire or hierarchy in international politics. Indeed, the peace of Westphalia (and the war that it brought to an end) was explicitly about some countries claiming greater standing than others; the opposite of the idea of sovereign equality. The war itself is traditionally explained as a conflict between the representatives of an imperial or universalist order (the Holy Roman Empire and those loyal to the Pope) and representatives of a more particularistic order promoting the modern idea of state sovereignty (mainly France, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands) (Carvalho et al 2011: 741). However, Osiander questions this reading and demonstrates in some detail that the interventions of Denmark, Sweden and France, rather than crusading for sovereign equality, were in fact motivated by a desire to take advantage of the weak position of the Habsburgs and enhance their own positions in Europe (Osiander 2001: 258). “Those who negotiated and commented upon the peace of Westphalia in the seventeenth century did not see it as introducing or consolidating the norm of sovereign equality. They saw the peace as restorative not innovative” (Stirk 2012: 643). This is evident, for example, in article 32 of the Treaty of Osnabrück which states: “Whoever has been disturbed or in any manner deprived of what they had in 1624 is to be truly and fully restored without exception” (Treaty of Osnabrück, article 32; see also Treaty of Münster, article 6). It did not usher in a new era where empire was considered a thing of the past and a new world order was emerging in its place. Rather a closer reading of the treaties reveals many instances in which the superiority of the Emperor is reiterated and the continuation of hierarchy as the dominant ordering principle in Europe is evident. Territory is divided up in the treaty between the different states, electors, princes and fiefdoms but there is no indication from any part of the
treaty that these territorial entities are equal in any sense, formal or otherwise. For example, the disputed territory of the Upper Palatinate is granted (by the Emperor) to a new fiefdom and those who had previously laid claim to it were to renounce such claims. The hierarchical ordering of the ‘states’ concerned with this territory is set out in articles 23-27 of the Treaty of Münster. Article 23 states that electors and princes must remain loyal to the Emperor:

the Lord Charles Lewis and his Brothers shall render Obedience, and be faithful to his Imperial Majesty, like the other Electors and Princes of the Empire; and shall renounce their Pretensions to the Upper Palatinate, as well for themselves as their Heirs, whilst any Male, and lawful Heir of the Branch of William shall continue alive (Article 23, Treaty of Münster, 1648, emphasis added).

Likewise, fiefs must remain loyal to their electors and princes:

Likewise, fiefs must remain loyal to their electors and princes:

the Fiefs confer’d by the Emperor on ... shall remain firm and stable: That nevertheless, these Vassals shall be bound to take an Oath of Fidelity to the Lord Charles Lewis, and to his Successors, as their direct Lords, and to demand of him the renewing of their Fiefs” (Article 27, Treaty of Münster, 1648).

The treaty recognises the supremacy of the imperial courts (article 41), the continued role of the Diets of the Empire in decision-making (article 66) and the role of the Emperor in consolidating (and guaranteeing) the peace (article 106-111). Hierarchy, thus, not only haunts international relations but is (and has been) integral to the international system from its so-called inception in the treaties of Westphalia.

**Westphalia and secularisation**

One final aspect of the Westphalian myth that is often neglected in critiques such as those I have drawn upon here is its link to the notion of increasing secularisation of international affairs, which is of particular interest given recent claims that international relations has entered a ‘post-secular age’ (Mavelli and Petito 2012). The changing nature of governance in Europe around the time of the Westphalian settlement is often explained in terms of the diminishing power of religious leaders and institutions over the princes and rulers of Europe.
and the growing secularisation of relations between them. According to international relations discourse, the Peace of Westphalia granted formal independence to the kingdoms of Europe who were thus able to determine their own religion for the first time. In explaining the significance of the Westphalia settlement, historians Derek McKay and H. M. Scott write that Westphalia was a key turning point because “the principle was now accepted that each state could have its own religion” and “the concept of a united Christendom ... was now finally buried after Westphalia” (McKay and Scott 1983: 6). As Blanning explains, “part and parcel of this development was secularization, which in Catholic countries involved the exclusion of any form of papal interference and everywhere dictated the subordination of Church to State” (Blanning 2008: xxiv). As a result of the declining influence of religion over public life, a new secular religion, that of nationalism, became the force that united in individuals living within these new entities (nation-states).

Once again, a critical re-reading of the treaties demonstrates that the peace of Westphalia did not signal a complete break between church and state. What is more, the principle allowing states to determine their own religion (cuius regio, eius religio) was not new: it had already been established in 1555 with the peace of Augsburg (Krasner 2001: 38) and in many respects the Westphalian treaties rolled back this provision. “The claim that the peace of Westphalia marked the end of Europe organized as a Christian community under the authority of pope or Emperor is, therefore, greatly exaggerated” (Croxton 1999: 575). The treaty allowed for freedom to practice certain religions, but only those recognised in the treaty (essentially the different denominations of Christianity): “Beyond the religions stipulated, no other shall be accepted or tolerated in the Holy Roman Empire” (Treaty of Osnabrück, article 7:2). The idea of Christendom did not disappear with Westphalia. What Westphalia did was to privilege individual rights to freedom of conscience over those of the state. For example, the treaties granted individuals the freedom to send children abroad to school or educate them at home according to one’s own religious convictions. They also stated that there should be tolerance of different religions within a
state making it a subject to ‘international’ scrutiny, in other words it was not a matter that states could exercise ‘sovereignty’ over:

It has also been agreed that those adherents of the Augsburg Confession who are subjects of the Catholics, and the Catholic subjects of the estates of the Augsburg Confession who had no public or private exercise of their religion at any time in the year 1624, and who at some time following the peace’s publication shall profess and embrace a religion different from that of the lord of their territory, shall be patiently tolerated and have liberty of conscience, and shall not be hindered in attending their devotions held privately in their homes. They shall not be prohibited from participating in the public exercise of religion in their vicinities as often as they wish, nor prohibited from sending their children to foreign schools of their own confession, nor from having them instructed at home by private teachers. Yet the said freeholders, vassals, and subjects shall perform their duty in all other things with due obedience and submission, and without any disturbance or commotion (Article 5:34, Treaty of Osnabrück, 1648; see also Article 28, Treaty of Münster, 1648).

Thus, “far from making religion an aspect of internal politics, the peace of Westphalia made religious liberty a matter of international responsibility” (Croxton 1999: 575). In a very different type of study, Willi Goetschel arrives at a remarkably similar conclusion to Croxton. Goetschel questions the secularisation narrative of Westphalia and the associated rise of modern sovereignty by examining the German-Jewish tradition of political thought through the work of thinkers such as Baruch Spinoza and Heinrich Heine (Goetschel 2010). He finds that those thinkers saw secularisation not in terms of a move from “Pope to Prince” but rather as a dual process involving the simultaneous recognition of both “religion and politics – tradition and modern – as discrete but related sites of power that, furthermore, are themselves constituted in multiple forms” (Shilliam 2010: 6, emphasis added). Religion and belief remained very high on the international agenda in a way that is dismissed by most recollections of the Westphalian treaties in international relations discourse.
Why Westphalia?

As the above analysis demonstrates, the link between the Peace of Westphalia and contemporary concepts of the modern nation-state, sovereign equality and secular international relations is a manufactured one. This link is perpetuated through the constant telling and re-telling of this Westphalian myth. The myth creates a reality or ‘truth’ that the contemporary international system is a European idea and was conceived as a solution to (religious) war. It tells us that this model of independent, (formally) equal, sovereign states began in Europe and then spread out to the rest of the world over the four centuries that followed. Recent discussions around notions of globalisation bringing about a ‘post-Westphalian’ world order (Linklater 1998, Falk 2002) simply serve to reinforce the seeming naturalness of the Westphalian myth. According to Stirk’s study, however, the link between Westphalia and notions of sovereign equality only really began to be made in the early 20th century (Stirk 2012: 643). This too was the time that ‘international relations’ began to emerge and be named as a distinct discipline and the myth of Westphalia is thus closely linked to the myth of Aberystwyth and the growth of the discipline more generally. The link between Westphalia and the concept of sovereign equality became firmly cemented in international relations discourse when Leo Gross published his article ‘The Peace of Westphalia’ in 1948. In it Gross claims:

The Peace of Westphalia, for better or worse, marks the end of an epoch and the opening of another. It represents the majestic portal which leads from the old into the new world ... In the political field it marked man’s abandonment of the idea of a hierarchical structure of society and his option for a new system characterized by a multitude of states each sovereign within its territory, equal to one another, and free from any external sovereignty (Gross 1948: 28-29, emphasis added).

While earlier claims to sovereign equality had faced some criticism, by the time the article was published, Gross’ views about sovereign equality in the international system were largely unchallenged.

What allowed this myth to take off were the circumstances in which Gross’ thinking was written and disseminated. Gross was writing in the
immediate post-WWII period in the context of the founding of the United Nations. This, according to Stirk, was the impetus for foregrounding the idea of sovereign equality and discursively creating a long history for the concept (Stirk 2012: 657). As Osiander writes; the myth of Westphalia “is really a product of the nineteenth and twentieth-century fixation on the concept of sovereignty” (Osiander 2001: 251). Until this time, the concept of hierarchy had remained the “dominant motif” in international politics (Stirk 2012: 643). This, however, was not only the period that saw the creation of the United Nations, an organisation claiming (rhetorically at least) that all member states are sovereign equals, but it also saw the most active period of decolonisation during which large parts of the world formerly controlled by the European powers were demanding their independence and (formal) equality. Thus the narrative of Westphalia, and the idea that the modern nation-state originated in western Europe (and spread outward), was helpful to (western) international relations discourse at that time. Its invention and propagation can be seen in some respects as an attempt by IR scholars from the 1940s onwards to purge international relations of its (violent) colonial history. This claim, and the ghostly beings it invites (the spectres of hierarchy and imperialism), will be explored throughout the thesis. First I turn to IR’s second creation myth: the myth of 1919.

The Myth of 1919:
Aberystwyth, idealism and the problem of inter-state war

Where is Aberystwyth anyway?
Another powerful, though perhaps less well-worn, myth in contemporary international relations discourse is the myth of 1919 or the myth of Aberystwyth. The myth of Aberystwyth is, in some respects, less well-defined than the Westphalian myth and incorporates a number of slightly different versions of the story of the discipline’s early history. Rather than focusing on the foundation of ‘the international’ (the object of our field of study), this collection of myths or stories tell of the birth of the discipline itself. Together they
function as a very powerful myth about the origins of the field of international relations and are crucial in shaping our understandings not just of what we study in ‘international relations’ but also how we study it and why. It is frequently recounted in international relations textbooks and, more often still, in classroom introductions to the subject of IR (see Carvalho et al 2011: 745). Like most of my peers, I too have been complicit in the propagation of this powerful myth sometimes with and sometimes without my knowledge.\(^5\) Describing these stories in terms of the myth of Aberystwyth is perhaps a particularly British way of approaching this aspect of IR’s founding mythology, nonetheless it captures significant aspects of the myths surrounding the birth of the discipline that is commonly referred to as ‘International Relations’ the world over.

The myth begins in a sleepy university town in north Wales, which, like Westphalia, is widely known amongst students and scholars of international relations. Yet, like Westphalia, the ‘place’ of Aberystwyth is more than just a place. It holds a certain mythical quality in international relations discourse; it is the birthplace of the modern discipline of IR. This story is set in 1919 when the Liberal MP David Davies – and, as is frequently forgotten, his two sisters (Soward 1974: 292) – endowed the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. It was the first position of its kind in the world and created with it the first ever department of international politics. It was followed shortly after by the founding of a department of international relations at the London School of Economics in 1920, which established its first Chair of International Relations, the Sir Ernest Cassell Chair, in 1924 (Fulbright 2012). Other departments followed in Britain, the US and across Europe. Over time, IR became institutionalised in many other countries around the world, but, according to the myth, Aberystwyth was the first. Aberystwyth University is an important centre for international relations research today as it has been in the past; nevertheless, its symbolic value to

\(^5\) I felt particularly uncomfortable in my role as a teaching assistant on someone else’s course (POLI 10601, University of Manchester), which opened by re-telling this myth. Yet, despite my unease, I continued to act in this role as it was a necessary step in my own professional development.
international relations discourse outweighs that of even the most ground-breaking research that is produced by its talented research community. Aberystwyth University uses this symbolic power to attract prospective students to study at its department of international politics. On its page for prospective students it states: “As the world’s first department of its kind, the Department of International Politics has been a pioneer in the subject, with members of staff striking out in new and innovative directions while shaping the agenda that defines the subject” (Aberystwyth 2013a). The department is thus creating a discursive linkage between past and present innovation. Aberystwyth was the first then and is the first now.

Many introductory textbooks cite Aberystwyth as the birthplace of the modern discipline of IR, often as part of a wider historical account of the discipline (Brown and Ainley 2009: 21, Vasquez 1998: 32, Burchill and Linklater 2013: 6). The myth of 1919, however, goes beyond the Woodrow Wilson Chair at Aberystwyth. There are at least two main versions of this story (Smith 2000: 376): the first sets out the discipline’s development in terms of chronology (Bull 1972, Vasquez 1998). Beginning in 1919, the interwar years were characterised by the dominance of idealism, progressing to the dominance of realism after the Second World War. A period of more widespread debate followed in the 1970-80s which eventually led to a coalescing around neo-realism and neo-liberalism that Wæver dubbed the ‘neo-neo synthesis’ (Wæver 1996: 163-4). Recent developments, specifically the rise in post-positivist approaches, are simply added as the most recent phase in the discipline’s development. An alternative method of narrating this same story focuses on the debates between competing positions (Jackson and Sørensen 2010). Here the field’s history is told in terms of a series of so-called Great Debates: between idealism and realism in the 1930s; traditionalism and behaviouralism in the 1960s; the inter-paradigm debate (between the competing paradigms of realism, liberalism and Marxism) in the 1980s and latterly between rationalism and reflectivism from the early 1990s (Smith 2000: 376).

Like Westphalia, the University of Wales, Aberystwyth also appears in Chinese IR textbooks; identified as the birthplace of IR (Qin Yaqing 2004a: 56).
As the institutional starting point for the discipline, the Woodrow Wilson chair at Aberystwyth is also said to have set the direction for the purpose and scope of the new discipline. The year 1919 is of fundamental importance to the myth: it saw the end of the ‘war to end all wars’. The myth of Aberystwyth inextricably links these two events and firmly establishes the discipline of international relations as a response to the experience of World War I. Reading these and other accounts of IR’s disciplinary history, three key elements of the myth of 1919 can be identified: the discipline was established in 1919 (in Aberystwyth); it was founded with the purpose to solve the problem of (inter-state) war; and, the idealist/utopian approaches that characterised the field’s early work failed because of their inability to explain the rise of interstate violence that culminated in WWII, they were thus superseded by (classical) realism which won out in the so-called First Great Debate (Carvalho et al 2011: 746). In situating the discipline’s institutional origins in a certain time and place, this myth tells not only how and when but also why the discipline came into existence. In so doing it reifies the boundaries of what is and therefore is not considered relevant to the study of international relations. Drawing on Barthes again; as a first order ‘story’, it tells of the founding of an international politics department at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth in 1919. Clearly this was a significant event but international relations discourse elevates it to the realm of myth and in so doing the place of ‘Aberystwyth’ and the date ‘1919’ become signifiers for what ‘international relations’ is all about. The historically-specific story of one department in Wales becomes the story of the entire field of study and its reason for existence. Yet, as with the myth of Westphalia, the myth of Aberystwyth is haunted by its own ghosts.

**Aberystwyth and 1919**

The myth of Aberystwyth (or the myth of 1919) claims a very specific starting point for disciplinary international relations. This element of the myth is, in many senses, quite straightforward to contend with and call out as myth. A number of revisionist scholars have put forward arguments that the date 1919 is more or less arbitrary in terms of the disciplinary development of
international relations and it is relatively easy to identify alternative starting points for the discipline (Knutsen 1997, Schmidt 1998, Vitalis 2005). Schmidt dates the discipline’s birth to some time around 1880, Knutsen to the 1890s and Vitalis points to a number of key milestones in the 1910s. Steve Smith agrees that “the subject of IR was studied long before the First World War” (Smith 2000: 377). Indeed, there are a number of institutional innovations that could equally have been cited as the beginning of the new discipline such as the establishment of a committee on international relations at the University of California in 1915 (Vitalis 2005: 170) or the first publication of the journal that was to become *Foreign Affairs* in 1910 (Vitalis 2005: 161). In addition, it is relatively easy to demonstrate continuity of thinking and modes of thinking pre and post 1919 (Schmidt 1998: 231). Almost all of the scholars that are identified as the first participants in the ‘new’ IR discipline were also writing in the two decades prior to 1919, including Norman Angell, John A. Hobson, Harold Laski and Woodrow Wilson (Carvalho et al 2011: 749). The theoretical frameworks which underpinned their work were heavily influenced by the Eurocentric and racist narratives that had emerged and developed in the 18th and 19th centuries. In the years leading up to 1919 (and, arguably, many that followed):

a whole set of profoundly ideological and racist notions were held by the colonizers about colonized peoples, lands, and histories. The belief in a hierarchy of peoples – in the superiority of Europeans or people with European ancestry and the inferiority of non-Europeans or ‘people of colour’ – was widespread and routine (Jones 2006: 2).

Yet the history of international relations offers no recognition of the modes of thinking that were so prevalent during its formative years, nor does it recognise the challenges made to them. Instead, most accounts of the discipline’s history begin in 1919 and conveniently situate international relations as a response to the problem of (inter-state) war (Smith 2000: 377). By situating the birth of the discipline in a response to the horrors of WWI, it becomes seemingly unproblematic to portray the field’s earliest contributors as idealist thinkers naturally focused on how to prevent such events from occurring again (Smith 2000: 377) and to entirely ignore the underlying intellectual trends of the time.
which were strongly influenced by the dominance of colonial modes of thinking and doing.

Aberystwyth and solving the problem of war

It is not unusual to see World War I described as a “defining moment” in world history (MacIver 2004: 2). It is unsurprising therefore that it is also seen as a defining moment in the history of international relations. WWI, specifically its conclusion in 1919 with the Paris settlement and establishment of the League of Nations, is often seen as the first significant milestone in the discursive history of international relations. Later milestones include, for example: World War II; the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union; and the terrorist attacks on September 11th 2001. With the exception of 9/11, which challenged the discipline’s self-image because it did not conform to dominant understandings of IR, all of these milestones refer to inter-state conflicts. The ‘Great War’ is cited in many introductory textbooks and lessons as the event that changed the (international) world and consequently the way ‘we’ think about and understand that world. According to the myth of 1919, the profound impact of the war inspired the creation of a new academic discipline dedicated to the study of war and the search for peace. Introductory textbooks often tell us that the discipline of international relations rose “out of the ashes of World War I” (Rochester 2010: 19) and that “International Relations was born out of the human tragedy of war” (Steans and Pettiford 2005: 229).

The birth of international relations and its connection to the ‘tragedy of war’ is set out very clearly by the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth University:

The Department of International Politics was founded in 1919, with the help of a generous endowment of £20,000 given by David Davies, as a memorial to the students killed and wounded in the First World War. Davies was moved by a

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7 But just as IR is Eurocentric so to are these accounts of world history. Most accounts of Chinese history are remarkably silent on this so-called ‘World War’. For a notable exception, see Xu Guoqi (2005) where he puts forward the argument that WWI was also a defining moment in Chinese history (though never credited) as it was the moment China began to question its own ‘national’ identity.
global vision, forged in the fires of war, aimed at repairing the shattered family of nations and, more ambitiously, to redeem the claims of men and women in a great global commonwealth—the League of Nations. This vision found concrete expression in the world’s first chair in international politics, also located in Aberystwyth and named in honour of the American president Woodrow Wilson, the man whose name is synonymous with the creation of a League of Nations for the maintenance of international justice and the preservation of peace (Aberystwyth 2013b).

This account sets out quite clearly and succinctly the myth of 1919, which is consistently told and re-told in IR classrooms around the world. The bitter realities of war, which were experienced in a new and more acute way by European nations (and their settler colonies), spurred on the thinkers of the day to a new cause: solving the problem of (inter-state) war. In international relations discourse, it has become a “self-evident truth that the discipline has been conceived on the blood-stained battle-field of Europe, with the infant child of IR having been delivered in 1919 after a gruelling 48-month gestation period... and was born with the noblest of moral purposes” to rid the world of the spectre of warfare (Hobson 2012: 15). This noble identity myth, as Hobson refers to it, underpins arguments about the purpose for (and function of) international relations research. “The holder of that chair was expected to travel the world to spread the message that war was not some inevitable feature of the international body politic, but, rather, was something that could gradually be eradicated by knowledge working on practice” (Smith et al 1996: xi).

The myth tells us that this new discipline of international relations was founded in order to bring about a new, more peaceful world order in the wake of the destruction brought about by the Great War. The myth of 1919 thus compounds the Westphalian myth by telling the story of a war between sovereign nation-states over territory and secular/material power thus reifying the categories and images of the Westphalian myth. It is built on a narrative of world history that identifies 1919 not only as the year of the birth of international relations (the discipline) but also as the year that the Westphalian
order expanded to the rest of the world (Saurin 2006: 24). With the doctrine of “national self-determination” at the heart of the Versailles peace agreement, 1919 was the year that saw the fulfilment of the Westphalian model in theory if not yet in practice. Citing the Woodrow Wilson Chair as the foundation of this new discipline serves to reinforce the importance of the doctrine with which he has become synonymous. Yet, as Carvalho, Leira and Hobson (2011: 750) argue, it “obscures an ‘inconvenient truth’: that the overwhelming majority of international theory throughout its existence has been imbued with a specific moral/political purpose – to defend and promote Western civilisation.”

Woodrow Wilson’s principle of national self-determination was conditional at best and applied only to the ‘international’ world (of Europe and its settler colonies). Wilson argued that the non-white races should not become independent states immediately; not only would this be destabilising to the fragile international order still under construction, but it would also be unfair on those states that were not yet mature enough to successfully govern themselves. In an article on the question of US control of the Philippines, Wilson argued that the US should not grant the Filipinos independence/self-government because “to do so would be to leave them like a rudderless boat adrift” (Wilson 1902). This racist attitude is also evident in his views on domestic politics, as can be seen in the following article on ‘The Reconstruction of the Southern States’:

An extraordinary and very perilous state of affairs had been created in the South by the sudden and absolute emancipation of the negroes, and it was not strange that the southern legislatures should deem it necessary to take extraordinary steps to guard against the manifest and pressing dangers which it entailed (Wilson 1901: 6).

In setting up the Mandate System within the League of Nations, Wilson formally recognised and thus legitimised colonial administration as an acceptable model of global governance, at least in the short to medium term. He argued for the necessity of continued colonial rule over the non-white races as they were not yet schooled in the ways of democracy and self-governance that were necessary
to participate in the ‘international’ order. He also rejected the Japanese proposed racial equality clause in the Paris Peace Conference.

After 1919, “European colonial rule did not diminish but continued to expand, not reaching its zenith until 1947 (and after yet another war to end all wars)” (Saurin 2006: 24). Thus while 1919 saw the end of the First World War and the drive to build a new world order in the ‘Westphalian’ mould, it also witnessed the continuation of western colonial administration which was met by an increasing rejection of western imperial rule by many of the world’s colonised peoples. Focusing on only one element of this story obscures the existence of alternative narratives about world order(ing) at that time. In the early 20th century ‘international’ and ‘world’ were not the same thing:

The world was segregated into two administrative structures. One of which was a small, elite group of sovereign states that originally comprised of European countries – but which eventually expanded in the early twentieth century to include the United States and Japan – came to represent the ‘international’ world... In contrast to this, the other administrative structure was a chaotic mix of colonial territories, protectorates, and dominions in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific whose external affairs were centralized through Europe (Leong Yew 2003: 1).

These two very different kinds of political and international interaction coexisted and cannot be understood in isolation, yet that is precisely what the myth of 1919 does. International relations builds its theories on a “pristine” view of Europe’s international history, seen as the source of “modernity, democracy, sovereignty and rights ... Meanwhile, it is more specialised scholars of history or area studies who might focus on topics such as slavery and colonialism” (Jones 2006: 4). Thinking about ‘international relations’ and colonial administration, however, were intimately tied together in the discipline’s so-called formative years: IR “had its real beginning in studies of imperialism, not world order, as has so often been suggested” (Schmidt 1998: 72). Most of IR’s early contributors were also experts in the area of colonial administration and their work was therefore infused with many of the racist theories that underpinned and legitimised such studies. For example, Paul
Reinsch, who wrote the book *World Politics* in 1900 and taught the first courses on international relations in the United States, “was [also] America’s first expert in colonial administration” (Vitalis 2005: 161). Leading British scholars such as Alfred Zimmern and John A. Hobson were also experts on British colonial rule and argued for its continued importance in post-1919 international relations. Zimmern, the first holder of the Woodrow Wilson Chair, argued strongly for the need to restore the British Empire as a necessary precondition for the League of Nations to be successful.

The work that the British Empire is called upon to do is to preserve the peace of the world. [It] is the surest bulwark against war in the present-day world – for this generation … If the League can keep the peace to-day, it is because the British Empire provides the chief of its guardians and executants (Zimmern 1934: 94-5).

Thus the new, peaceful world order in which the discipline claims its foundations was a hierarchical one in which the European/’international’ world played one role and the non-western/colonised world another. ‘International relations’ were those between the (white) European states and interactions with colonies continued alongside but were hidden; written out of the discipline. As Vitalis demonstrates, race played a crucial role in early studies of international relations, indeed races and states were twin units of analysis in early studies of IR in the US: “who is inside and outside the national space was not so much a territorial question as it was a biological one” (Vitalis 2005: 171).

The earliest IR journal in the US was first published under the title *Journal of Race Development*, it became the *Journal of International Relations* in 1919 and three years later was renamed *Foreign Affairs* (Vitalis 2005: 161). The 1920s saw a wave of writings and theorising on both race and race war (Vitalis 2005: 160). In much early international relations scholarship, “solving the problem of war was often couched in terms of preventing a future race war between the colonized and the colonizers” (Hobson 2012: 134). Zimmern described the “race question” as “the most urgent problem of our time” (Zimmern 1934: 109). Indeed, one of the earliest institutional innovations, the committee on international relations that was set up at the University of California in 1915,
was established to “give increased emphasis to the work of instruction and research in problems of international and inter-racial relations” (Ogg 1917: 373, emphasis added). There were two modes of world order existing alongside one another in the minds of the discipline’s early thinkers.

Aberystwyth, Idealism and the First Great Debate
The myth of Aberystwyth doesn’t stop at the founding of the discipline in 1919; it also incorporates wider narratives about the discipline’s history and historical ‘progress’ over time. In both versions of the story, the earliest phase of international relations research (from 1919 to WWII) is characterised by the dominance of so-called ‘idealist’ approaches. “It is almost impossible to read an account of the history of IR that does not begin with the writings of the ‘interwar idealists’” (Schmidt 2002a: 9). This brand of idealism is closely associated with Woodrow Wilson in particular, who appears both as a scholar and a practitioner as well as a symbol of the new approach to international order explored above. According to the myth, interwar idealism was existentially challenged by the onset of World War II and subsequently replaced by the (superior) paradigm of realism. This encounter – between interwar idealism and its challenger realism – is often termed the First Great Debate in international relations discourse as summarised in a recent textbook:

In the twentieth century the idealist paradigm was most closely associated with Woodrow Wilson and the other thinkers who were prominent in the interwar period ... Idealism’s reign as the dominant paradigm ended with its failure to anticipate and prevent World War II ... It was the idealists’ failure to comprehend the forces leading to World War II that gave rise to realism as the dominant paradigm in the immediate postwar period after 1945 (Rochester 2010: 19-21).

‘Idealism’, was discredited due to its intellectual and practical failings, specifically, its failure to predict, explain or prevent the outbreak of the Second World War (Gosh 2009: 6). Yet there is a growing body of revisionist literature that claims interwar idealism was a myth (Schmidt 2002a, Ashworth 2006, Long and Wilson 1995) and the so-called First Great Debate never happened (Wilson
constructed at a later stage in order to reaffirm realism’s dominant position as the ‘correct’ approach to international relations research (Carvalho et al 2010).

This research demonstrates that interwar scholarship belonging to the so-called ‘new’ discipline of international relations was far more varied and often far less utopian than the myth portrays. A wide array of topics, perspectives and discrete discourses each helped to shape the study of world politics in the interwar period. Schmidt (2002a) focuses on the existence of a pluralist school of thought, while Wilson (1998: 13) identifies at least four or five competing perspectives existing at that time. According to Ashworth, one major split (which largely took place between scholars on the left) was a debate over whether or not capitalism was the cause of war (Ashworth 2006: 306). What is more, the label ‘idealistic’ doesn’t fit very well when one actually begins to look at the scholarship of that time. The so-called idealism of scholars such as Wilson and Zimmern was conditioned by their racist assumptions about the legitimacy of colonial modes of governance existing alongside the ‘international’ order embodied by the League of Nations. “The list of idealist traits that often appear in introductory IR textbooks, more often than not, bear no relationship to the actual ideas professed by those who have been labelled as idealist” (Ashworth 2006: 292). As Ashworth demonstrates, the work of scholars such as Angell and Woolf, who are frequently labelled ‘idealistic’ focussed on studying cause and effect in international relations and was concerned with “gradual reform, rather than imaginary utopias” (Ashworth 2006: 301, see also Long and Wilson 1995).

The popularisation of the image of an interwar idealism and idealist/realist divide is largely attributable to E H Carr. Whilst Carr was not the first to contrast idealism and realism (see Spencer 1923), he “popularised the notion of a conflict between realism and an utopian orthodoxy” (Quirk and

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8 Wilson identifies a wide variety of approaches in the inter-war period ranging from the “class-based analyses of the states-system of Brailsford, Palme-Dutt, and Laski, to the power-political analyses of Spykman and Schuman; from the Christian pessimism of Niebuhr and Voigt, to the humanistic pacifism of Russell and Huxley; from the ‘peace through law’ approach of Noel-Baker and Lauterpacht, to the ‘peace through prosperity’ approach of Keynes and Hobson” (Wilson 1998: 13).
Vigneswaran 2005: 95). Carr wrote that, as a newly developed discipline, it was still in the utopian phase and needed to become more ‘realistic’ if it were to develop into a proper science of international relations. Carr’s work confirms the myth of Aberystwyth in claiming that international relations “took its rise from a great and disastrous war; and the overwhelming purpose which dominated and inspired the pioneers of the new science was to obviate a recurrence of this disease of the international body politic” (Carr 1964: 8). Carr believed that the motivation of solving the problem of war had led to an over-emphasis on utopian visions thereby neglecting ‘realistic’ perspectives. His definition of ‘utopianism’ or ‘idealism’ was, however, vast and multifaceted. “Carr’s concept of utopia … is not so much a carefully defined scientific concept, as a highly convenient rhetorical tool” (Wilson 1998: 11). Carr’s book was a polemical work that set out a view of ‘idealism’ through his critique of it. The label ‘idealism’ was used pejoratively to (collectively) dismiss the views of many early 20th century scholars and practitioners that he happened not to agree with.

We are told on the Aberystwyth website that, Carr’s book “heaped scorn on liberal ‘utopianism’ in stressing the paramount importance of power, so much so that it was at odds with Davies’ original vision for the chair” (Aberystwyth 2013b). In this, the myth takes hold of Carr’s critique and elevates it to the position of a Great Debate. Once again the Woodrow Wilson Chair at Aberystwyth it put at the centre of disciplinary history when the realist approach of its fourth holder (E H Carr) is pitted against the utopian visions of its founder (David Davies), its first holder (Alfred Zimmern) and Woodrow Wilson himself. Booth’s review of disciplinary history in the late 1990s demonstrates how this disagreement came to be “stereotyped and dramatised into a powerful story that gave meaning, a sense of direction and succour to the work of most students of international relations during the scary yet heady years of the Cold War” (Booth 1996: 328).

Carr’s critique is thus painted as the start of a discipline-defining debate and subsequent paradigmatic shift from idealist to realist perspectives, when it is perhaps better understood as a bold attempt to collectively dismiss a whole host of scholars with whom he happened to disagree. Ironically, it is in
this regard that Carr has been most successful. The label ‘idealist’ or ‘utopian’ has been described by Ken Booth as “a professional kiss of death” (Booth 1991: 531). Indeed contemporary accounts of the First Great Debate overwhelmingly conclude that the realists won out. As one leading textbook states: “the first major debate was clearly won by Carr, Morgenthau, and the other realist thinkers” (Jackson and Sørensen 2010: 38). The result of this hegemonic account of the discipline’s history is that the ideas and insights of the interwar scholars are assigned “to the dustbin of history” (Schmidt 2002a: 13). It has also made it easier for realist scholars to discount recent theoretical challenges by associating them with the now discredited interwar idealism (Wilson 1998: 10).

**Why Aberystwyth?**

The second of IR’s creation myths serves to reinforce the first by manufacturing a link between the birth of the discipline of international relations and Europe/the west’s response to World War I. The myth of Aberystwyth ties the study of world politics to the fulfilment (expansion) of the Westphalian ideal of ‘international’ order. Yet, in the period around 1919, when the myth tells us the discipline of ‘international’ relations became institutionalised, only a small percentage of the world’s population lived in the ‘international’ world. The early twentieth century was also the heyday of European (particularly British) colonialism. By telling the story of a new discipline and a new world order (organised around the concept of national self-determination in the form of the League of Nations then later the UN), this creation myth actively writes out the continuation, intensification even, of colonial modes of governance, violence and dispossession. The myth of 1919 thus severs international relations from its roots in colonial situations and modes of thinking. What is more, in claiming a victory for realism over utopian/idealist interwar scholarship, it claims a position for realism as the theory of international relations.

This last point is crucial to understanding where the myth of Aberystwyth originated from and why it remains so powerful in international relations discourse. As Carvalho, Leira and Hobson show, this myth is much more recent than its Westphalian counterpart (Carvalho et al 2011: 746). It is
the product of a growing self-consciousness within the discipline from around the mid-1970s onwards and an increasing interest amongst scholars and students of IR in the subject’s own history. Wilson claims “disciplinary self-consciousness began in 1972” and “a veritable explosion of interest in the growth of the discipline – its schools, debates, ‘defining moments’, and trends – occurred in the 1980s” (Wilson 1998: 8). Wilson cites 1972 specifically, because of a key publication that year which began the discussion about where IR had come from and where it was going. 1972 saw the publication of The Aberystwyth Papers (Porter 1972), a collection of contributions to the conference held the previous year to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the International Politics department and the Woodrow Wilson Chair at Aberystwyth. This also helps to explain why Aberystwyth is so central to the myth of the discipline’s founding. This historical tradition has been continued with the papers from the conference held to mark the 75th anniversary published in 1996 (Smith et al 1996).

The myth of 1919 also grew out of the need to justify the dominance of realism in IR theory. Using Carr’s work in particular to read back an earlier tradition of idealist thinkers that could be discredited as utopian and un-realistic, enabled realist scholars to solidify their position as leaders in the field and discredit challenges from various ‘liberal’ schools of thought (broadly defined). The narrative of Great Debates was heavily influenced by Kuhnian notions of paradigmatic shifts that were popular at the time. Thus rather than simply talking of contending perspectives, realism and idealism come to be seen as contending paradigms wherein one (idealism) lost out to the other (realism) as a result of changing global realities. Telling IR’s story in such a way reifies realism’s position as the dominant theory within the discipline (Carvalho et al 2011: 748). “The very fact that realism can be ‘shown’ to have replaced idealism, that it was a theory that more accurately captured the ‘realities’ of international politics, becomes a foundational myth in another sense: only realism can produce knowledge about the world of international relations that is scientific” (Smith 2000: 379). This confirms a narrative about the nature of theory as a tool to understand the world that can be altered or replaced when it ceases to ‘fit’
the realities of that world (see chapter 2 for wider debate about the nature of theory in IR). This inflects IR’s disciplinary history with a progressive teleology not just in terms of the ‘international’ world ‘out there’ but in terms of the theories one can use to know and understand that world.

**From myths to ghosts:**

*Absent presences and ghostly haunts*

Beginning with an understanding of the myth function in international relations enables us to look beyond IR’s ‘truth’ to acknowledge the ways in which it is produced and reproduced. It allows us to begin acknowledging the ghosts (absent presences) that these stories about international relations give rise to. Despite their apparent absence, such ghosts make their presence known in a variety of ways. Avery Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters* provides a helpful starting point for investigating “how that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence” (Gordon 2008: 17). I have found Gordon’s work on haunting in the sociological imagination particularly useful in my attempts to journey through international relations discourse in a manner that acknowledges the complexity of that discourse and my (our) own complicity in its (re)production and its exclusions. Gordon’s study begins with a story; that of Patricia Williams, a lawyer and a professor of commercial law and the great-great-granddaughter of a slave and a white southern lawyer. In her book *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Williams 1991), Williams tells of her efforts to learn about and to understand the predicament, the condition, the story, of her great-great-grandmother. She tells of reading the words – through journals and letters – of her great-great grandfather and his sons in an attempt to track her influence, her story and her life even through her absence in those texts. Despite being (conveniently) left out of those family histories, Williams’ grandmother’s presence, her life, was evident. Williams’ journey was one of “finding the shape described by her absence in all this” (Williams 1991: 19). Following that type of journey is what Gordon means by ghost hunting. It is about “finding the shape
described by her absence”; about tracking the forces that make their mark by “being there and not there at the same time” (Gordon 2008: 6).

International relations discourse, likewise, tells stories that leave out the histories and experiences of large portions of the world’s peoples and places. Their absence in international relations discourse is spectacularly clear yet at the same time it is a partial absence; it is always perpetually incomplete. Their stories are present even in the seeming absence; they haunt the myths of international relations discourse that tell us international relations (in theory and practice) was/is a European idea. Encountering such ‘absent presences’ is a troubling experience, it is, in Gordon’s words, an instance of haunting. “The ghostly haunt gives notice that something is missing – that what appears to be invisible or in the shadows is announcing itself, however, symptomatically” (Gordon 2008: 15). The ghost is merely the sign, the evidence that a haunting is taking place. These instances of haunting – these ghostly encounters – remind us of the complexity and complicity of (international) life. The purpose of Gordon’s work is to enables us to recognise such ghostly encounters and to learn from them. In Gordon’s words, it “looks for a language for identifying haunting and for writing with the ghosts any haunting inevitably throws up” (Gordon 2008: 7, my emphasis). These ghostly haunts alert us to things that somehow we already knew were there but cannot always see or see clearly. International relations discourse is littered with such absent presences that help to disrupt the seemingly straight-forward creation myths that discursively construct the discipline. I conclude this chapter by seeking to name some of those ghosts that have already begun to announce their presence in the above discussions of IR’s creation myths. The remainder of the thesis is dedicated to exploring further these ghostly beings as they appear in international relations discourse in and about China and the so-called ‘non-west’ as it encounters the parochial/global discipline of international relations. It is by acknowledging these instances of haunting that we can begin to better understand that which is obscured by powerful mythologies, such as IR’s creation myths.

Adopting a methodology of ghost hunting is a complex and unorthodox approach. It involves “producing case studies of haunting and adjudicating their
consequences” (Gordon 2008: 24). There is no simple, straight-forward way in which to deal with these cases of haunting, rather one must accept the messiness and complexity of such a journey at the outset and be prepared to be surprised along the way. Likewise, there is no straightforward methodology for ‘finding’ these ghosts. Instead, ghost hunting is about experiencing, writing with and being changed by those ghostly haunts that trouble us at every turn. “A case of haunting, [is] a story of what happens when we admit the ghost – that special instance of the merging of the visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present – onto the making of worldly relations and into the making of our accounts of the world. It is a case of the difference it makes to start with the marginal, with what we normally exclude or banish, or, more commonly, with what we never even notice” (Gordon 2005: 24-25, emphasis added). In attempting to look beyond such a parochial, Eurocentric discipline as international relations, it is incumbent on us to begin with the ghosts that haunt it.

The ghosts that haunt 1648 and 1919

A source of haunting in both of the creation myths I have explored is the way(s) in which they situate international relations in, of and for Europe/the west. The myth of 1648 tells us that ‘the international’ was a European idea or model that later spread to the rest of the (uncivilised) world. The myth of 1919 tells us that ‘International Relations’ too was a European idea that was conceived on the battlefields of Europe, for the purpose of saving (white, European) lives. These myths help to naturalise the idea that international relations is, has been, and perhaps even should be, western and/or European. They allow for the (often violent) exclusion of non-western others in the making of international relations (both with a big and a small I/R). At the time that Europe was purportedly creating ‘the international’ and ‘International Relations’ it was also engaged in multiple practices of violent exclusion and erasure in respect of its ‘non-western’ others. Widespread colonial expansion of the European states that were formed by the Westphalian treaties ensued for much of the three centuries that followed the signing of those treaties. Thus the founding of the
so-called Westphalian order happened alongside – at the same time(s) and in
the same place(s) as – the (European) colonisation of large swathes of the
world’s peoples. International relations discourse focuses on inter-state warfare
thereby excluding colonial and other forms of intra-state violence. The myths of
1648 and 1919 serve to obscure the foundational role of (imperial/racial)
hierarchy as an organising principle in international politics, in the past, present
and future, yet “imperialism is inextricable from the very foundations of
modern international relations and world order” (Jones 2006: 4).

Hierarchy and imperialism are ever-present in international relations
yet altogether absent from its creation myths and dominant self-image(s). They
frequently appear as ghosts haunting international relations discourse. If
anything, the world has seen a proliferation of hierarchy in the international
system from the signing of the treaties of Westphalia to the present day, yet
IR’s creation myths actively write this out. The myth of 1919 completely ignores
and/or forgets the histories of colonised peoples in the story of international
relations. Instead it tells the story of an inter-state war – in which white
Europeans were killing other white Europeans instead of black and brown
peoples elsewhere in the world – as the catalyst for designing an international
(inter-state) peace. The European story of international relations fails to
mention those (non-white) peoples outside of its immediate view. When it does
they are only permitted to enter the discourse by following the same path
already set out by the west or, in other words, fulfilling the required standard of
civilisation that will enable them to play a part in ‘the discipline’. Hierarchy and
imperialism; diversity, hybridity, and difference; standards of civilisation and
racist ideologies are just some of the ghosts that emerge when one begins to
pick apart the discipline’s creation myths and there are many others that as yet
remain unnamed. The remainder of this thesis is an account of my own
attempts to follow these ghosts on a journey through international relations
discourse in and about China. I begin by following the ghosts of Europe’s non-
white, colonised others: the ghosts of thinking and doing ‘non-western’ subjects.
Chapter Two

The (seemingly) absent (yet ever-) present ‘non-west’:
Situating non-western knowledge in a parochial discipline

*Western IRT does not need to be replaced, but can and should be enriched with the addition of more voices.*

*(Acharya and Buzan 2007: 427)*

*You can’t just add women and stir.*

*(Bunch 1987: 40)*

According to powerful myths that persist in contemporary international relations discourse, the international system and the study thereof were conceived, developed and perfected in western Europe and latterly its settler colony the US. Put simply, international relations, in theory and practice, was a (white) European idea. That idea later spread to the rest of the developing (uncivilised) world as it slowly caught up with the developed (civilised) ‘west’. In the creation stories of international relations, the non-west has no part to play: “the non-West can be present only as absence” *(Pasha 2010: 218).* This absence has been attracting the attention of a growing spectrum of international relations scholars in recent years. Increasingly, scholars are branding international relations as a Eurocentric discipline; dominated by

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9 While I adopt the terminology of west/non-west, I do not accept the implication that such a distinction is self-evident or unproblematic. Equally, the terminology of core/periphery doesn’t necessarily get us to a better place. As Cynthia Enloe writes; “‘centres’ and ‘margins’ must be created and maintained” *(Enloe 1996: 186).* I am interested in the discursive practices that create and maintain such centres and peripheries. I am writing (about) the ghostly presences that alert us to the constant (re)creation of centres and peripheries, whatever names we happen to ascribe to them.
American/western concerns and modes of thinking. This type of scholarship often finds its roots in wider self-reflective debates about the nature and scope of international relations which have been ongoing since the late 1980s. As Jim George explains, academic international relations has experienced a certain anxiety about both its purpose and its ability to understand and provide answers to pertinent questions about international politics, often attributed to the sudden and unexpected end of the Cold War (George 1994). Since that time, critical scholarship in international relations has been seeking to disrupt and/or challenge established knowledge and assumptions both in and, more importantly, about ‘the discipline’ (see Walker 1993, Ashley 1988). These debates have taken many forms and it would be impossible to do them justice here: they are, however, well documented elsewhere (Lapid 1989, Smith et al. 1996). Instead, this chapter focuses specifically on recent scholarship that raises concerns about the non-west’s (seeming) absence from international relations, broadly defined, and seeks in some way or another to address it.

I begin by providing an overview of this literature and demonstrate how it reaffirms the absence of the non-west as reflected in the discipline’s creation myths. I then consider some of the responses that IR scholars have provided to try to address this absence. Yet often such attempts to ‘bring the non-west in’ fail to challenge the underlying Eurocentrism of the discipline’s discursive construction and end up reproducing many of the same problems they seek to address. Once again, when closely engaging with this, often very well-meaning, scholarship, one is confronted by the very real spectres that haunt it. In reviewing this scholarship I hope to invoke the same sense of unease in the reader as I have experienced myself when engaging with this (very worthy) research. This chapter tells of two such ghostly encounters, although there are many others I could have included. The first concerns the ‘non-west’ itself and begins to unsettle the belief that the non-west is/has been/continues to be absent from international relations and international relations discourse. The second springs from the first and concerns the manner in which the ‘non-west’ can be permitted to enter the realm of international relations and international relations discourse. It focuses on the question of theory and what
counts as theory in IR. It argues that the distinctions frequently made in such
debates, between *theoretical* knowledge and *practical* experience, invoke
certain colonial ghosts – of modernisation, development and civilising missions
– that haunt this scholarship and the discipline more widely. I conclude by
reassessing (or restating) the challenge of situating so-called ‘non-western’
knowledge in the parochial/global discipline of international relations.

**The absent ‘non-west’**

Despite 30 or more years of self-reflection, the dominant historiography of
international relations remains largely intact. Told in the form of the twin myths
of 1648 and 1919, international relations continues to be discursively
constructed as a Eurocentric discipline with its origins in European wars and
their resolutions (see Carvalho et al 2010 for some suggestions as to why this
might be the case). In so doing, they create a situation whereby those outside
Europe and its (white) settler-colonies also find themselves outside of
international relations and international relations discourse. One of the first
scholars to identify this problem was Stanley Hoffmann, who in 1977 described
international relations as “an American social science”. Hoffmann argued that
the development of the study of international relations in the US as a distinct
sub-field of political science and its close ties to the American policy-making
world meant that, over time, IR came to develop a uniquely ‘American’ focus. As
the power and influence of the US grew in the mid-twentieth century, the focus
of international relations scholarship was directed towards the US and
American influence in the world. As a result, the discipline had become focused
solely on American experience and US policy-making requirements leaving little
space for the ‘rest of the world’ to develop alternative perspectives on
international politics (Hoffmann 1977). Hoffmann’s argument is, in many
respects, quite different to my own and to that of many of the scholars who
have cited it since. Nevertheless, his article is highly significant because it was
the first to level this type of criticism at the field and has continued to spark
debate over how scholars view the discipline they are working within and its
limitations. Indeed, the depiction of international relations as “an American
social science” has become one of the most “persistently and speculatively reproduced self-images in the field” (Turton and Freire 2009: 1).

