

Worlds beyond Westphalia: Daoist dialectics and the ‘China threat’

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Abstract. Discourse in the US/West that a rising China threatens world order serves no national interest or international purpose. It subscribes only to Westphalian anxieties about the Other. Drawing on Daoist dialectics, this article shows how we can reframe this issue by revealing the complicities that bind even seemingly intractable opposites, thereby undermining the rationale for violence. By recognising the ontological parity between (US/Western) Self and (Chinese/non-Western) Other, we may begin to shift IR/world politics from hegemony to engagement, the ‘tragedy’ of great power politics to the freedom of discovery and creativity.

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Introduction

Westphalian International Relations (IR)¹ cannot conclude otherwise: twenty-first-century China poses a threat. Conceiving the international system as a space where

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¹ The two pillars of contemporary world politics – territorial sovereignty and commerce as the basis for inter-state relations – come from the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), signed in the heart of what is today Germany. The term ‘Westphalian IR’, however, indicates more than a geo-cultural location like

chaos and anarchy rule by default, Westphalian IR has to eye with suspicion, if not outright hostility, China's recent prominence as the world's second most powerful economy,² alongside its 1.2 billion population with an army and navy to match.³ From within China, analysts may disagree with this thesis but not its analysis, thereby justifying their own realist ambitions. Two camps of opposition thus emerge in world politics: one representing a wary international community led by the West; the other, an ancient yet modern state of unknown hegemony. Apprehension, fear, and distrust fill world politics, again.

But we need not abide by this tired yet relatively recent scenario: one alternative comes from Daoist dialectics. It enables us to recognise the multi-layered and multi-constructed nature of our world politics.⁴ These formations remain open and variable, moreover, due to constant processes of mutual interaction. On US-China relations, Daoist dialectics show how two, supposedly distinct polarities could bind through complicities and complementarities despite their conflicts and contradictions. This process springs from the pockets of co-implication within each polarity (that is, us-within-China, china-within-US). I conclude with what a Daoist-inspired approach means for US-China relations, specifically, and IR/world politics, generally.

I begin with the 'China threat' thesis.

China threat: good China vs. bad China

'The Asia-Pacific', US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declares, 'has become a key driver of global politics'.⁵ She identifies 'six lines of action', of which the second involves 'deepening our working relations with emerging powers, including with China'.⁶ Indeed, she emphasises, 'a thriving America is good for China and a thriving China is good for America'.⁷ Clinton concludes by stating:

'the West'; it also refers to an 'epistemic community' that now covers the globe given five centuries of Western/Westphalian colonialism and imperialism. As this article shows, there are plenty of individuals and institutions outside the West that abide by Westphalian IR. At the same time, I recognise that Westphalian IR bears contending strains within it, both imperialist and anti-imperialist, though each stems from a Eurocentric tradition. On epistemic communities, see Peter Haas, 'Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination', *International Organisation*, 46:1 (Winter 1992), pp. 1–35. On the Eurocentric nature of Westphalian IR, see John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

² Justin McCurry and Julia Kollwe, 'China Overtakes Japan as World's Second-Largest Economy', *Guardian* (14 February 2011), available at: {<http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2011/feb/14/china-second-largest-economy>} accessed 14 August 2012. See also, Samuel S. Kim, 'China and Globalisation: Facing Myriad Challenges and Opportunities', *Asian Perspective*, 33:3 (2009), pp. 41–80.

³ Thomas Fargo, 'The Military Side of Strategic Rebalancing', and Wallace 'Chip' Gregson, 'Rebalancing US Security Posture in Asia', in a roundtable discussion, 'Turning to the Pacific: US Strategic Rebalancing toward Asia', *Asia Policy*, 14 (July 2012), pp. 26–30, 45–9, available at: {<http://AsiaPolicy.nbr.org>} accessed 17 August 2012.

⁴ For greater elaboration, see L. H. M. Ling, *Postcolonial International Relations: Conquest and Desire between Asia and the West* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Anna M. Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling, *Transforming World Politics: From Empire to Multiple Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2009); and L. H. M. Ling, *The Dao of World Politics, Towards A Post-Westphalian, Worldist Approach to International Relations* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

⁵ Hillary Clinton, 'America's Pacific Century', *Foreign Policy* (November 2011), available at: {http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century?page=full} accessed 18 August 2012.

⁶ The others include: (1) strengthening bilateral security alliances; (2) engaging with regional multilateral institutions; (3) expanding trade and investment; (4) forging a broad-based military presence; and (5) advancing democracy and human rights. *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

We cannot and do not aspire to impose our system on other countries, but we do believe that certain values are universal – that people in every nation in the world, including in Asia, cherish them – and that they are intrinsic to stable, peaceful, and prosperous countries.⁸

This admirable pronouncement, however, comes with a tacit codicil: only one kind of universalism applies and it is the Western liberal one as articulated and led by the US. As Clinton puts it, world politics as we know it reflects ‘the open and rules-based system that the United States helped to build and works to sustain’.⁹ To join the international community, then, all states must emulate the West – or risk *de facto* exile and exclusion.

A recent roundtable on US-China relations reflects this Westphalian ultimatum. Organised by the National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), a conservative think tank comprised of government, military, corporate, and academic elites, this roundtable of six panellists sounds one theme: the US must stay in charge.¹⁰ ‘The most consequential driver’, asserts James B. Steinberg, ‘will be the choices being made by the United States’.¹¹ Thomas Fargo proposes a geographical and military ‘rebalancing’ in the region. The US must reinforce longstanding security networks with stalwarts like Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, and Australia while strengthening new ones with Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Singapore, and smaller islands in the Pacific like Tinian. He adds: enhanced US air and naval power in the region must ‘sustain [the] gains [from] population-centric, counter-insurgency opportunities’ started in Afghanistan and Iraq.¹² Aaron L. Friedberg finds the US and China locked in a ‘contest for supremacy’ whose outcome will ‘depen[d] on whether Washington has the will and the wallet, to follow through’.¹³ Should China prosper and the US decline, J. Stapleton Roy forecasts, it could ‘roil the waters of the bilateral relationship’.¹⁴ He recommends that the US ‘employ a broader range of trade and investment arrows in its quiver’.¹⁵ David M. Lampton questions the ‘balancing’ strategy presumed by the other panellists – ‘The military soundtrack has the volume turned up too loud, while the volume on the economic soundtrack is too low’ – nonetheless, he agrees that ‘[o]ur vision should be a unified Pacific trading

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) self-identifies as ‘nonprofit, nonpartisan’ and ‘devoted to bridging the policy, academic, and business communities with advanced policy-relevant research on Asia’ {<http://www.nbr.org>}. A closer examination of NBR’s Board of Directors reveals a very partisan membership composed of mega-corporations (for example, Unocal, Coca Cola, Corning, Microsoft, Boeing, Ford) and their elite associates in the military (for example, former joint chiefs of staff John M. Shalikashvili, former Secretary of State Colin Powell), industry (for example, Virginia Mason Medical Center), and academia (for example, American Enterprise Institute, Woodrow Wilson Center).

¹¹ James B. Steinberg, ‘2012 – A Watershed Year for East Asia?’, ‘Turning to the Pacific: US Strategic Rebalancing toward Asia’, *Asia Policy*, 14 (July 2012), pp. 26–30; p. 22, available at: {<http://AsiaPolicy.nbr.org>} accessed 17 August 2012. Steinberg is Dean of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University.

¹² Fargo, ‘The Military Side of Strategic Rebalancing’; Ibid., p. 29. Fargo was a naval officer for 35 years and currently serves as the John M. Shalikashvili Chair for National Security Studies at The National Bureau of Asian Research.

¹³ Aaron L. Friedberg, ‘The Next Phase of the “Contest for Supremacy in Asia”’; Ibid., p. 35. Friedberg is a Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University.