The questions raised by Hoffmann’s article have been taken up by a number of scholars in the thirty or so years since it was published. Many have agreed with his assessment that international relations remains largely dominated by American interests and is driven by US policy-making requirements (Krippendorff 1987, Kahler 1993, Smith 1987, 1993). Several scholars have asked more recently: is international relations still an American social science (Smith 2000, Crawford and Jarvis 2001), and have tended to agree that Hoffmann’s assessment stands. In that time, international relations has been variously described as a ‘dividing’ (Holsti 1985), ‘not so international’ (Wæver 1998) and ‘hegemonic’ (Smith 1993, 2002) discipline with each of these studies reaffirming the dominant role of the US and/or west in defining and directing academic international relations.

Further studies in the late 1990s and early 2000s took Hoffmann’s assertions as a starting point and sought to identify the differences between IR scholarship in the US and elsewhere. For example, Ole Wæver’s sociological study of IR communities in the US, the UK and the rest of (western) Europe concluded that there were significant differences in approach between these communities, which led him to make the claim that “IR is quite different in different places” (Wæver 1998: 723). Similar studies have largely confirmed the existence of differing approaches to the study of international relations across Europe and America. A number of European scholars, for example, have sought to identify a distinct approach or focus within their country’s research that makes it different from American research (Smith 1985, Breitenbauch and Wivel 2004, Friedrichs 2004, Jørgensen and Knudsen 2006). Yet, until recently, this type of critical literature on the discipline of IR and its self-image(s), has largely focused on differences within what one might term the ‘west’ or the ‘core’. As an illustration, Danish scholar Knud Erik Jørgensen describes scholarship from continental Europe as the discipline’s “best kept secret” and an “exotic

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10 A simple Google scholar search revealed 505 articles citing Hoffmann’s 1977 article – covering a very wide range of topics.
theoretical landscape” (Jørgensen 2000: 9). Thus, is his research, ‘continental Europe’ is the exotic other to the American ‘IR theorising’ self. Jørgensen’s article further demonstrates this by citing a popular guide to IR theory at the time, which includes a chapter called: ‘The World Beyond: The European Dimension’ (Groom and Light 1994). The debates contained in these works seem exceptionally parochial or insular when considering the supposed subject matter of the discipline – world politics. Throughout these debates about US dominance, the absence of the ‘non-west’ is conspicuous.

Recent scholarship has built on a number of the key arguments from Hoffmann-inspired critiques of American or western-dominance and there is a growing consensus amongst international relations scholars that the ‘non-west’ is and has been largely absent from their discipline (Tickner and Wæver 2009, Bilgin 2008, 2010, Ikeda 2010, Mgonja and Makombe 2009). In 2007, in a special issue of International Relations in the Asia-Pacific (IRIAP), Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan posed the question ‘Why is there no non-Western IR theory?’ This special issue, which was later expanded and published as an edited volume (Acharya and Buzan 2010), begins with the premise that original theories about international relations have yet to be created in countries outside of the (so-called) west. They claim that “although academic IR is now a global activity (albeit very unevenly distributed, even within the West), it remains massively dominated by Western thinking” largely due to the historical development of the west and associated global material inequalities (Acharya and Buzan 2007: 293). Drawing on Robert Cox’s (1981: 128) now infamous claim, Acharya and Buzan argue that almost all international relations theory is “produced by and for the West” (Acharya and Buzan 2007: 288), and IR research that is conducted in other (non-western) academic communities largely adopts the theories and conceptual models created by the west. As the work of scholars such as John M. Hobson (2007) and J. Marshall Beier (2005) demonstrates, even the critical scholarship that provides the motivation and backdrop for the self-reflective debates I consider here, frequently fails to engage with ‘non-western’ sources of knowledge and ways of knowing (Krishna 1993). As Gerard Holden suggests; “critical IR’ has been a form of anglophone academic radicalism specific to the
late Cold War and early post-Cold War periods” (Holden 2002: 1). Even when it has considered the history of “non-anglophone IR communities”, such research has tended to focus on IR communities in the rest of Europe. Such claims are frequently made in scholarship about the discipline from a diverse range of sources. Such claims are particularly prevalent in Chinese scholarship and will be explored in greater detail in chapters 3 and 4. Today, the (perceived) absence of the non-west in the discipline of international relations is “disputed by shockingly few scholars, even those that represent the [so-called] ‘mainstream’” (Tickner and Blaney 2012: 1). Hoffmann’s critique has thus become an accepted part of disciplinary folklore. His claim that international relations is an American social science (or Anglo-American perhaps) both reinforces and is reinforced by the discipline’s creation myths of Westphalia and Aberystwyth. Throughout, the non-west’s presence as absence is striking.

**Bringing the non-west (back) in**

Despite a growing (self-)awareness of the discipline’s lack of knowledge of the ‘non-west’, there have been few attempts to remedy this situation, until recently (Tickner 2003: 296). When Arlene Tickner published her first major contribution to the debate – a study focused on international relations research in Latin America (Tickner 2003) – there was little debate to speak of. Perhaps the most notable exception to this was the emergent debate amongst Chinese scholars (and scholars who write about China) about the possibility of ‘international relations theory with Chinese characteristics’. This debate, which will be explored in detail in the two chapters that follow, was largely conducted internally without a great deal of interest from the wider discipline at the time (Chan 1999, Song Xinning 2001, Callahan 2001, Geeraerts and Jing 2001). Yet in the ten years since, interest in exploring IR from third world, non-western or non-core perspectives has grown exponentially. There has been a recent surge in the number of articles, special issues, edited volumes, conference panels and workshops seeking to address the problem of the non-west’s (apparent)

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11 Other notable exceptions include: Rajaee 1999 and Euben 2002 on Islam in IR discourse, Dunn and Shaw 2001 on Africa and Inoguchi and Bacon 2001 on Japan.
absence from international relations discourse. This research agenda has been driven forward by scholars like Arlene Tickner and others who share her concern that “the ‘who’ of IR studies continues to be a select number of academics hailing primarily from the countries of the core” (Tickner 2003: 296). In 2003, she got together with a number of colleagues, most (though not all) of whom were from and/or working in so-called ‘non-core’ settings, to discuss the publication of a three-volume edited series on the topic of “geocultural epistemologies in IR” (Tickner and Wæver 2009: xiii).

This move was, at least in part, a response to a challenge from Steve Smith, who used his year as president of the International Studies Association (ISA) to raise the question of the non-west’s absence in international relations discourse. The project has had a notable presence at the annual conventions of the International Studies Association since its launch with a one-day workshop at the 2004 convention in Montreal. The ISA itself has often been criticised for reflecting and reinforcing the discipline’s American or western-centrism. This is an easy criticism to make on one level in that its annual convention is always held in North America and its presidents have largely been scholars based in North American (and some European) institutions. Nevertheless, it has also been a consistent backer of this research agenda both in financial terms and also in offering prominent slots in convention programmes to these debates (Tickner and Wæver 2009: xiii). Another key publication contributing to this agenda, a special issue in one of the association’s journals International Studies Review, originated from the annual convention during J. Ann Tickner’s presidency, as a response to her call for greater attention to be paid to “responsible scholarship” in the discipline (Tickner and Tsygankov 2008).

The “geocultural epistemologies in IR” project has brought together at least 40 scholars from a diverse range of geocultural backgrounds and theoretical commitments and led to many publications including, but not limited to, the three-volume series now carried under the title ‘Worlding Beyond the West’ (WBW) (Tickner and Wæver 2009, Tickner and Blaney 2012, 2013). The series, edited by Arlene Tickner, Ole Wæver and David Blaney and published by Routledge, is now becoming a focal point (and source) for similar
research projects. Recent additions to the series include a study of IR in France (Breitenbauch 2013), a volume on IR and security in Brazil (Lima 2014) and a thematic study of border-crossing in western political thought (Davidson 2014). The stated purpose of the WBW series is to:

explore the role of geocultural factors in setting the concepts and epistemologies through which IR knowledge is produced. In particular, it seeks to identify alternatives for thinking about the ‘international’ that are more in tune with local concerns and traditions outside the West” (Routledge 2013).

This project, arguably the most ambitious intervention in this live debate, has been instrumental in setting the tone for many of the contributions to that debate and for raising the profile of the question itself.

The primary focus of the geocultural epistemologies project has been to bring about the type of response that Arlene Tickner demands in her 2003 article, that is: “systematic efforts to explore IR from third world perspectives” (Tickner 2003: 296). The first title in the WBW series demonstrates this most clearly. *International Relations Scholarship Around the World* (Tickner and Wæver 2009) is a collection of 15 case studies focussing on IR scholarship in either a specific country, group of countries or region. It also includes two essays reflecting on the problem of American hegemony in international relations discourse. The second title, *Thinking International Relations Differently* (Tickner and Blaney 2012), adopts a thematic approach seeking to identify alternative understandings of key ideas or concepts in international relations from different geocultural contexts. The motivation behind this approach was to begin filling in the gaps of knowledge about international relations research and what it looks like in different parts of the world. The editors write about their desire to be able to answer the questions students often ask such as: “is there a Chinese approach?”, “do African scholars think about the world based upon the specific problems of the continent?” (Tickner and Wæver 2009: 2). Tickner and Wæver argue that there is a need to bring together two key strands of literature: critical, disciplinary self-reflection that is largely taking place in ‘core’ countries (as set out above) and a strand of research which rejects or
questions the utility of applying ‘western’ IR concepts to ‘non-western’ contexts that is often quite detached from critical IR literature (Ayoob 1995, Blaney 1996, Chan et al 2001). They argue that: “the first step towards addressing this lacuna is simply to ask what the state of IR is in different corners of the world” (Tickner and Wæver 2009: 4).

This approach – to begin by “explaining ‘what goes on’ in IR in other parts of the world” (Tickner and Wæver 2009: 2) – is also evident in a number of other publications from around the same time. International Studies Review (ISR), published by the ISA, International Relations of the Asia-Pacific (IRAP) and Global Society all published special issues containing a series of case studies on international relations research in various parts of the world. ISR’s issue on ‘IR Theory Outside the West’ contained four case studies covering: Russia (Tsygankov 2008), China (Callahan 2008), Latin America (Tickner 2008) and Islam (Shani 2008). IRAP’s issue on ‘Why is there no non-Western IR theory?’ surveyed China (Qin Yaqing 2007), India (Behera 2007), Japan (Inoguchi 2007) and Southeast Asia (Chong 2007). When it was republished as an edited volume, chapters were added on Indonesia (Sebastian and Lanti 2010), Korea (Chun 2010) and Islam (Tadjbakhsh 2010). Global Society’s special issue on ‘Locating the “I” in “IR”’ was somewhat wider in scope emphasising issues such as ideology, ethics and identity, but also included case studies on Islam (Pasha 2003), China (Mitter 2003) and Africa (Ofuho 2003). Each of these studies provides us with valuable insights into the ways in which international relations discourse operates in different geocultural contexts. Nevertheless, the overall approach – producing anthologies of IR around the world – is problematic as it reinforces the non-west’s (apparent) absence from international relations discourse.

According to the publisher’s website, the purpose of International Relations Scholarship Around the World (Tickner and Wæver 2009) was “to re-balance this ‘western bias’ by examining the ways in which IR has evolved and is

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12 Interestingly, the only geobody other than China to appear in all of these collections is Islam: Christianity, Hinduism and other major world religions do not. This is likely a reflection of contemporary securitisation/politicisation of Islam within and beyond ‘the discipline’.
practiced around the world” (Routledge 2013). Likewise, J. Ann Tickner and Andrei Tsygankov edited the ISR special issue in order to “explore different knowledge traditions outside the West and how they might, or might not, contribute to building a more genuinely diverse, less hegemonic discipline” (Tickner and Tsygankov 2008: 664). Perhaps the first iteration of the link between studying non-western IR communities and diversifying the discipline can be found in Inoguchi and Bacon’s 2001 article on Japanese international relations research. Their paper, ‘The Study of International Relations in Japan: Towards a More International Discipline’, was the opening article in the newly-established journal International Relations of the Asia-Pacific (IRAP), clearly setting the tone for what they hoped the journal might achieve as a presence for the Asia-Pacific region in an ostensibly western discipline.

Such studies put forward an implied solution to the problem of an absent non-west in international relations: they advocate adding non-western perspectives into contemporary international relations (and stirring). This necessarily begins with an assessment of what IR looks like in different countries and then expands to search for possible alternatives in non-western scholarship and/or ‘third world’ traditions. In their introduction to International Relations Scholarship Around the World, Tickner and Wæver identify a number of key challenges to be aware of when studying IR communities outside of the ‘core’ (Tickner and Wæver 2009: 16-18). These include the need to critically assess how ‘international relations’, international relations ‘theory’ and disciplinarity are understood and explained in those contexts and how such debates might fit within wider critical reflections on/in the discipline. Nevertheless, the editors and many of their contributors fail to really grapple with these issues in this volume. The latter volumes in the series do begin to address them, yet, by starting with a series of case studies these wider debates are side-lined in a potentially damaging way. By producing anthologies of international relations around the world, such research often ends up perpetuating the myths that underpin the problem of Eurocentrism in the discipline in the first place. They draw on these myths to sustain their accounts of non-western exclusion and then seek new or alternative contributions that
might come from the (innocent/excluded) non-western other. What is more, that non-western other is generally presented in the form of a modern, sovereign (‘Westphalian’) nation-state with the exception of those studies that analyse ‘Islam’ as a distinct geocultural context for theorising international relations. I argue below that such attempts to add the non-west (back) into the discipline of international relations often, albeit unwittingly, repeat the violent erasures that deny the non-west their subjectivity in the first place.

Yet ghostly presences haunt this scholarship and the discipline of international relations more generally. Robbie Shilliam, in the introduction to his attempt at producing a study on non-western knowledge in international relations, begins by claiming that “the figure of a doing and thinking non-Western subject haunts the Western Academy” (Shilliam 2010: 2). Shilliam’s collection also includes a number of case studies, some focusing on countries or regions, others on themes such as secularism, sovereignty and racism, yet all of them rest upon a critical understanding of the violent, colonial pasts (and presents) that underpin international relations’ sense of identity as an “American social science” (Hoffmann 1977). They contend directly with IR’s underlying Eurocentrism in a way that recognises the ghosts that are left behind in the telling of IR’s creation stories. The figure of “a doing and thinking non-western subject” also haunts many attempts to address the problem of IR’s Eurocentrism.

Ghost (1): a doing and thinking non-west

Colonial encounters and the making of the non-western other

The golden nugget problematic

The work of the geocultural epistemologies and IR group, and much of the scholarship that follows in its mould, begins from a position of acceptance of the non-west’s absence from international relations discourse. What is often an implicit assumption is made explicit by Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan in their widely read contribution to the debate: ‘Why is there no non-Western International Relations Theory?’ (Acharya and Buzan 2007). Their somewhat
blunt question is clearly a pun on Martin Wight’s famous line of inquiry: ‘Why is there no International Theory?’ (Wight 1960) and perhaps betrays the influence of Wight and the English School on the authors in question. In any case, it demonstrates the almost unquestioned belief amongst the contributors to their volume that the ‘non-west’ is absent from contemporary international relations theorising. Acharya and Buzan look to Asia to ‘prove’ their hypothesis that international relations theory is dominated by western concerns and modes of thinking, but their basic proposition is also reflected in the work of scholars who study other parts of the so-called ‘non-western’ world (Tickner 2003, Bilgin 2008). The purpose of their case studies is to begin filling in the gaps left by the non-west’s absence.

Underlying this approach is the assumption that such ‘non-western’ voices – scholarly communities and intellectual/philosophical traditions from outside of the dominant west – have something significantly different or radically new to say about international politics. This assumption is particularly clear in Donald Puchala’s brief study from 1997. Puchala chooses to focus his research on what he calls “radical, non-Western thinking, because it is these rather extreme perspectives that are most at variance with Western formulations” (Puchala 1997: 129, my emphasis). Puchala’s article makes the claim that “there are other, non-Western or Third World, ways of looking at the world that interpret international reality as well, or perhaps even better, than the Western formulations” (Puchala 1997: 129). In this sentence, Puchala encapsulates the motivation behind much of the scholarship I have considered here; that is, a desire to find something new and different in the theories or traditions of the ‘non-west’ or third world. In Puchala’s research we also find ghosts of IR’s racist foundations making their presence known. Puchala’s definition of west and non-west is cultural rather than strictly geopolitical. He includes in his definition of ‘west’ those elements within non-western societies that are considered ‘westernised’ or bourgeois but excludes so-called “unassimilated immigrant enclaves” in Europe and its settler colonies (Puchala 1997: 129). Puchala’s work reflects assumptions made in early 20th century American IR scholarship in which inside/outside distinctions were based on
race/culture not space/place (Vitalis 2005: 171, see pp. 58-59). Similarly, Acharya and Buzan argue that “a broad approach to theory will give us a much better chance of finding local produce than a narrow one” (Acharya and Buzan 2007: 291 emphasis added). Yet they too invoke certain (racist) IR ghosts by questioning whether some of their ‘non-western’ contributors can rightfully be considered ‘indigenous’ if they were trained in the west or are working in western institutions (Acharya and Buzan 2010: 13). Each of these research projects shares a common desire to find alternatives, based on some notion of geocultural/racial difference between the west and the rest.

The implication is clear: if we simply go to the non-west (periphery or third world) and look hard enough or dig deep enough we can uncover alternative theories or perspectives that we have either been unable to understand or to reach before. Yet, contrary to Ole Wæver’s proclamation that “IR is quite different in different places” (Wæver 1998: 723), many scholars have discovered that in the ‘non-west’ it is more common to find scholarship that is “almost the same but not quite” (Bilgin 2008: 6). Arlene Tickner, for example, finds that the work of many scholarly communities outside the west “offers relatively little of the kinds of alternative knowledge that critical scholarship so eagerly seeks” (Tickner 2008: 745). And even where it does offer alternatives these are not necessarily any better or any more critical than the prevailing theories in the US or Europe (Callahan 2008: 759). Arlene Tickner has recently described her disappointment with the results of the first volume in the WBW series (Tickner and Wæver 2009) precisely because it failed to produce the type of ‘difference’ those behind the project expected to find “in terms of variation and ‘local’ flavor” (Tickner and Blaney 2012: 3). This, Tickner claims, should not cause us to abandon the search for alternatives but rather cause us to think about why this might be the case (Tickner 2008: 745). In the latter two volumes in the WBW series, Tickner argues for the need to “proceed with greater caution and more insight into the nature of difference within and beyond IR” (Tickner and Blaney 2012: 3). But perhaps there is something more fundamental required than being sensitive to the nature of difference. Perhaps rather than asking why it is that IR scholarship outside the west fails to live up to
such expectations of radical difference, we should question instead the expectations that such difference does or indeed should exist. Why is it necessary to look for and actively produce diversity in this way? And what are the consequences of doing so? I take up some of these questions with specific reference to Chinese scholarship in the chapters that follow.

Searching for difference or alternatives beyond the west, however sensitively one might do it, reaffirms the absence of the ‘non-west’ from the foundations and history of international relations discourse. Yet, as Shilliam points out, “non-Western thought has never really been absent from the Western academy; and neither should we imagine that its archive is simply waiting to be fully opened, thus revealing a pristine world of discovery” (Shilliam 2010: 15). There is no such pristine world; no such innocent, excluded Other, that is simply waiting to be found and added in to enrich or transform our Eurocentric discipline. Rather, engaging with so-called ‘non-western’ knowledge in international relations discourse is a messy and complex encounter(s). It involves negotiating the unhelpful, invented categories of west and non-west that are largely the product of Eurocentric colonial/imperial epistemology. It also requires of us a recognition of the essential (though unequal) role non-western others have played in the story of international relations from its very beginnings. Their seeming absence from historical and contemporary international relations discourse is maintained through constant recourse to the dominant narratives of IR’s construction – its creation myths of Westphalia and Aberystwyth. Yet their presence in those same stories can be felt by those who would stop for a moment and dare to look. Avery Gordon compels us to question “how that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence” (Gordon 2008: 17). So in this chapter (and throughout) I encounter the seemingly absent non-western other in contemporary international relations discourse with a disturbing or unsettling sense that this absence is not an absence at all. The non-western other is ever-present; it is haunting international relations discourse and (the very idea of) the western self, its creator.
The discovery of difference: the west and its non-western Other(s)

In attempting to understand why and how the non-west appears absent yet continues to haunt international relations discourse, we must return again to IR’s creation myths, in particular the myth of Westphalia. It is here that we find the origins of the concepts of ‘west’ and ‘non-west’ and the seemingly unbridgeable gap between them. The myth of Westphalia tells of the founding of an international order: the creation of a system of modern, sovereign nation-states interacting on a (formally) equal basis. Yet, as I have described, the myth is haunted by the persistence of imperial and hierarchical modes of thinking within and beyond this so-called ‘international’ world. The ‘international’ realm that was said to come into existence post-Westphalia included only a small segment of the world’s territories and peoples. There are other stories that are not told in international relations – stories of the rest of the world’s peoples and places. They are often violent stories of dispossession, devastation and death. These complex and overlapping tales, their injuries and injustices are rarely acknowledged if ever atoned for. IR’s creation myths fail to recognise the subjects, objects, authors and inventors of these stories and these worlds, yet they are still present in international relations discourse. They are assigned a different role in the myth: that of ‘not yet international’. Their colonial condition (past and present) is not recognised by IR’s development narrative, which tells only of their eventual acceptance into the Westphalian model of sovereign nation-states, when they (eventually) come to emulate the western norm. International relations discourse is haunted by the consequences of these violent erasures; ghosts of IR’s non-European others, the ‘not yet international’ world.

The work of scholars such as Naem Inayatullah and David Blaney (2004), Beate Jahn (2000) and J. Marshall Beier (2005) helps us to begin picking apart the powerful, sanitising Westphalian myth by demonstrating the vital role that the often violent encounters between Europeans and their ‘others’ have played in shaping (European) notions of ‘the international’ and what was later to become known as ‘international relations’. Inayatullah and Blaney (2004) provide an in-depth re-reading of the (incomplete) transition in sixteenth and
seventeenth century Europe from medieval, religious empire to modern, secular system of states. They identify a twin event to the peace of Westphalia in the (European) creation myth of modernity – the ‘discovery’ of the Americas. Together, these two ‘events’ were extremely influential in shaping European ideas about the world and their place within it. The encounters between European explorers, merchants and rulers and the peoples and lands of the so-called ‘new world’ played a vital role in shaping political and philosophical writings of the era, which have, in turn, had a strong influence on contemporary international relations discourse. Thus, much sixteenth and seventeenth century political philosophy, which contemporary international relations discourse often claims to root itself in, was fundamentally shaped by these encounters. One example of this is the state of nature analogy that frequently appears in international relations discourse, which is the focus of Beate Jahn’s study (2000). She argues that this theoretical tool (found in the writings of philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke) should in fact be seen as an attempt by European thinkers to understand the realities of encounters between European ‘adventurers’ and the Amerindian peoples they ‘discovered’ in the new world. It was also informed by the realities of bloody religious wars (what we might perhaps call genocides today) across Europe during that same era. These encounters fundamentally challenged the worldview of Europeans at the time as they were confronted with the reality of difference in the world.

Intellectual discourses of the time – in response to both the wound of the wars of ‘religious cleansing’ and the challenges of incorporating the peoples of the Americas into European worldviews (and empires) – mostly reinforced, rather than challenged, the interpretation of difference as a dangerous aberration from the norms of stability, safety, and order (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004: 2).

The most common response therefore was to see difference as a problem that had to be contained and ultimately eradicated. Inayatullah and Blaney draw on Todorov’s (1984: 42-43) concept of a double movement to explain the manner in which European discourses have worked to translate difference into inferiority. Todorov’s work focuses
particularly on the responses of European adventurers to their ‘discovery’ of the new world. In response to this discovery and the realisation of the existence of difference in the world, the European sense of self was shaken. Columbus, for example, “tends to translate the initial experience of difference into a conviction of the inferiority of the other,” which justifies much of the ill-treatment and exploitation non-European others were subjected to (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004: 10). In his response, however, there is a second movement. Further contact reveals commonalities between the European self and the Amerindian other. Yet, that limited moment of equality can only exist through the negation of difference between self and other. “Again, quite typically, Columbus becomes blind to differences, projecting his own values onto the other. Hence the demand, often backed by force, for assimilation.” The European superior sense of self says they are/can become like me, rather than we are different yet share some common humanity. “Wonderment is thus dissolved into the double movement: difference becomes inferiority, and the possibility of a common humanity requires assimilation” (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004: 10).

This double movement describes two separate, but related strategies for dealing with difference that can be found both in the historical discourses and experiences that sit at the heart of the discipline and in contemporary international relations discourse as we encounter it today. The first is a spatial strategy that attempts to separate difference with boundaries. The geopolitical demarcations of a society of states (as we find in the Westphalian myth) can be seen as a “spatial containment of cultural difference”. Thus in the international system:

difference is placed at a distance (managed within the boundaries of ‘other’ states and deterred by the defense of one’s own borders) and resolved into ‘sameness’ within one’s own political community. That is, the state is the domain where difference is translated into uniformity, while IR remains eternally a site of potentially dangerous, but one would hope manageable, confrontations with others (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004: 23).
Yet this solution is not a solution at all but rather a deferral of the problem of difference in the world. The Peace of Westphalia and the international order it is said to have created were founded on the same sense of fear of difference, which Inayatullah and Blaney explain through a comprehensive reading of the context of violent ‘religious cleansing’ that existed at that time. This inside/outside dichotomy that sits at the heart of contemporary international relations discourse is thus founded on a profound sense of fear of the other, the non-western self (see Walker 1993 for seminal piece deconstructing the inside/outside dichotomy in IR). The second is a temporal strategy that deploys ideas of development or modernisation. Those of the world’s places and peoples who were not original members of the ‘international’ system were (are) seen as belonging to the ‘not yet international’ world. Inayatullah and Blaney explore the ways in which Christian doctrine, particularly notions of the unity of creation and the restorative role of God’s church after ‘the Fall’, combined with medieval notions of wildness, created an image of and discourse about the Amerindian other as backward/behind. The Christian message of redemption allows for the belief that, theoretically at least, all can be saved from the situation of wildness; thus the condition of wildness is treated temporally as the beginning to which Christianity/civilisation is the teleological end (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004: 50-2). Thus, the peoples of the not yet international world are denied coeval-ness in the present; they can belong to the international system of modern nation-states but only through conversion and assimilation. International relations, as a form of modernisation theory, thus attempts to eradicate difference through the spatial demarcation of inside/outside and developmental sequence of tradition/modernity. These two strategies sit at the heart of international relations discourse and are fundamental to our understanding of what IR is and can be.

**The production of difference: the western self and non-western other**

International relations discourse, as a Eurocentric enterprise, can be seen from the outset as an attempt to overcome the originary alienation that begins with the ‘discovery’ of the new world, which “clefts humanity” in two – the civilised
western self and the barbaric/backward native Other (Krishna 2006: 94). Yet, the very idea of a (civilised) western self is only made possible through the existence, or rather creation, of its (barbaric) native other. As Edward Said’s vital work (1978) makes clear, the image of ‘the Orient’, or the native other, has been a vital tool in creating the sense of a common western identity, which makes possible claims such as Acharya and Buzan’s that IR theory is “produced by and for the West” (2007: 288). It was (is) the practice of European imperialism in the centuries following the Westphalian settlement that enabled European ideas about its non-European others – those in the new world to the west and the old world in the east – to be translated into ‘truths’ about the world as a whole (Anand 2007: 18-19). International relations discourse draws heavily upon representations of non-western others that were forged in the context of aggressive European colonialism.

Prior to, and even during much of the eighteenth century, Europeans often recognised that East and West were interlinked. But the emergence of Eurocentrism and the concomitant ‘production of alterity’ led to the construction of an imaginary line of civilisational apartheid that fundamentally separated or split East from West (Hobson 2007: 94).

Eurocentric or Orientalist discourses construct Asian identities from a perspective that sees Europe as the norm from with the ‘exotic’ Orient deviates. Constructing essentialised Eastern identities was important in affirming the existence of difference between the western (coloniser) self and the eastern (colonised) Other (Anand 2007: 19). “Having split these mutual civilisations into ‘distinct entities’, Eurocentric thinkers then elevated the Western Self and demoted the Eastern Other” (Hobson 2007: 94). Such racist modes of thinking were essential in legitimising colonial/imperial rule of the so-called ‘backward’ races, which was often claimed to be necessary to bring about the native’s eventual redemption from its backward condition. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, this type of racist thinking permeates early scholarship in international relations through the foundational role studies of colonial administration played in the budding discipline of international relations. Knowledge-production in the context of eighteenth and nineteenth century
European colonialism was complicit in the production of essentialised eastern and western identities that developed into cultural and racial hierarchies. These hierarchies continue to permeate contemporary international relations discourse.

Such processes of violent erasure deny the subjectivity of the native, the oriental, the non-western other. They are acknowledged only as the negation of the superior, western self. They are permitted to enter into international relations only when they (learn to) conform to the western mould and become sovereign nation-states in their own right. Even then, hierarchy remains. In international relations discourse former colonies that were previously outside of the international system go from being ‘uncivilised’ or ‘primitive’ to ‘impoverished’, ‘war-torn’, ‘failed’ or ‘quasi-’ states (Jackson 1993). “In contrast the West conceives of itself as having evolved beyond these problems, thus permanently deferring the Third World to another time and place” (Leong Yew 2003: 3). Even the boundaries between these ‘independent’ states are reminders of the legacy of violent colonial struggles between European powers as they fought amongst themselves to carve up the ‘not yet international’ world. Conflicts continue within and across now independent ‘nation-states’ – in Mali, Thailand, Somalia, South Sudan – yet they, and the dead bodies they leave in their wake, are rarely the concern of ‘international relations’. As Himadeep Muppidi argues: “international relations is a field littered with dead and dying bodies. But the dead never seem to rot or stink” (Muppidi 2012: 3). The bodies of these ‘victims’ of international relations are never allowed to rot; to transform theory or practice; to raise a stench because they were “never meaningfully alive” in the first place. Within the “zoological and museological modalities and institutions” of western imperialism/modernity they exist as colonial curiosities, as others, separate, different; never sharing a common humanity (Muppidi 2012: 162). Yet they live on in international relations discourse and frequently return to haunt it.

Attempting to add non-western perspectives into the discipline, without any serious consideration of the injustices (past and present) that privilege ‘western’ knowledge over ‘non-western’ perspectives and that render
such perspectives invisible or inferior at best, merely leads to a repetition of those same representational mistakes and gets us nowhere. By segregating the west from its non-western Other(s), contributors to the debate have hidden or obscured the complex web of interactions between the two, that serve to construct those identities in the first place. “It is this web of relationships between the ‘West’ and the ‘non-West’ (and their ways of thinking about and doing world politics) that renders problematic the expectations of finding ‘difference’ in the non-West’” (Bilgin 2008: 10).

Ghost (2): a doing and thinking non-west
Modernisation, assimilation and civilising missions

What is theory?
Many recent attempts to remedy the problem of parochialism in international relations discourse often serve to reinforce the discipline’s creation myths by reaffirming the non-west’s absence from international relations. They also reinforce the hierarchical ordering of superior (developed) western self and backward (developing) non-western other. The language of developed and developing is often found in such debates. For example, Ersel Aydinli and Julie Mathews (2000) produced a study of publishing practices in 20 leading journals in contemporary international relations and identified a clear divide between scholars in the ‘core’ and in the ‘periphery’ in terms of their ability to publish in those journals. They describe the divide between core and periphery as a geographically based divide between developed and developing world IR scholars and suggest there continues to be a lack of dialogue between the two. Similarly, judgments made about the quality or qualities of international relations research in non-western contexts betray an inability to fully exorcise colonial modes of thinking from such scholarship. It is haunted by the ghost not simply of a doing non-western subject but a doing and thinking one. When scholars such as Acharya and Buzan (2010: 11-15) and Arlene Tickner (2008: 745, also 2003) make the claim that IR research communities in the non-
Studies of IR communities outside of the core (Britain, America and, possibly, western Europe) frequently claim that scholarship in these contexts is theoretically weak. They argue that researchers largely adopt concepts and theoretical frameworks that were developed in core countries and apply them to their own situations. Acharya and Buzan claim, for example, that “theoretical work by Asian scholars seems to be concerned mostly with testing Western IRT on an Asian national or regional setting” rather than creating or developing generalised theoretical understandings of their own (Acharya and Buzan 2007: 307). Thus, while there may be plenty of non-western IR research, they can find little or no non-western IR theory. Tickner attempts to explain this by pointing to a situation across Latin America where practical knowledge with direct policy relevance is valued over “theoretically inclined scholarship” in IR (Tickner 2008: 745). Such a distinction, between theoretical work and practical, policy-based research, is common in studies of IR in non-western contexts. Alan Chong’s review of international relations in Southeast Asia, for example, incorporates an analysis of one key journal Contemporary Southeast Asia from the period 1979 to 2005. Chong classifies each of the articles as either “pure area/issue studies” or “theory”, with 90.5% in the former category and only 9.5% in the latter over the period (Chong 2010: 130). Likewise, Sebastian and Lanti’s study of Indonesian IR claims that there is an acceptance amongst Indonesian scholars that IR is a western science and hence a reluctance to even attempt to theorise from an Indonesian perspective and a tendency instead to focus on studies of domestic politics (Sebastian and Lanti 2010: 169).

There is also a growing body of literature, which feeds into the wider debate about non-western knowledge in international relations, that seeks to demonstrate the mismatch between key IR concepts (with western origins) – such as the state, sovereignty and power – and non-western ‘realities’ (Ayoob 1995, Neuman 1998, Chan et al 2001). This theme is taken up by many of the Chinese scholars who argue that China needs its own theory of international relations because western theories do not adequately explain Chinese realities.
(Ye Zicheng 2012, Qin Yaqing 2012b: 68). Qin Yaqing, for example, marks a clear distinction between theoretical innovation and research that applies existing (western) theories of international relations to Chinese (non-western) realities (Qin Yaqing 2010a: 27). Both sets of arguments make a clear distinction between theoretical understandings of the international and practical knowledge of international ‘realities’. Yet, as I alluded to in the previous chapter, drawing such a sharp distinction can be problematic. This type of statement is underpinned by a (largely positivist) perspective that sees international relations theory as a ‘tool’ to be used to get at the ‘truth’ about the ‘real world’ out there (Zalewski 1996: 341). The job of the theorist in this scenario is to uncover the ‘truth’ about the world, replacing old or outdated theories with new and more accurate ones that better reflect the lived experience of the international world. This allows Chinese scholars, for example, to claim that the theories they have imported from the US or elsewhere don’t work to explain Chinese realities, therefore it is necessary for them to come up with their own Chinese theories. Viewing theory in this way assumes a radical separation between ‘theory’ and the ‘real world’. Yet, as a generation of critical scholarship in international relations has consistently argued, “the world is always an interpreted ‘thing’” only decipherable through those theories we use to describe it (George 1994: 24, emphasis added, see also Ashley and Walker 1990).

Affirming the existence of a separation between those theories about world politics and the lived experience of people(s) in the world denies the constitutive role such theories have in creating and shaping that world and the manner in which one experiences it. As the previous chapter demonstrated, stories about how and when the ‘international’ came to be and how and when the discipline of IR was founded have been told and retold often and with authority such that they have taken on the form of unquestioned truths about the world and the discipline. They shape understandings of what ‘international’ means, how it works and how we might come to know it and know about it. Yet, powerful as they may be, such stories are but representations or re-presentations of one version of events that are taken to be the accepted history of the field: international relations common sense. Put differently:
reality, whatever that may be, is not complicitous with our efforts to theorize about it. What we have then are representations as endless power plays, arbitrarily seeking to impose a decipherable code on a reality that can never be apprehended with finality (Krishna 1993: 386).

Therefore, when Acharya and Buzan dismiss non-western research as un-theoretical, or claim it merely tests western theories against alternative realities, they are denying the world-making nature of theories of international politics and imposing an unhelpful division between theory and practice that cannot hold up against critical scrutiny. The positivist injunction that we can (and/or should) separate knowledge production from our own identities and subjective biases is itself a political strategy to deny the power relations that all knowledge production is embedded in (Shaw and Walker 2006: 155). The claim that international relations research in the non-west is purely practical or not theoretical enough is also a political manoeuvre, one that leaves behind its own ghostly haunt.

Not theoretical enough: a standard of civilisation

The distinction between theory and practice is frequently used to exclude or discount possible ‘alternative’ perspectives on international politics with non-western origins. For example, Hedley Bull’s opening chapter in the commemorative publication *The Aberystwyth Papers* (1972) summarises the first 50 years of development of international relations theory. Despite listing a number of non-western contributions to thinking about international relations, he completely discounts their validity to the history of the discipline. The contributions Bull lists include communist discourses such as Lenin’s analysis of imperialism, Krishna Menon’s doctrine of ‘permanent aggression’ and Lin Piao’s notion of the struggle of the world’s countryside against its cities as well as Gandhi’s theories of non-violence and Mao Zedong’s contributions to strategic theory. Bull argues, however, that none of these can be considered contributions to international relations *theory* because they are not theoretical enough (Bull 1972: 55). This type of value judgement is evident in many contemporary studies, including the debates surrounding China’s potential to
produce IR theory (see chapter 3, also Tickner 2008, Acharya and Buzan 2010). Such claims represent just one of the ways that international relations discourse functions to exclude certain perspectives or understandings of the world. Yet, as with Barthes’ myth function, such exclusions are always incomplete: they are troubled by the ghostly haunt they leave behind.

An example of such an attempt to exclude non-western knowledge on the basis that it is not theoretical enough is found in Behera’s work on international relations scholarship in India. Despite significant contributions made by Indian IR, particularly in the areas of nuclear deterrence and regionalism in South Asia, theorising in Indian IR has frequently been disregarded as it is seen to be “mostly at the sub-systemic level” (Behera 2010: 96). Behera argues that India’s role in initiating and promoting the concept of non-alignment could potentially be regarded as the source of a distinct Indian contribution to international relations theorising, yet it too was ignored by the wider discipline and considered not to qualify as ‘systemic’ IR theory. Articles addressing non-alignment were conspicuous by their absence from core IR journals throughout the 1950-1970s.

Despite offering an alternative world view of how the global state system should function, non-alignment was never accorded the status or recognition as a ‘systemic’ IR theory because it did not suit the interests of powers [sic] that be (Behera 2010: 96).

Not only was this competing or alternative approach sidelined at the time, but its exclusion is consistently re-enacted as it fails to be included in the discipline’s historical accounts (myths). Theories of non-alignment, like Mao’s three worlds theory, Gandhi’s theory of non-violent resistance and more recent contributions such as dependency theory (with its Latin American roots) do not feature in the ‘Great Debates’ account of theoretical development in the discipline and are effectively written out of our view of (what is) international relations, thus confirming the self-image of the discipline as an American social science. They do not exist in the collective memory of the discipline because they fail to live
up to the required standard of (positivist, universal) international relations theory as set by the discipline as it is discursively created again and again.

The persistence of a (colonial) standard of civilisation in international relations discourse is seen throughout debates about the place of non-western knowledge in the discipline. Acharya and Buzan, for example, claim to “set wide our [their] understanding of IR as a subject, and what counts as theory” (Acharya and Buzan 2007: 290). Yet, in effect, they end up with a definition of theory that is both limited and limiting. Acharya and Buzan write that, in order for something to be considered a valid IR theory, it must either be recognised as such by the “IR academic community”, by its creators, or be seen to represent “a systematic attempt to abstract or generalize about the subject matter of IR” (Acharya and Buzan 2007: 292). Yet such a definition still does not allow for a view of theory as everyday practice; as constitutive of the world around (Zalewski 1996: 346-351). Moreover, it assumes some level of agreement on what constitutes the subject matter of IR and a belief that a self-evident field of international relations exists and can objectively be known. Yet, as I have argued throughout, what counts as the subject matter of IR is informed by (Eurocentric) creation myths told and retold in international relations discourse. They are not neutral but formed through multiple colonial encounters between Europe and its others. In addition, by insisting that theories be recognised as such by the wider academic community, Acharya and Buzan are reaffirming hierarchical relationships between those in the discipline who get to set the agenda or terms of debate and those who must follow: the international and the not yet international; the theorists and the pre-theorists. Even allowing for self-labelling, the broader implication is that the discipline determines at the outset what counts as theoretical knowledge and, in order to contribute to theory-building in the discipline, non-western ‘newcomers’ must adopt the existing terminology and conceptual frameworks the field has to offer. They must attain the standard of civilisation that the discipline requires.
**Modernisation and (theory) development**

In these debates, the persistence of colonial modes of thinking and doing are evident. Non-western IR scholars are frequently painted as newcomers to the discipline in need of catching up with its western founders. This type of argument is particularly prevalent in Chinese accounts of academic international relations and will be explored in great detail in the next chapter (see also Qin Yaqing 2007a: 318). The implication of such claims is that non-western contributors must follow the path set out by IR scholars in the west in order to begin building their own theories: a path that will take them from dependence on western theories to theoretical independence or innovation. Eurocentric theories of modernisation sit at the heart of such attempts to move non-western IR beyond its current ‘pre-theory stage’. Acharya and Buzan explicitly link the development of theories of international politics with wider economic development or modernisation in the non-western world. They argue that “non-Western attempts to develop thinking about IR, like late industrialisers, necessarily have to make their way in an environment already heavily conditioned by earlier developments” (Acharya and Buzan 2007: 293).

Their work is informed by a belief in, what James Blaut labels, “Eurocentric diffusionism”: the idea that “European civilisation – ‘the West’ – has had some unique historical advantage ... which gives this human community a permanent superiority over all other communities” (Blaut 1993: 1). This belief can be found throughout international relations discourse but is particularly influential in recent debates about the apparent absence of non-western thought in contemporary IR. It presents a theory about how cultural processes flow across the world from a European/western centre to a non-western periphery. In this story, the west innovates and the non-west imitates. IR’s creation myths tell us that Europe and its settler colony, the US, created the discipline of international relations and its three main theoretical approaches: realism, liberalism and constructivism. Non-western scholars are outside of that discipline, awaiting an opportunity to contribute (to be rescued from their obscurity). Questions like ‘why is there no non-western IR theory?’ reaffirm these myths and re-enact the violent erasures they commit.
Debates about the non-west’s ability or apparent failure to contribute *theoretical knowledge* to the discipline of international relations also reflect a more widespread fetishisation of *theoretical knowledge* within international relations discourse. They reflect a disciplinary hierarchy which privileges grand theories over ‘practical experience’ and reinforces the existence of hierarchical relationships between theorists and not-yet theorists. I explore these relationships, how they are constructed and maintained, in chapter 4. I borrow an image Anna Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling (2004) who argue that international relations discourse is like a colonial household, closely regulating who does and does not belong and what positions they may or may not hold. In their colonial household of international relations, grand theories such as realism and liberalism occupy positions of privilege and set the standard of civilisation that others must meet in order to enter or to belong. The work of third world or peripheral scholars is frequently seen as non-theoretical and therefore inferior in the household structure. By denying the possibility of non-western knowledge to be *theoretical knowledge*, these debates also deny the ability of the non-west to think, or at least to think *theoretically*. They are therefore only able to occupy a lesser place in the disciplinary hierarchy. The distinction between theory and practice, which permits this hierarchical ordering, has, as I have argued, been consistently undermined by critical scholarship for the past two decades or more. Following Zalewski, I argue that an understanding of theory as (everyday) practice is the best hope to enable us to get beyond this divisive distinction in international relations discourse. Zalewski argues that thinking of theory as a verb rather than a noun enables us to get to a place whereby we recognise the world-making nature of what we say and do in international relations. We can then begin to understand theory/theorising as “a way of life, a form of life, something we all do, every day, all the time” (Zalewski 1996: 346). Adopting such an understanding enables us to see the (political) effects of a manoeuvre that labels non-western IR as non-theoretical and therefore subordinate.
Going Beyond:
Ghosts, hauntings and undoing IR

Difference has always been present in international relations; rather, it is fundamental to IR’s very constitution. Early studies in international relations were founded upon research into colonial administration, race and difference. Yet the creation myths of international relations obscure (actively write out) these histories, and in so doing violently erase ‘non-western’ others from IR’s discursive construction. In addition, they attempt to erase the violent encounters between west and non-west that were constitutive of those discourses and identities in the first place. IR maintains its coherence as a discipline through a “systematic politics of forgetting, a wilful amnesia, on the question of race” amongst other things (Krishna 2006: 89). The recent literature reviewed in this chapter attempts to right that wrong by returning non-western perspectives and traditions to the realm of international relations discourse. Yet it frequently does so without reference to the original (and perpetual) source of their exclusion. It therefore operates within a framework that re-affirms rather than challenges the myths that place such knowledge on the outside of ‘the discipline’. This type of scholarship, which is actively seeking – producing, even – difference and/or diversity, attempts to bring difference (back) into the discipline of international relations. But frequently it does so by treating those sources of knowledge as profoundly exotic in a way that romanticises or idolises the non-western other. The non-west is seen as an innocent source of new, alternative or exotic perspectives that can help to redeem IR from its parochial condition.

As feminist activist and scholar Charlotte Bunch famously argued: “you can’t just add women and stir” (Bunch 1987: 40). Rather, it is vital to consider the underlying situations that led to their exclusion or subjugation in the first place. The anthologising approach adopted by many of the contributions I have studied here mirrors the logic of liberal multiculturalism that Bunch was criticising. In the same way that ethnic minorities or religious groups in liberal democracies are often only given a voice as an interest group if they act within
the rules and norms of the existing political system, non-western contributors are given a (small) space within an already-defined culture and practice of international relations discourse/theory. In both cases the critical potential of new or alternative approaches is constrained. This reduces China’s contribution (or that of any other country/group/individual for that matter) to one slot in the anthology and, as Behera argues, it is a slot within a hierarchically-ordered disciplinary narrative: a small space within the master narrative of western IR (Behera 2010: 92). Another implication of anthologising is that certain scholars, often through no fault of their own, come to be seen as the voice of a particular country or region. Thus Arlene Tickner speaks for Latin American IR, Qin Yaqing for China, Takashi Inoguchi for Japan, and Erik Jørgensen for ‘continental Europe’.

The challenge, then, is how to encounter ‘non-western’ thought without reproducing the violent exclusionary practices that ascribe difference into spatial and temporal containers in international relations discourse. Shilliam articulates this challenge clearly in what he terms ‘the perilous but unavoidable terrain of the non-West’:

The complexities involved in this investigation are significant, especially when the case could be made that the very object to be retrieved has in large part been a construction of colonial/imperial epistemology. Is there – and should we conceive of – such a thing as ‘non-Western thought’? And, if there is, how might we encounter this diverse body of thought without in the process assimilating it within an existing archive or rendering it as profoundly exotic? (Shilliam 2010: 4).

How then can we situate non-western knowledge without assimilating or exoticising it? As I have argued above, the approach of producing anthologies of IR in different parts of the world does precisely that. My response somewhat echoes that of Peter Vale when he was posed with the question: ‘should there be a fully African IR?’ He answers by saying no, clearly not; however, there should be greater sensitivity to African ways of knowing the international. As Vale notes, “there is no way forward in the discipline without addressing three events which IR, with its penchant for presentism, has never seen – Slavery,
Colonialism and Empire” (Vale 2009). An understanding of the colonial condition, a sensitivity to the foundational role colonial modes of thinking and doing play in international relations discourse – how they pervade, permeate and drive international relations – is essential before we can go any further with a project seeking to engage with ways of knowing from beyond the scope of a Eurocentric international relations. “What is required,” according to Shilliam, “is a serious engagement with non-Western thought that is nevertheless sensitive to the way in which imperialism and colonialism have carved out the geocultural and geo-political terrains of West and non-West” (Shilliam 2010: 12).

The challenge, then, is immense. Yet “to acknowledge the perilous nature of the journey (back) to the non-West cannot be misunderstood as an injunction simply to stay at home” (Shilliam 2010: 18). My own journey will undoubtedly give rise to more ghosts or violent erasures and I must recognise and accept my own complicity in the (re)production of colonial/ imperial modes of thinking and being in the world. Yet to do nothing is not an option. What use is critique if we are paralysed by the fear of repeating the same representational mistakes we aim to put right? Writing ghost stories is not only about attempting to put right those representational mistakes but also about “striv[ing] to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place toward a countermemory, for the future” (Gordon 2008: 22).

Scholars have called for a decentering (Nayak and Selbin 2010), an undoing (Anand 2007) or decolonisation (Jones 2006) of IR. All of these approaches inform mine. My project is perhaps less ambitious than these others, yet it is no less important. This thesis tells a simple story of my own encounters with some of the ghosts that haunt international relations discourse. By taking on the methodology of ghost-hunting I hope to go beyond merely adding Chinese perspectives to contemporary understandings of international relations discourse. I hope through my discussions of the encounters Chinese scholarship is having with this parochial/global discipline, I might be able to better articulate some of the ways in which imperialism and colonialism have carved out the geocultural and geopolitical terrains of west and non-west, of IR and of China. In exploring these ghostly encounters I seek to expose and to challenge
parochialism as it is found within various articulations of international relations, Chinese or otherwise. By alerting others to the presence of these ghosts, I hope not only to contribute to the lofty goal of decentering, decolonising or undoing IR but also to begin working towards creating something new, something positive – a countermemory for the future.
Chapter Three

The ghostly haunts of modernisation and Marx:
Creation myths in Chinese international relations discourse

*Importation – critique – innovation is the inherent logic of contemporary Chinese IR theory development.*

*(Men Honghua 2002)*

*A spectre is haunting Europe — the spectre of communism.*

*(Marx and Engels 1848)*

As I set out in my introduction, my ghost hunt through international relations discourse took me to China. But I suspect one could find IR ghosts anywhere in international relations scholarship, however one might choose to define it. Indeed I would strongly advocate for further research of this type (further ghost hunting) into IR scholarship from anywhere and nowhere. I have attempted to follow IR’s ghosts to the ‘place’ of China and Chinese international relations discourse without falling into those familiar traps of re-enacting violent colonial exclusions or erasures. Mine is not the first study to consider Chinese international relations research in the context of democratising/diversifying the discipline *(Wang Yiwei 2009, Qin Yaqing 2010a)*. Indeed, Ole Wæver’s influential study of IR in different places points to China as the most likely destination for finding an alternative approach *(Wæver 1998: 696)* and several would-be explorers have taken him up on the challenge of looking for a distinctive Chinese IR (including his own students at Copenhagen Kristensen and Nielsen 2013, see also Noesselt 2012, Hung-Jen Wang 2013). Yet, the majority of such studies to date have tended to adopt the logic of Tickner and Wæver’s WBW...
anthology and are driven by a desire to uncover difference in the discipline (notable exceptions include Callahan 2001 and, possibly, Dirlik 2010). First, they ask ‘what is the state of IR research in China?’ They then ask questions like: ‘what is different or unique about Chinese approaches to IR?’; ‘Is there a uniquely Chinese perspective?’; ‘What are the prospects for a Chinese approach in the future?’ This is equally true of studies published in Chinese by scholars working within the Chinese academic environment (Mei Ran 2000, Ren Xiao 2009).

The purpose of this thesis is not to ignore these questions but equally, I am unlikely in what follows to provide (adequate) answers to them. My purpose, instead is to question these questions and, importantly, to consider the consequences of asking them in such a manner. Such attempts to ‘look for alternatives’ begin from a place in which Chinese knowledge is profoundly exotic and only considered relevant when it demonstrates its difference or ‘separate-ness’ from the rest of the parochial/global discipline. Equally, I am mindful of the tendency within some of the very same narratives to assimilate Chinese knowledge into Eurocentric frames of understanding ‘the international’ and the need to avoid such moves. In the chapters that follow, therefore, I ask: What are the self-images of Chinese international relations? How does Chinese international relations discourse construct a discipline called ‘Chinese IR’ or ‘IR in China’? How is the discipline narrated into life, what does it look like and what are the consequences of these narratives? What role do claims to sameness or difference play in these processes of discursive construction (identity production)? What are they motivated by and how do they work? In each of these questions and my answers to them, there are ghosts and instances of haunting that must be acknowledged and named if we are even to begin to understand the multitude of ways in which Chinese international relations encounters the parochial/global discipline of IR.

I have attempted to produce a case study that neither forces ‘Chinese’ knowledge about the world to assimilate into IR’s Eurocentric frames of reference nor treats that knowledge as profoundly exotic. By using the language of ghosts and hauntings, I have attempted to arrive at such a place that this
type of writing is possible; however, I am quite certain I will have failed. My own story is, I’m sure, haunted by its own ghosts that will, I can only hope, make their presence known to those who read it. Yet this cannot be a reason to abandon the project altogether. Instead, it is a warning to tread carefully, and above all to recognise my own complicity in disciplining knowledge of and about the ‘international’. Throughout this journey I have experienced moments of profound anxiety about my role in the disciplining project, particularly, as I have mentioned previously, my role in teaching new students and inculcating them in disciplinary mythology. Yet I have also encountered moments of great joy and excitement in my encounters with IR’s ghosts and the potential subversive politics of international relations that their experience offers. Even in the midst of my (difficult) experience teaching introductory international relations, I encountered some surprising moments. For example, in our opening class I asked all my students to identify 10 key words to describe what they thought the study of international relations entailed. The results were largely unsurprising with answers such as war, terrorism, international institutions and global markets topping the lists. Yet two of my students, both international students from mainland China, included ‘harmony’ on their list. I smiled, pondered a moment and then moved on. In this thesis I use what I have learnt from post-colonial studies together with my own experiences of the discipline to follow the colonial ghosts that haunt international relations discourse. I follow them on a journey through the discourse of international relations (国际关系, guoji guanxi) in and about China, not motivated by a desire to discover or produce difference but rather, simply, a desire to follow the ghosts’ leading, through this perilous and sometimes scary terrain of non-western knowledge.

Creation myths in Chinese IR

My opening chapter focused on creation myths in international relations discourse, specifically the myths of Westphalia and Aberystwyth. Chinese international relations discourse also rests on the foundation of some very
powerful creation myths, which form the basis of the analysis in this chapter, or this part of my ghost hunt. At this point it is worth restating my definition of ‘Chinese international relations discourse’. Here I mean scholarship that is produced predominantly (although not exclusively) by scholars working in institutions within mainland China and/or those engaging with Chinese-language publications, participating in conferences in mainland China and/or anyone who engages with the dominant questions and debates arising out of such interactions/scholarly endeavours. This is a relatively broad definition yet it still invites concerns in terms of how we might define ‘China’ and determine what does and does not count as ‘Chinese’ international relations discourse. I will return to these questions throughout – and address them specifically in my conclusion – as the identity politics of Chinese IR are a key facet of this project and one that cannot be easily resolved. Accepting the definition I have set out for now, however, we can see that disciplinary story-telling, whilst clearly not unique to China, is particularly prevalent in Chinese international relations discourse.

Accounts of disciplinary history are pervasive in Chinese international relations literature, frequently (but by no means exclusively) found in introductory textbooks for new students of the subject. Indeed, all but one of the textbooks surveyed contains an overview of the development of disciplinary IR in China. These include many of those used at the leading centres for teaching and research in international relations in mainland China, such as Peking University (Liang and Hong 2000, 2013), Renmin University (Chen Yue 2006) and Fudan University in Shanghai (Zhao and Ni 2007). Zhang Liliang’s (2002) *International Relations: An Outline*, a particularly successful textbook which is now in its fourth edition, also includes a similar account of IR’s disciplinary history.13 Frequently this serves as the only introduction to the subject for new students and therefore plays a significant role in setting the terms of later discussions of how to study world politics and what is, or ought to be, its object of study. These introductions often rely on the myths of

13 Gao Shangtao’s introduction to IR theory (2009) was the only textbook I have found not to include the type of disciplinary narrative identified in the others.
Westphalia and Aberystwyth that are foundational to the discipline as a whole, however, they also tell creation myths of Chinese international relations: specific stories about the creation and development of an academic discipline called international relations (国际关系, guoji guanxi) in China. These creation myths are well-documented in Chinese language publications and are often repeated or re-affirmed in English-language commentary on Chinese IR (Geerarts and Jing 2001).

In addition, self-reflective debates in Chinese IR have generated many historical accounts over the past twenty years that are well-recorded in the leading IR journals in China, all of which provide invaluable resources for my ghost hunt through Chinese IR. These include two full-length volumes, which offer in-depth reviews of international relations research in China over recent years and are therefore particularly useful here. The most comprehensive of these is titled Forty years of Chinese International Relations Research, by two young scholars Wang Jun and Dan Xingwu, both of whom were trained at leading research institutes in Beijing (Wang and Dan 2008).\(^{14}\) The book is part of the ‘Young scholars and International Politics’ series, published by the Beijing-based Central Compilation and Translation Press (CCTP). In the foreword to the book, the authors are described as belonging to a new generation of IR scholars in China and the book, correspondingly, reflects the viewpoints of that generation (Wang Yizhou 2007: 1). A similar volume was published by one of China’s leading international relations scholars Wang Yizhou a few years earlier, although covering a shorter period of time (Wang and Yuan 2006). Both volumes give step-by-step historical accounts of what their authors see as the major developments in international relations research from the pre-PRC era to the present. They also include a section dedicated to exploring recent debates amongst Chinese scholars about establishing China’s own distinct discipline or approach to the study of international relations, which I will return to later.

\(^{14}\) Wang received his doctorate from Peking University’s International Relations Institute in 2000 and Dan graduated in 2005 from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). Both scholars have worked at CASS (Wang Yizhou 2007: 1).
Such historical accounts are widespread in research about ‘the discipline’ in China. Numerous conferences and workshops have played a key role in both creating and sustaining coherent disciplinary narratives (myths) in Chinese IR discourse, particularly around the theme of international relations theory in China. The first ‘National Conference on International Relations Theory’ was held in Shanghai in 1987. This conference was both a product of the desire amongst scholars to establish the study of international relations theory in China as well as a key factor in driving that agenda forward (Wang and Dan 2008: 19). In October 1998 a second national conference was held where once again a large proportion of the conference was dedicated to consideration of Chinese IR theory and building the discipline. Similar, large-scale conferences focusing specifically on theory-building in Chinese IR were held in 1994 (Wang Lian 1994) and 2004 (Guo Shuyong 2005). The 2004 conference is particularly significant as this can be seen as the beginning of the most vigorous discussions amongst Chinese scholars on how to progress the idea of a Chinese School of international relations theory (see chapters 4-6). These high-profile conferences continue to play an important role both in leading and reflecting key debates in Chinese academia and, importantly, in inventing and perpetuating IR’s creation myths in China.

**The Story of a Young Discipline**

Accounts by Chinese scholars of their discipline’s history, while widespread, are remarkably homogeneous. ‘International Relations’, they tell us, is a young discipline in China. Some scholars identify an emerging discipline in the 1950s or 60s (Liang Shoude 2004), while others argue that “strictly speaking, international relations research only appeared in China in the past ten or twenty years” (Wang Yizhou 2005b). Theoretical research is said to have started even later and, as a result, international relations “began to take shape as a distinct discipline only in the early 1980s” (Ni Shixiong 2001: 486). Few scholars acknowledge any type of international relations research prior to the founding of the PRC in 1949; those that do are generally concerned with the intellectual origins of what was later to become Chinese IR post-1949 (Chan 1998b, Wang
and Dan 2008). Despite disagreement on exact dates or timings, there is a general consensus amongst commentators, both Chinese and not, that international relations is a “new and developing discipline” in China (Liang and Hong 2000: 1, also Geeraerts and Jing 2001). Such claims are frequently made with reference to the discipline in the US or, more commonly, ‘the west’ which is correspondingly characterised as well-developed and mature. This image of Chinese IR as new or underdeveloped is maintained through the performance of creation myths, which both rely upon and give sustenance to wider disciplinary myths.

In Chinese international relations discourse, the term ‘Westphalia’ is used as short-hand for describing certain elements of the current world in the same way it continues to be used in English-language scholarship (e.g. Xu Yihua 2011, Bi and Chen 2008). One of China’s most influential IR scholars, Qin Yaqing, compares Chinese perspectives on world order to “the Westphalian-born concept of international anarchy” (Qin Yaqing 2006: 9). He mentions Westphalia several times in his article – which is about the possibility of a Chinese IR theory – thus perpetuating the (mythical) link between the treaty of Westphalia and the concept of an anarchical international system. In another article Qin cites the first chair in International Politics at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth as the birthplace of disciplinary IR in the west (Qin Yaqing 2004a: 56, see also Wang Yizhou 2005b). He then narrates the development of the discipline through various stages, each characterised by the dominance of a particular theoretical approach: idealism, realism, neo-liberalism/neo-realism and, latterly, constructivism. Liang Shoude and Hong Yinxian’s textbook likewise, situates the birth of international relations in the immediate aftermath of World War One (2013: 2). They argue that the Paris Convention in 1919 was the crucial founding moment for the discipline and from that point the study of IR developed rapidly in the US and the UK, although somewhat differently in those two settings. Their account includes mention of key theoretical approaches – idealism (including the defining role of Woodrow Wilson’s 14 points), realism, behaviouralism and neoliberalism – as well as the importance of the discipline’s ‘Great Debates’ (Liang and Hong 2013: 22-23). Yan Xuetong also highlights the
role of the peace of Westphalia in shaping the international order (Yan Xuetong 2009d: 155-6). Thus Chinese scholars often demonstrate that they too possess IR’s “Westphalian common-sense” (Grovogui 2002), consistently reproducing IR’s founding myths in their teaching and research.

Chinese accounts of disciplinary development frequently situate China’s entry into the discipline of IR within those wider disciplinary myths. An article by influential scholar Ni Shixiong and colleague Xu Jia states that Chinese scholarship only really “joined in” the global study of international relations in the late 1970s and early 1980s, during the discipline’s “third great debate” (Ni and Xu 1997: 1). Some texts even go so far as to re-(en)list the discipline’s (mythical) canon – those philosophical texts that are read back into the disciplinary record to create a sense of a longer history for ‘international’ thinking than is perhaps the case. Hou Ying, for example, argues that “it is common knowledge that western IR’s earliest roots can be traced back to ancient Greece with Thucydides’ History of the Peloponnesian War and to Plato and Aristotle” (Hou Ying 2003: 27). Likewise, Liang and Hong’s textbook cites works by Thucydides (431BC) and Machiavelli (1532) as founding texts of ‘international relations’. Interestingly, however, they add Sun Tzu’s Art of War (6th century BC) which is generally not included in other (western) renderings of this historical account (Liang and Hong 2013: 2). Building international relations theory on such foundations reaffirms to other scholars that it is a western household to which they do not belong. In Leong Yew’s words, “the frequent allusions to IR’s western philosophical roots continue to indirectly remind those who study IR that … there is a separation between a privileged lot of peoples who are responsible for creating the discipline and those who are merely participants” (Leong Yew 2003: 11).

Re-telling the creation myths of Westphalia and Aberystwyth makes possible the related claim in Chinese IR historiography that international relations, as an academic subject, is not indigenous to China. As one textbook explains, international relations is “an import” (舶来品, bolaipin) from the west, the US in particular (Zhao and Ni 2007: 53). International relations research has, according to Chinese creation myths, made significant progress since its
inception and particularly in the period since the early 1980s (Zhang Ruizhuang 2003). This “progress” has largely followed from the success or influence of the reform and opening up policies begun under Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s and is directly related to the experience of importing international relations scholarship into China from the US and, to a lesser extent, Europe. According to the myth, however, a number of problems continue to exist in Chinese IR research despite recent progress towards building the discipline. Many accounts identify specific areas in which the discipline is lacking or underdeveloped, others simply argue that it is (Chan 1999, Men Honghua 2002, Johnston 2002). Su Changhe (2000), for example, argues that despite some recent attention, failure to meet basic academic standards is a serious problem within Chinese IR research. He argues that plagiarism and failure to give a clear indication of one’s sources or to provide complete and accurate bibliographies are common occurrences in academic work in Chinese international relations. Chinese IR research suffers from “confusion over disciplinary boundaries, low level of specialisation, out of date methodologies, lack of academic standards, [and] repetition or reproduction of low-quality work” (Zhang Ruizhuang 2003). In addition, scholarly critique is not sufficiently well developed (Wang Yizhou 2005a).

One of the most frequently cited problems is a perceived lack of creativity or theoretical innovation in Chinese IR research (Zheng Shiping 2005). Chinese scholars have repeatedly argued that in the realm of international relations theory their research consists merely of copying or critiquing the theories of others and has yet to produce original or innovative theories of their own. Qin Yaqing writes that, as a result of carrying out an extensive survey of ‘the state of the field’ in Chinese IR, he was left with one lasting impression: that Chinese IR is theoretically weak. He argues that in Chinese IR research most research is superficial, based upon practical experience and/or borrowed theories; “we see few substantive attempts at innovation that are founded on the basis of theorisation (理论化, lilunhua) and conceptualisation (概念化, gainianhua)” (Qin Yaqing 2012c: 3). This lack has been the key driving force behind recent self-reflective debates in Chinese IR that have been responsible
for producing much of the historical story-telling this chapter draws upon. In delving deeper into Chinese IR’s creation myths I hope to share with the reader the same sense of unease I have experienced upon encountering the ghosts that haunt this disciplinary storytelling.

**Developing Chinese international relations theory**

The creation myths that sit at the heart of Chinese international relations discourse make certain claims about the discipline: that it is relatively new, young and/or underdeveloped; that it requires modernisation; and, most importantly, is in need of (indigenous) theoretical innovation. These creation myths, and in particular the manner in which they are told, give notice of some of the (colonial) ghosts that continue to haunt Chinese international relations discourse. Virtually all historical accounts of Chinese international relations research narrate the development of ‘the discipline’ in terms of stages or phases of development. Whilst such an approach is not unique to Chinese IR myths (see Behera 2010 on IR in India), its ubiquity means that it warrants further attention. Despite variations in the number and length of periods identified, there are certain events or shifts that commonly appear in such accounts. In addition, there is a clear similarity in the language and logic of linear progression apparent in each. The table below summarises the periodisation approach used in a selection of accounts taken as indicative of disciplinary storytelling in Chinese IR (Figure 3.1, overleaf).

Wang Jun and Dan Xingwu (2008) provide the most comprehensive overview of the discipline. Drawing upon the many individual accounts available, Wang and Dan, settle on four broad historical phases: the period prior to the establishment of the PRC; from 1949 to the beginning of reform and opening (改革开放, gaige kaifang) (around 1978); the early reform and opening period until the end of the Cold War and the post-Cold War era. Wang Yizhou’s (Wang and Yuan 2006) account includes five phases but follows the same basic pattern as Wang and Dan. It differs, however, in splitting the second phase into two periods, 1949-1963 and 1963-1978, to account for the profound influence of
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<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Periods of development identified</th>
<th>Reform and Opening begins</th>
<th>End of Cold War</th>
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<td>Qin Yaqing (2010a)</td>
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the Cultural Revolution, which halted virtually all forms of academic work, including international relations research. The date markers used by almost all accounts revolve around external events such as these. The first of these – the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 – is understandably granted great significance. The founding of a new China brought with it a whole new system of academia to serve its new system of government. However, this date marker is used in most accounts of the history of Chinese international relations to discount any IR that might have existed prior to 1949. This “occluded history” of Chinese IR pre-1949 (Lu Peng 2014) is, however, highly significant and can help us to pick apart the myth of Chinese IR as a young (and underdeveloped) discipline. Wang and Dan’s ‘official’ account does acknowledge certain continuities or hangovers from the pre-PRC era; particularly the influence of Maoist revolutionary thought that was developed during and immediately prior to the civil war that eventually led to the PRC’s founding (Wang and Dan 2008: 11). In addition, Gerald Chan’s version of Chinese IR’s history identifies origins of Chinese IR thinking in earlier periods such as the May Fourth movement and Japanese invasion (Chan 1998b). Nevertheless, there is an accepted “common sense” in Chinese international relations discourse that there was no such thing as a formal discipline of IR existing in China prior to 1949 (Lu Peng 2014: 134).

The second key date marker, which is widely used in accounts of the development of Chinese IR, is the beginning of the Reform and Opening movement in 1978 (Qin Yaqing 2010a, Wang and Dan 2008, Wang and Yuan 2006, Zhang Feng 2012a). Many historical accounts focus solely on the period of time after the start of reform and opening policies since, they argue, there was little that could be described as a discipline of international relations prior to that time. This date is accorded such significance because the policy shift towards reform and opening facilitated an increasing openness to the outside world that enabled Chinese scholars to begin importing research from other countries, especially those in the ‘west’. Wang Yizhou characterises the period from 1978 to 1990 as one of “energetic learning” or borrowing from the experiences of Europe and the US (Wang and Yuan 2006: 5). Yu Zhengliang and
Chen Yugang (1999) likewise describe this phase as one of opening and importation from abroad. During this period, international relations research is said to have made remarkable, unprecedented progress, largely due to the influence of importing western literature and ideas (Wang and Yuan 2006: 5).

The end of the Cold War is identified in many accounts as another key date in the historical development of IR studies in China (Wang and Dan 2008, Wang and Yuan 2006, Yu and Chen 1999, Chen Yue 2006, Zhang Feng 2012a, Men Honghua 2002). The end of the Cold War brought challenges to seemingly dominant paradigms in international relations research, because of their inability to explain or predict the events of the time. It is also often credited with sparking the wave of critical scholarship responsible for much of the disciplinary self-reflection that informs this thesis and these (wider) debates. Whilst, according to Wang and Dan, international relations research in China was not as seriously affected as elsewhere, the end of the Cold War still brought many new challenges to Chinese international relations research. Changes were also brought about by domestic political change at that time including the deepening of reform and opening – its movement inland from the coastal regions and special economic zones (SEZs) – and the onset of rapid economic growth. At the same time, the country’s university system began to benefit from better funding and an increase in and diversification of international exchange. This period saw scholars moving into new areas of research such as feminism and international political economy (IPE) (Wang and Dan 2008: 33-4).

In some accounts, an additional phase is also cited, beginning around 1999 or the early 2000s. The phase is not attributed to a specific external event but rather reflects shifts within disciplinary debates in China and is concerned specifically with the issue of the quality and originality of international relations research (specifically theory) in China.

There are several other accounts of Chinese disciplinary development that have adopted a slightly different narrative; for example, Wang Yiwei who focuses specifically on the history of IR theory in China and Qin Yaqing who focuses on institutional building. Nevertheless, the periods both scholars set out largely replicate those identified by the other authors surveyed and still take
into account many of the same ‘external’ events. Wang Yiwei describes four phases in the development of Chinese IR: the “starting” period of the 1960s to 1980s dominated by Marxist thinking; the “learning” period in the 1980s characterised by importing/copying western scholarship; “stimulus” or response period in the 1990s; and a “reflecting” or constructing period in the 2000s seeing greater independence in Chinese research (Wang Yiwei 2009: 104-107). Qin Yaqing focuses on earlier developments and identifies three key stages: 1953 to 1963, beginning with the establishment of the Department of Diplomatic Studies at Renmin University,\(^\text{15}\) which became an independent institute in 1955 and is now the China Foreign Affairs University. The second stage, 1964 to 1979 was characterised by the establishment of international politics departments at three of the country’s leading universities: Peking University, Renmin University and Fudan University. The third phase, following Deng Xiaoping’s reform and opening, saw significant development in the field with exponential growth in both the quantity and the quality of research institutes across the country (Qin Yaqing 2010a: 33-5).

These time markers are helpful and do highlight the depth and extent of influence domestic and global social/political change has had on academic research in China over the years. Reform and opening did indeed make it possible for Chinese scholars to successfully access resources from the US and Western Europe for the first time, at least since 1949. Likewise, domestic political factors have often been responsible for widespread changes in direction of research. The Cultural Revolution undoubtedly had a massive impact not only through ceasing (nearly) all academic activity at the time but also the longer lasting legacy it had in terms of its influence on the lives and future direction of all those who lived through it, many of whom have now become influential players in the discipline (see Qin Yaqing in Lu Xin 2005 and Yan Xuetong in Lu Xin 2012). Moreover, these specific date markers are

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\(^{15}\) There is some ambiguity in the literature as to the date of the establishment of the diplomacy studies department at Renmin University. Wang and Dan cite 1950 as the founding year rather than 1953 as identified by Qin Yaqing (Wang and Dan 2008: 81), whereas the Chinese Foreign Affairs University itself refers only to its time as an independent institute from 1955 onwards (CFAU 2013).
significant in broader narratives or myths in contemporary Chinese discourse. They are often used to segment contemporary Chinese history as can be seen in history textbooks (Leung 2006: 159, Dillon 2012) and other expressions or performances of Chinese history such as the film *The Founding of a Republic* (建国大业, *Jianguo Daye*) and the Beijing National Day Parade, which were both produced to mark the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic (IMDB 2014, CCTV 2009).

Nevertheless, the near universal use of such time markers is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, it assigns all agency to political leaders and external political events. Such narratives rarely take into account the influence of individual scholars, students and, with the exception of Qin Yaqing’s account, changing institutional arrangements in setting the terms of debate; discursively drawing boundaries of/for the discipline.16 Secondly, and more problematically, this manner of storytelling imposes a strict linear (progressive) teleology onto the Chinese discipline of international relations; a teleology that views success as effectively replicating disciplinary international relations in the US in particular and western capitalism in general. The myths I have identified within Chinese international relations discourse provide helpful bite-sized steps toward this implicitly defined goal. They give the impression of a seamless unidirectional progression and serve to solidify these events or policy shifts (and not others) in the historical narrative, building a clear sense of what IR is and is not about in China. Chinese IR’s creation myths construct a specific identity for Chinese IR vis-à-vis the parochial/global discipline. In doing so, they also help to shape wider conceptions of Chinese identity and, specifically, Chinese identity vis-à-vis the rest of the world. I explore how this plays out in specific examples of contemporary Chinese international relations scholarship in the three remaining chapters. For now, I turn my attention to the ghosts that haunt these creation myths: the ghost of modernisation theory and the spectre of Marx.

16 For a helpful account of Chinese international relations written from an ‘internal’, sociological perspective see Kristensen and Nielsen (2013).
Modernising ghosts:  
The logic of disciplinary development in Chinese IR

Creation myths in Chinese international relations discourse begin with the assertion that international relations is an “import from the west” (Zhao and Ni 2007: 53), specifically the US. This claim is reinforced by constant (re-)iterations that the development of the discipline has been most productive since the onset of reform and opening because Chinese scholars were able to read western (American) theories of international relations for the first time. The post-reform period is consistently cited as the most productive period of disciplinary development and in particular in developing theoretical research (Qin Yaqing 2010a). This is evident in the account given by veteran Chinese IR scholar Ni Shixiong (Ni and Xu 1997). Ni also adopts a periodisation approach in his account of IR theory in China but chooses to focus solely on the post-1978 period because, he claims, prior to implementation of the reform and opening policies there was nothing in China that could be called international relations theory. In Ni’s account, disciplinary development can be categorised into three distinct periods. The first stage, from 1980 to 1987, was characterised by widespread importation of theories from the west. This led to the top academic journals giving more space to articles on international relations theory and leading universities specialising in theoretical research and teaching. The second phase, 1987 to 1994, saw the first attempts to move beyond western theories and establish China’s own system of international relations theory. The period from 1994 onwards, saw research in the field expanding into many new areas and the debate on international relations with ‘Chinese characteristics’ deepened significantly (Ni Shixiong 2001: 486-490). Ni argues that; “progress in Chinese international relations theory research has been moving in step with reform and opening” (Ni and Xu 1997). His phases of development reflect a widespread view amongst Chinese scholars that progress in the field of international relations is achieved through first importing and learning from western theories, then critiquing or building on them before, finally, creating something new and distinctly Chinese (or non-western). Men Honghua (2002)
states this explicitly, arguing; “importation – critique – innovation is the inherent logic of contemporary Chinese IR theory development”.

The close association between producing IR theory in China and importing IR from the west/US sits at the heart of creation myths of Chinese international relations discourse. In reading this myth, one is confronted with the ghost of (Eurocentric) modernisation theory in Chinese conceptions of disciplinary development. The myth presents a view of development that is rooted in colonial or Eurocentric ideas about modernity and modernisation specifically. Men’s ‘import – critique – innovate’ approach to theory-building implies that theoretical innovation is not possible until western theory is first understood and critiqued. It rests upon the belief that international relations theory was a western (white/European) idea that has had to be imported into the ‘not yet international’ China. IR theory therefore needs to be widely taught and examined before it can be properly critiqued or eventually surpassed by Chinese scholars. Men’s model for development mirrors/embodies certain colonial logics which dictate that non-western Others must first be schooled in the ways of their western masters before they can participate in high level assignments, in this case the important task of theorising (about) the world. Chinese scholars such as Men are perpetuating an image of themselves and their work as under-developed, not yet worthy of a seat at the table of IR theory. This myth perpetuates the idea of Eurocentric diffusionism that we find in other IR myths (Blaut 1993, see also p. 94). China’s own myths of origin suggest that, in the scholarly realm of international relations, the west leads, China lags; the west innovates, China imitates.

In this creation story, Chinese international relations discourse falls into the trap of attempting to assimilate non-western knowledge into the frames of parochial international relations. It compounds the modernisation logic which states that China is not different from the west but merely behind. This is reinforced by the language used throughout the accounts of IR’s creation myths in China. One of the most notable features of these narratives is the near universal usage of terms such as “lagging behind”, “immature” and “unhealthy” to describe the current situation of international relations research in China.
Wang Yizhou describes IR as the “little brother” in the wider family of social sciences (Wang Yizhou 2007: 1). International relations is said to be in its “early” or “preliminary stages” (Liang and Hong 2000: 1), is described as a “latecomer” to the party (Liang Shoude 2004) and as having “a long way yet to go” (Zhao and Ni 2007: 54). The purpose of developing the discipline is therefore to “close the gap” with other countries, and several accounts argue that in recent years Chinese research has been doing just that (Men Honghua 2002: 93). The “import – critique – innovate” logic, however, works to set out the path along which Chinese IR has “yet to go” and leaves little space for developments along different or competing trajectories.

**A Chinese Modernity?**

This perspective on disciplinary development and how it can be achieved has parallels with wider debates in China about modernisation both now and in the past. In each of these instances we see the enduring difficulties of bringing together diverse sources of knowledge and understanding and the interesting outcomes as they clash and fuse over time. The question of how to achieve China’s ‘modernisation’ is not a new one and continues to drive contemporary debates in Chinese scholarly and public discourse: from Zhou Enlai’s ‘Four Modernisations’ (1965) to Jiang Zemin’s ‘socialist modernisation with Chinese characteristics’ (Jiang Zemin 1992) to Xi Jinping’s ‘China dream’ (Xinhua 2013, see also Callahan 2014). Similarly, it drives debates about international relations theory, which Chinese scholars also argue needs to be modernised in order to compete on the world stage (Zhang Ruizhuang 2003). These debates often centre around how best to incorporate ‘western’ learning into (traditional) Chinese approaches. Recent Chinese history is littered with accounts of debates amongst Chinese intellectual and political leaders about how best to navigate a path between western knowledge and Chinese tradition. Perhaps one of the most famous articulations of this struggle originates in the late Qing period, during what is conventionally portrayed as the final attempts of Imperial China to resist joining the ‘international’ system (Eurocentric colonial world order). During the so-called ‘self-strengthening movement’, Chinese intellectuals
advocated the principle of “中学为体，西学为用” (Zhongxue weiti, Xixue weiyong – Chinese learning as essence, Western learning for usefulness), sometimes referred to simply as ti-yong. Proponents of this approach advocated that China adopt certain aspects of western technology and practical learning whilst at the same time retaining and reaffirming the superiority of the Chinese traditional value system (Rong Cai 2004: 155, Levenson 1968). This was an attempt to realise modernisation within the framework of a powerful cultural nationalism. The ti-yong formulation (re)appears, both implicitly and sometimes explicitly, in debates about Chinese international relations and how Chinese scholars might integrate into or make a contribution to the global study of IR (Hughes 1997, Callahan 2001). Attempts to construct a Chinese IR theory adopt existing (western) theory (for usefulness, yong) but maintain certain ‘Chinese characteristics’ (for essence, ti).

There are parallels too with contemporary debates about China’s current development path or road to modernisation. The dominant narratives about economic development in China today tend to focus on the concept of a ‘Chinese model’ (中国模式, Zhongguo moshi) of development; that is, the idea that the approach the current Chinese leadership has adopted towards economic development differs significantly from that adopted by western nations in the past (Zhao Suisheng 2010, Zheng Yongnian 2010, Chen and Goodman 2012). Yet, as Elena Barabantseva demonstrates, the assumptions that underpin the so-called ‘Chinese model’ are deeply rooted in Eurocentric conceptions of modernity and how it might be achieved.

The formulation of China’s current development model is informed and constrained by the paradigm of modernisation as the only right path to development. Rather than putting forward a ‘unique’ form of development, Chinese debates are deeply rooted in and limited by a particular way of thinking about the development process as a purpose-oriented, evolutionary, and linear idea (Barabantseva 2012: 64-5).

17 Qing reformer Feng Guifeng developed the formula in 1861 and it was popularised in 1898 by Zhang Zhidong’s Exhortation to Learning (Charle et al 2004: 277). Other key figures associated with the self-strengthening period include Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao.
The dominant language of modernisation in China relies on and reproduces the categories of developed (west) and developing (rest). There is an effort by Chinese scholars and political leaders to accelerate China’s progression from the latter category to the former, but little if any attempt to disrupt the categories themselves. As prominent scholar Wang Hui argues, “the most conspicuous feature of the Chinese discourse on modernity is its location within the ‘China/West’ and ‘tradition/modernity’ binaries” (Wang Hui 2003: 144). Yet, as I have argued in previous chapters, segregating the world into developed and developing countries is a temporal strategy that works to negate or deny the existence of difference in the world. It merely serves as a way of reinforcing “a timeline in which the former category is the future of the latter, and in so doing concealing the fact that both exist within unequal relations between centre and periphery – relations that involve domination and subordination” (Wang Hui 2009: 95). As a result, Chinese discourses on development are “trapped in the teleological thinking about a modernisation process, constructing the Chinese nation as somewhat inferior to the ‘developed West’” (Barabantseva 2012: 65).

This language around modernisation is equally influential in Chinese discourses on the development of disciplinary international relations, particularly claims about the need for theoretical innovation. Greater theoretical innovation is seen by Chinese scholars as the key to modernising international relations research in China, thereby creating a discipline to rival that of the US/the west. In recent years, innovation (创新, chuangxin) has become a buzzword in Chinese international relations discourse (Tang Yongsheng 2004, Qin Yaqing 2006, Ren Xiao 2009). There is a clear emphasis on newness or creativity in the debates on innovation in Chinese international relations theory, but there is also a clear sense that innovation means coming up with something that is not only new but also distinctive; distinctively Chinese. In these debates, Chinese scholars are once again playing out the arguments surrounding the ti-yong formulation in terms of their approach to ‘western’ learning in the field. Today’s calls for innovation ask for something that will move Chinese scholars beyond ‘dependence’ on western theories to a position of “walking their own path” (Ren Xiao 2009). As Wang Yiwei claims,
international relations in China is currently moving “between copying and constructing” (Wang Yiwei 2009), or as Qin Yaqing writes; from a pre-theory to theory-learning and, finally, theory-building phase (Qin Yaqing 2007: 318). An innovative theory of IR is therefore a Chinese theory of IR; it is not a western theory of IR. In other words, newness is measured against certain ostensibly western markers and originality can only exist where there is evidence of a clear distinction from the western theory that preceded it. Yet as I have consistently tried to demonstrate, so-called ‘western’ conceptions of international relations have been formed through a variety of instances of merging, clashing and fusing of western and non-western peoples, places and ideas. Indeed the concepts of west and non-west are created and sustained in those very (unequal) interactions, that continue to shape the world we live in and our understandings of it.

Theoretical innovation is, according to many Chinese scholars, the key to modernising the field of international relations in China. Yet the manner in which that innovation is talked about and achieved traps Chinese IR in a progressive, modernist teleology such that the only possible outcome is replicating existing (western) IR. This modernisation process constructs the Chinese discipline as inferior to that of the ‘developed west’. This portrayal is consistently reaffirmed by international relations scholarship, both Chinese and not. Acharya and Buzan, for example, claim that one of the reasons for the (apparent) lack of non-western theories of international politics is that “the West has a big head start, and what we are seeing is a period of catching up” (Acharya and Buzan 2007: 299). They perpetuate the notion that Chinese scholars are late entrants into an already established field of international relations and so must play by the pre-existing rules of the discipline. Recent scholarship in and about Chinese IR theory frequently perpetuates the discursive linkage between international relations and Eurocentric histories of development: histories that conveniently ignore the foundational role of colonial rule and imperial violence in making possible the so-called modernisation of the western (developed) world. These are just some of the
(many potential) instances where the ghost of modernisation theory that is haunting Chinese international relations discourse is made visible.

The spectre of Marx:

Storytelling logics and Marxist teleology

“IR Theory” in China

There is another apparent absence in Chinese IR’s creation myths, which on reflection is not an absence at all, but rather is “a seething presence” (Gordon 2008: 17). This IR ghost is the ghost of Marx or, more broadly, Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong thought. According to Chinese IR’s creation myths, international relations research was either non-existent (Zhao and Ni 2007: 53), or superficial and vague (Liang Shoude 2004), prior to the onset of the reform and opening period. Furthermore, there was little or no theoretical consciousness in Chinese IR until recently (Wang Yizhou 2005b, Song Xinning 2001, Zheng Shiping 2005). Such claims are widely accepted in Chinese international relations discourse and made possible through constant recourse to IR’s creation myths. IR is new to China and has come to China from the west (specifically, the US). These myths, as I have consistently argued, shape what is understood and accepted as ‘international relations’ and as ‘IR theory’ in Chinese discourse and, crucially, what is not. This is particularly relevant to recent discussions amongst Chinese scholars about the extent to which international relations research in China can be considered theoretical research.

Chinese-language research that is self-consciously described as ‘IR theory’ (国际关系理论, guojiguanxi lilun) is rare prior to 1980. Indeed, the earliest appearance of the term ‘International Relations Theory’ in a Chinese-language journal article was in 1982 (see Qin Yaqing 2011a for a more detailed analysis of ‘theoretical’ research in leading journals from 1978-2007). From the mid-1980s onwards, however, as the impact of the reform and opening policies began to be felt, the usage of the term became far more widespread as many more Chinese scholars began to occupy themselves with research into ‘international relations theory’. We can see this reflected in the numbers of
articles which contained the term ‘international relations theory’ (国际关系理论, guojiguanxi lilun) in either the title or abstract steadily increase from the 1980s to present (figure 3.2):

**Figure 3.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Abstract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980 – 1989</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 – 1999</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>1189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 – 2009</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>2957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 – 2012</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>980</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to understand this shift, however, it is vitally important to understand that what has been ‘imported’ into China since the late 1970s is not simply ‘IR theory’ but also the very meaning of the concept itself. Looking at the scholarship that was being imported and translated into Chinese in the early 1980s, it becomes immediately clear that the majority of those works can broadly be labelled as positivist research in terms of their understanding of the role and nature of theory in international relations. A comprehensive list of 52 of the earliest IR titles translated into Chinese can be found in Qin Yaqing’s study of Chinese IR (2010a: 30-31). These include influential American realist works such as Morton Kaplan’s *System and Process in International Politics* (1957), Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations* ([1948] 1985) and Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* (1979). In addition there were several titles by Robert Keohane (1984, 1986) including one specifically prepared for the Chinese market (Keohane 2006), a number of what could be termed ‘English School’ titles, such as Hedley Bull’s *The Anarchical Society* (1977) and Martin Wight’s *Power Politics* (1946) and only a handful of titles that could be labelled ‘critical scholarship’ such as Robert Cox’s *Production, Power and World Economy* (1987).
As Wang and Dan’s account claims, these early works of translation had the biggest impact on Chinese international relations research and became the foundation for theoretical work in the 1990s (Wang and Dan 2008: 19). According to Qin Yaqing, five major translation series have been particularly influential and of these “the translation of Han J Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations* was the milestone” (Qin Yaqing 2010a: 29). It is also important to note, that this process of ‘importation’ was, in large part, driven by vested interest of American institutions and funding bodies. For example, the Ford Foundation in particular has been instrumental in facilitating – indeed actively promoting – international exchange between American and Chinese scholars since the beginning of the reform era (Kristensen and Nielsen 2013). Thus the most common understandings of what constitutes IR theory in China, both in the 1980s and to a greater or lesser extent today, revolve around a positivist conception of theory that is most closely associated with American neorealist research. The apparent absence of ‘IR theory’ prior to the 1980s in Chinese IR research is largely due to the manner in which *theory* was (and still is) commonly defined amongst Chinese international relations scholars. By disrupting the power of Chinese IR’s creation myths, it might be possible to conceive of alternative conceptions of theory in Chinese IR that may permit entry of ‘other’ knowledge into the history of the discipline in China. As Algappa’s review of international relations research across Asia seeks to demonstrate, the claim that IR in Asia is characterised by its “strong practical orientation” need not imply a complete absence of theory from international relations research across the region. “If conceived *broadly* to include understanding, constituting, and transforming the world, the post-World War II IRS in Asia has *not* been bereft of theory” (Algappa 2011: 221, emphases added).

**Where is Marx?**

Yet, the discipline’s creation myths are powerful in China and continue to perpetuate the belief that *theoretical* research in international relations began in China after the onset of reform and opening and western (read American) theory could be imported. These myths violently erase a significant influence on
international relations in China over the past century: the influence of Marxist thought in its broadest sense. The iterations of the development of international relations in China that populate textbooks and journal articles in ‘Chinese IR’ either completely ignore, or at best gloss over, the influence of Soviet theories and methodologies on academic research in the 1950s and 1960s and the broader influence of Marxist-Leninist thought on Chinese political thought over the past century. Chinese research conducted during the 1950s and 60s, and even some that was conducted before 1949, included rich studies of communist movements around the world, ideas about war and peace and the global struggle against imperialism, research into other socialist countries and regions that might be labelled today as area studies and other aspects of what might broadly be termed international politics. Yet none of this research is considered relevant for inclusion in a Chinese ‘discipline’ of international relations and its influence and achievements are therefore totally ignored. In contemporary Chinese scholarship, those conducting what is seen as ‘Marxist’ research are to be found largely in the fields of political philosophy or political theory not in international relations (Kristensen and Nielsen 2010: 40). Where Marxism is mentioned, for example by Song Xinning in his paper on IR with Chinese characteristics, it is explicitly denied a role in disciplinary international relations and in any attempts to build theory in Chinese IR. Song states that: “before the 1980s no real IR theory was taught in China. The so-called theory of international politics before then was just interpretations of the viewpoints of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Zedong” (Song Xinning 2001: 63).

Mao Zedong’s contributions to strategic thinking are not considered relevant for the contemporary/modern discipline of international relations in China. Mao’s three world’s theory, for example, is rarely mentioned either in accounts of the discipline’s development or in contemporary IR scholarship more broadly. The only place this key contribution to strategic thinking is considered and analysed at present is in the context of Communist Party history (He Li 2010) or history of political thought (Tang Zhennan 1993, Luo Shiping 1991). In much the same way as Hedley Bull disregarded Maoist thought because it was not theoretical enough to contribute to the discipline of
international relations (Bull 1972: 55, see also p.91), Chinese scholars and students of IR make similar claims in order to write Mao out of contemporary Chinese IR discourse. A recent PhD thesis is indicative of such a manoeuvre; in it the author argues that Mao Zedong’s three worlds’ theory should not be considered a valid IR theory because it is not based on theoretical arguments and does not suit China’s specific circumstances (Yuan Wei 2008). Only recently have articles assessing the relevance of Mao’s three worlds’ theory to contemporary international politics begun to emerge within the Chinese language literature (Li Jiulin 2008, Zhang Jinliang 2010, Zhang Chunsong 2010, Tan Tianxing 2013). Even still, such scholarship is framed as discovering the significance of Maoist thought for contemporary international practice, and has not been incorporated into current debates amongst China’s IR scholars about building international relations theory in China (one notable exception is Qin Yaqing, see chapter 6). Chinese academic discourse surrounding Mao Zedong thought is labelled as irrelevant to contemporary international relations by the creation myths of Chinese IR.

Going back further still, the widespread importation and development of Soviet theory and Marxist-Leninist thought in the early years of the PRC and before its founding is also written out of Chinese IR’s creation myths. Lenin’s extremely influential theory of imperialism entered China after the Russian revolution in 1917 (Zhang Xiantao 2007: 130). The active ‘importation’ and translation of Lenin’s work continued throughout the 1930s and 1940s and “by the time the People’s Republic of China was proclaimed on October 1, 1949, practically all major works by Lenin were known in China” (Pantsov 2000: 30). Likewise, key works by Karl Marx were translated into Chinese from the 1920s onwards. The Communist Manifesto, which has been translated into Chinese countless times, is rightly seen as one of the works that have exercised the greatest influence upon modern and contemporary China. As Guo Yangsheng and Xiao Qinyuan argue, “metaphorically, modern Chinese history can be described as one of translating Marxism” (Guo and Xiao 2011: 1). Yet Marxism is assigned no place in the developmental narrative of international relations in China. Scholarship about international politics that dominated prior to the
Cultural Revolution and the onset of reform and opening was heavily influenced by Marxist-Leninist theories, particularly Lenin’s theory of imperialism. These ‘foreign’ theories were imported and transformed in a similar way to those works of western (i.e. American) theory that were translated in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet Lenin’s theories of international relations are dismissed in disciplinary narratives as irrelevant to contemporary Chinese IR. Such foreign theories, and their Chinese (re-)interpretations, should be considered no less significant in shaping Chinese international relations research that later (American) imports.