¹⁴ J. Stapleton Roy, ‘Strategic Challenges for the US-China Relationship’; Ibid., p. 36. A former ambassador to China (1991–5), Roy currently directs the Kissinger Institute on China and the United States at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 37.

system, not a balkanized structure'.¹⁶ After all, Wallace 'Chip' Gregson concludes: 'The United States national strategy supports democracy.'¹⁷

Two seemingly disparate schools of thought in Westphalian IR support this singular, 'China threat' thesis. For a classical realist like John Mearsheimer, a clash between hegemonic powers is inevitable. All great powers, he writes, 'search[h] for opportunities to gain power over their rivals, with hegemony as their final goal'.¹⁸ He supports 'offensive realism': it pre-empts this kind of great power challenge, rather than relying on the usual tactics of traditional, 'defensive realism' (balance-of-power coalition-building and so on). Precisely because offensive-realists posit the world and, by extension world politics, as insecure, chaotic, and constantly in flux, they rationalise a zero-sum calculus for all, no matter the cost. Such is the 'tragedy' of great power politics. Mearsheimer predicts that China will seize regional hegemony (like the US did with the Monroe Doctrine), before moving on to global hegemony. Accordingly, states in Southeast and South Asia will want to ally with the US to contain China. Mearsheimer concludes: the US might as well not waste any engagements with China to prepare for the inevitable.

From the perspective of the English School, Barry Buzan concedes to China's 'peaceful rise' – but only if it 'accept[s] the deep rules of the game'.¹⁹ These come from the 'deep and durable practices' of contemporary international society defined by the principles of 'sovereignty, non-intervention, territoriality, nationalism, international law, diplomacy, great power management, the equality of peoples'.²⁰ Given this prerequisite, China should consolidate its alliances with regional neighbours first, since they share 'Asian values'.²¹ 'But if China wants to play its main game at the global level', he adds, 'it will have to expect sustained pressure to extend its domestic reforms much further and deeper than it has done so far'; after all, Buzan underscores, 'the West and its values remain dominant'.²²

G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter (a former advisor to Secretary Clinton) echo this English School perspective from across the Atlantic. Like Buzan, they support China's assimilation into the existing world order with certain conditions in tow.²³ In *The Princeton Project on National Security*, Ikenberry and Slaughter identify China as one of the 'Major Threats and Challenges' to world order in the twenty-first century.²⁴ Accordingly, they advocate keeping US military superiority, including the option of pre-emptive war.²⁵ At the same time, they believe, China

¹⁶ David M. Lampton, 'China and the United States: Beyond Balance'; *Ibid.*, p. 43. Lampton is the Hyman Professor and Director of China Studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

¹⁷ Wallace 'Chip' Gregson, 'Rebalancing US Security Posture in Asia', *Ibid.*, p. 49. Gregson is a retired lieutenant general of the US Marine Corps and previously served as the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Asian and Pacific Security Affairs. He is a private consultant, a senior advisor at Avascent International, and Senior Director for China and the Pacific at the Center for the National Interest.

¹⁸ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), p. 29.

¹⁹ Barry Buzan, 'China in International Society: Is "Peaceful Rise" Possible?' *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 3 (2010), pp. 6–7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, Co-Directors, *Forging A World of Liberty Under Law: US National Security in the 21st Century*, Final Report of the Princeton Project on National Security (Princeton: Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, 2006), available at: {<http://www.princeton.edu/~ppns/report.html>} accessed 13 September 2009, p. 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

cannot resist America's 'soft power' or that of other liberal democracies. The current liberal world order hails democracy, individual liberty, and 'a framework of order established by law' as its cornerstones, bringing Others up to PAR ('Popular, Accountable, and Rights-Regarding').²⁶

Here, we see how Westphalian IR produces the 'China threat' thesis. Firstly, Westphalian IR defines world politics in terms of the state only. No other actor or dynamic or vision has comparable impact or importance. Secondly, Westphalian IR portrays world politics as a Hobbesian State of Nature, whereby each state must fight for survival. There is no recognition of any linkages across or within states that render each more than just a state. Consequently and thirdly, a binary logic surges forth and survival becomes a zero-sum outcome. Fourthly, then, Westphalian IR *necessarily* regards the new China with suspicion – unless it reforms. To Westphalian IR, China's ideology, politics, and culture are so alien the country cannot integrate into, not to mention play a leading role in, world politics. Instead, China must *assimilate*: that is, comply with, and preferably internalise, the norms, institutions, and practices of the Western, liberal order. Only in this way could China become a 'responsible stakeholder' in the Westphalian world order.