As David Shambaugh demonstrates, research that was conducted prior to the reform and opening period was undoubtedly influenced by Marxist-Leninist systems of thought (Shambaugh 2011: 341). Yet in Chinese IR’s creation myths it is Morgenthau and not Marx who is hailed as IR theory’s founding father. Chinese creation myths fail to acknowledge the formative role of Marxist-Leninist thought in Chinese international relations and, importantly, the many ways in which those ‘foreign’ ideas have been imported, re-interpreted and ultimately transformed through multiple and competing discursive processes across time and space. The only exception in Chinese-language texts I have found is in the introductory textbook authored by Liang Shoude and Hong Yinian, which includes a brief section on the role of Marxism in the development of the discipline (Liang and Hong 2013: 9-21). This is less surprising, however, when one notes that Liang Shoude is frequently labelled (by other Chinese scholars) as Chinese IR’s “Marxist scholar”. The erasure of Marxist thought from Chinese IR’s history is made possible through the telling of a disciplinary creation myth that situates the institutional birth of international relations in China in the early 1960s. However, this narrative is relatively recent having only emerged in the mid-1990s. Prior to that time, other historical accounts of IR in China were produced, which dated the discipline’s institutional birth far earlier. In the late 1980s for example, Shi Lei (1988: 9-10) located the starting point of Chinese IR in the 1920s, while, in an article focusing on theoretical developments in Chinese IR, Yuan Hong (1989: 33) traced Chinese IR back to the 1930s (Lu Peng 2014: 134). Lu Peng’s study reveals a rich history of IR studies in
International studies at that time was guided by a wide variety of sources including: Marxist-Leninist thought; other western traditions of politics and diplomacy; the study of international law and international organisations; Chinese philosophy, history and administration and even European colonial history and administration (Lu Peng 2014: 138-145). Lu Peng’s review also shows the prominent role that Marxism and Maoist thought played in shaping Chinese IR in the 1950s and 60s (2014: 146-147).

International relations discourse in China is and (always) has been informed by a wide variety of knowledge sources and the complex and multiple interactions between them. Yet Chinese IR’s creation myths tell only of one specific process: a one-way process of importation of western (American, positivist) IR theory. In so doing, they are closing down a potentially lucrative source of thinking about international relations theory and re-affirming a ‘progressive’ teleology that leads to their own discipline being required to replicate that of the US or, rather, a specific representation of American IR associated with positivist (realist) social science and the writings of Morgenthau and Waltz. Here we can see the myth of Aberystwyth – which claimed the victory for realism in the First Great Debate and henceforth its dominant position within the discipline – at work in Chinese international relations discourse (see pp. 59-64).

**A Marxist Spectre**

This exclusion, however, remains partial and impossible to sustain. Despite writing out the discipline’s Marxist legacy, Marxist modes of thought continue to be pervasive in Chinese international relations discourse and continue to haunt narratives in and about Chinese IR. Even the manner in which Chinese IR myths are told betrays a continued reliance on Marxist modes of thinking in contemporary Chinese international relations research. The linear story-telling logic employed raises a ghostly spectre of Marxist teleology. It seeks progress above all else and sets such progress out in various stages each necessary and each working towards a pre-defined goal. That pre-defined goal is an
‘international relations discipline’ that looks like the mature or well-developed discipline in the west. Yet the model that Chinese IR aims to replicate is itself a discursive creation. The discipline in the west, that Chinese IR myths judge the Chinese discipline against, is an idealised image which is both limited and limiting. It defines all of ‘western IR’ against the model of (neo)realist, positivist research originating largely from the US, thereby denying the existence of multiple and competing perspectives on international politics that are to be found within so-called ‘western IR’. Chinese scholars are, in essence, striving to build a discipline that reflects a very narrow understanding of international relations. At a time when historical and interpretive methods are becoming increasingly popular in the discipline globally, Chinese scholars like Men Honghua (2002) are arguing that Chinese researchers “have yet to break free from their reliance on historical and descriptive methods” which are viewed as old-fashioned and not fit for the modern discipline of IR he wants to build in China. Marxist logics determine that there are certain stages that Chinese research must pass through before it can resemble the mature and developed discipline one finds in the west. Zhang Ruizhuang, for example, argues that the continued used of philosophical and historical methods means that the field is still in a “pre-positivist” phase and this presents a key barrier to its modernisation (Zhang Ruizhuang 2003, see also Lu Xin 2011: 240-244). Before Chinese scholars can consider post-positivist methodologies, the discipline must first pass through a positivist research phase.

The continued exclusion of Marxist-Leninist thought from Chinese international relations discourse is made possible by the widespread adoption of such a positivist understanding of the nature of international relations theory by Chinese scholars. This is encouraged and enabled by the constant (re)telling of Chinese IR’s creation myths, which situate the birth of the discipline in the 1960s and associate growth and development in IR research with the importation of American (realist) theories of IR. This myth powerfully defines international relations theory against a model of American positivist research from the 1960s and 70s. It violently excludes alternative histories of IR by
imposing a progressive teleology onto ‘Chinese IR’, casting the discipline in
China not as different but merely behind that of ‘the west’.

**Other (Domestic) Ghosts**

In addition to the 20th century influence of Marxist-Leninist thought, there are
other traditions within Chinese political thought that haunt contemporary
Chinese IR. Since Chinese IR myths define international relations in very narrow
terms derived from one particular branch of positivist, realist IR, Chinese
international relations scholars have been reluctant to acknowledge the
influence that centuries of imperial rule have had in shaping Chinese views of
the world and of China’s place within it. Even some recent scholarship that
looks to traditional Chinese culture and philosophy to inspire contemporary IR
looks back to an era in Chinese history prior to the establishment of dynastic
imperial rule (e.g. Yan Xuetong’s work, see pp. 177-180). Yet, according to the
official record at least, ‘China’ existed as a (more or less) unified empire for
nearly two millennia. 18 It would seem problematic at best to suggest that this
legacy has not had an impact on contemporary thinking about international
relations in and about China. Two millennia of imperial rule has undoubtedly
influenced Chinese thinking about how the world works, what is China’s place
within it and indeed what is China? Nevertheless, the nature of these
historical/imperial ghosts and the manner in which they make their presence
known in contemporary IR discourse is complex and often contradictory. It
would be much too simple to equate Chinese imperialism with the Euro-
American imperialism that, as I argued in chapter one, shapes our most basic
understandings of international relations and how it works. One of the
differences between Chinese understandings of imperial rule and European
colonial ideologies is in their respective understandings of the nature of
otherness and difference. As an illustration, the practice of marriage diplomacy
(和亲, heqin) was rare in the European empires that dominated the post-

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18 From unification under the Qin dynasty in 220BC until the fall of the Qing Empire in 1911,
‘China’ was ruled as a dynastic empire under the leadership of the Emperor, the Son of Heaven
(天帝, tiandi).
Westphalian world yet it has been a common practice throughout the history of the Chinese Empire. The European coloniser saw the foreign ‘Other’ as absolute, whereas Chinese perspectives were far more fluid and allowed for the possibility of conversion of barbarians into (a part of) the Chinese self (see pp.82-88 and pp. 224-233 for a fuller discussion of European and Chinese perspectives on the nature of difference). The foreign relations of the Chinese Empire, characterised by the so-called tribute system, saw others as inferior to the Chinese self but with the potential to learn and become (more) civilised. Under the tribute system, the Emperor was viewed as the centre of the universe, ruling over tianxia (天下, all under heaven), his influence radiating outward. Thus the imperial Chinese worldview was a Sinocentric worldview.

This ghost of Sinocentrism (of Chinese worldviews) is evident throughout much recent scholarship in Chinese international relations and, I hope, will make its presence known in the chapters that follow. A number of recent studies have attempted to breathe life into this ghost resurrecting the idea of a Sinocentric world order as the basis for a potential Chinese perspective on international relations. The most high-profile of such attempts is Zhao Tingyang’s reworking of the tianxia concept, which I explore more fully in the next chapter (see pp. 148-149, see also (Zhang Feng 2010, Ren Xiao 2010). But even those works within Chinese international relations that do not directly draw from the historical experience of the tribute system and the foreign relations of the Chinese Empire, often begin from a distinctly Sinocentric perspective. The underlying narrative of China’s rise, which drives many of the current debates within Chinese IR, often (unwittingly) depicts a new Sinocentric world order (see chapter five). The very project itself (to create a Chinese School of IR theory) is arguably driven by the absent presence of Sinocentrism in Chinese IR thinking. Much of the research that I have examined in this thesis, diverse as it is, shares a common desire to tell the story of the world from a Chinese perspective. This does not always result in a vision of a Sinocentric world (and it would be misleading to suggest it does). Nevertheless, China at the centre is a recurring, if often hidden, theme of much contemporary international relations discourse in and about China.
Patriotic worrying and the innovation imperative

As I have argued in previous chapters, creation myths are extremely important in producing and constraining possibilities for international relations research. Yet these creation myths are neither stable nor fixed, they must come from somewhere and must be maintained through their constant telling and re-telling. The myths of origin I have surveyed in this chapter began to appear from around the mid 1980s onwards and, according to Lu Peng, reached a consensus around the early 2000s (Lu Peng 2014: 136). Since then, debates about the future direction of the field have become widespread and increasingly intense but have largely worked to sustain the same myths about the discipline in China: that it is a new and developing discipline, it is not indigenous to China and has largely been imported from the west (read US) and that it continues to be underdeveloped or immature. As Qin Yaqing writes, the view that Chinese IR has yet to contribute any original theory or theoretical school has become “common knowledge” (共识, gongshi) in Chinese IR (Qin Yaqing 2005: 165): in Barthesian terms, it has acquired mythical status. Disciplinary story-telling in Chinese IR discourse has tended to focus on perceived problems or shortcomings with international relations research in China. Scholars have questioned the quality of research, the subject-matter or scope and, in particular, the methodologies and theoretical approaches adopted by Chinese researchers. Their ‘histories’ are therefore forward-looking in the sense that their primary motivation appears to be improving the situation of international relations research so that it can be a healthy and firmly-established discipline within the social sciences in China. In this regard they suffer from the same presentism that plagues other accounts of/in the discipline (Schmidt 1998). The overriding drive for these ‘histories’ is the concern that Chinese IR requires theoretical innovation in order to become a ‘developed’ discipline.

The disciplinary story-telling that perpetuates Chinese IR’s myths of origin has largely been driven by a growing perception amongst Chinese scholars of the need not only to define the discipline in China but also to create a discipline for China. In other words, China needs an IR discipline and an IR
theory that serves its (the Party-State’s) own needs. This is reflected in many of the articles I have covered here, which frequently argue that the failure to have a successful and productive IR discipline is unacceptable for a country as large – as significant or as powerful – as China is or is to become. Size matters, it seems, in international relations discourse. There is a widespread view amongst Chinese scholars that since China is a large (read powerful) country it must have an IR discipline to match. For example, Zhang Ruizhuang argues that:

not only has the academic standard of Chinese international relations research lagged far behind that of such major western powers as the US, UK, Australia and France but also behind that of countries that have learnt from the west such as Japan and Korea, to the extent that China is unable to rival even the academic achievements of Hong Kong or Singapore. For a country of over 1 billion people, this must be said to be a tragedy (Zhang Ruizhuang 2003: 70).

It is seen as both tragic and unsustainable that a country like China, that is rising to prominence on the world stage, should produce sub-standard research in the field of international relations. Such views are driven partly by a desire for the prestige that comes with academic success but also by a belief that to be powerful in the world one must first understand the world. Chinese scholars see a vital need to understand the international system, so that they might play an active part in it. Not only that, they must innovate and develop a uniquely Chinese way of understanding the world so they might contribute to bringing about a better world into the future. According to Wang Yizhou, a country as large as China can and must have its own perspective on international politics (Wang Yizhou 2005b). China’s IR discipline must therefore be modern and successful but must also serve China’s (national) interests.

This link, between a rising China and an emerging Chinese international relations, is common throughout contemporary Chinese IR (see for example Wang Yiwei 2009). Theoretical innovation is viewed as a key component in nation-building and strengthening (new) China. In order for China to play its proper role in the world it must develop a clear understanding – and, crucially, it’s own understanding – of international politics and how it works. This type of
concern is widespread in Chinese academia. According to Gloria Davies, one of
the key distinguishing features of the Chinese intellectual scene is the
phenomenon of “patriotic worrying” (忧患, youhuan) (Davies 2007). Under such
conditions, the strength of an argument is judged not against some notion of
scientific accuracy or theoretical soundness but rather is judged against
whether or not it benefits China’s national interest (Saussy 2008: 685). The
strength of international relations research is thus judged against whether or
not it benefits China’s national interest, both on the micro level of individual
theories and research projects and on the level of the discipline as a whole. This
thinking shapes Chinese IR scholars’ approach to the notion of theory-building
and creates an imperative to innovate in order to build a successful discipline
that can compete on the world stage. As I aim to demonstrate in the remaining
chapters, Chinese international relations scholars are clambering over one
another to solve the ‘Chinese School’ problem. Over the past 30 years or more,
Chinese scholars have been debating whether and how to come up with a
Chinese theory of international relations that will firmly establish Chinese
international relations as a worthy participant in the parochial/global discipline
and with it contribute to the PRC’s rise on the world stage. This crucial debate
has been both the source of the myths of origin I explored in this chapter but
also a casualty of their disciplining power. Chinese encounters with the
parochial/global discipline of IR are fundamentally shaped by the myths of
origin that constitute the discipline in China and beyond. Those encounters are
the subject of my next chapter to which I now turn.
Chapter Four

A haunted house(hold) of international relations?
Chinese encounters with the parochial/global discipline

*Chinese IR scholars ought to make every effort to
demonstrate innovation and independence in their research,
to establish a ‘Chinese School of international politics’.*
*(Mei Ran 2000)*

*The more enlightened our houses are, the more their walls ooze ghosts.
Dreams of progress and reason are haunted by nightmares.*
*(Calvino [1967] 1987)*

Creation myths play a vital role in creating and sustaining the idea of a ‘discipline’ of international relations within and beyond China. Chinese IR’s creation myths create an enduring self-image for Chinese IR vis-à-vis the parochial/global discipline. This chapter begins with that self-image – of the immature discipline eager to catch up with the western ‘standard’ – and explores in more depth the ways in which Chinese scholarship has interacted with wider international relations discourse. It considers Chinese contributions to debates about the parochial nature of the discipline and interrogates claims that Chinese scholarship might provide part or all of the answer to the problem of Eurocentrism in IR (Wæver 1998, Wang Yiwei 2009). In examining these encounters between Chinese IR and the so-called ‘global’ discipline, I am not seeking to argue for (or against) the development of a uniquely Chinese approach to international relations but rather I am interested in the politics of gaining acceptance for Chinese contributions. In particular, I highlight the ways
in which Chinese scholarship is complicit in myth-making in and about the
parochial/global discipline. Chinese IR scholars are active in disciplining the
discipline even as they argue against their own marginal position within it. In so
doing they are helping to construct a mythical house(hold) of international
relations, and discursively regulate the roles they are permitted to play within it.
This chapter focuses, therefore, on the approaches and strategies used by
Chinese scholars to engage with the parochial/global discipline of international
relations. In particular, I am interested in the ways in which Chinese scholars are
attempting to challenge their own position (rather, portrayal) as marginal
scholars; as consumers not producers of theoretical knowledge. In each of these
encounters there are ghostly beings lurking and the chapter seeks to
demonstrate how these ghostly encounters work to pick apart the myths of
international relations.

I begin with a return to the discipline and its founding mythology. The
myths of Aberystwyth and Westphalia are powerful in terms of shaping what
we think of as ‘international relations’ but there is an even more fundamental
myth at work in international relations discourse, that is, the myth of the
discipline itself: the very idea that a clearly-defined and well-structure discipline
of IR self-evidently exists and operates independently of those who participate
in it. The first section considers the implications of adopting a Foucaultian
understanding of disciplinarity when questioning the role(s) Chinese scholarship
plays in wider international relations discourse. It begins with a recognition that
hierarchical or uneven relationships in and with ‘the discipline’ do not simply
exist nor are they granted by some external power acting on the discipline.
Rather, it is each of us who participate in the practice/performance of
international relations discourse that create and sustain those unequal
relationships. Chinese scholars are no different in this regard and this chapter
explores some of the ways in which they ‘discipline the discipline’ through a
close examination of contemporary Chinese international relations discourse. In
the chapter I seek to highlight some of the key debates that have dominated
this discourse over the past two or three decades. By far the most significant of
which has been whether or not China should have its own, unique approach to
international relations research and theorising. This, in many respects, reflects a wider anxiety about where that scholarship fits within the parochial/global discipline in its broadest sense. I demonstrate how, in these debates, Chinese scholarship works both to undermine the colonial logics of international relations discourse and to reify (actively perform) the discipline and its founding mythology. In their production of contemporary international relations discourse, Chinese IR scholars are simultaneously building and un-building a mythical house(hold) of international relations and simultaneously challenging and (re)producing their subordinate role within it.

**International relations: a colonial household?**

As I have argued, international relations discourse – in particular the two founding fables upon which IR is built – functions so as to affirm its version of events in the historical record. It presents its version of ‘international’ history as the only possible way of understanding world order past, present and future. When we begin to pick apart those myths and see them for the myths that they are, “international relations’ singularity also becomes apparent: that is, it is but one of the many versions and understandings of world politics” (Agathangelou and Ling 2004: 21). It is a peculiarly white, European account of world politics in which the non-western world plays a vital yet hidden (subordinate) role. Through the constant (re)telling of IR’s creation myths, the story that international relations (European colonialism) tells about the world comes to be seen as the only legitimate story. At the same time the foundational role of Europe’s colonial past, the material encounters between Europe and its Others that are at the heart of this story, are silenced or ignored. As a result, the self-image of international relations as an American or Eurocentric discipline is perpetuated and non-western scholarly communities are considered outside of that disciplinary history and hence outside of ‘the discipline’. In order to understand the dynamics of this (unequal) relationship between Eurocentric histories and alternative/non-western knowledge claims, I begin with an image borrowed from Anna Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling (2004, 2009). Their description of international relations as a colonial household provides a helpful
starting point for understanding how the colonial logics of international relations discourse are continually upheld and reproduced as it encounters knowledge claims from different communities around the world.

In interrogating key myths in international relations discourse, it becomes clear that what they present as truth about the world is merely one of many possible interpretations of the world(s). The ghostly beings that haunt those myths make it known to us that the world is a far more complex place and (international) life far messier than the myths of international relations would have us believe. This forces us to recognise the existence of multiple worlds and multiple stories about those worlds; “to recognise that becoming and being have countless forms, various voices and changing scripts” (Agathangelou and Ling 2004: 21). It is when we recognise the existence of such multiplicity and complexity in the world that we are able to recognise IR for what it is, one understanding amongst many, one version of world politics masquerading as the only possibility. In this light;

IR comes to resemble a colonial household. Its singular, oppositional perspective (‘I versus You’) stakes out an establishment of ‘civilisation’ in a space that is already crowded with local traditions of thinking, doing, and being but proclaimed, in wilful arrogance, as a ‘state of nature’ plagued by fearful ‘anarchy’ and its murderous power politics (Agathangelou and Ling 2004: 21).

One of the key consequences of IR’s creation myths is that they create the perception that international relations (in theory and practice) was a white European idea and as a result the rest of the world is considered ‘outside’ of those ‘international relations’. Or, to use Agathangelou and Ling’s words: “Others must wait faithfully for their admittance, if ever, into the House of IR” (Agathangelou and Ling 2004: 21). Identifying IR as a colonial household exposes some of the most damaging effects of ‘the discipline’, that is; “its constitution of boundaries that fence off a majority of the world” (Agathangelou and Ling 2004: 22). In (re)telling its myths of origin, the discipline is created and sustained as a (white) European entity that finds its intellectual roots entirely within European history and philosophical traditions. As a site or a culture of
knowledge production, international relations exhibits practices of exclusion and commits colonial violences against those (non-western others) who might try to enter without permission. Thus, like a colonial household, the “House of IR” closely regulates who is inside and outside, upstairs and downstairs and works to actively maintain those boundaries (Agathangelou and Ling 2004: 23). Agathangelou and Ling consider many (not all 19) of the agents – here, scholarly communities and schools of thought – that live inside and outside their “House of IR”, demonstrating how their positions in relation to the household are consistently (re)negotiated.

The colonial household provides a useful metaphor for thinking about the relationships between the different schools of thought, individuals and other participants in international relations discourse in and about China. Yet, as an image, it is only helpful up to a point. This image – and Agathangelou and Ling’s work in a wider sense – is also complicit in perpetuating the myth(s) of the discipline. The boundaries Agathangelou and Ling refer to – between those who are inside and outside, upstairs and downstairs, a familial part of or totally excluded from the colonial household of IR – are not fixed or given but rather are created only as they are invoked by scholars, both Chinese and not. Disciplines can only exist as they are discursively performed. The colonial household metaphor helps us to understand the relationships that are constructed/constituted through the production of international relations discourse but the ghostly haunt reminds us that those relationships and identities are not fixed but rather are fragile, unstable and in a constant state of becoming. By invoking the image of the discipline as a well-structured/stable household with clearly defined roles for each of its constituent members, 20 Agathangelou and Ling are actively participating in the production of disciplinarity: they are actively creating what they seek to critique. This pattern,

19 Agathangelou and Ling (2004: 23) recognise the limits of their model as one which addresses only certain contributions to the field of international relations. They argue, however, that the analogy holds up with the addition of new schools of thought and/or approaches.

20 In particular, the manner in which they assign different theoretical approaches specific and seemingly fixed identities (pater realism, mater liberalism etc.) suggests a degree of structural stability in the ‘household’ that I (and the ‘household ghosts’) hope to demonstrate is not there.
however, is remarkably similar to that displayed by Chinese IR scholars over the past three decades or more as they have debated the place their scholarship could/should have within the wider discipline. In these debates Chinese scholars actively create and sustain the notion of an unequal or parochial discipline from which they have been excluded, either through choice or necessity. They too are complicit in disciplining the discipline and often (but not always) in ways that undermine their own position within it.

**Chinese-Style IR**

Chinese international relations scholars have been attempting to define their place vis-à-vis the parochial/global discipline of IR for at least the past 30 years. According to Chinese IR’s creation myths, the period following the onset of reform and opening policies in the late 1970s was, if not the beginning of the discipline in China, certainly its most productive period of expansion and development. In any case, it was a time where Chinese scholars became far more aware of and engaged in international relations scholarship produced elsewhere in the world. Whilst, as I argued in chapter 3, this was not the first encounter between Chinese IR and ‘foreign’ scholarship, this period is cited in the creation myths as the birth of *theoretical* consciousness in Chinese IR. Happening alongside, and indeed as an integral part of, this increasing theoretical consciousness was the emergence of a key debate within Chinese international relations discourse. That debate, which has since come to dominate that discourse, concerns the possibility and desirability of a distinctively Chinese approach to international relations; a Chinese-style IR. Since the late 1980s scholars have been asking what international relations theory with ‘Chinese characteristics’ might look like and whether it might be necessary (Liang Shoude 1994, 1997a, 1997b, Chan 1998a, 1999, Song Xining 2001); debating what must be done in order for China to establish its own independent discipline of international relations (Wang Jianwei 1986, Zhang Yahang 1989) and, more recently, have argued for the need to build a ‘Chinese School’ of international relations theory (Ren Xiao 2000, 2009, Qin Yaqing 2006, 2010a, 2012b). This so-called “marathon style” debate (Wang and Dan 2008:
341) has taken many forms over the past 20 or more years and is perhaps better understood as a series of complementary and overlapping debates. Nevertheless, all share a common theme: scholars are either searching for, actively constructing, or denying altogether the need for a specifically Chinese approach to world politics; a definitively Chinese way of doing IR. These debates appear against the background of a shifting intellectual environment in China in the early 1990s which, according to Wang Hui, saw a resurgence in interest in Chinese history and Chinese studies (国学, guoxue) with Chinese intellectuals increasingly shifting their focus from “the west” to China (Wang Hui 2003: 143).

The earliest articulations of a potential Chinese approach to international relations theory and research were those arguing for IR theory with ‘Chinese characteristics’ (中国特色, Zhongguo tese). The concept of ‘Chinese characteristics’ finds its origins in the words of Deng Xiaoping, the architect of China’s reform and opening. However, according to Shi Bin the principle of creating China-specific approaches to international relations predates Deng Xiaoping’s ‘Chinese characteristics’ concept/slogan (Shi Bin 2006: 520). The charge for ‘IR theory with Chinese characteristics’ was initially led by prominent Marxist scholar Liang Shoude at Peking University (1994, 1997a). Whilst his arguments have since been disregarded by a number of, predominantly younger, scholars, the term ‘Chinese characteristics’ continues to be widely used and debated in Chinese international relations discourse (Noesselt 2012: 15). Over the past thirty years, “one of the topics debated most heatedly was whether or not the so-called ‘Chinese characteristics’ should be a key consideration in Chinese scholars’ theorizations of international politics and international relations” (Wang Jianwei 2002: 81-82).

The purpose of the ‘Chinese characteristics’ label is generally to emphasise the distinctiveness and separation of Chinese IR from that of the wider discipline. It is about marking out research as Chinese IR rather than simply IR in China. This purpose is also present in recent scholarship which calls for a ‘Chinese-style’ (中国式, Zhongguoshi) or ‘Chinese School’ (中国学派, Zhongguo xuepai) of international relations theory. According to Wang and Dan
(2008: 343) the term Chinese School was first coined by Zhang Mingqian in a 1991 publication, where he argued for the need for China to build up its own theoretical system (Zhang Mingqian 1991). The term only really became popular, however, in the early 2000s as a result of articles written by young scholar Mei Ran (2000) and veteran Ren Xiao (2000) amongst others. It has since become one of the most commonly used terms in international relations research in and about China. Some scholars who had previously been sceptical of the idea of ‘Chinese characteristics’, due largely to its overt political or ideological implications, have since argued in favour of developing a distinctly Chinese approach (Wang Yizhou 2005b). Recent calls for a Chinese School have also begun to attract a broader audience within and beyond China (Chen 2011, Noesselt 2012, Kristensen and Nielsen 2013). The term ‘Chinese School’ is becoming more widely known amongst scholars of international relations, even by those who have no real interest in China. It is also worth noting that all of the anthologies I reviewed in chapter 2 (see pp. 75-76) include a chapter on Chinese IR. In addition, there is anecdotal evidence that the ‘Chinese School’ concept is attracting attention from scholars in Latin America who see it as inspiration for building their own school(s) of IR theory. Some of Qin Yaqing’s work has recently been translated into Spanish, which may be a key source of inspiration for such work (Qin Yaqing 2012b, 2013).

Some scholars have gone so far as to claim there is almost universal acceptance or common agreement that Chinese scholars ought to be working toward establishing some form of China-specific approach (Ren Xiao 2009: 15, Lu Peng 2006: 52, Shi Bin 2004: 8). However, there are still some scholars who continue to argue against the need to emphasise or protect the distinctiveness of Chinese IR and who appeal to colleagues to work towards integrating their research with that of the wider discipline, which usually means American (and/or realist) IR. Scholars such as Yan Xuetong, who was trained in the US, have argued strongly in favour of methodologies and approaches that enable Chinese scholarship to integrate better into the wider discipline. Yan has been particularly vocal in his opposition to the notion of a ‘Chinese School’ and is highly regarded in China as an expert in and advocate of ‘the scientific method’
Despite this principled position, however, Yan has recently invested significant time and resources into discovering what ancient Chinese thought might contribute to contemporary international relations theory. As a result, Yan is now (somewhat ironically) identified by his contemporaries as the creator or founding father of the ‘Tsinghua School’ of international relations theory (Zhang Feng 2012b: 79-80, see also pp. 177-181) a potential candidate for the Chinese School so many of them are attempting to build. The debate continues within (and beyond) China, with scholars divided on whether or not they should seek to live inside or outside the colonial household of IR.

While some scholars have been debating the need for a Chinese School to maintain the distinctiveness (separateness) of Chinese research, others have been using the Chinese School idea as a mechanism for improving China’s position within the discursive hierarchy of the parochial/global discipline of IR. Scholars such as Qin Yaqing – widely regarded as the Chinese School’s strongest advocate – have argued that Chinese scholarship is not theoretical enough and needs to innovate theoretically in order to compete with western scholarship. As Agathangelou and Ling’s work demonstrates, international relations discourse tends to regard ‘theory’ as superior to ‘practical knowledge’ about world politics. To use the analogy of the colonial household, theorists occupy the privileged (upstairs) positions in the household, whereas ‘non-theorists’ exist downstairs, providing accounts of practical experience with which to feed/sustain the theorists upstairs. As I have discussed previously, such a distinction between theory and practice – between ‘the world’ and our understandings of it – cannot be easily maintained, yet it continues to be made (and clung to) by IR scholars around the world and exists as yet another of IR’s mythological tales. It is frequently invoked by Chinese School advocates who are attempting to carve out a position for themselves upstairs as knowledge-producers rather than downstairs as servants to the (western) master theorists (Ren Xiao 2009, Wang Yiwei 2009).

In each of these debates, scholars occupy a variety of different positions and take numerous approaches to situating Chinese knowledge about the world within the parochial/global discipline of international relations. As will
become clear, there is no singular, easily-identifiable ‘Chinese IR’ to be found in these debates, no unifying themes one could use to describe the key elements of a Chinese IR. Instead, what such debates reveal are the numerous attempts by so-called Chinese IR scholars to define their contributions to thinking about the world against the ‘ideal type’ parochial/global discipline of IR. I hope to capture some of these attempts in the encounters I examine below but what follows is necessarily selective and can serve only to give a flavour of those interactions and their impacts over the past 30 or so years. Ultimately, these are debates about disciplinary identity or self-image; they enable us to see how Chinese scholarship is actively performing ‘the discipline’, sometimes in subversive ways. In Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1995), he explores the model of the panopticon and the general concept of panopticism. This provides a particularly useful illustration of how Chinese scholars are themselves complicit in disciplining the discipline; in discursively creating the parochial/global discipline of IR from which they are excluded or permitted to enter only under certain conditions. Foucault writes;

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection (Foucault 1995: 202-203).

In much the same way, the more Chinese scholars self-consciously debate the discipline and their place within it, the more they are actively constructing that discipline often (though not always) in ways that place Chinese scholarship in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis the parochial/global discipline. In performing the discipline of international relations, the Chinese scholar becomes “the principle of his own subjection” (Foucault 1995: 203). Yet here too the myth(s) of the discipline are haunted by the ghosts of what they attempt to leave out. The ‘House’ that IR’s myths seek to build, that Chinese scholarship is actively involved in building, is, in each of those discursive encounters, being simultaneously torn down. As I seek to demonstrate in the analysis that follows, myths of purity and separation are simply that, myths. The (absent) presence of
diversity and hybridity in international relations discourse within, about and beyond China haunts those myths of separation, structure and exclusion, and shows the “House of IR” for what it is – another ‘IR’ myth.

**A cautionary note: more ghosts ahead**

Before continuing to discuss the various encounters Chinese IR scholars have had (are having) with the colonial house(hold) of international relations, it is necessary to once again reflect on my own complicity in IR’s myth-making processes, which became clear in the writing of this chapter. When I took an earlier version of this chapter to a workshop on ‘the Chinese School of IR and its Critics’ in Beijing in July 2013, I was confronted with the rather painful realisation that I too was (re)producing IR myths in my own work. After presenting the paper to an audience of Chinese scholars, many of whom feature in the stories that fill these pages, I should have been pleased as I was met with a generally positive reaction to the paper. But one comment, from Professor Song Xinning, unnerved me. He said; “I really like the paper; I think it’s great how you have captured the various stages of development of the IR discipline in China”. The stages of development myth, which my previous chapter attempts to pick apart, had snuck into my own (critical) story-telling too. In attempting to provide a critical analysis of the encounters between Chinese IR scholarship and the colonial household that is ‘the discipline’, I had failed to notice my own complicity in re-telling one of Chinese IR’s creation myths. This, I believe, demonstrates how powerful such myths are in international relations discourse and gives notice to the perils and indeed limitations of writing critically. Is such complicity unavoidable? Perhaps. What follows is yet another attempt to avoid such myth-making in my writing but I shall leave it up to the reader to judge whether or not I have been successful in this regard. Below I tell of some key encounters that Chinese IR scholars have had (are having) with the parochial/global discipline of IR; the ghosts, I fear, remain.
Many attempts to situate Chinese knowledge of international politics have emphasised the need for a distinctively Chinese approach, to theoretical work in particular. Many such efforts focus, therefore, on the difference or uniqueness of Chinese approaches to that of ‘mainstream’ or ‘western’ IR. Such arguments are often used by Chinese scholars as a method for distancing their research from what they often describe as the western-centric discipline of IR. Many critics of such research programmes have also based their critique upon similar assumptions, arguing that Chinese scholarship should be engaging with and learning from ‘western’ scholarship in order to play an active (if still unequal) role in the production of international relations discourse. In both sets of arguments, the concept of ‘western’ or ‘mainstream’ IR is taken for granted as a fixed and recognisable entity against which Chinese contributions can be judged. Such debates see Chinese scholars constructing a “House of IR” either to enter into or to remain outside of it. Yet in these same discursive performances, ghostly hauntings trouble the categories of ‘western’ and ‘Chinese’ that they rely upon, reminding us of the fragility of those categories and the mythical nature of the claims to racial purity or absolute otherness that underpin them.

**Chinese Characteristics as resistance**

One of the first scholars to argue for the need to clearly distinguish Chinese IR research from that of ‘the west’, or the US in particular, was Liang Shoude of Peking University. Liang has argued since the late 1980s for the need to build an IR theory with Chinese characteristics. His widely used textbook *Guoji zhengzhi gailun* (Introduction to International Politics) opens with a chapter dedicated to setting out the case for ‘Chinese characteristics’ in IR research (Liang Shoude 1991). His later work takes the argument further by setting out a series of steps for Chinese scholars to take towards achieving an IR theory with ‘Chinese characteristics’ (Liang Shoude 1994, 1997b: 27, Liang and Hong 2000, 2013). Liang’s position is predicated on the assumption that China has a distinct role to
play in international politics and that it is therefore important to adapt (or even replace) ‘western’ theories to fit Chinese realities. In the 1980s calls for an ‘IR theory with Chinese characteristics’ were closely related to the dominant political rhetoric at the time. Deng Xiaoping’s opening address to the 12th Party Congress in September 1982 called for the “establishment of socialism with Chinese characteristics” and is seen as the official introduction of the phrase ‘Chinese characteristics’ (中国特色, Zhongguo tese) into the Chinese vernacular. Whilst idea to create a China-specific approach to international relations may have an earlier origin (Shi Bin 2006: 520), at least initially, the term ‘Chinese characteristics’ was closely tied to official government discourse or Party-State rhetoric. As Chan points out, during the late 1980s calls for “… with Chinese characteristics” pervaded every area of the social sciences and beyond.\(^{21}\) Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the term Chinese characteristics was widely adopted by IR scholars because it “confer[ed] some kind of authority or legitimacy within China” (Chan 1998a: 4). As a result, the debates surrounding IR theory with Chinese characteristics were highly motivated by political rhetoric. This also helps to explain why many of the debates that took place between Chinese scholars on the merits (or otherwise) of IR theory with Chinese characteristics were “unrewarding, divisive and occasionally acrimonious” (Zhang Yongjin 2002: 107).

IR theory with Chinese characteristics was closely tied, therefore, to Den Xiaoping’s belief that as China modernised and became more outward-looking it needed also to guard its distinctiveness (Deng Xiaoping 1983). The concept of ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ was an important element of, and/or justification for, the reform and opening movement that had begun under Deng’s leadership in the late 1970s. It can be seen as a tool used by Deng Xiaoping and the Party-State to negotiate the many challenges associated with the introduction of market reforms, often characterised as “western influences”, into China’s socialist state system (Callahan 2001: 77). The reform and opening

\(^{21}\) These included “socialist economy with Chinese characteristics”, “socialist politics with Chinese characteristics”, “modernisation with Chinese characteristics”, “theory of higher education with Chinese characteristics”, “study of diplomacy with Chinese characteristics” and even “agricultural modernisation with Chinese characteristics” (Chan 1998a: 3).
policies brought this same challenge – of increasing western influence – to research in the field of international relations. This period saw the introduction for the first time of IR theories from the US and is frequently labelled in Chinese accounts of IR’s disciplinary history as a phase of “learning from the west” (Qin Yaqing 2010a: 29, Wang Yiwei 2009, Song Xinning 2013). A number of so-called ‘classical’ works of international relations theory were translated during this period (see p.123) and many more introductions to “Western International Relations” were published (Chen Lemin 1981, Chen Hanwen 1985, Ni Shixiong 1986, Ni Shixiong and Jin Yinghong 1987). As China’s IR myths tell us, it was these early works of translation that had a biggest impact on Chinese international relations research (Wang and Dan 2008: 19). Mirroring in a sense how the phrase was used in Party-State rhetoric, a number of Chinese scholars sought to use Chinese characteristics as a defence against what they saw as encroaching western/US influence on their discipline and their research. Emphasising Chinese characteristics was thus a type of protectionism against ‘spiritual pollution’ from the west or, less strongly, it was necessary to protect a young discipline from a richer, more established field in the west. As Gerald Chan comments; “if the academic study of IR in China is solid and strong, then there is no need to develop such an apparently parochial theory” (Chan 1998a: 12), yet many scholars felt the need to protect their ‘fledgling’ work from the encroaching, and intellectually dominant west/US.

Instead of looking for possible compatibility and accommodation, the traditional, conservative IR scholars apparently put emphasis on the preservation of Chinese uniqueness as a way to resist the encroachment of Western scholarship … To meet the challenge posed by Western IR theory, they try to develop something which they can call their own – a theory of IR with Chinese characteristics (Chan 1998a: 22-23).

Advocating IR theory with Chinese characteristics was, for some Chinese scholars, a strategy of resistance against western influence, or against the influence of the “House of IR”.

147
Chinese IR: ‘ours’ not ‘theirs’

Even as the political overtones of the Chinese characteristics debate have faded since the mid-1990s, and the arguments on both sides have become more complex, this theme – of emphasising distinctiveness and separation – has continued. Many Chinese scholars are continuing to argue strongly for the need to have their own distinctive approach to/theory of international relations that will reflect the uniqueness of Chinese culture and politics, past, present and future, thus maintaining Chinese IR’s separation from the parochial/global discipline. The work of Zhao Tingyang, or more specifically its reception by Chinese IR scholars, is illustrative of this point. Zhao, who is not an IR scholar but rather a professor of philosophy at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), has nonetheless been instrumental in driving forward the idea within Chinese international relations discourse that China does and indeed should have its own unique approach to world politics. In 2005 Zhao published his influential book The Tianxia System, which very quickly became a best seller in China (Zhao Tingyang 2005). His English-language article, which provides a condensed version of his thesis, has also been widely read in and beyond China (Zhao Tingyang 2006). Chinese IR scholars continue to point to Zhao’s re-working of the ancient concept of Tianxia (天下, all under heaven) as one of the best examples of Chinese innovation in international relations thinking. One of the reasons Zhao’s work was so popular was that it “caught a wave of interest in Chinese-style solutions to world problems” (Callahan 2008: 750). It attempted to translate an ancient Chinese idea/ideal into something that could be applied to contemporary international relations. For Chinese scholars interested in building a Chinese School of IR theory, Zhao’s re-worked Tianxia provides a potential starting point for describing China’s unique approach to ordering the world and demonstrating the radically different nature of Chinese and western worldviews. Wang Yiwei, for example, cites Zhao’s work as one of the most valuable contributions to the attempts to construct a Chinese-style IR theory in recent years (Wang Yiwei 2009: 109). He argues that (Zhao’s reading of) tianxia demonstrates a radically different way of imagining ‘the world’ that emphasises the fundamental political nature of the Chinese worldview, which is a
collectivist worldview as opposed to a western individualistic one (Wang Yiwei 2009: 111). What is most important about Zhao’s work is the manner in which Chinese IR scholars have seized upon the ideas within it as evidence of China’s unique outlook and unique perspectives that make it deserving of its own, separate, IR. Wang Jiangli, for example, lists Zhao Tingyang’s *tianxia* concept alongside Qin Yaqing’s theory of relations and Yan Xuetong’s study of pre-Qin philosophy as key contributions to “building Chinese international relations theory” (Wang Jiangli 2013: 79, see also Li Wei 2007, Su Changhe 2009). Many ‘non-Chinese’ observers/participants have also cited Zhao’s work as an important attempt to build a uniquely Chinese approach and have taken the concept of *tianxia* as a motif that represents the radical difference of a Chinese approach to understanding (and ordering) the world (Paltiel 2011, Hueckel 2013, Noesselt 2013).

The desire to define an approach to international politics that is Chinese (and not western) sits at the heart of the Chinese School project. Having a Chinese School of IR is about Chinese scholars producing theory of their own. As one Chinese scholar explains: “It is not the Soviet theory, nor the American theory, nor even the theory that could be accepted by the whole world. It must be *Chinese opinions* of international affairs and the culmination of *Chinese understandings* of the laws of development of the international community” (Zhang Mingqian in Callahan 2001: 77). “The ‘Chinese School’ will originate from local (Chinese) culture, historical tradition, and practical experience” (Qin Yaqing in Zhang Feng 2012a: 77). It is, therefore, about producing knowledge of the world that comes from ‘us’ (China) not ‘them’ (the West) (Callahan 2001: 77, also Ren Xiao 2000). It is *Chinese* theory not *Western*; ours not theirs.

These differences are made explicit in a recent publication by Xin Yishan (2012) called *Chinese-style IR Theory*. In the introduction, Xin defends his

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22 When discussing my project with Professor Qin Yaqing, he urged me to spend time considering Zhao’s work in this thesis since, alongside his own efforts at creating a Chinese School, Zhao was the leading scholar in this regard. I could quite easily have taken up his suggestion, but sadly a project such as this must know its limits and not attempt to go beyond them. For further explanation and critique of Zhao’s work see Callahan 2008, Barabantseva 2009.
use of the term ‘Chinese-style’ IR, claiming it is easily understood shorthand for Chinese scholars. He argues that the prefix ‘Chinese-style’ (中国式, Zhongguo shi) instantly tells readers the inner meaning of the theory, which reflects China’s long historical tradition of striving for morality (道德, daode) and peace (和平, heping) (Xin Yishan 2012: 1). Xin’s book provides a comprehensive exposition of what ‘Chinese-style’ IR looks like, which is predicated upon setting it apart from western approaches. In this comprehensive study, Xin attempts to explain all key aspects of what a specifically Chinese IR theory looks like and also sets out ways in which existing Chinese-style IR can be strengthened. Xin argues that a desire for peace (和平, heping) is the most basic or fundamental element that defines the Chinese approach to IR and sets it apart from existing western approaches (Xin Yishan 2012: 15). Xin traces the influence of Chinese political thought from Confucius and the early years of the Chinese empire, through Marxism, the Cultural Revolution and up to contemporary Chinese diplomacy arguing that peace and ethics/morality (道德, daode) remain defining features throughout. For Xin there are four key elements to a contemporary Chinese-style IR, which (helpfully) mirror the position and language of current PRC foreign policy. The first of these is the theory of peaceful co-existence; the idea that countries with different political systems and/or outlooks can interact, trade and live happily beside one another without conflict arising. The second is the belief that even in the midst of international crisis an “orderly evolution” can be found. Both of these characteristics, according to Xin, stem from an engrained Chinese belief in the value of order above all else. Thirdly, Xin highlights the potential for every country to develop peacefully without harming the interests of other countries. Xin argues that changes in the international environment mean it is possible for a country to develop peacefully through economic means and not damage the overall international system. He gives example of countries that have been successful in this regard post-WWII, such as Brazil, Singapore, India and, of course, China (Xin Yishan 2012: 8-9). Finally, Xin argues that humanity is, in general, moving toward greater harmony and cultural/civilisational (文明, wenming) progress (Xin Yishan 2012: 10). According
to Xin, these features clearly (and in a way that is obvious to all Chinese scholars) distinguish Chinese approaches from the ‘western’ approaches that have until now dominated international relations discourse. One key area of difference, according to Xin, is that western IR approaches focus on power (权力, quanli), whereas Chinese-style IR focuses on benefit/interests (利益, liyi) (Xin Yishan 2012: 94). Yet overall, Xin spends very little time setting out what western approaches look like or how they have dominated IR theory up to now. Xin also takes for granted certain aspects of the international political system that other Chinese scholars have argued are profoundly western. For example, he frames his Chinese-style approach in terms of interactions between sovereign nation-states, existing in an anarchical international environment (Xin Yishan 2012: 60) and accepts a number of assumptions about the nature and scope of international relations that Zhao Tingyang’s work, for example, would reject. Xin’s book is significant, however, as it clearly demonstrates the desire amongst some Chinese scholars to emphasise distinctiveness in Chinese IR, even if there is disagreement amongst those scholars as to what it is that makes a Chinese approach distinctively Chinese.

**Scientism as engagement**

Nevertheless, at the same time a number of Chinese scholars have been arguing against emphasising China’s distinctiveness as it might create a barrier to them contributing fully to the parochial/global discipline. For example, Song Xinning of Renmin University, Beijing, made an impassioned argument against the use of the term ‘Chinese characteristics’ in the early 2000s because it was preventing Chinese scholars from entering into debates with their western counterparts. Song argued that, despite appearances, many Chinese scholars were highly critical of the idea but were unable to openly criticise it because of the political overtones of the Chinese characteristics formula. This type of critique was rarely recorded in publications but could be found in the exchanges at academic conferences where the topic was hotly debated throughout the 1980s and early 1990s (Song Xinning 2001: 68). Song’s main contention with the
idea was that it prevented Chinese scholars from participating in global debates because it contradicted claims of universality made by existing (western) IR theories. Many, often younger, scholars rejected the Chinese characteristics argument because they believed it to be “a backward step, one that would ensure the continued isolation of Chinese scholarship from Western IR” (Johnston 2002: 34). Many of those who were critical of Chinese characteristics in the 1980s and 1990s had studied at American universities and were critical of their colleagues’ attempts to remain outside of the parochial/global discipline (Yan Xuetong in Lu Xing 2011). They saw learning English, application of ‘western theories’ (usually realism of one form or another) and adoption of scientific approaches as the way for Chinese scholars to cross the threshold (back) into the discipline (Lieberthal 1986). Song Xinning was (and remains) highly critical of his colleagues who do not speak English well and has argued that more of the Chinese graduates who study in the US must return to China so that they can pass on the skills and knowledge they have learnt through teaching and translation (Song Xining 2001: 72, own interview July 2013).