Westphalia's binary logic *implicitly* favours the US/West. It portrays the US/West as leading an 'open and rules-based system' with a military that ensures global democracy, free trade, and human rights. China exemplifies the opposite: it aims to grab power with world domination in mind and a military that serves its national interests only. The course of action thus becomes clear: the former must stay in charge while the latter must choose. China can either remain the 'bad', recalcitrant People's Republic of old or it could reform into the 'good', assimilationist 'China Pop' of the future.²⁷ The US/West need not change. After all, Robert Kagan states elsewhere, only 'the American system' has the wherewithal to 'adapt and recover from difficulties [where] many other nations, including its geopolitical competitors' cannot; '[i]n the end', he writes, 'the decision [about the future of world order] is in the hands of Americans'.²⁸

Chinese analysts take this Westphalian ultimatum seriously. However, their responses differ according to whether the analyst is writing from inside or outside China. All – except one – work within Westphalian IR.

Chinese responses

Diaspora analysts disqualify China as a threat.²⁹ China cannot become a hegemon, Jian Yang writes from Australia, because it has neither the soft nor hard power to do

²⁶ PAR introduces 'a degree of transparency and integrity comparable to the level of other participants' in the international community, thereby 'transmit[ting] the values and practices of rights-regarding governments . . .' Ibid., p. 6.

²⁷ Jianying Zha, *China Pop: How Soap Operas, Tabloids, and Bestsellers are Transforming a Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1996).

²⁸ Robert Kagan, 'Not Fade Away: Against the Myth of American Decline', *The New Republic* available at: {<http://www.tnr.com/article/politics/magazine/99521/america-world-power-declinism>} accessed 19 August 2012.

²⁹ 'Diaspora analysts' refer to those who were born, raised, and primarily educated in China although they may have received graduate training elsewhere and now work outside China. These analysts differ from those of Chinese descent, like Wang Gungwu, who were born and raised outside China but have a deep

so.³⁰ Li Mingjiang concurs from Singapore: China lacks self-confidence regarding soft power; it 'is unlikely to employ in the foreseeable future any effective soft power strategy that challenges the existing international order'.³¹ The most comprehensive dismissal comes from Minxin Pei, writing from the US.³² Whether militarily, economically, demographically, historically, ideologically, environmentally, politically, or educationally, Pei contends, China cannot compete with the US/West. 'Think again', he urges. Asia as a whole depends on the US/West for its markets and investments, not to mention guns and security; for this reason, the region wants America's leadership, not China's. Pei slips in a bit of advice at the end: Asia's rise offers not just economic and political 'opportunities' for the US/West but also 'competitive pressures [for] Westerners to get their own houses in order – without succumbing to hype or hysteria'.³³

Analysts within China, however, are responding in kind. Initially, the Dengist principle of pragmatism prevailed. In an interview in 2005, the Dean of the School of Foreign Relations, Wu Jianmin, proposed to dismantle the 'China threat' thesis (*zhongguo weixielun*) with 'concrete action' (*shishi*).³⁴ This view echoed positions taken a decade earlier. It is 'impossible', Xue Jundu contended in 1996, for China to threaten the US or the West, given China's (lack of) military capability and the country's philosophical traditions, economic interdependence, and principle of peaceful co-existence.³⁵ But today, many in China absorb Westphalian IR's hyper-masculine-nationalist competitiveness, along with its Self/Other binaries.³⁶ A muted presumption takes root: 'they' (US/West) don't understand 'us' (China/Chinese). Invariably, a more ominous corollary follows: and they never will. Gu Weijun, publishing in the journal *Guofang* (National Defense), charges the 'China threat' thesis with 'scandal mongering' (*chao zuo*).³⁷ Yan Xuetong, Professor of International Relations and Director of the Institute of International Studies at Tsinghua University, flatly states that the US and China should give up the charade of a

knowledge of and proficiency in Chinese language, culture, and history. These distinctions indicate different socio-political and cultural relations between the analyst and the Chinese state as well as the host state in which the analyst is living, working, and writing *at the time of publication*. (I place particular emphasis on the latter given constant moves in academic/policy appointments.) See Wang Gungwu, 'The State of Migration and Sojourning: the China Difference', London School of Economics (28 April 2009), available at: {<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUFYIxYS7so>} accessed 14 April 2012.