Researchers, like Song, argue that IR scholars in China should apply scientific theories to Chinese realities in order that they might produce knowledge universally accepted and applicable across cultural and national boundaries (Song Xinning 2001: 68-9). Similarly, Yan Xuetong has invested the best part of his career promoting scientific approaches to IR research and opposes recent attempts to build a Chinese School on the grounds that it contradicts the universality of IR theory (Yan Xuetong 2006b). Any attempt to create a ‘national’ (parochial) school of thought undermines existing theories of IR and is therefore not adding to the discipline. Yan’s approach is, instead, to refine those theories by testing them against, and adding knowledge from, Chinese experience. For Yan, and other critics of the Chinese School idea, it is more important for Chinese scholars to engage with existing, ‘western’ theories of IR than to create their own rival theory(ies). Participating in the discipline (household) of IR should be the main goal for Chinese scholarship and scholars ought to learn or adapt as necessary to enable this to happen rather than
focussing on their own distinctiveness and claiming a Chinese School before such a thing even exists.

**The ghost of diversity: a ‘western IR’ straw man?**

In all of these attempts, however, the figure of ‘western IR’ is taken for granted as a fixed, stable, known identity against which Chinese IR can be judged and which Chinese IR can contribute to, refine or replace. Chinese scholars, keen to emphasise the distinctiveness of Chinese culture, philosophy and history from the ‘western’ modes of thinking that dominate IR, argue that China’s peace-loving nature and harmonious approach to ordering the world sets them apart from the violent or aggressive western (colonial) traditions that sit at the heart of international relations (theory and practice). These types of arguments are made by both advocates for and critics of the Chinese School idea. Both Yan Xuetong and Qin Yaqing (see chapters 5 and 6) talk about ‘western’ or ‘mainstream’ IR as a fixed and obvious category, yet such a strict separation between Chinese and western – between harmonious orderer and aggressive colonialist – is difficult to maintain. The myth of an IR discipline with a clearly defined inside and outside, that Chinese scholars can (chose to) enter into or not, is troubled by the ghostliness of the borders between ‘Chinese’ and ‘western’, inside and outside, that make possible such claims.

The scholars who originally advocated IR theory with Chinese characteristics, usually described as conservatives or the ‘old guard’, used the notion of Chinese characteristics as a way to remain outside the influence of the discipline of international relations; as a way to prevent their ‘purity’ being contaminated by mixing with members of this (western) household. Likewise, some advocates for creating a Chinese School have focused on the distinctiveness of China’s culture and history as a way to demonstrate their separation from (innocence of) western (colonial) ways of ordering the world. Yet as we begin to look at their arguments more closely, the fragility of the borders that they draw between western and Chinese (between inside and outside) becomes more apparent. The ‘purity’ or isolation from western influences that conservative scholars such as Liang Shoude were trying to
protect was very closely tied to the centrality of Marxism as the basis for social science theories. It is worth noting that Liang Shoude – closely associated with the drive for IR with Chinese characteristics – is also considered by Chinese IR scholars today as China’s leading (and perhaps only remaining) Marxist IR scholar. As an illustration, every time I have asked about where Marxism features in contemporary Chinese international relations research, I have been pointed towards the work of Liang Shoude. For Liang, as with most scholars who were advocating the concept of Chinese characteristics in the 1980s and 90s, IR theory should always take Marxism as a guide (Liang Shoude 2004, Chan 1998a: 8, Li Bin 2005). Marxism forms not only the basis for Liang’s consideration of what IR with Chinese characteristics might look like but it also forms the basis of his philosophical defence for emphasising national characteristics in the first place. Liang employs Marxist dialectics to argue for the need for all IR theory to emphasise its own (national) characteristics as a way to eventually get closer to the ‘truth’ about international relations. Liang writes: “only when we master the dialectical relationship between uniqueness and generality can we understand that emphasising country-specific characteristics is a pursuit of perfection in social science research” (Liang Shoude 1997b: 29). There are many other examples of scholars emphasising the importance of Marxism for IR with Chinese characteristics, including, for example, Yang Zheng and Zhang Zhi (see Wang Lian 1994). However, both emphasise the need to combine Marxist principles with ancient Chinese theories, IR theories of Chinese leaders, specifically Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping and also, for Yang, “the essence of Western IR theories” (Yang Zheng in Song Xinning 2001: 68). Marxism is claimed by these scholars as a mark of Chinese characteristics, or Chinese cultural specificity. Yet Agathangelou and Ling argue that Marxist approaches maintain “an exclusive reliance on Western intellectual traditions, concepts and methods” (Agathangelou and Ling 2004: 28).

Marxism is at once being claimed as ‘Chinese’ and as ‘western’ demonstrating the malleability (and unhelpfulness) of such categories. Chinese scholars are appealing to Marxism as the basis of international relations theorising, yet they are appealing to a Marxism which itself has so-called
‘Chinese characteristics’. It is a Marxism that has been reinterpreted, merged and changed as it has encountered China, its people and its thought traditions; in particular the contributions of China’s ‘great leaders’ Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. The ghostliness of the line between ‘East’ and ‘West’ that advocates of Chinese characteristics or the Chinese School continue to draw is evident in this debate. There are, here, no pure categories of Chinese or western to speak of. These categories are negotiated anew in each and every interaction between ‘Chinese’ and ‘western’ IR.

Diversity exists within, between and across so-called ‘western’ and ‘Chinese’ international relations discourse: recognising that diversity renders those categories highly problematic. Yet those categories continue to be reproduced through the performance of international relations discourse within and beyond China. Wang Yiwei, for example, argues that “the diversity amongst Chinese IR scholars is no less than among American IR scholars” (Wang Yiwei 2009: 116). Yet, at the same time, Wang talks about ‘western’ IR as a singular entity underpinned by a clearly identifiable ‘western’ culture that is distinctly different from ‘Chinese’ culture. A recent paper he co-authored with one of his students sets out a list of ten key differences between western and Chinese approaches each of which is rooted in the different cultural traditions, which at their most basic level are totally at odds. Wang argues that western culture is based on the concept of universalism, which creates a sense of cultural superiority and its accompanying missionary spirit. He also argues that this makes western culture more suited to abstraction or theory. Chinese culture on the other hand is based on the notion of “tianxia-ism”, which leads to an introverted and learning culture, preferring to absorb rather than conquer. Upon this basis Wang lists 10 key differences between western and Chinese culture, which he argues help to explain why there is not yet a Chinese IR theory. These include, for example, that (western) IR theory is universal, whereas Chinese culture is against universalism (Wang and Han 2013: 4); Chinese thinking is pragmatic not systematic like western thinking (Wang and Han 2013: 12); Chinese culture values the middle way rather than (western) binary opposition (Wang and Han 2013: 13). In each of these examples ‘western IR’ is
taken for granted as a known, fixed identity, completely obscuring the existence of difference within ‘the west’ and helping to sustain the very idea that a distinct ‘west’ exists. In so doing, they create the image of a discipline, or a ‘House of IR’, with a clearly-defined inside and outside; where the west is the house(hold) and the rest is outside of it.

The ‘ghostliness’ of these borders is particularly evident when considering how Chinese scholars have drawn on the English School and scholarship from other European countries to demonstrate the possibilities for producing a unique (alternative) approach to theorising international relations. Since its introduction into Chinese IR discourse in the 1990s, the English School has proved popular amongst Chinese scholars, particularly those working on building a Chinese School (Zhang Yongjin 2003: 100, Peng Zhaochang 1999). Many have asked, as Ren Xiao does, “if it is possible for international relations to have an ‘English School’, then why not a ‘Chinese School’?” (Ren Xiao 2009: 21, 2003). Indeed, “Chinese scholars have begun to purposely link their studies of the English school to the establishment of Chinese international relations theory, expecting to find useful experiences to draw on for developing the discipline” (Lu Peng 2006: 54). One of the earliest papers on the English School published in Chinese described studies of international society as “IR with British characteristics” (Pang Zhongying 1996: 34), directly mirroring the language of debates at that time. Similarly, Chinese scholars have looked to other European IR communities in order to demonstrate the existence of other distinct schools of thought in IR (Hou Ying 2003, Shi Xianze 2008). Leading Chinese-language journal *World Economics and Politics* published a series of articles examining French and German IR scholarship that share a common language with Chinese School debates (Yuan Zhengqing 2006a, Xiong Wei 2009, Yan Shuangwu and Chen Fei 2009). They seek to identify the particular ‘national characteristics’ of the scholarship surveyed and to demonstrate its distinctiveness from ‘mainstream’, western or American approaches.

Chinese School advocates, in their use of the English School and other European examples, are reaffirming IR’s ‘international’ (Westphalian) myth by defining difference along national boundaries. The Englishness of the English
School has been questioned many times, since many of its key members are not in fact English and live and work in different national contexts. Nevertheless, the manner in which Chinese scholars have appropriated this school as an example of non-American IR is revealing. Qin Yaqing, for example, conflates the English School with British IR (Qin Yaqing 2005). His key argument is that Chinese IR needs a distinct core problematic in order to construct its own school of international relations theory. He demonstrates this with the use of two examples; American IR (which here he conflates with neo-realism) and British IR (here, the English School), with respective core problematics of hegemonic maintenance and international society (Qin Yaqing 2005: 65-67). For Qin, difference is defined along national boundaries; US, Britain, China. Yet it does not take much to demonstrate that difference also exists within these national containers, disrupting Qin’s logic and the logic of IR’s myths of origin. To some extent the terminology used by Chinese scholars is unhelpful in this regard as the English School is generally translated into Chinese as ‘British School’ (英国学派, Yingguo xuepai) rather than ‘English School’ (英格兰学派, Yinggelan xuepai). In 2008 Zhang Xiaoming published an article in an effort to remedy this mistranslation, making the argument that the term Yingguo xuepai (英国学派, British School) creates ambiguity that could impact upon scholars’ understanding of the English School. His appeals to colleagues to adopt the ‘correct terminology’ of Yinggelan xuepai (英格兰学派, English School) were, however, largely ignored (Zhang Xiaoming 2008).

In the examples above we see also the slippage between Europe and France/Germany, UK and Europe, Britain and England, USA and West. At times, these categories are used interchangeably, yet at others they are considered distinct. Chinese scholars frequently refer to the introduction of ‘western’ scholarship or ‘western’ IR theories into China from the 1980s, which includes works from American, British, Australian and even Indian scholars. At the same time they use the English School as an alternative to western theories,

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23 Amitav Acharya was born in Orissa, India and educated in India and Australia. A Canadian citizen, he now works predominantly in the US. Looking only at this one example, demonstrates the futility of such national labelling when it comes to individual scholars.
here meaning (American) neorealism. Building these categories of west and non-west, American and British, them and us, is necessary, unavoidable perhaps, for Chinese School advocates to distinguish their contributions from others already present in the parochial/global discipline. Yet it is these same categorisations that are used to construct the mythical ‘House of IR’ over and over (and over) again. In these debates, Chinese scholars are actively disciplining the discipline, creating an illusion of separation between west and east. In so doing, they are creating the sense that Chinese scholarship is, or at least has historically been, outside of the IR household, faced with a dilemma over whether to protect that position or to change it and seek admission into the discipline. Yet such a house only exists as it is discursively created, often by the very scholars who find themselves outside of it.

**Ghostly Encounters (2)**

**Upstairs or downstairs: socialisation, assimilation and distinctiveness**

It is evident from the above discussion that many Chinese scholars are keen to emphasise the distinctiveness of Chinese perspectives on the world and/or international relations, whilst others continue to argue for the need to learn from and adapt to ‘the west’ in order to participate in the parochial/global discipline of IR. Nevertheless, debates about the need for a Chinese School, or Chinese-style IR, are often more complex than such a portrayal suggests. Rather than simply focusing on difference in order to maintain separation from ‘the discipline’, many of those advocating a Chinese School of IR see it as a way to enter into a dialogue with existing IR scholarship, but on more favourable terms. Some recent claims found within Chinese international relations discourse appear to be using the concept of a Chinese School as a deliberate challenge to the apparent parochialism of the discipline of IR. Such scholars are seeking to challenge the west’s (or sometimes specifically the US’s) theoretical dominance; they are demanding a seat at the ‘theorising’ table as equals. Yet the manner in which Chinese scholarship is talked about in such debates frequently serves to reinforce the image of ‘the discipline’ functioning as a colonial household, with
Chinese scholars being portrayed as native servants, socialised children and/or outside challengers. Yet the identities that are discursively created in such debates are neither stable nor fixed. Once again we catch a glimpse of the (absent) presence of hybridity in (Chinese) international relations discourse, undermining again the sanctity of IR’s creation myths.

**Native servants and standards of civilisation**

IR myths in China and beyond function so as to create the sense that a clearly-defined IR discipline exists with definite insiders and outsiders and clear boundaries between them. In order to get ‘inside’, scholars(hip) must fulfil certain criteria in order to be considered legitimate IR research, and even more stringent standards seem to apply for something to be considered international relations theory. The manner in which Chinese scholars discuss the discipline and their place within it reinforces this myth that there is a standard of civilisation that must be attained before entry can be granted into the household. This was reaffirmed for me in a recent interview with Xu Jin from the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS). Xu argued that “there are objective standards to get into ‘the club’; if you don’t meet them then you have to look at yourself and see why you don’t reach the standard” (interview July 2013). Xu told me that the claim that IR in China is not theoretical enough is not a reflection of western bias but is simply an objective reality and it is up to Chinese scholars to fix by bringing their own work up to the standard set by western scholars(hip).

Agathangelou and Ling base their understanding of the colonial household on Ann Laura Stoler’s study of colonial management in Indonesia and Indochina under Dutch and French rule (Stoler 2002). Stoler demonstrates the ways in which colonial logics enabled exclusions and condoned violence in order to maintain order in the household. “Stoler notes, for example, a legal case in French-controlled Indochina where a French father sought clemency for his half-Vietnamese son but was refused on the grounds of the son’s insufficient

24 Xu Jin is a former colleague of Yan Xuetong’s and co-author on much of his pre-Qin project (see chapter 5).
‘Frenchness.’ Yet other mixed-blood progeny were granted European status if they could demonstrate due ‘cultural competence,’ such as feeling alienated when placed among ‘natives’” (Agathangelou and Ling 2004: 23). This example demonstrates the civilising logic of the colonial household: mixed-blood progeny had to prove they had been adequately socialised into the culture and etiquette of the household such that they no longer belonged with the other natives on the outside, only then could they be granted a place within the colonial household. In their recent engagement with the discipline of international relations there is a similar logic at work in the writings of many Chinese scholars: gaining entry into the parochial/global discipline is portrayed as contingent on one’s socialisation into that discipline.

There is ample evidence to suggest that Chinese scholarship has been shaped and directed by this apparent necessity to first learn the discipline before being able to contribute to it. Over the past 30 years, Chinese IR scholars’ use of the English-language has become more widespread and is seen as crucial if Chinese scholars are going to make any sort of contribution to the parochial/global discipline. More importantly, however, Chinese IR scholars are now seen as fully conversant in the technical language, the culture and etiquette of international relations discourse. Standard translations of key terms, names of theories and even names of theorists are widely understood and accepted by both scholars and students in the field. Although as the English School example mentioned above demonstrates, sometimes these are mistranslations. Chinese texts on international relations more often than not frame theoretical debates in terms of the three “-isms”: realism, liberalism and constructivism. For example, some studies attempting to incorporate ancient Chinese thinking into contemporary understandings of IR use these three theories as reference points. They equate contemporary realism with China’s legalist tradition and China’s military and political strategists of the Warring States period, and describe Confucian traditions (including some Daoist and Mohist texts) as variations of idealism (Chen Xiangyang 2004: 25). Other “isms”, such as postmodernism (Li Hongxia 2008) and feminism (Zhou Shaoxue 2010, Hu Chuanrong 1997), have also been taken up by Chinese scholars in recent
years. Wang Yizhou and Yuan Zhengqing’s comprehensive study of the development of international relations research in China from 1995 to 2005 sets out its chapters according to theoretical approach, from realism and constructivism to feminism and the English School (Wang and Yuan 2006). Wang Jisi notes also a preference for the term “international” in Chinese scholarship and institutional set-up, rather than the ‘new’ names many scholars in the west have advocated for the field such as “world politics” or “global politics” (Wang Jisi 2002: 3).

Key IR concepts, such as sovereignty, national interest and balance of power are found throughout Chinese discussions of international relations and IR theory. For example, according to Liang Shoude the interests of “China’s state sovereignty” (中国国际主权, Zhongguo guoji zhuquan) are at the heart of an IR theory with Chinese characteristics (Chan 1998a: 8). ‘Sovereignty’ is seen as the foundation of a Chinese theory of IR, yet this concept, which is closely associated with IR’s Westphalian myth and firmly rooted in IR’s colonial past (and present), is stable neither in the west nor in China (Callahan 2001: 83). The legacy of IR’s creation myths and dominant categories is evident in much scholarship that claims to be characteristically Chinese as well as that which does not. One interesting example of this at work can be found in the work of Taiwanese scholars Shih Chih-yu and Huang Chiung-chui (Shih and Huang 2013). Shih and Huang describe their “Balance of Relationships” (BoR) theory as a complimentary addition to existing theories of international relations. A system of balance of relationships exists in parallel to balance of power in the international system. According to BoR theory, nation-states place high value on maintaining strong bilateral relationships and will often use compromise and confrontation to restore bilateral relations rather than merely seeking to increase their own relative power. It is a theory of long-term behaviour in the international system and, according to its creators, helps to better explain the behaviour of nation-states in the contemporary international system both in Asia and beyond.

BoR predicts that national actors will not consistently stick to any specific synchronic ways of rational thinking in the long
run. Rather, they will always try to achieve stabilized reciprocal relationships no matter how deterministic or opportunistic they might appear in the short run in their pursuit of security, prosperity, global governance, peace, etc. It is a system of bilateral relations that relies on reciprocal tolerance instead of shared values (Shih and Huang 2013: 3).

Shih and Huang argue that their new theoretical approach provides a uniquely different perspective for understanding international relations by drawing upon unique Chinese cultural traditions. Specifically, they draw upon the notion of guanxi (关系, relationships) culture in Chinese worldviews. In BoR theory, as in Shih and Huang’s understanding of Chinese Confucianism, long-term stability of relationships and the concept of reciprocity are more important than short-term (short-lived) gains. Nevertheless, Shih and Huang deliberately use the language of neorealist IR in order to explain their new theory derived from Confucian culture and tradition. The result is something that is claimed to be ‘Chinese’ but is also framed by the Eurocentric ideas and concepts (about the ‘international’ system, about the nature of power etc.) that form the building blocks of neorealist theory and international relations discourse in the parochial/global discipline of IR. The technical language of ‘international relations’ is widely used in Chinese discussions of world politics, carrying with it all the same contradictions and exclusions of any colonial discourse.

What is more, Chinese IR scholars are keen to instruct their own ‘progeny’ in the etiquette of international relations discourse. Introductory textbooks adopt similar categorisations of theories/approaches and reproduce the creation myths that sit at the heart of international relations discourse in the parochial/global discipline. This is evident in the following statement from an associate professor at Peking University:

The old generation of professors are trained in Marxism, they do not know Hans Morgenthau, they do not know what structural realism is. We learned by ourselves. Today we can teach this to our students (Yu Wanli, interview 2010 cited in Kristensen and Nielsen 2010: 41).

Li Shaojun’s popular textbook, like most others, introduces IR theory as a choice between realism, liberalism and constructivism (Li Shaojun 2009). When
textbooks do include possible Chinese approaches or contributions to the study of world politics, they are almost always located in a chapter at the end of the book (Li Shaojun 2009, Gao Shangtao 2009) or as part of the introduction (Liang and Hong 2000). Undergraduate courses in IR include key readings from English-language journals and are sometimes taught in English by visiting scholars from abroad. As Alistair Iain Johnston has observed, “the topics covered in Qin Yaqing’s IR syllabus at the Foreign affairs University look very similar to a typical list in a US undergraduate course of IR” (Johnston 2002: 32-3). Associate professor Zhang Feng explains why this is the case: “If you teach theory in classrooms still you have to teach Western theory because they are well established ... We [Chinese] do not have established theories yet” (Zhang Feng interview 2010 cited in Kristensen and Nielsen 2010: 48). One of the consequences of this drive to prove their acculturation into the colonial household is that myths about the discipline and its historical emergence are habitually retold by Chinese scholars (see pp. 106-108). In so doing, they are perpetuating IR’s creation myths which construct the discipline in China as not different but behind, and Chinese IR scholarship as occupying a lesser position within the discursive hierarchy of international relations; the so-called colonial household. By reinforcing the idea that international relations is a “western phenomenon” (Hou Ying 2003: 27), Chinese scholars are helping to uphold the image of a ‘House of IR’ and its European (colonial) foundations. In so-doing they consistently reiterate their own position outside of it, awaiting permission to enter from their colonial masters.

Even when Chinese scholars(hip) is permitted to enter into such a dialogue, it is not (always) on equal terms. In the colonial household roles are hierarchically ordered and not all roles are available to an outsider who manages to earn a place inside of it. The following excerpt from a 19th century colonial “housewife’s guide” is illustrative of this point:

the whole duty of an Indian mistress towards her servants is neither more or [sic.] less than it is in England ... Here, as there, the end and object is not merely personal comfort, but the formation of a home – that unit of civilisation where father and children, master and servant, employer and employed,
can learn their several duties (Steel and Gardiner [1888] 2010: 16, my emphases).

In the colonial household, each member of that household clearly knows and understands their place and attendant duties. The colonial household image is useful (up to a point) in demonstrating the impacts of (self)disciplining on Chinese IR discourse in constructing it as subordinate to IR discourse from the US and, to a lesser extent, (western) Europe. The manner in which such debates play out creates a situation whereby Chinese contributions to international relations discourse are considered derivative of and/or subordinate to the contributions from established (western) IR scholars, the so-called “masters of the house” (Agathangelou and Ling 2004). Chinese scholars are seen to exist only as “Native Others”. They can learn the etiquette of the household and even pass it onto their ‘children’ but they cannot escape their visible ‘Otherness’.

These Native Others – “non-western, non-white sources of knowledge, traditions, or worlds” – may, according to Agathangelou and Ling, “be smuggled in as ‘servants’ or ‘wards’ of the House but otherwise are not recognised as identities in their own right” (Agathangelou and Ling 2004: 27). Socialised Chinese scholars thus come to resemble native informants. They are the servants to the household, permitted only in certain (downstairs) areas, servicing the needs of household members without recognition or respect. They provide valuable ‘local’ knowledge, which western theorists – those living upstairs in the house – cannot access due to language difficulties and the time required to conduct fieldwork in places like China, but they are not permitted to enter the spaces occupied by such theorists. “Those upstairs depend on the ethnographic sustenance and services provided by those downstairs,” yet a line of demarcation is created to prevent such servants becoming theorists in their own right (Agathangelou and Ling 2004: 30-1).

As I explored in chapter 3, the contributions made to international relations by Chinese scholars have consistently been characterised as un-theoretical, by commentators from within and beyond China (Acharya and Buzan 2010, Qin Yaqing 2010a). By consistently reproducing the image that Chinese scholarship is theoretically weak, Chinese scholars themselves are
authorising – or indeed actively performing – their own position as servants working downstairs in a hierarchically ordered household. As a result, they are required to change, to become more theoretical, in order to reach the upper floors of the discipline. Many recent attempts to create a Chinese School of IR theory merely serve to reinforce the myth of a hierarchically structured discipline which Chinese scholars are not (yet) able to reach the top of.

*Getting upstairs: inventors not copiers*

The response of many Chinese scholars to this situation – which they have played an integral part in creating – is to strive to create a Chinese School of international relations theory so that their contributions might be considered theoretical enough to compete with the leaders in the field; to become more than simply native informants aiding and supporting their western (colonial) masters but theorists (masters) in their own right. To use Holsti’s (1985) terminology, they are staking a claim on becoming producers not simply consumers of theoretical knowledge. They wish to be recognised “not just as *disciples* of Western schools of thought but as *inventors of their own approaches*” (Acharya and Buzan 2010: back cover, emphasis added). Many of the proponents of the Chinese School see their work as an attempt to challenge their (apparent) marginalised position in the parochial/global discipline and demand greater recognition for China’s (unique) contributions. Yet rather than undermining ‘the discipline’, such attempts and, crucially, the manner in which they are (re)presented frequently reproduce the myth of international relations as a western discipline to which Chinese scholars do not (yet) belong.

As Ren Xiao argues, the Chinese School project is far more confident and self-aware than earlier attempts to bring Chinese characteristics into international relations theory (Ren Xiao 2009). Many advocates of a Chinese School approach are clear about what they wish to achieve by creating a Chinese School, particularly in terms of how their work relates to the parochial/global discipline. For example, in one of the earliest essays to call for the establishment of a Chinese School of IR, Mei Ran encouraged his colleagues to actively promote a “Chinese brand” in order to expose the unfair/inequitable
situation in the current field of international politics. He wrote “Chinese IR scholars ought to make every effort to demonstrate innovation and independence in their research, to establish a ‘Chinese School of international politics’”, in order to shift from a “singular core” system of IR theory to a “multi-core” one (Mei Ran 2000). From Mei Ran’s perspective, therefore, the Chinese School project is motivated by a desire to displace American (realist) IR from the dominant position in the parochial/global discipline. However, in making such claims, scholars like Mei Ran are also reaffirming the myths of the discipline that grant American (realist) IR that dominant position. In order to stake a claim to a place in the disciplinary hierarchy, that they have helped to construct and maintain, Chinese scholars frequently succumb to the pitfalls that Shilliam warns us of by either assimilating into colonial narratives or rendering their contributions as profoundly exotic (Shilliam 2010: 4). Chinese scholars make claims to be inventors not copiers in IR either through replicating the logic of IR’s colonial underpinnings and repeating Stanley Hoffmann’s claim that theoretical dominance follows material wealth and power (assimilating) or by emphasising the unique contribution that Chinese theory can bring (exoticising) or, as is frequently the case, some combination of both.

Hoffmann’s original critique of American dominance in international relations was founded on the notion that American scholarship’s virtual monopoly on theory production was sustained by American dominance of world politics (Hoffmann 1977). Rather, that US material ‘power’ ensures the country’s dominance in knowledge-production too. Yet instead of challenging the inequalities identified by Hoffmann, Chinese scholars use the same logic to claim that their contributions to IR theory now deserve a place at the table; a position of privilege within the colonial household. When Chinese School advocates claim that China should now be contributing to international relations theorising because of the country’s rapid economic growth and rising status in global politics, they are discursively linking the ability to speak in international relations discourse to the possession of material wealth/power. The PRC’s growing material (and political) power is seen both to justify and to facilitate the creation of a Chinese School of IR, which can make a genuine
contribution to the parochial/global discipline. Wang Yizhou, for example makes the following observations:

From the strict meaning of ‘great power’ (大国, daguo), a great power never permanently depends on other countries, whether in terms of politics, economy, thinking, or culture, unless it is colonised or semi-colonised. In light of this, it is unacceptable and impossible for a great power to be dependent on other countries … *It is very uncommon to see great powers simply copying each other* (Wang Yizhou 1998: 19-20, emphasis added).

In their efforts to define or create a Chinese School of IR theory, many scholars have explicitly linked their project(s) to China’s current rise. “Will China’s rise bring the rise of Chinese IR theory?” is a commonly asked question amongst Chinese IR scholars (Wang Yiwei 2009: 114). Most believe that it will or at least ought to. Chan claims that China’s growing economic, political and military strength demand other countries take greater notice of Chinese thinking on international relations (Chan 1998a: 3). At the same time, Chinese scholars argue that, as a rising world power, China must develop a greater theoretical understanding of the world (Wang Yizhou 2005b). “To be a ‘true world power’ China needs to excel not just in economic production, but in ‘knowledge production’ as well” (Zhao Tingyang 2005: 1). Chinese scholars are concerned that if Chinese IR research is not up to scratch it will hamper China’s rise on the world stage. This type of (patriotic) worrying is common amongst Chinese intellectuals, as I argued in chapter 3. In many of these claims, however, we see the same colonial discourse that links the requirement of material wealth with participation in knowledge production at work in the Chinese School project. As Agathangelou and Ling argue, IR’s “structural intimacy with capitalist-patriarchy” permits it to continue authoring knowledge or understandings of our world (Agathangelou and Ling 2004: 22). By reproducing the same intimacy with global capitalism, Chinese scholarship works to uphold and reproduce the myth of the ‘House of IR’.

At the same time, Chinese School advocates also have a tendency to exoticise their theoretical contributions in their attempts to claim a place for
them within the parochial/global discipline. For some scholars, it is through emphasising the distinctiveness of Chinese tradition and culture that they are able to claim a place for their theories within the perceived disciplinary hierarchy. This is evident in the following comment made by an associate professor when asked why Yan Xuetong might want to do research into ancient Chinese thought:

Yan Xuetong mentioned a very practical reason [for researching ancient Chinese thought]. He said ‘For Chinese scholars, if you are doing research with American style theory you cannot surpass those American scholars. Because all these theories are rooted in Western culture. So you can only follow up, you cannot surpass that. So if you want to do a real achievement, you need to do something that the Westerners cannot understand.’ [laughing] So Confucius is a good thing. (anonymous associate professor in Kristensen and Nielsen 2013: 109).

Such statements betray a continued reliance on (colonial) categories of west and non-west that confer positions of privilege and marginality on the scholarship from respective locations. In this way they help to sustain the colonial logic of ‘the House’ that claims the west speaks for all, the Chinese School (or Latin American, African, Japanese, Islamic etc.) speaks only for itself (Agathangelou and Ling 2004: 38). This colonising move is a familiar one. It works here to marginalise Chinese scholarship, labelling it a new source of knowledge to be added to existing (universal) theories about the world. These new sources of knowledge from the third world or global south are often treated as ‘exotica’; as Others totally separate, distinct. By emphasising the Chinese School’s distinct identity, Chinese scholars are compounding this problem. Seeking out ‘new’ knowledge from beyond the west to enrich international relations simply reinforces the non-west’s role as outsiders as objects not subjects of international relations theory. It suggests a separation between east and west that has never existed and helps to sustain the myth of a household from which they are excluded.
The mythical household:
The challenge of diversity and hybridity

Agathangelou and Ling concede that; “like its colonial counterpart, the House of IR seems more solid that it actually is” (Agathangelou and Ling 2009: 8). I would go even further to argue that it is not solid at all but rather is like a mirage in the desert: an image that is under constant (re)construction as light rays are refracted against the air, their meaning interpreted anew by each observer/participant. This ‘discipline’ that Chinese scholars are so eager to enter into, to interact with and to reshape, restructure or reform, is not a real, tangible, structured ‘House’. It is not a place that they can study, charm or force their way into. Rather it exists only as they and we sing it into life. Relationships and borders between outside and inside, downstairs and upstairs in colonial households during the time of formal European empires were also not as simple, clear-cut or well regulated as the images we hold in our heads suggest. The categories of west/Orient and master/slave were never as pure and distinct as colonial discourse suggests: hybridity was (and is) ever-present in those relationships and encounters. For example, as Stoler’s study of colonial household management in Indonesia and Indochina under Dutch and French rule documents:

Up through the turn of the 20th century, more than half of the European men in the Indies lived in domestic arrangements with women who were their servants, sexual partners, concubines, household managers, and sometimes wives and sometimes lovers (Stoler 2002: 136).

The image of the structured, well-ordered colonial household in which each member “can learn their several duties” (Steel and Gardiner [1888] 2010: 16) is simply that, an idealised image that was rarely reflected in the messy and complicated reality of day to day life under European colonial rule. Similar messy, over-lapping and complex relationships exist between the constructed categories of ‘Chinese’ and ‘western’ international relations. Hybridity is ever-present in international relations (theory and practice). Exposing it helps to
discredit the myths of pure origin and separation that the household image relies upon. The parochial/global discipline exists on the basis of myth: the myth of an untainted European history in which the non-west played no part. It is a story in which the international world, and later the study of that world, was conceived and created in (western) Europe in response to European conflicts and their resolutions. It is this myth that situates Chinese scholarship, and all scholarship belonging to the ‘non-west’, as outside, marginal or subordinate to the rest of the discipline. It authorises standards of civilisation that non-western scholarship must meet in order to be brought into the international world and the world of international relations. The myths of order and (racial) purity in international relations persist but are haunted by the absent presence of diversity and hybridity in international relations discourse in, of and for ‘China’.
Chapter Five

The Chinese School according to Yan Xuetong:
Hierarchy, pre-Qin thought and China’s global rise

*The rise of China is granted by nature.*
*They [the Chinese people] believe China’s decline is a historical mistake which they should correct.*
(Yan Xuetong 2001: 33)

*China should behave differently from the US,*
*by providing a different type of international leadership for the world.*
*I am advocating for China to be a humane authority.*
(Yan Xuetong in Creutzfeldt 2012)

In order to explore further the interactions between Chinese scholarship and the discipline of international relations it helps to construct, I consider some key examples of contemporary Chinese international relations discourse. I have focused these thematic studies around two scholars in particular, however, they are reflective of broader themes and engage with a larger body of work beyond that of the scholars in question. The following two chapters present case studies of two individuals who are often seen as inhabiting diametrically opposed positions in terms of the Chinese School debate: the Chinese School’s most prolific and successful advocate, Qin Yaqing and its most consistent and prominent critic, Yan Xuetong. In reality, however, these two scholars have far more in common than such a portrayal would suggest and are not so far apart in terms of their view on how Chinese scholarship might contribute to and challenge the parochial/global discipline of IR. Both are of a similar age and
background, both completed their doctoral training in the US and both hold senior positions at major centres for international relations research in Beijing. They are both interested in making a contribution to the wider discipline by drawing on ‘Chinese culture’ (loosely defined) and both have been successful in influencing large numbers of scholars to follow them in their research paths, whether purposefully or not. Both scholars are attempting to challenge the discipline’s parochialism in one way or another and are using Chinese thought as a way to make a (distinctive) contribution to contemporary international relations discourse. In this context, I begin with Yan Xuetong and his well-documented opposition to the term ‘Chinese School’ and to the efforts of many of his colleagues, such as Qin Yaqing, to build one. Despite this opposition, however, Yan is often regarded as a supporter of the principle of Chinese-style IR and is certainly committed to improving international relations theory by enriching it with insights from Chinese philosophical traditions. Carefully considering Yan’s work on ancient Chinese thought, in the context of wider ‘Chinese School’ debates, is therefore vital in order to fully understand contemporary Chinese IR discourse and what if any role it might play in challenging parochialism in international relations discourse. The following two chapters also aim to present a subversive reading of Yan Xuetong and Qin Yaqing’s work, recognising and naming some of the ghostly beings that haunt their respective international relations.

This chapter begins by explaining further the rationale for looking to Yan Xuetong in order to understand key trends in Chinese international relations discourse. Yan’s attempts to bring insights from ancient Chinese thought into the contemporary study of international relations in China will be the main focus of this chapter because, despite his protestations, this research has seen Yan labelled as the founder of a potential Chinese School of IR theory or what is now being termed by many Chinese scholars the ‘Tsinghua School’ (Creutzfeldt 2012, Zhang Feng 2012b, Xu Jin 2013). The remainder of the chapter will consider what Yan’s Chinese School (or Tsinghua School) looks like and what it means for international relations in theory and practice. I argue that Yan’s Chinese School challenges IR’s creation myths by bringing to the fore
certain IR ghosts. In particular, the ghost of hierarchy that haunts the myths of Westphalia and Aberystwyth is given life and form in Yan’s pre-Qin project. Hierarchy in ‘international relations’ (global politics) is recognised, celebrated and redefined in Yan’s vision of a Chinese-led world order derived from pre-Qin philosophy. Yet Yan’s work is not free from its own ghostly haunts; it too frequently reproduces and reaffirms certain aspects of IR’s key creation myths. Taken together, Yan Xuetong’s IR research (re)produces a realism that is both familiar and yet unfamiliar at the same time. It is, in Homi Bhabha’s words “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 1994: 85). In examining more closely Yan Xuetong’s (Chinese) realism we can see how his work – his contributions to Chinese international relations discourse – help to construct the very notion(s) of ‘Chinese’, ‘realism’ and ‘international relations’. This re-affirms the contested, slippery and unfinished nature of such identities and identity-making processes. The chapter concludes with a summary of Yan’s contribution to shaping international relations discourse in and about China and his role in the ongoing search for a Chinese School of international relations theory.

It is almost impossible to discuss contemporary Chinese international relations research without mentioning Yan Xuetong. He has become synonymous with Chinese IR both within China and, importantly, beyond. In a recent survey, Yan Xuetong was identified by his peers as one of the most prominent Chinese IR scholars – almost 50 percent of those surveyed ranked Yan as one of the top four scholars in China today (Kristensen and Nielsen 2010: 36). Alongside his position as an academic, he can also be described as one of China’s leading public intellectuals, named one of Foreign Policy’s top 100 public intellectuals in 2008 (Foreign Policy 2008). His influence thus extends beyond the academic world to wider public and policy discourses. Yan acts as an advisor to the International News Center of CCTV (Chinese state television) and is influential with China’s opinion-makers in the mass media. His research has been important in shaping public policy as well as recent intellectual trends in China. Yan is influential in a number of key areas of Chinese international relations discourse and, despite his outward opposition to the notion of building a Chinese School of IR theory, he is actively involved in debates about Chinese-
style IR and – with or without his consent – is leading the field in defining what such a Chinese-style IR might look like in the form of his Tsinghua School (or approach). His influence can be summed up in the following three personas: Yan the realist, Yan the scientist and Yan the ‘founding father’ of the Tsinghua School.

**Yan Xuetong: realist scholar**

Yan Xuetong is perhaps the most prominent of China’s realist IR scholars and is closely associated with an American-style neorealist approach (Lynch 2009: 99). He is viewed as a conservative, nationalistic scholar who is especially hard-line when it comes to Sino-US relations or issues such as Taiwan, particularly amongst American and European scholars. For example, Yan Xuetong is described by Mark Leonard as one of China’s ‘neo-cons’ or, in reference to their ideological legacy, ‘neo-comms’. Leonard sees Yan as a direct parallel to American neo-con William Kristol. “Where Kristol is obsessed with a China threat and convinced that US supremacy is the only solution for a peaceful world order, Yan Xuetong is fixated with the USA and sure that China’s military modernisation is the key to world stability” (Leonard 2008: 91). Yan prefers the label realist to that of neo-con (Leonard 2008: 90), nevertheless, he continues to reinforce his hawkish reputation by publishing op-ed pieces with titles such as ‘How China Can Defeat America’ (Yan Xuetong 2011b) and ‘China Should Be More Assertive’ (Yan Xuetong 2011c). Such articles have gained Yan a reputation, particularly in the US, for being reactionary and uncompromising when it comes to defending Chinese security interests. Amongst his colleagues in the PRC, however, Yan’s prominence is largely based upon his work on promoting scientific methodology and his more recent research into ancient Chinese philosophy and its relevance for contemporary IR. Nevertheless, in both of these key areas, which I will explore below, Yan’s commitment to realist understandings of IR underpin his choices both about what to study and how to study it.

Yan’s commitment to positivist (neo)realism was largely formed during his time as a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley. Yan
claims that it was only after studying at Berkeley that he really understood what international relations was all about. In Yan’s own words, his Chinese education, including a Masters degree from the Institute of International Relations, was “no match” for what he was taught in the US. He believes that it was only after studying ‘the classics’ – such as Morgenthau ([1948] 1985) and Keohane (1984, 1986) – that he understood what was important in the study of international relations (Yan Xuetong in Lu Xin 2011: 234-5). During this time Yan formed the view that what matters in international relations are: individual sovereign nation-states; power, its loss, gain and the international balancing of; and (inter)national security, broadly defined. Therefore his work on international politics has consistently focused on inter-state relations, with a particular concern for Sino-US relations and issues of national security. These realist ontological commitments continue to shape the focus of, and rationale for, all of Yan’s contributions to Chinese international relations discourse, even (especially) his recent work on ancient Chinese thought. Yan has been described by one colleague as a “disciple” of neo-realism, which is clearly evident across all aspects of his scholarship. Nevertheless, a close reading of Yan’s ‘realism’ reveals an approach that is both familiar and not. On the surface it uses the same language and similar logics: Yan frequently talks of the rise and fall of world powers, hegemony and balance of power; he writes about states, power and (national) security. Yet at the same time, Yan introduces alternative readings of many of these key concepts and often situates their origins within ancient Chinese thought, troubling some of IR’s creation myths which locate such origins within European history and philosophy. Yan produces a theory of international relations that is claimed as both ‘Chinese’ and ‘western’, both different and the same: Yan’s identity(ies) remain contingent and slippery.

Yan Xuetong: devoted scientist

Stemming from his neorealist view of global politics is Yan’s commitment to positivist methodology in his research. Until recently, Yan Xuetong’s

25 Comment made at ‘Chinese School of IR’ conference I attended in Beijing. The source has been anonymised.
prominence in Chinese academia could largely be attributed to his methodological work and association with ‘the scientific method’. According to Wang Yiwei, Yan is leading the charge for the scientific approach in Chinese IR (Wang Yiwei 2009: 117). For Wang, adopting a ‘scientific’ approach means taking American IR theory – rather, a particular brand of positivist theory that is commonly but not exclusively found in US scholarship – as the model. Since the publication of his prize-winning methods book, in which he strongly promotes positivist approaches (Yan and Sun 2001), Yan Xuetong has become synonymous with ‘the scientific method’ in Chinese IR. This is evident from one online biography page, which gives a three sentence introduction stating Yan’s institutional affiliation, key positions of responsibility and sums up his contribution to IR in China as: “a scholar famous for promoting scientific methods and prediction of international trends in the field of IR in China” (Hexunwang 2012). Yan believes that the social sciences in China are deficient because they do not consider methodology seriously enough: Chinese research “still lacks a true scientific bent” (Yan Xuetong in Lu Xin 2011: 236). Yan therefore promotes the use of scientific methods in his journals, teaching and amongst the research students he mentors. For example, the English-language journal that Yan edits, Chinese Journal of International Politics, encourages submissions that use “modern methodology” such as quantitative and statistical methods (CJIP 2013). In addition, Yan actively recruits PhD students to his IR programme who have a background in the natural sciences (Tsinghua 2012). He hosts an annual methodological training workshop at Tsinghua University that is “well attended by graduate students and junior scholars from all over the country” (Zhang Feng 2012b: 75), where he promotes the use of scientific approaches in IR. Through this work, Yan is training up a new generation of scholars fluent in and committed to the use of scientific methodology in IR research. This is having a profound impact on the shape of current and future thinking in Chinese international relations.

26 Yan was awarded the National Outstanding Teaching Award for his book on research methods, Practical Methods in International Relations Research (Yan Xuetong and Sun Xuefeng 2001) (see Hexunwang 2012).
Yan had a keen interest in science long before entering the field of international politics, which has clearly influenced his work since. Despite majoring in English as an undergraduate, Yan claims to have had no interest in literature, history or art either then or now. The only outside subject that interested him was linguistics because he felt that it was “scientific and logical” (Yan Xuetong in Lu Xin 2011: 233). After failing the entrance exam for a Masters programme in linguistics, Yan was assigned to the Chinese Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) to study Africa and so, somewhat reluctantly, began his journey into the field of international relations in which he is so prominent today. Yan’s preference for science over literature is something that has stayed with him throughout his academic career. His PhD training at the University of California, Berkeley also helped to reinforce his preference for ‘science’ over ‘art’. Yan writes: “the main influence of this process [studying for a PhD] was that I entered into the scientific method” (Yan Xuetong in Lu Xin 2011: 236). Yan applies this scientific methodology to every aspect of his scholarship, including his work on ancient Chinese thought.

**Yan Xuetong: founder of the Tsinghua School**

Yan has recently become more widely known amongst international relations scholars for his work on ancient Chinese philosophy. This research project examines a number of scholarly traditions from Chinese philosophy’s so-called golden age – the pre-Qin era – and attempts to apply them to contemporary international politics (Yan Xuetong and Xu Jin 2008, 2009 and Yan Xuetong 2011a). The ‘pre-Qin era’ encompasses the Spring–Autumn period (approx. 771-479 BC) and the Warring States period (approx. 481-221 BC), during which ‘China’ is generally portrayed as a collection of small(er) competing feudal states. These competing kingdoms were finally unified into one empire under the Qin dynasty some time around 220 BC. This period of instability generated some of China’s richest and most enduring philosophical traditions, which have

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27 After completing his PhD in African politics and development studies he quickly switched his focus to international relations, believing it to be more beneficial for his long-term career prospects.
long outlived their creators who were writing through these tumultuous times. The Confucian legacy is the most widely recognised and discussed as a distinctly Chinese philosophical tradition. One of the key strengths of Yan’s pre-Qin project, however, is that it draws upon the writings and associated traditions of many thinkers and philosophers of ancient China not just Confucius and those most closely associated with that tradition. The pre-Qin era is also often viewed as the height of Chinese philosophy and the pre-Qin texts are significant because of the sustained influence they have had on politics in the Chinese empire over the two millennia that followed (Ford 2010).

Yan began his research into the philosophies of pre-Qin (770-220BC) China in 2005 alongside his colleague and co-author Xu Jin. The first publication from the project was a reader of pre-Qin thought for undergraduate students featuring original pre-Qin texts such as extracts from Laozi’s writing, founder of the Daoist tradition; three of Mozi’s ten key principles; selected texts from the Four Books (四书, Sishu) and Five Classics (五经, Wujing) that make up the Confucian canon (Yan and Xu 2008). It also includes extracts from Strategies of the Warring States (战国策, Zhanguoce) a collection of historical texts compiled during the 3rd to 1st centuries BC, generally regarded as a historical rather than philosophical text. All the extracts were selected because they were considered to be relevant to thinking about international or inter-state politics. In the book they are accompanied by introductory notes, translations into modern Chinese (to aid understanding) and questions for class discussion. The book’s stated aim is to “allow readers to gain inspiration from pre-Qin thinkers and thereby deepen their understanding of contemporary international politics” (Yan and Xu 2008: front jacket). Yan and Xu (2009) have also produced an edited volume which employs a more analytical approach to survey many of the same pre-Qin thinkers and texts. It brings together commentaries on a wide array of pre-Qin works, written almost exclusively by scholars that Yan has mentored or worked with at Tsinghua University. It includes studies of the seven key thinkers or philosophical traditions from the pre-Qin era identified by Yan – Guanzi, Laozi, Confucius, Mencius, Mozi, Xunzi and Hanfeizi – as well as other important texts.
from the period, such as: *The Chronicle of Zuo* (左传, Zuozhuan), *Strategies of the Warring States* (战国策, Zhanguoce), *Lü’s Spring and Autumn Annals* (吕氏春秋, Lushi chunqiu), and the *Book of Rites* (礼记, Liji). Each of the essays includes the author’s reflections on the relevance of pre-Qin thought for contemporary China and the study of international relations today. Yan and others have also published widely on the topic in some of the leading Chinese language IR journals, with many such articles appearing in the pages of the (Chinese-language) journal Yan edits *Quarterly Journal of International Politics*. In 2011, a (limited) selection of these works were translated and published in English in the widely read and promoted volume *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Yan 2011a).

Yan’s research into pre-Qin thought has earned him recognition both within China and beyond. It has been warmly welcomed by those IR scholars around the world who are keen to demonstrate and to challenge the parochialism of international relations discourse and is now held up by some scholars as a possible example of a non-western approach to international relations.28 This recognition, however, has largely arisen in the past two to three years as some of Yan’s research has been translated into English and actively promoted around the world. Following the publication of *Ancient Chinese Thought* (Yan Xuetong 2011a), the journal that Yan edits ran a series of review articles which, alongside aggressive marketing by the book’s publishers, helped to raise the profile of Yan’s pre-Qin work (Paltiel 2011, Cunningham-Cross and Callahan 2011, Hui 2012a, He Kai 2012, Zhang Feng 2012b). The book has now been widely read and reviewed around the world (see Chong 2011, Hang Lin 2012, Warner 2012). Yan’s work has also been keenly debated within Chinese scholarly circles, largely because it chimes with debates about Chinese-style IR that have been dominating international relations discourse in and about China in recent years. In Zhang Feng’s review article (2012b), he uses the term ‘Tsinghua approach’ to refer to the work of Yan and his colleagues at Tsinghua. Whilst in Zhang’s opinion “it does not yet amount to a full-fledged

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28 Yan’s recent book (2011a) has even found its way onto reading lists for courses on international relations theory in the UK (Lawson 2013).
‘Tsinghua school’; Yan’s research does represent a distinct approach to international relations theorising that is amongst the most original and exciting work currently being undertaken by Chinese IR scholars (Zhang Feng 2012b: 75). The term ‘Tsinghua School’ is now quite commonly used by Chinese scholars to refer to the work of Yan Xuetong, Xu Jin and others whose research follows that pattern (Yan Xuetong 2011a: 255, Creutzfeldt 2012, Xu Jin 2013). As I have mentioned previously, Yan Xuetong has been perhaps the most vocal opponent of the Chinese School project in recent years. As if to underline this, Yan reprinted his article ‘Why There is No Chinese School of IR’ (Yan Xuetong 2008a, 2009e) as an appendix to both his English-language and Chinese-language books on pre-Qin thought alongside another article in the Chinese book titled ‘IR Theory is Universal’ (Yan Xuetong 2006b). This editorial choice was, arguably, Yan’s attempt to reiterate that in studying pre-Qin thought he is not trying to create a Chinese School to compete with existing IR theory but rather to enrich and improve existing (western) theories of international relations with new insights from China’s rich intellectual history. While Yan himself rejects the project to build a ‘Chinese School’ of international relations theory, many scholars are taking hold of his work as a first step in achieving such a goal. “Yan’s book is like a torch in the dark showing us [Chinese scholars] the path to follow” (He Kai 2012: 197). Chinese scholars such as He Kai are taking Yan’s pre-Qin project as the starting point for building a Chinese School of international relations theory, arguing that through this approach Chinese scholars can soon displace the US from its hegemonic position in the discipline of international relations.

Despite his consistent arguments against a Chinese School, Yan may not be quite as opposed to He Kai’s position as we might think. As Zhang Feng points out, what Yan is rejecting is the label ‘Chinese School’ rather than the substantive intellectual project (Zhang Feng 2012b: 78). Yan believes that scholars such as Qin Yaqing, Ren Xiao and others are putting the cart before the horse by insisting on the “necessity” of a Chinese School rather than working on

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29 The term ‘Tsinghua School’ was used a lot in this context at the ‘Chinese School of IR and its critics’ conference I attended in Beijing in July 2013.
the substantive project of theory-building and letting the naming take care of itself. According to Yan, every IR theory starts out like a baby and “what Chinese scholars should worry about most is not the name but first to give birth to the baby” (Yan Xuetong 2009e: 297). He points out that Thucydides’ ancient dictum, “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must” (from 481BC) is still very popular in international relations theory today and therefore Chinese scholars should focus their energies on formulating interesting ideas that will attract global attention rather than worrying too much about labelling them Chinese (Yan 2011a: 202, see also Cunningham-Cross and Callahan 2011: 359-362). Yan’s project seeks to ‘excavate’ or unearth (挖掘, wajue) similar ancient wisdom that can help guide contemporary international relations. However, Yan is seeking this ancient wisdom specifically from Chinese sources in a manner that somewhat contradicts his claim to focus on the ideas rather than the source. Yan strongly believes that “the contribution of Chinese traditional thoughts to IR will/should be recognised” (Yan Xuetong 2009e: 301).

The Chinese School according to Yan Xuetong

Yan’s (accidental) Tsinghua School

Despite his opposition to the Chinese School idea, Yan Xuetong has become one of the ‘founding fathers’ of an approach to international relations research that is increasingly being seen as a possible candidate for an eventual Chinese School of IR. The manner in which his work has been received by fellow scholars in and beyond China means that his Tsinghua approach is likely to become more influential in Chinese international relations discourse not less. In some respects, Yan’s work on pre-Qin thought seems to represent a departure from his previous (realist, scientific) work. Nevertheless, I argue that there are some very clear continuities between this recent project and Yan’s earlier research which focused on more obvious realist topics such as his work on China’s ‘New Security Concept’ (Leonard 2008: 100) and his efforts at refining the idea of ‘Comprehensive National Power’, which also makes an appearance in his later studies on pre-Qin thought (Yan Xuetong 1996, Yan 2011a: 102). Whilst clearly
this research project represents something of a shift in favour of utilising new sources of knowledge about international relations, Yan still claims to do so according to realist logics of international relations. Yan’s realist ontological commitments shape his pre-Qin research project by influencing his selection of sources. Yan claims to focus on the elements of pre-Qin thought that reflect enduring international ‘realities’ and any element that does not fit with these understandings is dismissed as “a particular understanding applicable to a particular international system” (Yan Xuetong 2011a: 202). Through such statements, Yan is making judgments about which elements of pre-Qin thought are relevant based upon his existing assumptions about the nature of international politics, yet he never reflects upon the process by which he makes these selections or their implications. Even his decision to study pre-Qin philosophy, rather than that from any other period of China’s long history is significant. Yan justifies this decision by arguing that pre-Qin inter-state relations most closely resemble that of contemporary international society (Yan Xuetong and Xu Jin 2008: 3). This applies not just to Yan but also to those who draw inspiration from and those who critique his work. For example, He Kai follows the same mould by beginning and ending with a realist ontology of international relations. His study is concerned with how Yan’s pre-Qin concept of morality might be made operational in the realm of what He Kai calls “real politics” (He Kai 2012). His focus on the world ‘out there’ is made possible by reference to a pre-conceived view of what the world is and how it can be known; one that is profoundly realist.  

Yan’s work – and that of many of his colleagues and critics – actively aims to (re)produce a realist version of international relations, but one that incorporates aspects of ancient Chinese thought. In turning to ancient Chinese thought, Yan has therefore not abandoned his commitment to modern scientific methods. According to Zhang Feng, one of the key distinguishing features of the

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30 It is perhaps also worth noting that He Kai has a similar academic background to Yan having worked at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) for 6 years before travelling to the US for doctoral study and promotes a very similar realism in his research. Interestingly, however, He Kai completed his doctorate at Arizona State University, which is often viewed as a hotbed for poststructuralist IR in the US.
Tsinghua approach is its use of scientific methodology in relation to ancient texts (Zhang Feng 2012b). Even a brief flick through the pages of *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* reveals Yan’s fondness for tables, typologies and strict categorisations (Yan 2011a). The first chapter, for example, contains a review of the seven key schools of thought covered by Yan’s pre-Qin project. Here he uses a number of typologies, largely derived from contemporary IR theory, to categorise the schools of thought in order to make better comparisons with “current international realities” (Yan 2011a: 21-69). Nevertheless, the typologies Yan uses never quite fit the pre-Qin thought he is reading; there is always slippage between the ideas and the categories he selects.

Furthermore, Yan never reflects on his own role in constructing the international ‘realities’ he seeks to compare with and enrich understandings of. Instead, Yan is reading *his* understanding of contemporary international order – based upon a realist ontological view of the world, which emphasises the primacy of sovereign nation-states existing in an anarchical system – back onto (ancient) Chinese history and philosophy in ways that expose the always incompleteness of such identity-forming processes. This mirrors the ways in which the parochial/global discipline employs classical European philosophy (in a selective way) to create a longer intellectual history for international relations. There are a number of readers available for students of IR that set out a history of international relations in political thought from the Ancient Greeks to the present (Boucher 1998, Brown et al 2002). Yan’s pre-Qin project attempts to add to this literature by claiming there is also a Chinese lineage for such knowledge, his reader of pre-Qin thought is very similar in look and feel to those collections (of European philosophy) mentioned (Yan and Xu 2008). This is, arguably, an example of mimicry of ‘western’ international relations discourse within Yan’s work (Bhabha 1994). Whether deliberate or not, this is an effective strategy for destabilising IR’s (apparent) parochialism. (Re)producing a reader of international relations in political thought filled with Chinese thinkers instead of European ones works to undermine or subvert existing narratives (myths) in international relations discourse that construct the discipline as Eurocentric. As
Jones writes: “the architects of IR’s self-construction ... have self-consciously located IR’s heritage or canon in classical European thought from ancient Greece through to the Enlightenment” (Jones 2006: 3). Yet just as realism’s deployment of Thucydides, for example, relies on a selective reading of the History of the Peloponnesian War, Yan’s project relies on a particular reading of ancient Chinese philosophies and obscures potential alternative understandings of those texts. As Agathangelou and Ling note, realism’s reading of Thucydides ignores Athens' demise due to ambition and greed and, therefore, “conveniently silences another reading of this text, such as the crisis of empire and its implications not only for world politics but the empire itself” (Agathangelou and Ling 2004: 24, see Ling 2002: 106-108 for alternative readings of Thucydides). I argue in the next section that Yan’s project similarly presents one of many possible readings of pre-Qin philosophy as it applies to contemporary international relations. Yan’s intention in this project is not a subversive one – indeed he is explicitly attempting to stay within the coloured lines of the discipline (and realist IR in particular). Yet his deployment of philosophical traditions from more than two millennia ago challenges some of IR’s creation myths and claims an alternative origin for certain key ideas in international relations discourse. By locating key concepts from international relations discourse in the textual history of China’s pre-Qin philosophers, Yan is challenging the west’s claims to sole ownership of IR’s intellectual history; and challenging the west’s claim to be ‘father’ of our world and/or creator of ‘international relations’.

**Pre-Qin thought and China’s global rise**

It is clear that Yan Xuetong’s ‘Chinese School’ (his Tsinghua approach) is shaped by the realist, positivist commitments that underpin all his work in the field of international politics. A close reading of Yan’s work, however, reveals a realism that is both familiar and not. The impact of his training in a US institution is evident and Yan himself emphasises its foundational role in all his accounts of where his IR thinking comes from. Nevertheless, his self-image as a ‘Chinese’ scholar also shapes his research and works to discursively (re)produce a
particular understanding of ‘realism’, ‘international relations’ and ‘China’, demonstrating once again the contested nature of each of these (id)entities and the ghostliness of the boundaries we all too often draw around them. Yan’s version of realism differs in some respects from many other (structural) realist accounts of the international system. Yan’s realism, I argue, does not attempt to obscure or hide the presence of hierarchy in the world in the same way as structural realism or other theories resting upon the Westphalian myth might attempt to. A permanent feature of Yan’s work is his concern with securing China’s place in the world, which he implicitly (thought later explicitly) views as a hierarchical (inter-state) structure. According to Yan Xuetong’s reading of international politics, some countries are more powerful than others, countries may rise and fall but within the system there will always be those that lead and those that must follow. By focusing his pre-Qin research on the issue of China’s rise, Yan Xuetong – whether purposefully or not – is helping to draw attention to the (absent) presence of hierarchy in international relations discourse: making his Chinese-style IR theory all about improving China’s place within that hierarchical international structure. Yan is not the only scholar to present such a view of the world – that not only accepts but celebrates the presence of hierarchy in the international system. David Kang has consistently argued that international relations in East Asia have largely remained peaceful and productive due to the widespread acceptance of the principle of hierarchy in the system. Peaceful relations are made possible due to the acceptance by others countries of China’s long-standing leadership role in the region and the lasting influence of the imperial Chinese tribute system (Kang 2004, 2009).

Yan Xuetong has been concerned with understanding and helping to bring about China’s rise for many years. In fact he was one of the first Chinese IR scholars to use the term ‘rise’ (崛起, jueqi) to discuss China’s future trajectory (Yan Xuetong 1995). In 1998, together with three other researchers at the Chinese Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), he published the book China’s Rise: Assessing the International Environment (Yan Xuetong et. al. 1998), which Wang Jisi claims was the first analytical work to discuss the concept of China’s rise within China (Wang Jisi 2006). Yan’s prize-winning
Analysis of China’s National Interest is also, arguably, about understanding China’s rise. This in-depth study focuses on China’s ‘relative power’ in international relations and offers strategies to increase it (Yan Xuetong 1996). His writing on the subject has continued in both English and Chinese, including several books directly addressing the question of China’s rise (Yan Xuetong 2001, 2005, 2006a, 2010). Yan has continued to use the term jueqi to discuss China’s future direction in world politics even as other commentators have rejected it in favour of the less provocative term ‘development’ (发展, fazhan) (Glaser and Medeiros 2007, Suettinger 2004).

In this regard, Yan’s work follows much Chinese scholarship that is ‘patriotically worrying’ (忧患, youhuan) about China’s place in the world (see pp. 131-133). Yan believes that “giving advice on policy is the responsibility of the intelligentsia to society” (Yan Xuetong in Lu Xin 2011: 249). He advocates returning to a system that more closely resembles that which existed during the time of the pre-Qin scholars he now studies where this was the case. “Like ancient thinkers in the pre-Qin era, he tries to provide a menu of advice to ‘princes’ on how to become a strong power” (He Kai 2012: 195). Yan’s work thus combines the patriotic sentiment of a Confucian scholar-intellectual with the scientific method of a western social scientist. In many respects it is his commitment to positivism that allows for the wholesale ‘borrowing’ from pre-Qin philosophy to ‘prove’ his narrative about China’s future trajectory. Yan consistently repeats his commitment to the belief in enduring laws of international politics that exist across space and time. He is able then to use China’s past as a model for understanding its future. Previously Yan has argued that the rise of China: “will be peaceful”; “will make the Asia-Pacific region more peaceful”; and “will make the world more civilized” (Yan Xuetong 2001: 35-37). Through his reading of pre-Qin philosophy, Yan is able to back up these assertions with ‘evidence’ from ancient Chinese thought to provide a compelling vision for China’s future rise and what it means for China and its relationship with the rest of the world.
Yan is just one of a number of contemporary Chinese scholars to adopt such an approach. For them “History is flexible, offering a toolbox of models and counter-models about how to make China great – again” (Callahan 2012: 45). Yan believes that China’s return to greatness is assured:

The Rise of China is granted by nature... In the last 2000 years China has enjoyed superpower status several times, such as the Han Dynasty, the Tang Dynasty, and the early Qing Dynasty... This history of superpower status makes the Chinese people very proud of their country on the one hand, and on the other hand very sad about China’s current international status. They believe China’s decline to be a historical mistake which they should correct. (Yan Xuetong, 2001: 33).

Yan is hoping to find the solution for righting this historical mistake in the wisdom of China’s ancient philosophical traditions. In turning to pre-Qin thought, he is looking for answers that he has failed to find in western theories of international politics. In Yan’s words: “when academia studies pre-Qin interstate political philosophy, it does so precisely to learn how pre-Qin thought can enrich our understanding of the foundations, strategies, and influence of China’s rise” (Yan 2011a: 216). Yan believes that China’s ancient thinking made China great once before so it can do the same once again. In this way Yan’s research embodies a type of epistemological optimism that is common in Chinese intellectual discourse (Metzger 2005: 26). Yan believes that the ideas necessary for bringing about China’s national rejuvenation are ‘out there’ and it is his moral duty (as an intellectual serving the state) to discover them.

Reading the many contributions to the so-called Tsinghua School it is clear that the visions of world order expressed in philosophical texts from the pre-Qin era are diverse and often contradictory. As Yan himself argues, the significant differences amongst scholars and philosophical traditions of the pre-Qin era provides another reason for the futility of searching for a Chinese School of international politics; since there is no single school of thought that can be called “Chinese theory” (Yan Xuetong 2009c: 1). Nevertheless, a critical reading of the Tsinghua School reveals a number of key themes that, taken together, form a convincing answer to the question/problem of China’s future rise;
narrative that claims a distinctively Chinese future for the world and a significant role for the Chinese state in bringing that world into being. Thus, despite his insistence on recognising diversity within and between Chinese and western thought, Yan’s work discursively constructs a particular narrative about world order and China’s place within it, both now and into the future. This narrative reproduces and reaffirms certain aspects of IR’s key creation myths but it also challenges them by bringing to the fore some of IR’s ghosts. In particular, the ghost of hierarchy that haunts the myths of Westphalia and Aberystwyth is given life and form but is also redefined in Yan’s pre-Qin research. Neither is Yan’s work free from its own ghostly haunts. Despite his insistence on universality of science and his commitment to an ostensibly ‘American’ realism, Yan’s work reflects, constructs and sometimes destabilises his own identity(ies) as a Chinese realist scholar. His work reflects his own patriotism, seen in terms of his desire to make ‘China’ great once again, but also discursively constructs what it means to be Chinese by drawing upon specific thoughts and ideas (and not others) from the pre-Qin era.

Global leadership: a new kind of hegemony

The answer to the problem of China’s place in the world suggested by Yan (and his Tsinghua School) begins with the premise that China’s rise, now inevitable, will also be peaceful. Yan explicitly contradicts the conclusion of structural realism that rising powers necessarily cause instability in the international system and suggests that China’s rise will, in fact, lead to greater global stability. He recently debated this point with John Mearshimer at an event held at Tsinghua University in November 2013, passionately refuting Mearshimer’s claim that the peaceful rise of China is impossible due to the anarchic nature of international relations (UChicago CPOST 2013). 31 Yan argues that China’s rise

31 Susan Shirk’s volume China: Fragile Superpower (2007) raises an added dimension to such debates about China’s future rise and its impact on the international system. Shirk claims that the fragility of the Communist regime within the PRC means that more often than not foreign policy is driven by the desire to maintain stability within the country than by wider international considerations. This potentially undermines the ability of the Party-State to adopt softer, more nuanced positions on issues such as Taiwan and relations with China’s neighbours in East Asia for fear of appearing weak at home. According to Shirk, therefore, a growing populist
can and indeed will be peaceful because China will become a different kind of world power from the hegemonic model currently embodied by the United States. It will rely not on military or even economic strength but on a political power that is rooted in notions of personal morality and virtue. China’s presence as a new kind of world leader will re-shape world order in a peaceful and harmonious way. In Yan’s Tsinghua School, power and international standing are understood in relative terms. For example, Wang Haibin demonstrates how for the writers of the Lü Annals the rise of one state required the fall of another (Wang Haibin 2009: 68). Nevertheless, Yan’s work presents a reading of rising and falling powers in international politics that is not quite the same as most contemporary realist narratives. His work is filled with contradictions and tensions that demonstrate the contested nature of identity-forming processes in international relations discourse. Here we witness the slippage in Yan’s work between his realist pretentions and desire to counter negative portrayals of China and its future role in the world, such as that represented by Mearsheimer’s structural realism. Yan can be found on the one hand explaining “How China can defeat America” (Yan Xuetong 2011b) and arguing that “China should be more assertive” (Yan Xuetong 2011c) whilst on the other hand using his pre-Qin project to claim that China’s rise represents a peaceful, stabilising force in contemporary international relations. Yan is attempting to reframe the way in which China’s rise is portrayed in contemporary international relations discourse, which tends to view China’s future as a choice between becoming a revisionist (disruptive) or status quo (submissive) power (Shambaugh 1996, Johnston 2003, Roy 2003, Feng Huiyun 2009).

Contending for hegemony, or international leadership is highlighted by the Tsinghua School as the core issue of many pre-Qin works and, arguably, the core issue of international politics (Yan and Huang 2008: 79, Yan Xuetong 2009b: 101). Despite sometimes reflecting a zero-sum approach to the rise and fall of nationalism has the potential to derail China’s “charm offensive” (Kurlantzick 2008) of which Yan Xuetong’s work is arguably a part and in so doing generate the potential for conflict between China and the US (Shirk 2007: 8-11).
states in world politics, Yan argues that China’s rise will in fact be peaceful. According to Yan, China can and will rise peacefully because it will follow a different model of world leadership. Yan argues that there are at least two distinct models of political leadership for great powers found amongst the philosophical writings of the pre-Qin era. While Western theories of world politics speak only of hegemony (霸, ba) in the international system, pre-Qin texts introduce the possibility of a different model of leadership, that of ‘true kingship’ or ‘humane authority’ (王, wang) (Liu Jiangyong 2009: 44). The concept of wang leadership is more commonly translated as ‘true kingship’ or the ‘kingly way’, however, in Yan’s most recent book the translators have chosen instead the term ‘humane authority’ because: “obviously, Yan is not arguing for the reestablishment of a monarchical system led by one sage who would save the world with his moral goodness” (translators note in Yan Xuetong 2011a, emphasis added). I have opted to continue using the more common translation of true kingship, as used by Yan himself in his own English-language articles, because I am reluctant to agree with the translators’ assertions about Yan’s narrative. I argue that the account of China’s rise and the new world order it will bring about that is constructed in the work of the Tsinghua School is, in many ways, reflective of the definition of true kingship which the translators wish to avoid.

According to Yan, the possibility of different types of hegemony, or different models of global leadership was first raised within the text known as the Guanzi (管子); a collection of works attributed to the 7th century philosopher Guan Zhong, which was compiled in around 26BC. In the Guanzi, hegemonic leadership (霸, ba) is seen to be founded on power, whereas true kingship (王, wang) is founded on both power and morality (Liu Jiangyong 2009: 32). The Guanzi did not, however, treat hegemony and true kingship as

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32 The pre-Qin texts that Yan’s project draws from are better understood as collections of writings associated with a particular scholar, his followers and/or critics that have developed over a period of time rather than as a specific text authored by each of the individual philosophers cited. In the rest of this chapter I follow Yan in generally disregarding debates on the precise authorship and/or authenticity of these sources, focusing instead on the content and key arguments of each of these traditions. Not because such debates are unimportant, but rather because they are unimportant to Yan and his purposes in turning to pre-Qin thought.
completely opposing terms; but rather saw establishing hegemony as one step in the process towards the ultimate goal of establishing true kingship (Yan Xuetong and Xu Jin 2009: 2). Later scholars, however, recognised a fundamental difference in the nature of wáng and bá leadership (Yan Xuetong 2009a: 156). According to Yan’s reading of Xunzi, for example, there are three possible types of state – true kingship, hegemon, and tyranny (強, qióng) – which embody three alternative approaches to inter-state relations: “wáng means to lead the world; bá to wield hegemony in certain areas of the world; and qióng to exert greater power than other states” (Yan Xuetong 2008b: 136). From the time of Mencius onward (372-289BC) the differentiation between wáng and bá had become one of the fundamental concepts in Chinese people’s discussions about politics (Sun Xuhong 2010: 19). What sets apart the positive value of true kingship from the negative one of hegemony is the ethical or moral requirement necessary for its attainment. Becoming a true kingship state requires not just high moral standards but higher moral standards than any other country (Xu Jin 2009a: 2, Liu Jiangyong 2009: 45, Yan and Xu 2008: 1, 48).

The writings of Guanzi (Liu Jiangyong 2009: 46), Laozi (Yan and Xu 2008: 17), Xunzi (Yan and Xu 2008: 64-5), and Mencius (Xu Jin 2009b: 128), all state that world leadership cannot be gained through force (武力, wǔlì). The route to true kingship begins, instead, with winning the hearts of the people (Yan and Xu 2008: 7, 47, Xu Jin 2009a: 4). The Tsinghua School authors draw attention to the idea that many pre-Qin thinkers opposed expansionary war as a means of gaining world leadership. Even under the circumstances of the early Spring and Autumn period, where every year a new war would break out, the Guanzi advised rulers of the time to avoid over-reliance on force but to rely instead on forming alliances and mutual support (Liu Jiangyong 2009: 45). The opposition to offensive warfare is most evident in the writings of Mozi, and this is again picked up as an example for today’s China to emulate. Mozi’s philosophy centred around 10 key concepts, including that of feigong (非攻), the principle

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33 The writings contained in the Mengzi, which is a key text in the Confucian tradition, date from the second half of the 4th century BC. Mencius was a follower of Confucius and developed Confucian thought.
of defensiveness. This principle did not signal opposition to all war but rather to so-called ‘wars of conquest’ and is claimed by Tsinghua School authors as a key and enduring aspect of Chinese thinking about the proper manner in which to conduct inter-state relations (Li Bin 2009: 449). Indeed, this defensiveness principle is arguably reflected in contemporary (political) rhetoric around China’s stance on nuclear weapons regimes for example (Horsburgh 2012). The Chinese government’s ‘no first strike’ nuclear policy could be viewed as a contemporary reworking of the ancient principle of feigong. In Yan Xuetong’s reading of pre-Qin thought, a rising China – as a contemporary expression of the model of true kingship power – will shun the use of force as a tool to gain control in the international system. Here Yan advances a very different perspective to the structural realism he is said to be a disciple of. He is asserting the possibility for change in the dynamics of the international system – for one state to become more dominant than another – without the use of force and without the need for violent conquest. Yan is (re)writing structural realism, whilst claiming to be learning from it.

**Political power: setting a moral example**

Yan argues that the major difference between contemporary international relations theory and much pre-Qin writing lies in their respective definitions of power, or more accurately the value they place on different elements of state power. Yan, like most realist theorists, sees power as some function of economic, military, political, (and possibly cultural) power possessed by a nation-state in the international system. Drawing on a variety of pre-Qin sources, Yan offers different configurations of that function but does not challenge the underlying assumptions about the nature of power as something that can be possessed, increased, lost or gained. The influence of Yan’s commitment to realist understandings of international relations is most evident in relation to his definition of power. The concept of Comprehensive National Power (综合国力, zonghe guoli) (CNP) is not usually mentioned in discussions of
Chinese-style IR, which focus almost exclusively on aspects of ‘cultural’ China,\(^{34}\) yet it is arguably one of the best examples of a distinctive Chinese addition to thinking about international politics. The concept of CNP contains obvious elements of realist power politics, specifically realist assumptions about the nature and scope of political power. Nevertheless, Yan’s understanding of power is also influenced by his deployment of Chinese thought. The ‘Chineseness’ found here, however, is not a typical reading of ‘Chineseness’ as found in most Chinese School debates. It is not a cultural or ‘Confucian’ China that can be easily exoticised. It does not fit into a colonial discourse that constructs China as a weak or exotic Other. Yan, like many Chinese IR scholars, is drawn to structural realism and realist power politics because he is interested in how China can be a great power and finds realism useful for that. He is promoting a (Chinese) discourse of power that disrupts the tendency in international relations discourse to exoticise the (weak), oriental other.

Whilst Yan did not come up with the term CNP himself, he has done much to bring it into wider usage in mainstream IR and has also played an important part in discussions over how it should be calculated, particularly by integrating it into his research on pre-Qin thought. According to Ghosh; “the concept of CNP and the associated analytical methods are not rooted in traditional Marxist-Leninist dogma or Western social science but are in many ways unique” (Ghosh 2009: 19). Chinese strategists have rejected basic measures such as GDP or military size alone to project a country’s power in the international sphere arguing instead for a wider, more comprehensive measurement. A number of those strategists, including Yan, argue that this approach to ‘power’ has its roots in ancient Chinese thinking. Wu Chunqiu, for example, argues that “China’s wise ancient strategists never advocated relying only on military power to conquer the enemy, but emphasized combining military power with the non-military power related to war in order to get the upper hand” (Wu Chunqiu 1995: 98). Yan’s recent work on ancient Chinese

\(^{34}\) For example, Zhao Tingyang’s *tianxia* concept (pp.154-6) and Qin Yaqing’s theory of relationality (ch.6).
thought makes a similar argument drawing on the traditions of Guanzi and Xunzi in particular (Yan and Xu 2008: 7 and 47).

Despite a basic agreement amongst Chinese scholars that national power should be calculated on the basis of many factors, there is no agreement on how or what those measurements should be. Yan cites six key elements for consideration: population, land area, economy, politics, military, and historic culture (Yan 1996: 59). The other two commonly used models draw on similar themes but with significantly more complex systems of calculation. In Yan’s early scholarship, he works on the basis of a simple average approach, rather than a complex weighting system. However, much of Yan’s scholarship from the past five or so years has been critical of the Chinese leadership for placing too much emphasis on economic aspects of power. He is therefore critical of other models of measuring CNP, which prioritise economic power over all other aspects. Yan’s most recent understanding of CNP moves away from a simple average of all aspects of power to include a new distinction between resources of power and operating power. Drawing on the thinking of pre-Qin scholar Xunzi, Yan argues that increases in power resources (that is; military, economic and cultural aspects of power) are irrelevant if not accompanied by a corresponding increase in operating power (that is; political power). Yan’s focus on political power is both similar to and different from that of classical and/or structural realism.

35 Models for measuring CNP have been put forward by Senior Colonel Huang Shuofeng of the Academy of Military Sciences (AMS) and by a team at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) led by Wang Songfen. Both use complex systems for measuring CNP: the CASS model has 64 indices and the AMS model has 29 secondary indices and more than 100 tertiary indices (Ghosh 2009).

36 The CASS index, for example, gives by far the highest weighting to economic capability: a weighting of 0.28 versus 0.10 for military capability and 0.08 for foreign affairs capability (Ghosh 2009: 36).

37 Yan re-writes his equation for calculating national power from a simple average of all ‘power factors’ to a more complex equation where total power is a function of political power:

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CP = (M + E + C) \times P
\]

where CP is comprehensive national power, M is military power, E is economic power, C is cultural power and P is political power. Note that natural resources and population that featured in his earlier analyses have dropped out (Yan 2011a: 102).
Political power, Yan argues, is seen by all pre-Qin scholars as the foundation or cornerstone of national strength (Yan Xuetong 2009b: 101). According to Wang Haibin, there was a general understanding among thinkers of the time that, while military power was not completely irrelevant, “political power was the linchpin in a country’s rise or fall” (Wang Haibin 2009: 69). In some of the analyses included in Yan’s project, political power is referred to as soft power. For example, Xu Jin writes of Mencius that, different types of state rely on different types of power: a wang country needs only soft power, but a ba country is reliant on a combination of both soft and hard power (Xu Jin 2009b: 120). Yan’s narrative about political power shares similarities with soft power discourses in IR but is also distinct in some respects. As Bhabha claims, such mimicry is at times unintentionally subversive. This, I argue is evident in Yan’s deployment of the concept of political power in his theorising of international politics. Bhabha writes: “in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (Bhabha 1994: 85). Yan’s writings on power in international relations look and sound like realist theories of power, yet they also demonstrate this consistent slippage between existing realist narratives and Yan’s (re)productions. His work serves to disrupt widespread understandings of power (both hard and soft) in international relations discourse by demonstrating the incompleteness and ghostly nature of such definitions.

Drawing from his work on Xunzi, Yan argues that contemporary understandings of soft power do not distinguish between cultural and political elements: political power, as understood by pre-Qin thinkers, emanates from the leader of a state (Yan Xuetong 2009a: 154, see also Wang Haibin 2009: 69, Xu Jin 2009a: 2 and Yan Xuetong 2009b: 102). For Confucius, all politics are the king’s politics (Xu Jin 2009a: 5), while Xunzi argues that “what makes a country secure or endangered, good or bad, is determined exclusively by its ruler and not by others” (Yan Xuetong 2008b: 139). Mencius and Mozi bring in the possibility that it is in the implementation of correct (just) policies that political power is located (Yan Xuetong 2009b: 102). Nevertheless, the common thread consistently highlighted by Yan and his Tsinghua team is the notion of morality.
or virtue. For example, Guanzi argues that a country’s political power is determined by the capability of its leaders: “a good ruler selects competent ministers; a ruler without morals will lead his country to ruin” (Xu Jin 2009a: 2). Here a good ruler, who gains success, is contrasted with a bad ruler, who is without morals. Laozi, founder of the Daoist school of thought, also stressed the necessity for a virtuous ruler: “rulers must be sages, ones with the exemplification of Dao [道, the Way] and the manifestation of De [德, virtue]” (Liu Jeeloo 2006: 148). The importance of personal morality is often extended beyond the leader to the ministers he selects. In Strategies of the Warring States, the moral character (品德, pinde) and leadership ability of a ruler and his ministers is the core of political power (Yan and Huang 2008: 86). Ministers must therefore be selected on merit (Yan Xuetong 2009b: 102), where once again good is equated with having a high moral standard (Yan Xuetong 2008b: 163). Yan’s lesson for China’s leadership, therefore, is that they must secure the next generation of morally upstanding leaders if they are to succeed in making China a true kingship power in the world. Evidence of this in practice can be seen in the ‘red culture’ moral campaigns that were being promoted by some of Beijing’s future leaders prior to the fall of Bo Xilai (Lam 2012). Moral leadership remains an element of the widespread political discourse of ‘the China Dream’ (Callahan 2013).

Not only does the superior moral quality of a wang state’s ruler guarantee good governance in his state, but his influence reaches beyond the state to ensure the stability of the system as a whole (Yang Chuanhui 2009: 82, Xu Jin 2009a: 9, Yan Xuetong 2009b: 95). As a true kingship state, therefore, China’s leaders will set a moral example not just for the Chinese people but for the whole world. Adopting the Tsinghua approach, the Party-State assumes the role of moral leader for the new world order, a role that, I argue, involves showing others not just how to behave in the world but how, and who, to be. Yan’s attempts to bring pre-Qin thought into contemporary international relations discourse let loose ghosts of hierarchy and imperialism. When discussing his pre-Qin work with scholar William Callahan, Yan reaffirmed the
potentially positive value of imperialism to contemporary IR thinking. Yet he consistently works to redefine such imperialist thinking in order to make it ‘fit’ within his realist ontological framework. Yan argues:

National rejuvenation refers to those periods when China was very strong, like in the Han dynasty, the Tang dynasty and the early period of the Qing dynasty ... This is the imperialist system. But, it doesn't mean that this system is so bad that you can learn nothing from it. For the modern society, we can adjust it and learn from the positive part of it to develop the modern international system (Yan Xuetong in Callahan 2014).

For Yan, it is not imperialism itself that is seen as problematic but rather the adoption of a negative model of global leadership (hegemony) instead of a positive model (true kingship). The Tsinghua School’s approach to global order/international relations seems to accept hierarchy as an enduring aspect of the international system but redefines it in a potentially positive way. Hierarchy led by a hegemon (such as the US) is bad, but a hierarchical structure with a true kingship power (such as China) at the top is good. In setting out an alternative form of leadership, Yan is, I argue, offering a sanitised version/vision of imperialism in international relations.

**Opposition, difference and cultivating harmony**

The story Yan’s project tells is one whereby China *will* become a world power; but a true kingship power not a hegemonic one. In this tale, China’s political power, based largely on the moral virtue of its individual leaders, will peacefully bring about a new, and better, world order. Yan argues that this new, harmonious world can be brought about “through voluntary submission rather than force” (Yan Xuetong 2008b: 159). However, this future is one whereby peace and harmony must be cultivated or actively constructed in a manner that precludes opposition and subsumes difference into sameness. It gives rise to imperialist desires to expand (if not to conquer) and impose (Chinese) standards of civilisation upon Others in the world. Drawing from writings of the Confucian scholar Mencius, Xu Jin argues that a true kingship’s power of attraction lies not in wealth but in political ideas and in the model it can provide for societal
development (Xu Jin 2009b: 128). Likewise, Yan argues that, for China to become a true kingship state, its strategic goal must be “to present to the world a better social role model” (Yan Xuetong 2008b: 159). Yan, and others, argue that there is already some evidence of China filling this role in the world. They point to growing support for the idea of a ‘Chinese model’ (中国模式, Zhongguo moshi) of development or a ‘Beijing Consensus’, which has been claimed as an alternative to the western neo-liberal model of industrialisation for developing countries today (Yang Chuanhui 2009: 84, also pp. 118-120).

While Yan argues that other countries will be drawn to follow the Chinese model ‘through voluntary submission’, his narrative also creates an active role for China in bringing this new world order about. Drawing on Xunzi, he writes; a wang state must take the lead and make itself an example (Yan and Xu 2008: 65). What this means for China’s future, according to Yan, is that Deng Xiaoping’s principle of ‘hide one’s capabilities, bide one’s time’ (韬光养晦, taoguang yanghui) is no longer appropriate. Building on this, Yang Chuanhui’s chapter about ‘Confucian thought on obtaining the world through benevolence’ claims that one day in the future, when China becomes a leading power with global influence, it will have a responsibility to the rest of the world to act accordingly. In it he argues that much of the chaos in world politics after the end of the First World War was due to the failure of the United States to assume its ‘correct’ role as a leading country in the world: at the top of a hierarchical global structure. Therefore, while China will not become another US-style hegemon, China must consider its long-term responsibility to the world (Yang Chuanhui 2009: 83-4). Likewise, Yan counsels against adopting Laozi’s notion of wuwei (无为, non-action or inaction) since it precludes an active role in shaping world order (Yan Xuetong 2009a: 163). Xu Jin’s analysis of Confucian scholar Mencius leads him to argue that a wang state does not force its ideas onto others in the international system but rather is able, through publicising its own success, to attract other states to imitate or follow (Xu Jin 2009b: 128-9). Indeed this strategy is arguably already apparent in Chinese foreign policy approaches: for example, by hosting major global events such as the Beijing
Olympics in 2008 (Cunningham-Cross 2008), and the Shanghai World Expo in 2010 (Nordin 2012), as well as the establishment of Confucian Institutes across the world (Barabantseva 2009, Hartig 2013). In each of these examples ‘China’ is promoted as more than simply an economic model for the rest of the world to follow but a cultural and political role model too.

According to the Tsinghua approach, the solution to the problem of (inter-state) war – the defining core problematic of the discipline of international relations according to the myths of Westphalia and Aberystwyth – is the construction of a harmonious world under the leadership of a benevolent ‘true kingship’ China. Not so dissimilar to the description given by the translators of Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power of what wang leadership is not: “a monarchical system led by one sage who would save the world with his moral goodness” (Yan Xuetong 2011a). According to Yan and colleagues, the world is brought into a new harmonious state when other countries imitate or follow China’s example. Yan’s notion of ‘voluntary submission’ requires adopting the Chinese model in order to guarantee success; submission, therefore, requires Others to become more like the Chinese self. Thus the manner in which the Tsinghua School deals with what Inayatullah and Blaney (2004) claim is the core problematic of international relations – the problem of difference – frequently advocates conversion rather than coexistence.

The excerpts of pre-Qin thought Yan and Xu select offer several options for dealing with difference in the world that often present contradictory views of how to achieve harmony/order. These contradictions help to disrupt the clear narratives presented both by IR’s creation myths and by Yan and his colleagues about a Chinese-led future world order. At times they seem to reaffirm the foundational claim of international relations discourse that “difference is debilitating to the purpose of establishing order” (Inayatullah and Blaney 2002: 104). Yet at other times they present a view of difference as a necessary and productive force in world politics. Of the pre-Qin narratives offered, the Confucian view with its concept of Great Harmony (大同, datong)
and the ideal of universal love (兼爱, jian’ai) found within Mohism\(^{38}\) are given prominence by the Tsinghua team in their selection of texts and so are considered in more detail here.

Piao Bingjiu for example directly relates Hu Jintao’s key foreign policy concept ‘Harmonious World’ (和谐世界, hexie shijie) to the Confucian Book of Rites ( 礼记, Liji). Piao seeks insights into what a Confucian view on difference and harmony might mean for China’s and the world’s future. He argues that the best way to understand the establishment of a harmonious world is with the Confucian concept of 修身、齐家、治国、平天下 (xiushen, qijia, zhiguo, ping tianxia), which means to ‘cultivate the self, order the family, govern the state [and] pacify the world’. This means that a wang ruler or sage king can bring peace to the world by first cultivating his own moral value then that of those he rules over. The method that the sage king relies on for bringing about peace in the world is jiaohua (教化), where jiao means to teach or educate and hua to change or transform (Piao Bingjiu 2009). Therefore, “when properly inspired, everyone will want to be good and act in the correct way” (Liu Jeeloo 2009: 62, my emphasis). The world is pacified therefore by transforming the people to become like the king. Similarly, Zhao Tingyang’s reworked tianxia, in “its approach to an ethical world order encourages a ‘conversion’ of difference, if not a conquest of it” (Callahan 2008: 750). The highest form of ethical society in Confucianism is, according to Piao, Great Harmony (大同, datong), which is also sometimes referred to as 天下一家 (tianxia yijia), literally ‘all under heaven are one family’. In such a society “people make no distinction between them and us” (不分彼此, bufenbice) and the final goal of the Confucian datong is summed up in the phrase “where all the world are like brothers” (四海之内皆兄弟也, sihaizhinei xiexiongdiye) (Piao Bingjiu 2009: 214). Thus, the result of the Confucian datong is that otherness is transformed into sameness in order to

\(^{38}\) Mozi, or Mo Di (circa 470-391BC), was a philosopher who lived during the Hundred Schools of Thought period (in the early Warring States era). His work directly challenged Confucian and Daoist schools of thought. The school he founded, known as Mohism, was popular during the Warring States period but lost prominence with the spread of the legalist school during the Qin dynasty (220-207BC) and was marginalised further with the spread of Confucianism during the Han dynasty (206BC-220AD).
create harmony in the international system, promoting a kind of universalism that, to the student/scholar of international relations, is both familiar and not.

The Tsinghua School’s interpretation of Mozi presents an even more radical approach, based on the Mohist tradition’s notion of universal love (兼爱, jian’ai). Despite Mozi’s critique of Confucianism, the manner in which this concept is interpreted and deployed is remarkably similar to the deployment of the Confucian notion of datong just discussed. According to the Mozi, all people have different opinions; therefore, when individuals act purely out of self-interest and rulers act only in the interests of their own nation, conflict arises (Yan and Xu 2008: 24-6). Peace is attained by unifying diverse opinions and instilling mutual love. This is achieved through multiple layers of government: where a local leader is benevolent, he is able to unify all the opinions of his village and that village is stable. Likewise, if the ruler of a state is also a benevolent leader, he can unify the opinions of all the local leaders and through them the people. The emperor, if benevolent, unifies the opinions of state leaders and through them all the people (Yan and Xu 2008: 23-4). The example of the morally superior emperor radiates through many layers of government such that people’s very preferences are changed to be in line with those of heaven. As Liu Jeeloo argues, “what Mozi hoped to accomplish, then, was not merely behavioral reform, but a psychological transformation of all people” (Liu Jeeloo 2006: 110).

In both attempts to incorporate pre-Qin thinking into contemporary IR, difference continues to be portrayed as a potentially destabilising force in the world. To bring order to the world, that difference is transformed into sameness, through an appeal to a morally correct example, which all people will learn to follow. Their preferences are shaped to be one and, as a result, there is harmony in the world. This involves not just a radical reordering of people’s preferences but the construction of new identities, such that all become – as the 2008 Beijing Olympics slogan required – part of ‘One World, [with] One Dream’ (同一个世界, 同一个梦想, tongyi ge shijie, tongyi ge mengxiang). The future Yan’s Tsinghua School discursively constructs is one whereby the world is
made peaceful and harmony is created through demonstrating the superiority of the Chinese way and actively encouraging others to imitate it.

Yet within the Confucian tradition at least there is another important concept: ‘harmony-with-difference’ (和而不同, *he’er butong*). While Great Harmony (*datong*) creates perfection through a unified order, ‘harmony-with-difference’ questions the utility of unity, in ways that encourage different opinions, norms and models. Rather than describing the same thing, Great Harmony and harmony-with-difference thus present very different notions of social order and world order: one appeals to the benefits of overarching unity, while the other seeks to preserve opportunities for difference. The writings of Tsinghua School contributors seem to opt, almost exclusively, for an understanding of harmony closer to that of *datong* yet the (absent) presence of a Confucian definition of harmony-with-difference serves once again to disrupt such (mythical) claims. It also causes us to question how such ideas about harmony might play out in contemporary Chinese foreign policy guided by the concept of ‘Harmonious World’ (和谐世界, *hexie shijie*). Does Yan’s Tsinghua School point to a benign egalitarian Harmonious World or to a more ominous hierarchical ‘harmonising’ the world? The contradictions and overlap between these alternatives play out in different ways creating multiple possibilities for China’s (and the world’s) future.

**Sanitising Hierarchy:**

The (absent) presence of imperialism in the Tsinghua School

Yan and his colleagues within the so-called Tsinghua School draw upon selected pre-Qin texts in order to present an alternative vision for world politics to that offered by existing ‘western’ international relations theories. Yet what Yan and his colleagues find within pre-Qin thought closely chimes with a number of key concepts or ideas in international relations discourse whose roots are traditionally located in western political thought. Yan argues that such similarities merely reinforce the existence of enduring international realities.
Yet such claims, inadvertently perhaps, undermine the creation myths that construct the parochial/global discipline of IR. The Tsinghua School’s promise of creating a Harmonious World through the model of true kingship (wang leadership) challenges liberalism’s claim to have found the route to peace, or the so-called ‘End of History’, in the model of liberal democracy (Fukuyama 1989). Simply by bringing pre-Qin intellectual sources into disciplinary discourses, Yan Xuetong and the Tsinghua School are disrupting claims of origin for foundational ideas in international relations discourse. Confucian and other pre-Qin traditions provide a rich source of thinking about world politics that have been written out of disciplinary creation myths and Yan’s work brings this erasure to light, complete with all its complexities and contradictions. By drawing upon a wide range of pre-Qin texts and philosophical traditions, Yan’s project helps also to emphasise the (absent) presence of diversity both within and between ‘Chinese’ and ‘western’ political thought.

Nevertheless, the Tsinghua School’s narrative about world order, and China’s role in reshaping it, also performs a myth function in international relations discourse and is haunted by ghostly presences; namely the ghosts of hierarchy and imperialism. The Tsinghua School narrative claims that China’s rise to power can be set apart from that of rising European powers in the past because it will be achieved through a process of peaceful evolution rather than violent upheaval. This vision accepts the presence of hierarchy in international relations as read, however, it also acts to present a positive or, rather, sanitised version of the production and maintenance of hierarchy in the international system. Yan argues that, by adopting a wang approach to leadership modelled on the pre-Qin benevolent sage, China can lead the world in a positive and constructive manner. Yet, whilst on the one hand Yan’s project can be seen as celebrating diversity and respecting difference, the ‘harmony’ it tends to advocate is achieved through the complete erasure of difference in the world. It requires the creation of new identities such that all belong to the new harmonious world order, leaving little room for those who may not wish to belong.
The *wang*/*ba* distinction is crucial in Yan’s pre-Qin work; seen as the key to presenting an alternative theory, or at least a crucial amendment to existing theories about rising powers in international relations. According to Yan Xuetong, the *wang* leadership model presents China’s rulers with an opportunity to bring peace to (to harmonise) the world that is simply not understood within existing (western) theories of international relations. It offers an opportunity to build what former and current presidents Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping have called “new-type relations” between the rising power (China) and existing hegemon (the US): relations built on “mutual respect and win-win cooperation” (Hu Jintao 2012, Xi Jinping 2012). However, translating the pre-Qin *wang*/*ba* distinction into contemporary international relations discourse is problematic in a number of ways. Translating *wang* as ‘humane authority’ rather than ‘true kingship’ presents a positive (sanitised) vision of hierarchy in the international system that obscures imperialist undertones that sometimes haunt Yan’s IR thinking. Equally, translating *ba* as ‘hegemony’ also leads to confusion. While *ba* is thoroughly immoral in modern Chinese – involving the humiliation of a state and a people, according to Xu Jin (2011: 276) – hegemony means a number of things in English. When one says the US is a ‘hegemonic power,’ English-speakers probably think that it is big and powerful, while Chinese-speakers definitely think that it is immoral and evil. For Yan to claim that the Chinese state will never be ‘hegemonic’ does not necessarily mean that it will not dominate the international system; merely that it will not be, or rather will not see itself as, immoral but then what state ever does?

In Yan’s work the concepts of *wang* and *ba* are plucked from their position in a 2000 year old philosophical tradition and ascribed onto the contemporary geo-bodies of ‘China’ and ‘America’. As a result, Yan’s pre-Qin project becomes about finding ways to replace “American hegemony” (bad) with China’s benevolent world leadership (good). To use the language of Barthes once again, the concepts of *wang* and *ba* are given the status of mythical signifiers in contemporary Chinese international relations discourse, thus emptying them of their history and meaning. Throughout his work Yan argues that China requires intellectual power not just material power in order to
lead the world. He argues that it will be the country with the greatest intellectual power – the most to offer in terms of political thought – rather than the strongest material power that will win out in the global competition for overall leadership. According to Yan, (ancient) Chinese thought offers a more valuable contribution for world politics than western/American liberal thought. In Yan’s words: “Chinese thought is more civilised” (Yan Xuetong 2012). Where American liberalism values freedom and equality above all else, Chinese thought values fairness and civility. According to Yan, these (Chinese) values are superior to the ‘western’ values of freedom and equality and therefore hold the key to a better way of organising the world and its international relations when other countries (learn to) follow the civilisational standards set by the Chinese. Yan advocates fairness over equality. Fairness, according to Yan, respects the existence of weak and strong and is therefore more conducive to promoting harmony (Yan Xuetong 2013). As an illustration, he writes:

The rule of equality for boxing in the Olympic Games is that the one who falls on the floor in the set time loses while the rule of fairness classifies the boxers into heavy weight and light weight, thus giving boxers of lighter weight a chance to win medals. This equitable principle of differentiated treatments is not only applied in the Olympic Games but also practiced in international politics (Yan Xuetong 2013).

Following this principle therefore, “China must also recognize that it is a rising power and assume the responsibilities that come with that status” (Yan Xuetong 2011d). Similarly, the principle of fairness sometimes means China as a developing country should have lesser responsibilities. For example, in responding to climate change, Chinese politicians and academics argue for the need to recognise the historical role of the US and other western powers as polluters and give them far greater responsibility to cut emissions further and faster than newly developing countries such as India and China (Yan Xuetong 2011d). In Yan’s alternative vision for a Chinese-led world order, hierarchy is thus re-branded as “differentiated responsibility”, where the principle of “differentiated responsibility” recognises the ability of some countries to take on more responsibility (power) than others.
In addition to fairness superseding equality, (Chinese) civility trumps (American) freedom. Yan contends that civilisation is what separates human beings from animals and freedom is nothing without civility (Yan Xuetong 2013). China’s ability to follow the kingly way (wang leadership) as opposed to the way of might (hegemony) is what will ultimately make Chinese global leadership possible and successful. “When China and the United States regulate strategic competition between them in a civilized way, it will be possible that such competition will produce benign results” (Yan Xuetong 2013). This is made possible through the superior moral example set by the Chinese. This rhetorical approach that positions Chinese foreign policy/approach to international relations as morally superior to that of the U.S – where Chinese foreign policy facilitates peace (harmony) and American policy is detrimental to international security – is common throughout Yan Xuetong’s work and contemporary Chinese IR more widely (Yan 2011a: 219). Yet similar arguments are often made about China, particularly in relation to its alliance with North Korea and recent involvement across Africa (Rosman 2010: 124, Eisenman and Kurlantzick 2006).

While Yan has criticised George W Bush’s unilateralism as ‘immoral’ and therefore hegemonic, Bush’s own statements frame US foreign policy in terms of a noble America standing up against the global ‘Axis of Evil’. Chinese appeals for moral order (and against things like the “Three Evils”) are similarly problematic because they characteristically code China as fundamentally moral, and all other ways as immoral. Such claims to moral superiority and/or moral leadership are, as Said argued in Orientalism, an important method of control in imperialist discourse (Said 1978). There are plenty of historical examples where an imperial regime has promoted its own cultural ideas as the moral standard, for example; Britain’s ‘white man’s burden,’ France’s ‘mission civilisatrice,’ and even China’s own ‘civilization/barbarism distinction’ (华夷之辨, huayi zhibian).

By setting out an approach to international politics that highlights the role China can (will) play as a morally superior global leader, Yan Xuetong and his Tsinghua School are running the risk of simply replacing one form of imperialism with another (Callahan 2008).
Chapter Six

The Chinese School according to Qin Yaqing: Relationality, hybridity and Chinese dialectics

*The Chinese IR community has a long-cherished hope to produce a Chinese IRT.*
(Qin Yaqing 2011a: 477)

*Use of Chinese dialectics may provide an alternative explanation of relations between actors of different cultural and civilizational backgrounds in global society*  
(Qin Yaqing 2012b: 81)

In many respects it is far simpler to justify the inclusion of Qin Yaqing's scholarship as a case study in this thesis than that of Yan Xuetong. Qin’s publications on the Chinese School idea have been widely read and debated in China and beyond. His contribution to Acharya and Buzan’s project which asked ‘Why is there no Chinese IRT?’ has been cited not only by those scholars interested in China and Chinese thoughts on world politics, but also by some who are interested in broadening or democratising ‘the discipline’ in a more general sense (Shilliam 2010, Onar and Nicolaidis 2013). Because of his strong advocacy for the Chinese School project and his capacity to publish widely in English, Qin Yaqing has come to be seen as a key representative of contemporary ‘Chinese IR’, within and beyond China. In many respects he has become the standard-bearer for the Chinese School idea and is frequently, and unfairly, portrayed as speaking for Chinese IR. Nevertheless, his work is clearly significant and worthy of inclusion in this study. Qin is highly influential in the
field international relations in China today. He is Executive Vice President and Professor of International Studies at the prestigious China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU), which was founded as the training centre for Chinese diplomats. Operating as the only institution of higher learning under the guidance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, CFAU “aims to train professional personnel in foreign service, international studies as well as in the careers related to international business and law” (China Scholarship Council 2013). As Professor of International Studies and Executive Deputy Director of the East Asian Studies Centre at CFAU, Qin is in a key position to influence the development of international relations thinking in the theory and practice of China’s foreign relations. Qin is also an important public intellectual, influential beyond academia. He serves as China Country Coordinator for the Network of East Asia Think Tanks (NEAT). He was on the resource team for the UN High Panel for Challenges, Threats, and Changes (2003) and worked as Special Assistant to the Chinese Eminent Person, China-ASEAN Eminent Persons Group (2005) (Creutzfeldt 2011).

Furthermore, Qin is influential amongst his peers. He is Vice-President of the China National Association for International Studies and in Kristensen and Nielsen’s survey Qin received the most ‘votes’ of any of the scholars mentioned, selected by around 58% of respondents as China’s top IR scholar (Kristensen and Nielsen 2010: 36). Qin, however, was quite unhappy about seeing the results of this survey published or discussed. He claims that the survey is evidence of a fundamental cultural difference between the ‘western’ scholars who carried it out and the Chinese scholars who participated in it and were the subject of it. He argues that the fixation on status and prominence that this survey represents is a profoundly western phenomenon and does not sit well with a Chinese culture of deference and respect. As Paltiel argues, “Chinese [people] are acutely sensitive to status relations and moreover are adept at manipulating status differences in order to manoeuvre for interest advantage” (Paltiel 2009: 58). It is entirely plausible that Qin’s response is as much about saving ‘face’ and needing to be seen as modest and self-effacing than it is about profound cultural difference. There is ample evidence amongst Chinese-
language sources that Qin is held in high regard: one online source describes him as a “principle representative” or “leading exponent” (主要代表人物, zhuyao daibiao renwu) of Chinese IR (Baike 2014). Either way, Qin’s remarks betray a tendency of his to frame disagreement in terms of cultural difference. This type of argument is part of what has earned Qin the reputation as flagbearer for a unique, Chinese-style international relations. His influence in the field of Chinese IR extends beyond this however to a number of other areas including his role as a leading constructivist scholar, a translator and also an advocate for a Chinese School of IR.

Qin Yaqing: (constructivist) theorist

Prior to the publication of his influential article on the Chinese School (Qin Yaqing 2006), Qin Yaqing was best known within Chinese academia for his work promoting constructivist approaches to international relations. Just as one might see Yan Xuetong as representative of China’s realist scholars, mention constructivism in China and one would inevitably be sent in the direction of Qin Yaqing. Unlike Yan Xuetong, however, Qin cannot be considered a ‘disciple’ of any single theoretical approach. He is far more pragmatic and his theoretical preferences and outlook have quite clearly changed and evolved over time. As a student, Qin Yaqing (like me) had a keen interest in mathematics: he studied statistics at the University of Missouri and, at the time, was very taken by Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* (1979). He adopted a structural realist approach in his PhD thesis, which focused on the question of hegemonic maintenance and US foreign policy behaviour. He was motivated largely by a desire to promote ‘scientific’ approaches in China at that time. One of his earliest Chinese-language publications based on his doctoral project adopted a similar approach (Qin Yaqing 1999), which Qin describes as “a creative empirical study within the framework of Structural Realism” (Qin Yaqing 2011a: 453).

Soon after, however, Qin parted ways with structural realism and has continued his search to find theoretical perspectives that better suit his (Chinese) understanding of the world. Qin has since remarked that, having conducted his PhD thesis using strict quantitative methods, he was sceptical of
such approaches from the beginning; seeing the possibilities to manipulate the
data to fit a certain hypothesis. Nevertheless, one can find examples in Qin’s
most recent work where he continues to rely on statistical or quantitative
methods. For example, he recently conducted a quantitative survey of IR
publications over the past 30 years in order to chart development and progress
in the discipline in which he systematically classified over 1100 journal articles
according to their choice of theoretical approach in order to chart trends (and
progress) over time (Qin Yaqing 2011a). Qin is described by Mark Leonard as “a
rising star amongst liberal internationalists” due to his support for greater
integration across Asia and arguments promoting China as a cooperative rather
than competitive force in the region (Leonard 2008: 103). Amongst his Chinese
colleagues, however, he is most closely associated with constructivist
approaches to international relations, specifically those associated with
Alexander Wendt. Qin’s work has been strongly influenced by his encounters
with Wendt and his constructivism. Qin has done much to promote Wendt’s
ideas and approaches within China; including translating his book Social Theory
of International Politics (2000). This translation was highly significant in terms of
popularising constructivism in Chinese international relations discourse, which
until then had been largely unheard of amongst Chinese scholars (Yuan
Zhengqing 2009b: 143-144). One of the reasons Qin was initially attracted to
Wendt’s work was that he felt that Wendt’s approach was a better fit for
Chinese understandings of the nature of the social world. Qin writes that:
“Wendt’s discussion of agency had inspired me ... I felt that some of the ideas
were similar to traditional Chinese philosophical thinking, which stresses change,
mutual interaction and human agency” (Qin, Blaney and Tickner 2013: 162).
Above all, Qin is a pragmatist and sees theory as something that can be taken
on, adapted, amended and ultimately cast aside when it is no longer useful to
understanding the world ‘out there’. I will return to the implications of Qin’s
approach to theory later, for now it is worth highlighting his desire to find or
develop a theoretical approach that is sensitive to cultural difference(s), which
Qin believes are of great significance in shaping IR research.
Qin Yaqing: passionate translator

Like Yan Xuetong, Qin studied English as an undergraduate and landed in the world of international relations somewhat by accident or, as Qin suggests, fate (Qin Yaqing in Lu Xin 2005: 61). Unlike Yan, however, Qin has always had a keen interest in literature, arts and culture. He wanted to go into the field of theatre studies and spent time in the 1980s alongside his wife translating the works of American dramatists such as Harold Pinter and Kate Chopin (Qin et al 2013: 169, interview July 2013). Qin has trained and worked as a UN interpreter and translator but now considers translation more as a hobby than a career in its own right (Qin et al 2013: 174). His efforts in translating works of international relations theory, however, have had a key influence on contemporary Chinese international relations discourse and represent an important element of Qin’s efforts to combat US intellectual hegemony in the discipline. His decision to devote his time to translation work was, Qin argues, a response to hearing a Chinese PhD candidate in the mid-1990s arguing in defence of his thesis that there is no place in international relations for ethics and morality. This, according to Qin was because the student in question had relied entirely upon Chinese translations of western theoretical works, which at that time included only a few American realist scholars such as Morgenthau and Niebuhr (Qin et al 2013: 169). Qin, a strong believer in the importance of intellectual pluralism, sought to rectify this imbalance by translating additional works of western scholarship beyond neorealist theories.

Qin has actively sought to diversify the range and scope of translated works available for students and scholars working exclusively or predominantly with the Chinese language. He has been responsible for translating at least 12 IR books from English into Chinese and serves on the editorial board of several major publishing companies producing important translation series. He worked with Peking University Press to produce a series that focuses predominantly on liberal theorists and with World Affairs Press to produce a series focusing on approaches such as the English School (Qin et al 2013: 170). The series by Zhejiang People’s Publishing Houses includes translations of Christine Sylvester’s *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Post-modern Era*
Qin recently published a reader of ‘western IR theory classics’, which aims to provide a comprehensive and systematic understanding of western international relations theory for newcomers to IR (Qin Yaqing 2008a: 1). In contrast to many similar works available in Chinese (Song Wei 2011, Wang Fan 2012) Qin presents translations of major works belonging to four key theoretical approaches, rather than the typical three: realism, liberalism and constructivism. Qin adds a fourth category ‘critical and post-modern approaches’, which includes translations of works by Richard Ashley, Robert Cox and Immanuel Wallerstein. Nevertheless, Qin arguably (re)performs existing disciplinary narratives by listing them after the three ‘mainstream’ approaches.

Throughout Qin has sought to maintain a balance between American and European scholarship, fuelled by his fear of the domination of one single discourse. Qin believes strongly that “it is very dangerous to only be able to buy one thing” (interview conducted July 2013). Despite his attempts at diversification, however, his recent quantitative study of leading Chinese periodicals shows that the gap between work based on American scholarship vs. non-American scholarship appears to be getting larger not smaller (Qin Yaqing 2011a: 446) and Qin concedes that realist scholarship from the US is still very dominant in Chinese international relations. Nevertheless, Qin still sees translation as a vital element of his work and argues that the process of translation itself is useful in his own theory-building efforts (Qin et al 2013: 170). He views translation as a dialectical process that allows cross-fertilisation of ideas between the text, author and translator. Characteristically, for Qin, the process is as important – if not more so – than the outcome(s). This emphasis on process over results, and on dialectical encounters between ‘east’ and ‘west’, are key building blocks of Qin’s own international relations theorising and, according to Qin, represent a distinctively Chinese way of understanding the world.
Qin Yaqing: Chinese School advocate

The work Qin Yaqing is most famous for, particularly outside of China, is his work promoting or advocating for a Chinese School of international relations theory. Fuelled by his dissatisfaction with the continued dominance of seemingly western theoretical models in Chinese IR research, Qin began reflecting on the possibility of a Chinese IR theory in around 2003 (Qin Yaqing 2012c: 1). In 2006, he published his first direct intervention into the debate in the now infamous article: ‘A Chinese School of International Relations Theory: Possibility and Inevitability’ (Qin Yaqing 2006). In this paper he set out the reasons why it was not only possible for a distinct Chinese theoretical paradigm to emerge but also inevitable. This article sparked great debate amongst Chinese scholars at the time and has since been translated into English (Qin Yaqing 2012a). However, due to its earlier publication, it was his contribution to Acharya and Buzan’s ‘non-Western IR’ project that has earned him most recognition beyond the Chinese-speaking world (Qin Yaqing 2007a, 2010a). In this article Qin explains why there is currently nothing that could be considered a distinct Chinese theory of IR but that it is highly likely that one might emerge in the (near) future. He has also made similar arguments in relations to the likely emergence of a “theory of diplomacy with Chinese characteristics” (Qin Yaqing 2008b: 9).

Qin justifies the need for a distinctly Chinese approach by arguing that “social research is unavoidably subjective; its aim is not merely to discover constants in the social world, but also to understand the social world’s meaning” (Qin Yaqing 2006: 7-8). It is therefore not possible to apply the same rules and approaches one might in the natural sciences to discover objective facts about the natural world. The social world is different and requires a different approach to both explain and understand it. In Qin’s words:

Those who hold the monistic view think that there are no national boundaries in IR theory because a proper theory must be universal. This is because constants transcend the limits of time and space ... Those who hold a dualistic view believe that while natural science has no national borders, it is possible for social science to have national distinctions. The reason is that
understanding is an important way of knowing in social science, and understanding is very much delimited by geocultural differences (Qin Yaqing 2006: 8).

Qin argues that social science theory is rooted in specific geocultural contexts. Such contexts influence the underlying assumptions and beliefs of those living within them and, in turn, infuse and inform their theories about the world and how it works. He believes that all theoretical work has an unavoidable geocultural birthmark. In stark contrast to Yan Xuetong’s instrumental understanding of the role of culture in international relations theorising, Qin argues that culture and identity do matter. Qin writes: “If we agree that social theory is heavily dependent upon the history, experience, and practice of a people, we need to recognise that culture matters in theoretical innovation and evolution” (Qin Yaqing 2012b: 69). Qin’s work reflects a genuine desire to engage with reflexivity in IR scholarship. He, like me, is attempting to develop a sensitivity in international relations discourse to the (absent) presence of alterity and difference. His work on Chinese dialectics, which this chapter explores, has the potential to provide critical scholars with a language for capturing the “complex personhood” that Avery Gordon speaks of (Gordon 2004: 4-5) and helps to demonstrate and reaffirm the complexity of (international) life. Nevertheless, Qin’s work, like mine, is haunted by its own ghostly beings that remind us of the difficulties of thinking and writing critically in international relations.

In addition to his philosophical argument as to why theories might differ from one context to the next, Qin underlines his case for a Chinese School by documenting the ways in which “Western International Relations theory has sometimes failed to explain the reality in our world” (Qin Yaqing 2012b: 68). Qin gives several examples of how contemporary (mainstream) IR theories do not explain international realities in East Asia particularly well. For example, he argues that the model of rule-based governance that underpins much liberal institutionalism (and other mainstream IR approaches) does not adequately explain regional cooperation and multilateralism in East Asia (Qin Yaqing 2011b: 117-8). Qin claims to have discovered, while working as a practitioner during
negotiations with ASEAN and ASEAN + 3, that existing (western) theories of international relations were inadequate for understanding and explaining the dynamics of East Asian regional integration. He argues: “the questions raised within the major western IR paradigms are so limited; they are not the questions I found to matter in the practice of East Asian regional integration” (Qin Yaqing in Creutzfeldt 2011). For example, Qin argues that existing IR theories were unable to explain why East Asian countries cooperated as they did over the period. Ostensibly western theoretical ideas such as democratic peace and hegemonic stability didn’t seem to apply to relations between states in East Asia, many of which were not democratic. Likewise, the manner in which ASEAN operates – with less stringent constitutional arrangements than for example the European Union – does not fit with established theories of regional integration such as (neo)liberal institutionalism. David Kang, similarly, argues that East Asian diplomacy follows a different logic due to cultural heritage in the region, specifically the historical experience of Chinese imperial rule (Kang 2004).

Qin’s answer to this apparent mis-match between theory and practice is to create a new theoretical approach that takes into account, or rather is built upon, the thinking, culture and practical lived experience of ‘China’ and its East Asian neighbours. Despite how Qin’s work is frequently portrayed both by others and by himself, he is not arguing for a completely essentialist approach. Qin recognises value in considering both western approaches and Chinese approaches and, importantly, appreciating the complex interactions between, across and within them. In his approach to the Chinese School question, as with any other question in international relations, Qin remains a strong advocate for pluralism. Recently Qin has started to favour the term Chinese Theoretical Paradigm (CTP) to Chinese School, believing the former to be more inclusive than the latter. Qin envisages many Chinese Schools competing but eventually coalescing to produce a distinctive Chinese paradigm (Qin Yaqing 2011a). In Qin’s words: “all these theories provide insights, very interesting and useful insights, but I don’t think that’s enough: there should be pluralism and diversity—that’s the key point of my argument” (Qin Yaqing in Creutzfeldt 2011).
This element of Qin’s argument is frequently lost or misplaced when Qin’s work is talked about in wider disciplinary debates about non-western IR. Qin’s strong advocacy for a Chinese School means he is frequently portrayed as the (sole) purveyor of Chinese IR. Qin’s account becomes the Chinese account within the wider anthology of non-western IR, obscuring the existence of diversity within ‘China’. Labelling Qin Yaqing’s work as ‘the Chinese School’ follows the tendency within international relations discourse, as a colonial discourse, to exoticise and/or essentialise the contributions of non-western others. This colonising move allows Chinese scholarship to be brought into the global/parochial discipline without disrupting IR’s founding mythology. It is brought in as a new (exotic) other – an alternative perspective that can be added to the existing canon of international thought but without challenging the portrayal of the non-west as outside needing to be ‘brought in’. Qin’s work sometimes helps to compound such a portrayal by labelling theoretical approaches in distinct terms; as either ‘Chinese’ or ‘western’.

Qin’s declaration that there shall be a Chinese School has been taken as something of a rallying call by colleagues, many of whom are also eager to develop a Chinese approach. Constructing a Chinese IR theory is portrayed by some as the highest prize in contemporary Chinese international relations – a silver bullet that will solve all of China’s problems. But, as I argued in the previous chapter, it is also seen as a waste of time by some critics, such as Yan Xuetong. Yan responded directly to admonish Qin for getting too caught up in the how and the where of a Chinese School rather than getting on and developing ideas that might contribute to the discipline as a whole (Yan Xuetong in Creutzfeldt 2012). For Qin the use of the ‘Chinese School’ label is strategic. It is a deliberate attempt to disrupt the intellectual hegemony of western theories in the parochial/global discipline. Qin writes:

> If you want to do something like that, change the intellectual status quo, you have to sometimes go to some extreme, so as to at least open up a way for it. Otherwise nobody will pay any attention to Chinese ideas. If you wouldn’t use the label, other people wouldn’t even see them. So you need to use the label.
Qin is advocating a kind of strategic essentialism that is deliberately subversive within contemporary international relations discourse. He sees the Chinese School label as having the potential to challenge the parochialism of the discipline by drawing greater attention to the (absent) presence of Chinese international relations scholarship. He is using the language and logics of international relations discourse to claim a defined role – a seat at the ‘theorising’ table – for Chinese IR scholarship, by labelling it a ‘Chinese School’. Qin believes the way to challenge western hegemony over the discipline is to present non-western alternatives as equally valuable for understanding the world; even if his own theory is, in reality, a complex hybrid of knowledge traditions that are western, eastern, neither and both. In direct contrast to Yan Xuetong, Qin values the label over the content because he recognises the power of language and the disciplining power of labelling. Nevertheless, both Yan (as critic) and Qin (as flag-bearer) are working towards the same purpose. Both are urging other Chinese scholars to think about their work in relation to the parochial/global discipline: they are encouraging their students and their peers to think about how their work can make a contribution to global debates and earn a place within ‘the discipline’. Whether that be through helping to refine existing theories (as Yan suggests) or offering alternative theories that are either partially (like Qin) or wholly (like Zhao Tingyang) based upon Chinese culture, philosophy and/or history. Qin “hopes his efforts will help inspire other scholars from China to think of their work as contributions to a global conversation about how politics works and how it should work” (Qin et al 2013: 159).

The Chinese School according to Qin Yaqing

Qin’s earlier research into developing Chinese-style international relations theory dealt only with why questions – why is there no Chinese IR theory; why do we need a Chinese School – and did not answer the question of what such a Chinese School might look like (Qin Yaqing 2012c: 2). Qin, however, has spent
the last decade diligently devising his own theory of international relations, which he hopes will contribute to the emerging Chinese theoretical paradigm he believes is inevitable. Qin recently published the results of this journey in his (Chinese-language) book: *Relations and Processes: the cultural construction of Chinese international relations theory* (Qin Yaqing 2012c). Bringing together much of his earlier work, it comprehensively sets out Qin’s vision for an international relations theory that is built on Chinese perspectives on the world. It reflects the distinct geocultural context in which its author is grounded and hence is a key contribution to shaping and driving forward Chinese international relations discourse and its contributions to the parochial/global discipline.

Qin argues that constructing a Chinese School of IR theory requires first having a distinctive core question or problematic (核心问题, *hexin wenti*). Drawing on Lakatos (1978), Qin argues that each new theory requires its own distinct hard core in order to be considered new or distinctive from other theories or research programmes: “once a new hard core is formed, a new theory is born” (Qin Yaqing 2010a: 39). This hard core contains two separate but related elements: the physical/material element – which provokes new hypotheses about the world ‘out there’ – and the metaphysical/ideational element, which produces the “ontological essence” of a theory. The metaphysical element of a theoretical hard core is the most significant and is what necessitates, guarantees even, a Chinese theory since it is grounded in and created by culture:

This component is formed over years in the cultural context of a people: their history, their intellectual tradition, their world outlook, their universal vision and their way of life and way of thinking – their culture (Qin Yaqing 2010a: 39).

The distinctive culture of the Chinese people ensures a distinctive approach to formulating international theory.

Qin argues that the core problematic from which the ‘hard core’ of mainstream (American) IR theory is derived is the problem of maintaining the dominance of the US in the international system. For British IR – or the English School, which Qin often speaks of as the same thing – it is how to govern
‘international society’. The core problematic for the Chinese School is the question of China’s place in the world (Qin Yaqing 2011a: 474, 2012c: 3). Qin believes this is the question that China has been struggling with for the last century; it is China’s “hundred year puzzle” (百年困惑, bainian kunhuo). Thus, just as for Yan Xuetong, explaining and negotiating China’s rise represents the key challenge for the scholar-intellectual (patriotic worrier) in China today. The problem of where China ‘fits’ in the international order and how China’s current transformation will impact upon that order – the question of ‘who China will be’ – provides the physical/material challenge from which a theoretical hard core can emerge. The metaphysical/ideational component of the hard core will be derived from China’s unique culture and intellectual history. As Qin writes, “when a problem presents itself to the human mind, the solutions to it do not come out of nothing” (Qin Yaqing 2010a: 40): Chinese scholars, embedded in their unique geocultural context, will approach a problem in a particular way when drawing on Chinese historical and cultural resources. Qin believes that if Chinese scholars use this puzzle – the question of China’s rise – as their starting point, they will be able to arrive at a robust theoretical hard core upon which to build a theoretical system or framework that is distinct from that of western theoretical schools that currently make up ‘mainstream’ international relations (Qin Yaqing 2005).

Building on his two-part definition of a theoretical hard core, Qin identifies three potential (pairs of) sources from which to develop a distinct Chinese theory of international relations. The first of these, which is the most commonly identified by other Chinese scholars, is the (Confucian) concept of tianxia and its practical outworking, China’s imperial tribute system. The second is (Chinese) theories of modernisation and 19th and 20th century history of revolution, from the Boxer Rebellion to the civil war and founding of the PRC. The final source is Deng Xiaoping’s pragmatism and reformist thinking and the practical aspect being China’s integration into the international system (Qin Yaqing 2010a: 41-45). In other work, Qin further highlights the importance of Marxism (Qin Yaqing 2011a: 455) and the “theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics” (Qin Yaqing 2008b: 9). In this respect Qin is unusual amongst
Chinese School advocates. He recognises the vital role played by Marxist thought in shaping Chinese perspectives on world politics both in the past and the present. He acknowledges Marxism’s enduring legacy in contemporary Chinese international relations discourse that is ignored or actively written out by Chinese IR’s creation myths (see pp. 123-129). In respect to each of the potential sources of inspiration, Qin advocates an integrative approach – one that incorporates theory and practice (albeit still viewing them as separable entities) and that draws upon a wide variety of different intellectual resources; both Chinese and not. Qin looks for inspiration in all aspects of Chinese thought, past and present.

What’s the big idea? Rules vs. relations

Drawing together these (varied) sources of knowledge, Qin settles on a core concept, or “big idea” (Qin Yaqing 2010a: 40, 2011a: 473-475, Callahan 2004a), that he claims encapsulates the core meaning of Chinese culture across space and time. Qin Yaqing’s ‘big idea’ for a Chinese international relations theory is found in the twin concepts of process (过程, guocheng) and relations (关系, guanxi) (Qin Yaqing 2012c). Qin describes ‘relations’ as “the conspicuous missing part” from the three major systemic theories of international relations. He writes: “the three mainstream international relations theories – structural realism, neo-liberal institutionalism and structural constructivism – have missed an important factor, namely the study of processes in the international system and relational complexity in international society” (Qin Yaqing 2009: 69). To the extent that relations are considered by mainstream IR, they are always framed as derivative of the actions of independent actors (states) in the international system. In contemporary realism and liberalism and even in (mainstream) constructivism, the main unit of analysis is the actor: the nation-state, which, according to Qin, is ontologically prior to any relationships between them. From a Chinese perspective, on the other hand, such relations are significant and constitutive of actors’ identities in global politics:

Process, defined as relations in motion, can stand on its own, has its own dynamics, and plays a crucial role in international
relations. The core of process, by definition, consists in relations. If ‘rationality’ has been a key concept for Western society, with its basis in individuality, then its counterpart in Chinese society should be ‘relationality’ (Qin Yaqing 2009: 69).

Relationality is the key defining feature of Chinese thought, both historical and contemporary. Qin uses the framework of rules vs. relations to explain the differences between a ‘western’ conceptual framework and a ‘Chinese’ one. Whereas western thought tends to treat (id)entities – usually states – as prior to any relationship between them, Chinese thinking sees the relationship as constitutive of any such entities. His own theory begins therefore with a thorough interrogation of the concept of relationality and considers how it might shape our understandings of the world if we begin with relations.

Qin first applied this relational approach to the issue of regional integration in East Asia, since this was one of the first areas he highlighted as not being ‘understood’ by existing (western) IR theories. In his article ‘Rule, Rules and Relations’ (2011b), Qin sets out two competing approaches to global governance: a rule-based approach and a relational approach, and uses Europe and East Asia as case studies to demonstrate the differences in approach between different cultural contexts. Qin argues that both forms of governance exist in contemporary international society but that the former is more prominent in western contexts and the latter is more pronounced in eastern societies. Rule-based governance “is rooted largely in the American cultural tradition and post-WWII European experience” (Qin Yaqing 2011b: 124). Such rule-based approaches reflect a western culture of individualism based upon assumptions of rationality which views states as rational actors in international politics. These rational states are then able to interact with one another according to the various rules, institutions and regimes that govern those relations. A relational approach, on the other hand, operates on the basis of mutual trust: it emphasises negotiation rather than control as the foundation for governance; it views governance as a dynamic process not a static set of structures or rules and it is relations rather than individuals that are the subject of such governance. Rule-based governance has been very widely studied and
theorised in contemporary international relations research but Qin has to look to the field of business management in order to find scholarship about relational governance upon which to draw. In addition, he looks to Chinese thought traditions to present a philosophical argument for relational governance. Qin effectively demonstrates the limitations of adopting either approach in isolation and argues that an integrative approach – that takes seriously both relational governance and rules-based governance – is far more useful and also better reflects the lived experience of governance both in the east and the west.

That said, Qin believes relational approaches are more pronounced in eastern/Chinese societies because such approaches accord better with the underlying (cultural) assumptions of those societies. A similar argument is made by Jeremy Paltiel who looks to eminent Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong to explain the Chinese preference for relational modes of governance.

According to Fei Xiaotong, the organizational order of the West places the accent on the formal structure, and relationships are seen as dependent on positions within that structure. He terms this tuantigeju [团体格局] or the organizational mode of association. ... By contrast in the mode of differential association [差许格局, chaxugeju] value is always relative to the self. At the same time, cohesion is a value in itself (Paltiel 2009: 59-60).

Qin also draws upon Fei Xiaotong’s work in order to explain the preference in western societies for rules-based organisational structures governing social relationship and a preference amongst Chinese societies for a more communitarian approach (Qin Yaqing 2012c: 4, 2010b: 132). Fei’s explanation of the fundamental difference between western and Chinese worldviews is captured in two simple yet elegant images or analogies. He describes Chinese society using the image of a stone dropped into a river; the ripples created by the stone represent social relationships. Ones relationships with others, and the obligations they entail, differ depending upon how close or far away they are from the self. This (Chinese) concept of relationality creates “an ego-centred network of social-relationships of family and friends that connects everyone in a
web of mutual obligations” (Hamilton 2014). Western societies, by contrast, are organised according to an individualistic rationale, which Fei encapsulates in the image of a haystack: “Western societies are like straws being collected to form a haystack. Each straw is distinct but equivalent” (Hamilton 2014). According to this worldview, all individuals are separate and formally equal; they may belong to many levels of organisation, each of which imposes certain rights and duties, but beyond this they are free to act as they please so long as they are not infringing other people’s rights and duties. According to Qin, the existence of such contrasting conceptions of the nature and importance of relations/relationality – these fundamentally distinct worldviews – results in distinct ways of conceptualising international relations. It leads to different schools of IR theory (Qin Yaqing 2006).

Yet relationality is not a new concept in international relations discourse. Qin’s is not the only study to emphasise the role of relations and thinking relationally about global governance (Lake 1999, 2009). David Lake, for example, argues that: “through a relational conception of authority, world politics is properly seen as a realm of variegated hierarchy … international relations are not a uniform piece of cloth, but a rich tapestry of varying shades, hues, and patterns” (Lake 2009: 175). Yet, in Lake’s study, nation-states are still taken as given; they are considered ontologically significant actors/entities, prior to any relations they might enter into. For Qin, this stems from Lake applying a fundamentally western worldview to relationality in international politics. However, critical scholarship over the past two or more decades has given the discipline of IR a wide variety of perspectives on relationality and its role in international politics. Much of that scholarship has tried to demonstrate the constitutive role of relationships and relationality to international relations (Shapiro and Der Derian 1989). I argue that Qin’s research – particularly his work on so-called Chinese dialectics – has the potential to add significantly to this research agenda. Qin’s re-presentation of key Chinese philosophical traditions potentially provides critical scholars with a new language in which to talk about and to understand relationality and identity in world politics. Whether or not Qin’s work is evidence of a fundamentally different worldview
that is irreconcilable with the western, individualistic worldview that Qin believes underpins existing IR research remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is the potential for his theory of relationality to offer a fresh perspective on (what constitutes) international relations.

**Difference, binary opposition and the yin-yang relationship**

Qin adopts an integrative approach that “attempts to construct a dialogue between Western international theories and Chinese cultural thinking” (Qin Yaqing 2012b: 78). According to Qin, the (Chinese) logic of relationality differs significantly from the (western) logic of causation, which forms the basis of most mainstream approaches to international relations. Qin turns to the field of medicine by way of illustration. A traditional Chinese medicine chart and the entire system of Chinese medicine is based on a different kind of logic to a (modern) western logic, which focuses almost entirely on the notion of direct causation (Qin et al 2013: 164-5). The two systems are underpinned by entirely different logical structures. Western medicine, or biomedicine to give it its more accurate name, “is primarily concerned with isolable disease categories or agents of disease, which it zeroes in on, isolates, and tries to change, control, or destroy” (Kaptchuk 2000: 3). Chinese medicine, however, is built upon a wholistic or synthetic logic. The Chinese physician begins by collecting together all available symptoms and signs, organising them into understandable configurations, or ‘patterns of disharmony’. “The therapy then attempts to bring the configuration into balance, to restore harmony to the individual” (Kaptchuk 2000: 4). In western medicine, interventions are directed at the identifiable cause but Chinese medicine views the whole person made up of a complex web of relations and influences. In other words: “The Chinese method is based on the idea that no single part can be understood except in its relation to the whole” (Kaptchuk 2000: 7). Qin takes this understanding of the body and applies it to the body politic of international relations. He argues that a Chinese approach to understanding international relations begins with the whole. Change and continuity are understood in terms of the whole system not in terms of the actions of one individual element. Kelvin Cheung has produced a
similar study in which he uses Chinese and western approaches to medicine and the human body as an analogy to explain differences in Chinese and western approaches to strategic culture. He argues that the holistic perspective in the Chinese notion of security means that Chinese thinkers and actors in international politics perceive threats in different ways. Cheung argues “adopting the Chinese cultural perspective on security would require us to ask a different set of questions in global governance than that informed by traditional positivist IR theories” (Cheung 2011).

In developing his theory of international relations – his theory of processual constructivism – Qin begins with processes and relations. Mirroring the logic of Chinese medicine in which “the question of cause and effect is always secondary to the overall pattern. One does not ask, ‘what X is causing Y?’ but rather, ‘what is the relationship between X and Y?’” (Kaptchuk 2000: 4). In Qin’s theory, actors are constituted by the relations and interactions taking place between them – it is these relationships therefore that become the basis unit of our study of international relations.

In other words, things or ‘variables’ change and co-change along with change in their relations; individuals in the web are subject to changes in the relational web as a whole; and, similarly, interaction among individuals can have an impact on the web. This is perhaps why Western social scientists try to control variables that may interfere so as to focus their research on the causally connected variables, while Chinese scholars tend to include as many variables as possible in dealing with a subject of research, so as to figure out the overall relationships among them (Qin et al 2013: 165).

Qin believes that a Chinese theory of international relations is a relational theory of international relations.

In developing his relational theory, Qin draws upon a variety of Chinese intellectual resources, including the classic Chinese text the Yijing (易经, Book of Changes), the Confucian idea of zhongyong (中庸) or middle way and the concept of yin-yang (阴阳), which is central to a number of Chinese philosophical traditions (Qin Yaqing 2011b: 133). He begins with an explanation of the Chinese philosophy of correlativity. Fundamental to each of the strands
of Chinese philosophy Qin draws upon, found also in the sociological analysis of Fei Xiaotong I mentioned above, is the basic (Chinese) principle of correlativity. That “everything in the universe is related to everything else is the basic understanding and practice of the Chinese” (Qin Yaqing 2011b: 127). To further explore the nature of this relationality, Qin focuses on what he calls the meta-relationship in Chinese culture: the *yin-yang* relationship. This relationship, according to Qin, “represents the essential nature of all relations, including relations between humans, between social groups, and between nation-states” (Qin Yaqing 2012b: 79, my emphasis). The concept of the *yin-yang* is fundamental to Chinese thinking about the nature of the self and its relation to others. According to Qin’s work, it differs from the modern (colonial, western) self/other binary that underpins much contemporary international relations discourse.

The presence of binary oppositions – like self/other, absence/presence, male/female, black/white – is frequently identified as one of the key defining characteristics of modern, western thought. This type of binary thinking has been the subject of much criticism from scholars belonging to the various ‘post’ schools of international relations theory (post-structuralism, post-modernism, post-colonialism). As I explored in chapter 2, the categories of west and east are generally portrayed within international relations discourse as binary opposites. Post-colonial critique has demonstrated the constitutive role of the east or the Orient in western (colonial) identity formation. European colonial discourse – to which international relations discourse arguably belongs – requires the existence of an eastern other in order to construct its western self-identity (Said [1978] 2003, Neumann 1999). In Derrida’s post-structuralist critique, one of the opposing poles typically assumes dominance over the other such that any binary relationship is inescapably hierarchical. He argues, in the west, meaning is defined in terms of binary oppositions. These opposing forces cannot exist peacefully together but rather take the form of “a violent hierarchy [whereby] one of the two terms governs the other” (Derrida [1972] 1981: 41). L. H. M. Ling’s work highlights the colonising tendency of this binary opposition: “convert to be like us or suffer discipline from us”, which is particularly relevant.
for international relations discourse (Ling 2013: 556). As I argued in chapter two, international relations, as a colonial discourse, encounters so-called ‘non-western’ knowledge with the competing desires to assimilate and/or exoticise that knowledge. Assimilating (converting) non-western knowledge enables the myth function of international relations discourse to remain intact and undisturbed by the presence of alternative stories or meanings in/of the world. Equally, by treating such knowledge as profoundly exotic, it can be cast as subordinate or secondary to pre-existing (western/mainstream) knowledge – it assumes the bottom rung in the binary relationship.

Qin Yaqing offers *yin-yang* dialectics as an alternative way in which we might conceptualise the relationship between self and other and in so doing escape the modernising, colonising tendency of self/other binaries. The fundamental difference between the *yin-yang* relationship and the (modern, western) self/other relationship is the manner in which each conceptualises difference. The two poles *yin* and *yang* are different but never completely distinct. There is always an element of *yin* in *yang* and an element of *yang* in *yin*. This is most easily understandable with reference to the widely recognised *yin-yang* diagram:

**Figure 6.1 – Yin-Yang Dialectics**

![Yin-Yang Dialectics Diagram](image-source)

This symbol is a visual depiction of the intertwined duality of all things. *Yin* (the white area) signifies the female principle and *yang* (the black) signifies the male.

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But each half retains an element of the other within it; the white dot in the black and the black dot in the white. These dots signify “the Other in the Self” or what we might label ‘intersubjectivity’ (Chowdry and Ling 2010). As Ling explains: “with this mutual identification and penetration, the polarities of *yin* and *yang* are co-implicated even as they oppose each other” (Ling 2013: 560). They are never fully separable, always coexisting and evolving together. Thus rather than presenting a conflictual, hierarchical relationship as in Derrida’s critique of binary opposition in modern (western) thought, the *yin-yang* image offers a productive relationship whereby both Other and self can co-exist, co-evolve and co-change.

By providing an alternative to binary opposition as a model for understanding difference and sameness, Qin is challenging some of the fundamental underlying assumptions of contemporary international relations discourse. Specifically, Qin’s use of the *yin-yang* model of self/other relations challenges dominant discourses about difference that helped shape IR’s original myths of origin and that, as a result, continue to influence the discipline as those myths are told and retold today. Todorov’s double-movement (see p.84) is no longer possible with this reading of difference. Where Eurocentric colonial discourse translated difference into inferiority such that the “possibility of a common humanity requires assimilation” (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004: 10), the Chinese *yin-yang* dialectic recognises our shared humanity despite the (omni)presence of difference. There is no west that is fundamentally at odds with the east, but rather two identities that are separate but related, that evolve and change together. International relations discourse, as it consistently (re)performs the myth of Westphalia, tells us that difference in the international sphere exists between different actors/entities (predominantly nation-states) who are distinct but equal, and internally ‘the same’. This inside/outside distinction is, according to Rob Walker, one of the founding principles of disciplinary international relations: international relations is concerned with interactions or relations between (separate) states but not with what goes on inside (across, below, above) those individual entities (Walker 1993). Qin offers an altogether different reading of international relations that studies the entire
system, where its constituent parts only exist by virtue of their relationships to one another. Qin’s reading of the yin-yang dialectic offers a potential alternative to inside/outside renderings of international relations that critical scholarship within the discipline has been seeking for decades.

**Chinese dialectics, co-evolution and the middle way**

Qin’s theory, based upon his reading of Chinese dialectics, is first and foremost a theory of change. Qin argues that change is a fundamental feature of Chinese thinking about the world. The most influential book in the Chinese philosophical canon, the source from which all other Chinese philosophy is said to draw sustenance, is *The Book of Changes* (*易经, Yijing*). Qin’s theory about international relations is, therefore, a dynamic theory of change and evolution in the international system (the world). It draws upon Chinese dialectics to present an alternative way to conceptualise change in international politics to that offered by existing (western) theories. To explain this, Qin uses the Confucian concept of *zhongyong* (*中庸*), which has been variously translated as ‘doctrine of the mean’ (Watson 2004), ‘unwobbling pivot’ (Pound 1969), ‘middle course’ or ‘mutually inclusive way’ (Qin Yaqing 2012b: 81). The *Zhongyong* is one of the classic texts of Confucianism, its authorship usually attributed to Confucius’ grandson Zisi. Following the *zhongyong* is a recipe for harmony and order throughout heaven and earth that begins with the cultivation of the self. The ‘superior man’ (*君子, junzi*) closely follows the way (*道, dao*); he charts a middle course, maintaining equilibrium and harmony within himself and with his surroundings.

Therefore, the superior man cultivates a friendly harmony, without being weak. How firm is he in his energy! He stands erect in the middle, without inclining to either side. How firm is he in his energy! (*Zhongyong* stanza 10, Legge 2014).

Qin argues that following the *zhongyong*, the mutually inclusive way, is a superior approach to life. It embraces difference in a harmonious and productive way. It is a dialectical approach but one that differs significantly to western, specifically Hegelian, dialectics.
Like Hegelian dialectics, it sees things in opposite and interactive poles; but unlike Hegelian dialectics, it assumes that the relations between the two poles (yin and yang) are non-conflictual and can co-evolve into a harmonious synthesis, a new form of life containing elements of both poles and which cannot be reduced to either (Qin Yaqing 2012b: 81).

Following the zhongyong leads to co-evolution rather than conflict. The two poles, here yin and yang, are different but not distinct. They interact with one another “co-evolving without mutual elimination and forming new life while maintaining the properties of each” (Qin Yaqing 2012b: 82). Qin argues that western (mainstream) theories of international relations are heavily influenced by an understanding of the nature of change based upon Hegelian dialectics. According to Qin’s reading of Hegel, the relationship between two opposing forces is necessarily conflictual, and such conflict is only resolved when one of those forces eliminates the other. Realism views the international system in terms of conflict under anarchy: the result of one country challenging another (or the system as a whole) is necessarily conflict (Mearsheimer 2001). Liberal theories attempt to mitigate these tendencies by constraining actors through norms and regimes (Keohane 1984) and English School approaches emphasise the need for other countries to accept the prevailing norms in order to ‘join’ international society (Buzan 2010). Each of these approaches begins with states as pre-defined actors or entities with “a priori defined and fixed properties … seeing them as conflictual in nature until one conquers or eliminates the other” (Qin Yaqing 2012b: 82).

Chinese dialectics offers an alternative conceptualisation of change in international relations that is non-conflictual or harmonious. The model of the yin-yang relationship allows for a “process approach” that sees everything as part of an ongoing process of harmonisation: “combining opposites and thwarting conflict” (Qin Yaqing 2012b: 82). Conflict is not eradicated from international relations altogether but viewed as part of a wider, ongoing process that is ultimately working towards a goal of harmonious order; or, in official Party-State rhetoric, a “harmonious world” (Hu Jintao 2005, Qin Yaqing 2007b). Co-evolution is a process of changing together. Both self and other (east
and west) change and form something new without eliminating the essence of one another. This, according to a number of scholars, captures the fundamental nature of Chinese culture. Wang Yiwei, for example, suggests an appropriate Chinese alternative to the “House of IR” metaphor might be a river or a pond in which all the different perspectives and theories might merge together and create a better way of thinking about international relations (own interview, July 2013). In his recent book, he describes further what he sees as the fundamental differences between western and eastern cultures. Wang explores the implications of European culture as an ‘oceanic’ culture and argues that western culture is now declining (Wang Yiwei 2013). The book is titled Haishang (海殇) a play on the title of the controversial Chinese television series from the 1980s River Elegy (河殇, heshang), which depicted the decline of traditional Chinese culture. The series used the analogy of the Yellow River to portray the once superior Chinese civilisation as having dried up due to isolationism. It claimed that China’s future success must come from looking to the ocean (Goldman 2002: 514). Wang Yiwei turns this on its head and argues that Chinese culture as ‘river culture’ – an absorptive culture that welcomes and integrates alternative perspectives – is far stronger that the ‘oceanic’ alternative. The Chinese have encountered and ‘Sinicised’ Buddhism since around two thousand years ago and similarly, since the twentieth century, Marxist-Leninist thought. In both cases, ‘foreign’ influences have been absorbed and merged and changed such that the result is unrecognisably new: a hybrid containing the essence of each yet belonging to neither. During its long history, the Chinese empire has been ruled by two foreign or ‘barbarian’ dynasties, the Mongol-led Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) and the Manchu Qing (1644-1911), both of which relied upon (Han) Chinese traditions to govern and to maintain order in the empire. The result was a merging and shifting of both identities such that all come to be considered ‘Chinese’, yet in each instance what that ‘China’ looks like is markedly different than it was before. Each of the philosophical traditions that Qin and others (including Yan Xuetong and his Tsinghua School) draw upon has been formed through the merging together of multiple thinkers and
perspectives over time. Chinese culture is often portrayed in international relations discourse as ‘Confucian’ culture but, as both Qin and Yan demonstrate through their wide reading of Chinese philosophy, Confucianism is just one of many philosophical traditions that influence Chinese worldviews, past, present and future. Chinese history can be read as a series of encounters between different cultures that have merged and changed or, to use Qin’s terminology, co-evolved.

Qin applies this perspective to contemporary international relations, hoping to offer an alternative, more hopeful, way for IR scholars to view change in the international system. Unsurprisingly, Qin applies his theory to the question of China’s contemporary rise (Qin Yaqing 2004b, 2010b). He argues that adopting his theory “helps to illustrate that China’s rise can take an approach different from that of other powers in history whose rise was accompanied with violence” (Qin Yaqing 2011a: 475). Qin argues that a view of Chinese dialectics allows for the possibility of an encounter between China and the international system that can be seen as a harmonising process. “It is not conflicting opposites in this case, rather it is harmonious opposites” (Qin Yaqing 2012b: 82). These opposites differ at the beginning but interact and together they co-change and co-evolve. China’s contemporary rise can therefore be peaceful. Qin cites the past 25 years’ experience of China integrating peacefully into international society under reform and opening and its current foreign policy stance, with its New Security Concept and emphasis on ‘win-win principles’, as evidence that China can (and will) rise peacefully (Qin Yaqing 2004). L. H. M. Ling similarly applies her reading of Daoist (yin-yang) dialectics to the pressing question of China’s rise arguing that such a perspective allows international relations to escape the “tragedy of great power politics” (Mearsheimer 2001) and view China and its interactions with the world in a different light (Ling 2013). Thus, despite very different starting points and very different journeys, both Qin Yaqing and Yan Xuetong end up at a very similar destination: according to them both, Chinese philosophy tells us (international relations) that China’s rise can and will be peaceful. It offers a prescription for a harmonious/harmonising approach to world order that defies the logics of
international relations discourse and/or IR’s founding mythology. Both theorists upset or disrupt those myths, whether intentionally (Qin) or not (Yan), yet both are haunted by those same myths and often reproduce them in their own work.

**Ghostly Trails:**

*A different way of doing difference?*

Qin Yaqing’s work differs from Yan Xuetong’s in that it is very deliberate in its attempts to disrupt (western) intellectual hegemony in disciplinary international relations. Qin’s approach – advocating the construction of a distinct *Chinese* School of IR theory – is one of strategic essentialism. Qin is emphasising Chinese distinctiveness in order to claim a place for Chinese thinking in international relations discourse. He emphasises the importance of a theory’s (and a theorist’s) geocultural context in order to stake a claim for Chinese research to be taken more seriously within the (mythical) household of international relations. In many respects Qin’s approach has been successful. His advocacy for Chinese IR – in particular his role in leading the charge for a Chinese School – has meant that scholars both within and beyond the borders of the PRC are now carefully considering what Chinese perspectives might bring to wider understandings of world politics (Ren Xiao 2009, Wang Yiwei 2009, Shilliam 2010, Onar and Nicolaïdis 2013). The Chinese School debate and Chinese contributions to IR theory are becoming increasingly well-known and widely debated. ⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Qin’s strategic essentialism also has a number of unintended consequences; most notably, its potential to undermine Qin’s own theory based on Chinese dialectics.

Despite ultimately arguing for a synthetic or integrative approach – one that takes account of multiple and competing knowledge traditions and remains sensitive to local context(s) – Qin frequently begins his writing by setting out the fundamental differences between ‘western’ and ‘Chinese’ worldviews that

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⁴⁰ As an example, a seminar course on ‘Non-western contributions to international relations theory’ at Freie Universität, Berlin (2013) includes several lessons on Chinese contributions, which were chosen by the students themselves as the most relevant and/or interesting non-western debates to consider (Peters and Wemheuer-Vogelaar 2013).
shape their respective approaches to international relations. In one article Qin explains his work and that of colleagues in terms of their respective approaches to ‘analogical interpretation’ (Liu Xiaogan 2006). He explains the difference between adopting an inverse, reverse or interactive approach to international relations theorising. In other words, we can use Chinese conceptual frameworks to understand Chinese realities (obverse); use ‘foreign’ (i.e. western) conceptual frameworks to study Chinese realities (reverse); or we might adopt an approach that uses a combination of, or conversation between, the two conceptual frameworks (interactive) (Qin Yaqing 2012b: 70). He characterises Yan Xuetong’s work as the second (reverse) approach and his own theory as both the result of and roadmap for an integrative approach. Nevertheless, the manner in which he talks about ‘Chinese’ and ‘western’ conceptual frameworks, here and elsewhere, suggests that these frameworks are distinct and complete and also that they are separate from the ‘realities’ they are being used to understand. Qin therefore talks about hybridity as something that is a new creation formed out of the interaction between two distinct entities even as he writes his own theory of co-evolution and co-change.

Qin makes certain assumptions about ‘western IR’ within his work that perpetuate a particular image or identity and as a result obscure the presence of diversity within that category of ‘western IR’. According to Qin, his processual theory of international relations is valuable precisely because it adds an alternative perspective – a focus on relationality – that is missing from ‘mainstream’ (western) IR. Qin specifically situates his own theory within what he sees as the basic framework of contemporary ‘mainstream’ international relations theory. He identifies the three main paradigms that define approaches to international relations in contemporary scholarship – realism, liberalism and constructivism – and situates his own theory, his processual relationalism (Chinese IRT), in relation to these approaches. He plots these four theoretical approaches against two axes: material vs. social and structural vs. processual (see figure 6.2). The first considers whether a theory is primarily concerned with material aspects of global interactions of more concerned with social aspects of
international life; the second, concerns whether structures are seen as most
relevant or if processes are given prior significance.

**Figure 6.2**

![Diagram of international relations theories]

Structural realism, epitomised by Kenneth Waltz, favours material factors over
social and structure over process hence it lands in the top left of Qin’s 2x2
matrix. Qin’s own brand of processual relationalism is said to contribute a new
approach to international politics that is fundamentally different from the three
existing approaches because it favours social factors over material ones and
process over structure. Qin treats these axes as continuums rather than binary
choices but, in any case, what he is left with is a clear articulation of the
mythological discipline of international relations with its choice of three
approaches: realism, liberalism and constructivism or realism, rationalism and
revolutionism (Wight 1991).

This characterisation of the discipline is widespread in Chinese
literature and aids in perpetuating the myth of Aberystwyth with its claim that
international relations is a progressive science. By attempting to ‘fit’ his
(Chinese) theory into a matrix of existing (western) approaches, Qin Yaqing is
reproducing the parochial/global discipline complete with all its contradictions
and exclusions. This is arguably another act of Qin’s strategic essentialism;
staking out a place for Chinese IR *within* the discipline. It also suggests echoes of
Alexander Wendt’s influence on Qin’s work and ways of thinking, demonstrating once again the complex and competing ways in which Qin’s (and all of our) thoughts on international relations are formed. Qin’s theory is the result of a collection of influences interacting and merging across time and space, and his theory is a deliberate attempt to capture such a ‘reality’. Nevertheless, the language that Qin uses to talk about ‘Chinese’, ‘western’, ‘mainstream’ theories, for example, reproduces certain IR myths and runs the risk of compounding colonial logics of international relations discourse, which claims that the west founded the discipline and the rest must then find their place within it.

**From geocultural to national: a Westphalian ghost?**

Qin’s primary justification for supporting the construction of a Chinese School is that:

> the social practice and interaction of people from different geocultural settings will create different social phenomena and meanings, which will result in the formation of unique ways of understanding, knowledge systems, and thus different theories (Qin Yaqing 2006: 8).

Qin argues that the nature of social scientific knowledge, specifically his belief that it is grounded in human interactions rather than natural fact, means that a theorist’s (geocultural) context inevitably has an influence on the theory they produce. He takes seriously the role of identity in international relations theorising and attempts to come up with an approach to world politics that is sensitive to social realities and identities that are neither fixed nor given but rather are multiple, contested and in a constant state of becoming. His theory of processual constructivism demonstrates the importance of relationships in constructing identities in world politics and his interpretation of Chinese dialectics offers international relations an alternative way of conceptualising change in the international system that is harmonising not conflictual. Nevertheless, as a result of Qin’s discursive approach (his strategic essentialism) to drive forward the Chinese School agenda, Qin explicitly equates cultural difference with *national* difference, betraying a Westphalian ghost that is haunting Qin’s (critical) international relations.
Differences in geography, culture, history, ways of thinking and collective memory are among the factors that constitute the differences in people’s understanding ... According to Marx, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already.” These circumstances are closely related to the geocultural history of individual nations, which provides the basis for national distinctions in social science theory (Qin Yaqing 2006: 8, my emphasis).

Qin’s move from geocultural to national is, arguably, a legacy of the Westphalian myth functioning in and on Qin’s international relations discourse. As I argued previously, the story that international relations tells about the formation of international order – the Westphalian myth – resolves the problem of difference in the world by packaging it into discrete national containers (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004). The myth of Westphalia makes possible claims about the need for nationalised schools of international relations theory, which also trace difference and sameness along national lines. Qin’s advocacy of the Chinese School is no different in this regard and gives rise to comments such as: the Chinese perspective on international politics is X and the western perspective is Y. Whilst Qin himself may object to the closed nature of such a statement, his work unintentionally leads to this type of thinking. Qin frequently reinforces the narrative of Westphalia and its shaping of international order by characterising difference along national boundaries. He argues that, whilst there are certain universal aspects of human nature, the most fundamental of which is that human beings are inherently social creatures, “people also have differences, for example Americans cherish freedom, French people romance; Germans are stern (严谨, yanjin) and Japanese are meticulous (细致, xizhi)” (Qin Yaqing 2012c: 4). These kinds of national (racial) stereotypes are occasionally found within Qin’s work and undermine or unsettle his claims to see difference differently. Such national labels obscure the persistence of diversity within and hybridity between (across, above and below) these different ‘national’ containers. They construct bounded, complete notions of what American theory or Chinese theory looks like. But out everyday lived
experience within and beyond international relations discourse, and Qin’s own theory, tell us that life is more complicated than that. Such ‘national’ labelling of IR theories constructs not only international relations (by reproducing Westphalian myths about ‘the international’) but it also discursively constructs those national identities. Qin Yaqing’s Chinese School of IR, therefore, tells us as much about ‘China’ as it does about international relations.
Conclusion

Situating ‘China’ in the Chinese School:
Identity matters in Chinese international relations discourse

*China has adopted much Western wisdom since its opening-up. But it refuses to be westernized. The rejuvenation of the Chinese civilization is its dream.*

*The more China learns from the West, the more confident it becomes in its own culture.*

(People’s Daily 2010)

中学为体，西学为用

*Chinese learning as essence, Western learning for usefulness*

(Popular phrase during the self-strengthening movement in early 20th century China)

This thesis has been an exercise in ghost-hunting. Throughout, I have sought to follow the ghosts that haunt international relations discourse in, of and for ‘China’. Those ghostly encounters raise numerous questions about the discipline of international relations and the role for Chinese scholarship within it: questions about the role of imperialism and Marxist thought in shaping Chinese IR; questions about how IR scholarship (both Chinese and not) discursively constructs a hierarchically ordered discipline, a ‘House of IR’; questions about the role ancient Chinese thought might play in contemporary thinking about world politics. An even more fundamental question, however, arises from such encounters, one that as yet remains unanswered: who or what is ‘China’? What is Chinese about Chinese IR? Is it simply the case that Qin Yaqing is Chinese therefore he will produce a Chinese theory of IR, or, as Yan Xuetong has
purportedly said; “theorising Confucius is a good thing because the westerners cannot understand it” (Kristensen and Nielsen 2013: 109). Can we conceive of eastern and western identities as separate and irreconcilable, in Kipling’s words: “East is East and West is West, and ne’er the twain shall meet” (Kipling 1889)? Or is it not the case, as I have argued throughout, that the very categories or identities of ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ (and ‘Chinese’ and ‘not’) are discursively constructed and maintained through the deployment of statements such as these.

Such statements suggest a simple, straight-forward causal relationship between (Chinese) identity and (international relations) theory/theorising. Yet such a simple relationship is not possible amongst the complexity and complicity of (international) life. If Qin is Chinese does that mean he is not western? But he gained his PhD from an American University, he publishes in English, has a passion for American literature and, in his words, “like[s] coffee, [and] the occasional glass of whisky or cognac” (Qin Yaqing in Creutzfeldt 2011). Yet he also likes to drink tea, he enjoys Chinese calligraphy, literature and other aspects of so-called ‘traditional Chinese culture’ and the influence of his upbringing in a tumultuous period of China’s recent history is also clearly evident in his work (Lu Xin 2005). Yan Xuetong’s international relations journey tells a similar tale of multiple, competing influences on his intellectual and personal life that have helped to shape both him and the theories he has produced (Lu Xin 2011). As Qin’s own efforts at theorising attempt to capture, we are all without exception shaped, moulded and defined by the multiple, complex and overlapping web of relationships and encounters that constitute our (messy) lives. We can be both Chinese and western and both and neither. Identities are never fixed or stable and need to be discursively (re)constructed at all times and in all places. The ghostly encounters I have been following throughout the thesis help to demonstrate the incompleteness of such identity-forming processes. Identity must always be conceived as something that is unfinished; in a permanent state of becoming.

With this critical understanding of identity construction we may ask once again: who is Chinese in the Chinese School and what does this (their)
Chineseness represent? How do debates about Chinese-style international relations construct not just ‘international relations’ but also ‘China’? As Deng Yong argues, “China is still in search of its Chineseness” (Deng Yong 1999: 64): that Chineseness is always in question, its meaning always deferred. In many respects the efforts at international relations theorising that comprise the Chinese School and related debates, the conversations and disagreements that shape and drive contemporary Chinese international relations discourse, can all be read as attempts to answer the question of who is China and, often, who will China be? This conclusion sets out to explore some of the many ways in which the pursuit of a Chinese School reflects and informs wider questions about Chinese (national) identity and how this ‘China’ views itself and its place in the world, past, present and future.

**Chinese international relations discourse:**

**Assimilating, exoticising, constructing ‘China’**

Encounters between international relations discourse and so-called ‘non-western’ knowledge are complex and multifaceted. As I argued in chapter two, those encounters are fraught with difficulties and potential pitfalls and frequently see ghostly beings let loose on/in ‘the discipline’. When attempting to talk about non-western knowledge of international relations, we must constantly ask ourselves: “how might we encounter this diverse body of thought without in the process assimilating it within an existing archive or rendering it as profoundly exotic?” (Shilliam 2010: 4). I have argued throughout that Chinese attempts to participate in (parochial/global) international relations discourse, often encounter the same twin desires to assimilate and/or exoticise their respective contributions. Chinese scholarship frequently reproduces the creation myths we find within international relations discourse in its attempts to carve out a place within those myths and the mythical discipline they continually (re)construct. Yet such scholarship also serves to unsettle those same myths; sometimes deliberately, other times not. The myth that international relations (in theory and practice) began in Europe and the so-
called western world then spread to the rest of the world’s peoples and places as they slowly accepted and integrated into that ‘international’ world is performed over and over again within Chinese international relations scholarship, which claims that international relations (and international-ness) was an import (舶来品, bolaipin) from the west (Zhao and Ni 2007: 53). Qin Yaqing argues, for example, that one of the reasons why there is no Chinese international relations theory is due to the “lack of international-ness” within Chinese traditional thought.

Traditionally, Chinese had no consciousness of ‘international-ness’ nor the concepts related to it, such as sovereignty and territorial integrity... When the first professorship was set up in Aberystwyth immediately after World War I, the Chinese still believed that ‘Half of The Analects is enough to govern the whole world’ (Qin Yaqing 2010a: 37).

Now of course Chinese scholars such as Yan Xuetong, his Tsinghua School and Qin Yaqing himself are returning to the Analects and other ancient texts to determine how to govern the world from a Chinese perspective. Looking to (ancient) Chinese philosophy and tradition in order to construct contemporary theories of international relations has become one of the dominant themes within Chinese international relations research today and is seen as a key element of constructing a Chinese School of IR. The term wajue (挖掘), which means to ‘dig up’ or ‘unearth’ usually some kind of buried treasure or hidden jewel, is often used to describe this type of research (Qin Yaqing 2012c: 1). Such scholarship is attempting, we are told, to unearth ancient (pristine, innocent) Chinese wisdom so that it can be brought into contemporary international relations discourse. Yet treating Chinese thought in this manner – as an innocent, ancient relic awaiting discovery – often compounds existing (colonial) tendencies to treat such knowledge as profoundly exotic and obscures the multiple, complex histories of interactions between philosophies and worldviews, both ‘Chinese’ and not.

Attempts to ‘bring China in’ to the parochial/global discipline frequently fail to satisfy our critical appetite precisely because they begin with an acceptance that Chinese thought needs to be ‘brought in’ from the outside.
As I have argued, the mythical construct of an IR “House” – a well-ordered, structured discipline with a clearly defined inside and outside – is haunted by the ghosts of diversity, hybridity and of those ‘others’ who have been violently excluded from the household as a result of the discursive performance(s) of international relations discourse, of which all of us are a part. When we accept the presence of diversity and hybridity in international relations discourse – in, of and beyond ‘China’ – it challenges our understandings of what constitutes ‘the discipline’ of IR, if indeed we can talk of a discipline at all. But crucially, it also troubles our understandings of what constitutes ‘China’ and how we might begin to understand and define it. Debates about Chinese contributions to international relations and Chinese-style IR play a vital role in discursively constructing the China and/or Chineseness they claim to reflect/represent. Debates about a Chinese School of international relations are therefore intimately intertwined with wider ongoing debates about Chinese (national) identity.

Which China? Or who is ‘Chinese’ in the Chinese School?

As international relations scholars (theorists), our situated-ness matters. But one is rarely ever situated in one place at all times and, even then, places change around us and are changed by us. Defining what it means to be Chinese and who gets to be included in such a definition (as author of a Chinese School/Chinese theory) is just one of the ways in which discourses about Chinese-style IR are working to construct ‘China’ each and every time they are performed. Until recently, the vast majority of debates about building a Chinese School of IR theory and/or IR theory with Chinese characteristics were located within Chinese-language periodicals, conferences, textbooks and/or classrooms. In addition, the vast majority of participants in such debates were PRC citizens based in mainland Chinese universities who were used to publishing predominantly in Chinese (Ren Xiao 2000, Mei Ran 2000, Song Xinning 2001, Qin Yaqing 2006, Wang Fan 2008). In the past ten years, as (global) interest in non-western approaches to IR has proliferated, so too has the number and diversity of potential participants in (debates about) Chinese-style international
relations theory. Increasingly publications about whether or not there should be a Chinese School are appearing in English-language publications (Qin Yaqing 2010a, Ren Xiao 2008, Zhang Feng 2012) and being authored by scholars from ‘other’ places beyond the PRC (Wang 2013, Noesselt 2012, Kristensen and Nielsen 2013). Yet in each of these debates, the question of who belongs to the resultant ‘Chinese School’ remains open.

Most scholars who explicitly claim to produce a Chinese School or Chinese theory of IR are mainland Chinese scholars; that is, they were born in, often (though not always) educated in and continue to work within the PRC. In addition, there is a definite Beijing-bias amongst those scholars: Qin Yaqing, Song Xinning, Wang Yiwei, Wang Yizhou, Liang Shoude, for example, are all based at institutions in the capital. Ren Xiao and his colleagues at Fudan University are notable exceptions. Zhao Tingyang, whose work has inspired much of the Chinese School efforts, also works from Beijing, at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). The debate about whether and how to build a Chinese School of international relations theory has been most enthusiastic amongst this group of scholars. Nevertheless, there are many more potential candidates for authors of a Chinese School or, in Qin Yaqing’s preferred terminology, contributors to a Chinese Theoretical Paradigm (CTP) (Qin Yaqing 2011a). I have already explored the contributions of (Beijing-based) Yan Xuetong, Xu Jin and their Tsinghua School as a key contribution to the Chinese School project. Despite Yan Xuetong’s personal reservations and strong criticisms of the concept of a Chinese School, within Chinese international relations discourse ‘the Tsinghua School’ is already considered a key contribution to the creation of Chinese-style IR (He Kai 2012, Zhang Feng 2012b).

Another prominent scholar who works within mainland China has, similarly, produced what he claims is a unique, original approach to theorising international relations. Yet unlike Yan’s Tsinghua School, Tang Shiping’s work is rarely referred to as a contribution to building Chinese-style IR. This is perhaps because, unlike most IR scholars working in (mainland) China at present, Tang Shiping has chosen not to engage in debates regarding Chinese-style IR. His work to date has tended to focus on security issues, in particular he has
published a number of studies on China’s security dilemmas and analyses of offensive versus defensive realism (Tang Shiping 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b). His most recent book The Social Evolution of International Politics (Tang Shiping 2013), however, claims to present a unique approach to world politics that is distinct from existing (read, western) international relations theory. Tang argues it provides a systemic understanding of the changing nature of international politics, employing an original ‘Social Evolution Paradigm’ (SEP) that he has developed by drawing from anthropology and evolutionary biology. This may well represent an interesting and significant contribution to IR theory from a Chinese scholar yet Tang has thus far steered clear of naming it as such and chosen not to participate in any way in debates about Chinese-style IR, neither has his work been cited by others as an example of an emergent Chinese IR. Tang does not explicitly draw on any Chinese cultural or historical sources to develop his theoretical approach and therefore it is not generally considered to be a Chinese approach. Thus in the case of Tang Shiping, it is the intellectual source of a theory rather than its author that defines the approach as Chinese.

Another example worthy of mention here is the prominent scholar and flag-bearer for the New Left (新左, xinzuo) in China, Wang Hui. Wang Hui’s contributions to an emergent Chinese Theoretical Paradigm in IR are certainly more indirect that those mentioned in earlier chapters. As in the case of Zhao Tingyang, Wang Hui is rarely identified – by others or by himself – as an expert in IR theory, but rather a scholar of intellectual history or literature. Nevertheless, his work is significant in shaping views on contemporary China and its place in the world and therefore might be considered relevant to those seeking to build a Chinese School of IR. In particular, Wang’s methodological choice to adopt an ‘internal perspective’, which defines his studies of Chinese history and politics, provides a helpful starting point for those scholars seeking to write a Chinese theory of international relations unencumbered by

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41 Tang Shiping was working in Singapore at the time when the Chinese School question was most vigourously debated at conferences and events in mainland China and so his reluctance to participate in the Chinese School debate may be as much to do with chance circumstance as it is about deliberate choice.

42 See Weber 2014 for a helpful, in-depth analysis of Wang Hui’s potential contribution to a Chinese School of IR.
Eurocentric conceptions of modernity. Wang Hui’s work seeks to understand the complex relationship between contemporary Chinese thought and concepts of modernity and modernisation. He explores Chinese understandings of modernity and seeks to unpick the reliance in Chinese discourse on a ‘Western’ binary of empire/nation-state that narrates Chinese history in terms of a transition from pre-modern empire to modern nation-state (Wang Hui 2003, 2008). According to Ralph Weber, therefore, “Wang clearly showcases a methodological sensibility from which the exponents of the ‘Chinese School’ approach might profit” (Weber 2014: 85). Wang’s commitment to finding alternative narratives to that of Eurocentric modernity (see also pp. 118-119) makes him a worthy participant in debates about post-western IR. Nevertheless, with the exception of Weber’s recent article (Weber 2014), Wang Hui’s work rarely enters discussions of a potential ‘Chinese School’ of IR.

Similarly, until recently Taiwanese scholars have tended to remain detached from debates about Chinese-style international relations. Many have deliberately steered clear of Chinese School debates and chosen instead to focus on learning and developing American/western IR theory. Shih Chih-yu explains why this is the case:

Taiwanese scholars do not want to be different from their Western counterparts so as not to be reduced (in the eyes of the Western academic) to being a pre-modern, non-universal, non-rational actor. To speak the same language is not unlike becoming an equal colleague in the English-speaking academic community (Shih Chih-yu 2007: 218).

Ching-Chang Chen, who is himself originally from Taiwan, argues that the general reluctance of Taiwanese scholars to enter into debates about Chinese-style or even Taiwanese-style international relations theory is a deliberate “self-empowering identity strategy.” Taiwanese scholars associate themselves with the US/west “allow[ing] them (and, indeed, the emerging Taiwanese state) to look at China from a presumably universalist, superior position” (Chen 2011: 12).

Nevertheless, Chen’s characterisation of Taiwanese scholarship paints only half of the picture and opinions about the Chinese School differ amongst scholars from, and working within, Taiwan. The recent conference on ‘The
Chinese School of IR and its Critics’ that was held in Beijing in July 2013 was sponsored by a Taiwanese research foundation and co-hosted by the Department of Political Science at National Taiwan University. The conference itself and many of the debates and contributions springing from it demonstrate that there are Taiwanese scholars who are actively engaging in debates about Chinese-style IR and proposing potential theories based upon Chinese (cultural/philosophical) ideas. Chang Chishen from the National Chengchi University in Taiwan, for example, is currently conducting research into the meaning of the concept of de (德, usually translated as benevolence) during the Spring-Autumn (pre-Qin) period. This research challenges some of the assumptions made in Yan Xuetong’s work on pre-Qin thought by claiming Yan’s interpretation of de and of hegemony (霸, ba) is not historically accurate. However, like Yan, Chang also claims to present an understanding/theory of hegemony that is distinct from its western counterpart (Chang Chishen 2013). In addition, Shih Chih-yu’s own ‘balance of relationships’ theory, which I explored in chapter 4 (see p.159), claims also to draw on Confucian ideas to produce a complementary (different) theory to the (western) theory of ‘balance of power’ (Shih and Huang 2013, see also Shih 2013). The relationship between Taiwanese scholarship and any emergent Chinese School(s) is complex and sometimes contradictory. In such debates, Taiwanese scholars are discursively constructed (by themselves and by others) as both Chinese and not. The question of whether Taiwanese scholarship belongs in a Chinese School is often tied into wider questions over whether Taiwan belongs to China. Wang Jisi, for example, has argued that a fully fledged Chinese School of IR is not possible without full reunification of Taiwan with the mainland (cited in Wang Yiwei 2009: 116). As such the identity politics of the Chinese School debate have wider implications for Chinese/Taiwanese (identity) politics.

Another key source of contributions to Chinese-style IR is from scholars who are living and working outside of the territorial boundaries of ‘China’, variously defined. In particular, a number of key interventions in these debates have come from scholars from the US/west who claim Chinese ancestry or
heritage. These ‘overseas Chinese’, huaren (华人) or huaqiao (华侨) in official government language, draw upon Chinese cultural and intellectual sources to make their own (distinct) contribution to international relations discourse, often claiming their unique position as members of both communities enables them to contribute to this important agenda. One example of this type of scholar/scholarship comes from L. H. M. Ling, who is Associate Dean at the New School in New York. Ling is highly critical of western/US hegemony within disciplinary international relations and has recently turned her attentions to Daoist philosophy to offer an alternative perspective on international relations to that offered by western/Westphalian theories. Her *Dao of World Politics* (Ling 2014) is, in many respects, very similar to Qin Yaqing’s theory of relationality and draws upon many of the same texts and traditions. Nevertheless, it is rare that Ling’s work would ever be mentioned by mainland Chinese scholars in debates about a Chinese School as an example of Chinese IR research. Victoria Hui is another ‘American-born Chinese’ scholar who is adding her perspective to emerging Chinese School debates. Her work involves a deep (re-)reading of Chinese history and cultural tradition in order to bring greater insights into contemporary international phenomena (Hui 2012b). Hui is particularly critical of Yan Xuetong and his Tsinghua School for their cavalier attitude toward Chinese history and tradition. She urges such scholarship to begin with a thorough understanding of the historical context of the texts under consideration and warns against studying pre-Qin thought in isolation from Chinese history (Hui 2012a). Hui’s research recently featured alongside a number of similar studies conducted by a wide variety of scholars each looking to Chinese history to gain insight into contemporary international relations. In his introduction to the special issue in *Chinese Journal of Political Science*, Ming Wan classified these varied approaches into those that study Chinese history through ‘western IR lenses’ with the purpose of making western IR theory more universal and those that study Chinese perspectives because they are interested in viewing the world differently (Ming Wan 2012). Each of these articles could potentially be considered contributions to an emergent Chinese School, though are rarely labelled as such. Their authors are from a variety of backgrounds with
various claims on being ‘Chinese’. Some stake that claim on being *huaren* (Ming Wan 2012b, Hui 2012a), others on the basis of their birthplace and/or institutional affiliation being within (Greater) China (Lai 2012, Cheng 2012), and Rozman (2012) on the basis of his longstanding expertise in studying Chinese history/culture.

Rozman is not the only apparently ‘non-Chinese’ contributor to be seeking to build a Chinese-style IR utilising Chinese historical and/or intellectual sources (see also Agnew 2012, Paltiel 2012). These scholars are using Chinese (cultural) sources but find it harder to stake a claim to being *Chinese*. In addition, there are those, like myself, whose research is concerned with the Chinese School phenomenon itself (Kallio 2012, Noesselt 2012, Kristensen and Nielsen 2013). All of this research has helped to widen the scope and the impact of Chinese international relations discourse in the widest sense and therefore plays a key role in driving forward the Chinese School agenda regardless of whether or not it is labelled as such. But as this brief discussion demonstrates, even within each of these various claims to be ‘Chinese’ (or not) there are multiple identities and identity-forming processes at work. Yan Xuetong and Qin Yaqing, for example, are seen as key mainland Chinese contributors (full members of the Chinese School) but they were both trained in the US and have links with wider networks both within and beyond the territorial boundaries of the PRC. Likewise, many of those who are discounted as not Chinese (enough), such as Hui and Rozman, may have decades of experience of studying Chinese history, culture and philosophy and often a deeper understanding of the historical texts their work draws upon than ‘Chinese’ scholars such as those belonging to the Tsinghua School.

**Constructing Chineseness**

In each iteration of the/a ‘Chinese School’ the meaning of China/Chineseness is constructed and deployed in different ways and for different purposes. As I have argued throughout, (cultural) identity is about “becoming” rather than “being”: it is a process with a long history of perpetual transformation (Wong 2005: 49). Defining who might belong – who is Chinese – in the Chinese School
is a complex and ever-changing problem. Conceptually and linguistically ‘China’
can be defined in multiple, potentially contradictory ways each of which is
evident in the descriptions of potential contributors/contributions I have
mentioned above. Perhaps the most obvious way to talk about ‘China’ in an
international relations context is in the territorial sense; writing China as
*Zhongguo* (中国, Central States or Middle Kingdom). Such a definition focuses
on the territorial boundedness of China as a nation-state or, perhaps more
accurately, a civilisation-state (Tu Weiming 1994: 14). Seeing ‘China’ in this way
puts PRC-based scholars at the heart of the Chinese School and also validates
centering such work on Beijing – as the heart of the Middle Kingdom. Likewise,
adopting a territorial understanding of China enables Wang Jisi to make the
claim that reunification is essential to the creation of a proper/complete
Chinese School that will speak for all of China. Conceptualising ‘China’ in this
way, however, excludes all those would-be contributors who happen to be
living and working outside of the territorial borders of the PRC.

In addition to the term *Zhongguo*, ‘China’ can also be written as
*Zhonghua* (中华, Chineseness). *Zhonghua* is generally understood in terms of
culture or ethnicity and one’s ability to belong to this ‘China’ is largely
dependant upon ones ethnicity/ancestry or, potentially, ones ability to
internalise (learn or convert to) Chinese culture/civilisation. It is such a
definition that authorises claims from ‘ethnic’ Chinese scholars such as L. H. M.
Ling and Victoria Hui to participate in building a Chinese School and/or writing
Chinese-style IR. In the past Chinese policy discourse has tended to maintain a
clear distinction between Chinese citizens living overseas (华侨, *huaqiao*) (for
example contributors such as Zhang Feng and He Kai) and ‘ethnic’ Chinese or
those of Chinese ancestry (华人, *huaren*) (such as Ling and Hui). This distinction
in recent years has begun to break down as the PRC government has sought
increasingly to build links with Chinese populations in other parts of the world.
Often driven by the promise of economic gain from building links with wealthy
business owners of Chinese origin or ancestry, recent government policy has
shifted toward inclusion of *huaren* as “an integrated part of the work
concerning Chinese overseas” (Thunø 2001: 921). This is a reflection of the fact that many ‘ethnic’ Chinese are naturalised citizens of ‘foreign’ countries and may never have set foot in their (mythical) homeland. Discourses of huaren construct China/Chineseness along racial/ethnic lines. This type of (racist) assumption can be found reflected in debates about who can and cannot participate in building Chinese-style IR. Yan Xuetong, for example, argues that “Chinese scholars have an advantage in reading Chinese ancient writings and, thus, are able to have a more nuanced and perhaps better understanding than their Western colleagues” (Yan Xuetong 2011a: 256). Yet those ancient texts are arguably as exotic to Yan (who is not trained in classical Chinese) as they are to a wider international relations audience. Yan’s assumption that he is better placed (than a western Sinologist) to understand them is based upon a cultural essentialist view that implies ‘Chinese’ people – here constructed as ethnic Han – possess a unique or distinct understanding of Chinese culture that cannot be learnt or taught (see also Xin Yishan 2012: 1).

Nevertheless, there are other discourses in ancient and contemporary Chinese identity politics that view Zhongguo/Zhonghua as an (id)entity with flexible and ever-changing boundaries. An often trumpeted element of Chinese imperial rule was the growth of the empire through a process of absorption (rather than conquest) of barbarian tribes. But as Callahan reminds us, these experience were of complex and multidirectional absorption not simple conversion to a Sinic (Confucian) way of thinking, understood as cultural imperialism (Callahan 2005: 279). Contemporary discourses about transnational Chinese identity(ies) make similar claims that allow ‘barbarians’ to become part of China. New waves of migration, increased travel and changing information technologies (specifically developments with the internet) have all played a role in creating a contemporary transnational Chinese cultural sphere. The members of this online space are drawn from Tu Weiming’s “Cultural China”, which centres around “three symbolic universes:” the “Chinese” territories (mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore); overseas Chinese communities; and individuals anywhere (e.g. teachers and journalists) who have an interest in understanding China better (Yang Guobin 2003: 470). Thus,
neither ethnicity nor geographical location prevents one from contributing to
the online Chinese cultural sphere.

It is true that Cultural China has implications of territory, nationality, race and language, but its essential defining characteristic is that it exceeds the particularities of territory, nationality, race and language. What it signifies is the construction of universal values of global significance (Tu Weiming 1990: 60).

Tu Weiming’s “Cultural China” is invoked in conversations about whether ostensibly ‘non-Chinese’ scholars might be qualified to participate in building a Chinese School of IR.

There are inherent tensions in each of these discursive constructions of ‘China’. Wang Yiwei has suggested when talking about the Chinese School scholars should be talking of a Zhonghua School rather than Zhongguo School to reflect the importance of cultural aspects of the theories under construction. Yet whilst definitions of Chineseness that focus on shared culture, civilisation and/or ancestry challenge conceptions of China as a bounded nation-state, they also serve to strengthen “the continued significance of the ‘national’” (Yeoh et. al. 2003: 208). Transnational conceptions of ‘Chineseness’ rely upon the myth of a shared territory or homeland as a reference point to unite the various social imaginaries into a singular, standardised identity. Thus, rather than deterritorialising the concept of Chineseness, talking of a Zhonghua School potentially extends the boundaries of the ‘Chinese’ nation and broadens the influence of the state; for example, by including Taiwanese scholars in an emergent Chinese School. At the same time, however, discussions of Zhonghua and Cultural China also serve to highlight and maintain contradictions between cultural unity of ‘Chinese’ across the world and the diversity of the populations living within the territorially-bounded Zhongguo. Most explicit attempts to build Chinese-style IR focus on a particular reading of Chinese culture, both past and present. Whilst they may draw upon a variety of intellectual or philosophical sources, these are largely the intellectual sources of the Han majority. I am not aware of any studies that claim to build a Chinese-style IR from Uighur/Muslim, Tibetan, Mongolian (or any of China’s 55 ethnic minorities’) philosophical or
religious traditions. Therefore the picture of ‘Chineseness’ that Chinese School debates construct is a partial and unstable one. Defining ‘Chineseness’, according to Waldron, is a perpetual challenge:

the problem facing successive dynasties has not been conquering “China,” or recovering it, or even ruling it. The first problem has always been defining it, and that is as true today as it ever was (Waldron 1990: 190).

In each of these claims to be (or not to be) a Chinese School, China and ‘Chineseness’ is performed in multiple and often competing ways, demonstrating the always incompleteness of identity-making processes in international relations discourse and beyond.

The Chinese School as a nationalist project

As the above discussion demonstrates, there are many competing notions of what a Chinese School of IR might be and who it may or may not include as its creators. Nevertheless, amongst those self-consciously advocating a Chinese School there remains a strong mainland-Chinese bias or at least a focus on the PRC as the starting point for the production and diffusion of such a school. As I have argued previously (see pp. 131-133), many Chinese School advocates share the belief that creating a Chinese School is not just about building a Chinese understanding of international relations but also about building an understanding of international relations for China. In this way the Chinese School can be seen as a nationalist project, a way to project Chinese thinking and (political/cultural) power into the world. This is certainly the case amongst scholars in the PRC who are committing considerable time and effort on promoting Chinese understandings of international politics both at home and, crucially, abroad. Qin Yaqing, for example, uses the Chinese School label to raise the profile of Chinese contributions to international relations discourse and project an image not just of Chinese scholarship but also of China itself as important and worthy of consideration by western researchers. Despite his criticism of the Chinese School label, Yan Xuetong and his Tsinghua team have sought to use discussions of Chinese-style IR to construct a narrative about
China’s future rise that not only helps to counter some of the negative reactions from the US/west but also helps to ensure that future rise is brought about. Yan’s work is about restoring ‘China’ to its rightful place as global leader (not follower) which defines ‘China’ as a civilisation destined for greatness. Likewise, Wang Yiwei describes China’s rise (and indeed the wider rise of Asia) as the key driver behind the development of a Chinese School of IR theory (Wang Yiwei 2009: 115). The work of Yan Xuetong and the Tsinghua School, of Qin Yaqing and other China School advocates (Ren Xiao, Wang Yiwei and others) is clearly focused on how Chinese culture and tradition can help to answer the big question in China today: China’s contemporary rise and what it means for the world.

Their answers coalesce around one articulation or another of Beijing’s “Harmonious World” doctrine (Hu Jintao 2005). The various articulations of the Chinese School I have explored above tell us that China will rise peacefully (Yan Xuetong 2001: 35-37, Qin Yaqing 2004b, 2010b, Chen Xiangyang 2004), China will act differently (more harmoniously) in its relations with others (Yan Xuetong in Creutzfeldt 2012, Qin Yaqing 2012b) and ultimately the world will be a better place as a result of China’s leadership (Zhao Tingyang 2005, Yan Xuetong 2011a, see also pp. 232-233). Xin Yishan’s book *The Chinese-style International Relations Theory* (2012) is perhaps the most blatant example of the Chinese School as a nationalist project. Published only in Chinese, Xin’s book provides a comprehensive exposition of “the Chinese-style IR theory”, which at times reads like a press statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Xin argues that the core values of a Chinese-style IR theory are peace and harmony (Xin Yishan 2012: 15), which come from thousands of years of historical experience and cultural values of the Chinese people who “ardently love peace” (Xin Yishan 2012: 1). He sets out the key facets of Chinese-style IR, which mirror key PRC policy formulations including: the principle of “peaceful coexistence” and the commitment to China’s “peaceful rise” (see pp. 150-151). Critics have seen this move in a negative light arguing that “the project to create a Chinese international relations model seems to be just another effort to disguise China’s real identity with the mask of benevolent Confucius” (Kallio 2012). Either way,
there is a clear link between the drive to create a Chinese School of IR theory amongst mainland scholars and the party-state’s power projection in the world. The Chinese School project is thus perhaps best understood as a nationalist project aimed at improving China’s position not just within the discipline of international relations but within the world that international relations claims to understand/depict.

**Parting thoughts:**

*As rain falls on the voices’ screeching*

At the end of this journey I (we) still have no sense of what Chinese international relations looks like other than something fluid, variable, contingent, complex and contested, which is precisely where I wish to end up. As my journey through the parochial/global discipline of IR has revealed, life really is complicated. International relations theory can be seductive in its simplicity: it often claims to present a neutral, (social) scientific view of the world and how it works that is simple, easy to understand and even to manipulate. It tempts us with easy answers and clear explanations for how the world works and why. Even some critical theories and many of the so-called ‘non-western’ theories or attempts to theorise from non-western perspectives that I have encountered on this journey also work to obscure the (omni)presence of complexity, diversity and hybridity in (international) life. Emancipatory projects in international theory that do not begin with an appreciation of this complexity seem destined to fail; to (re)produce the inherently unequal, colonial underpinnings of ‘the discipline’ they seek to disrupt or reform: to reproduce the creation myths that make international relations possible. Those creation myths present (construct) an image of ‘International Relations’ as a noble discipline dedicated to discovering and tackling the causes of (inter-state) war and thereby ensuring a better, more peaceful future for the world. Chinese contributions frequently perpetuate, rather than challenge, this image of the world. They might present a revised or competing image of how such a future can be created, but frequently they are
built upon the same (mythical) understandings of the nature of the ‘international’ world, how it works and how it came to be. Yet such a presentation of ‘the discipline’ and of its history, obscures the multiple, complex, overlapping and unequal relationships that are constitutive of these ‘international relations’. It masks an inherent (European) colonial bias in international discourse that cannot be overcome simply by adding ‘non-western’ voices to the mix; regardless of what it is they have to say.

This thesis has attempted, instead, to begin with an appreciation of the complexity, the messiness, of (international) life: an appreciation of change, continuity, complexity and complicity not as binary opposites but as interwoven, overlapping forces acting at one in the same time and place. In Foucault’s words:

> We must not imagine that the world turns towards us a legible face which we would have only to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscriptive providence which disposes the world in our favour. We must conceive discourse as a violence which we do to things, or in any case as a practice which we impose on them (Foucault 1984: 127).

International relations discourse gives meaning to our world, but those stories (myths) we tell about ‘the world’ and its international relations are a form of violence: they are an imposition on, not a neutral reflection of, an underlying reality. It is only when we fully appreciate the mythical nature of such stories that sit at the heart of all our attempts to know and to understand the world that we can ever fully grasp or even begin to move beyond parochialism in international relations. Recent attempts to build a Chinese School of international relations theory and the debates that surround them have been largely (though not exclusively) built upon (re)productions of those same disciplinary creation myths and therefore frequently (re)perform the parochial/global discipline even in their attempts to add to, change or overthrow it.

Yet in all these performances of ‘the discipline’, Chinese and not, both and neither, there are slippages: incomplete or unfamiliar reproductions, performed in ways that are almost the same but not quite. Throughout
international relations discourse there are ghostly beings lurking in the shadows. These ghostly haunts remind us of the always incompleteness of disciplinary identities and the mythical nature of the parochial/global discipline itself. Naming and following those ghosts – of hierarchy, imperialism, standards of civilisation and violence; of diversity, hybridity, complexity and difference; of modernisation, enlightenment and progress – is merely the first step on the journey beyond parochialism in international relations discourse. Coming face to face with these ghosts, whilst of great critical import, is also highly unsettling, unnerving and downright terrifying at times. I have sought to appreciate and celebrate the complexity and complicity of (international) life that is made apparent in these ghostly encounters, yet at times it has been a painful and difficult experience. IR’s ghosts are not the soft, fluffy or friendly kind we might encounter in a child’s cartoon but rather the terrifying ghastly remains of violent acts of exclusion, dispossession and death (Muppidi 2012). IR’s ghosts are sad, they grieve, (Eliot 1948), they weep and cry out in pain, angered by injustice and stricken with loss (Du Fu 750). In light of this, I do not wish to end with a harmonising move that seeks to right all those wrongs and present a bright, cheerful vision of the future: that would, I fear, be disingenuous at best. Rather I end with the image with which I began – of ghosts crying out to be noticed and to be heard. The words of the great poet Du Fu that were written at the height of one of China’s most successful dynasties, at a time with the great Tang Empire was at its peak, having brought stability and good governance to all of China and set about creating a Chinese-led ‘harmonious world’: “Moistening rain falls from dark heaven on the voices’ screeching” (Du Fu 750). Woe betides those of us who fail to listen.
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