³⁰ Jian Yang, 'China in the South Pacific: Hegemon on the Horizon?', *The Pacific Review*, 22:2 (May 2009), pp. 139–58.

³¹ Li Mingjiang, 'China Debates Soft Power', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 2 (2008), p. 308.

³² Minxin Pei, 'Think Again: Asia's Rise', *Foreign Policy* (22 June 2009), available at: {http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/06/22/think_again_asias_rise} accessed 1 May 2011.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Yuan Yuan, 'Yong shishi huajie "zhongguo weixielun": Zhuanfang waijiao xueyuanzhang Wu Jianming' ('Dismantling the "China threat" Thesis with Concrete Action: An Exclusive Interview with the Dean of the School of Foreign Relations, Wu Jianmin), *Liaowang xinwen zhoukan* (Survey News Magazine), 37 (12 September 2005), pp. 12–14.

³⁵ Xue Jundu, 'Xue Jundu jiaoshou pingzou "zhongguo weixielun"' (Professor Xue Jundu Critiques the 'China threat' Thesis), *Xiandai guoji guanxi* (Contemporary International Relations), 10 (1996), pp. 43–4.

³⁶ For a summary and critique of this literature, see Nancy Fraser, 'Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History', *New Left Review*, 56 (March/April 2009), pp. 97–117. See also, Bina D'Costa and Katrina Lee-Koo (eds), *Gender and Global Politics in the Asia Pacific* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and Marianne Marchand and Anne Sisson Runyan (eds), *Gender and Global Restructuring: Sightings, Sites, and Resistances* (London: Routledge, 2010).

³⁷ Gu Weijun, 'Yingdui "zhongguo weixielun"' (Responding to the 'China threat' Thesis) *Guofang* (National Defense), 2 (2010), pp. 70–1.

‘superficial friendship’, constantly rocked by failed expectations and other disappointments; instead, he proposes a relationship of ‘superficial enmity’.³⁸ This strategy would help to stabilise US-China relations, asserts Yan, since ‘they have no way to become real friends’.³⁹

Binary thinking is affecting the younger generation as well. To negate the ‘China threat’ thesis and affirm China’s ‘peaceful rise’, Wang Bin writes in his 2010 master’s thesis that China should undertake ‘rational nationalism under patriotism’ (*aiguo zhuyi xiade lixingde minzuzhuyi*).⁴⁰ It contrasts with the ‘parochial nationalism’ (*xiaaide minzuzhuyi*) of old which indoctrinates the people with a ‘superiority complex’ (*yiouyue*), filling them with hate (*chouhen*). But anger against the ‘China threat’ thesis is unavoidable. It is simply ‘infuriating’ (*shizai rang ren fenmen*), notes Peng Zhen in another master’s thesis from the same year, for the West to peddle a ‘China threat’ just like it did with ‘yellow peril’ in the late nineteenth century.⁴¹ China has no choice, he concludes, but to become a ‘great power’; after all, history shows that only ‘weak powers’ are accused of hegemony whereas ‘great powers’ are glorified and emulated.⁴²

A dialectical alternative

Still, a different voice has emerged recently. It draws on what the author, Qin Yaqing, calls Chinese dialectics to redefine international society:

Society is not a self-enclosed, self-contained entity. Rather, it is a process, an open process of complex social relations in motion. Rules, regimes, and institutions are not established to govern or restrain the behavior of individual actors in society, but to harmonize relations among members of society. This understanding of society is based upon the relational thought process and the complementary dialectic, both of which originate in the Chinese philosophical and intellectual traditions.⁴³

³⁸ ‘Superficial enmity’ entails ‘preventative cooperation over mutually unfavourable interests and lowering mutual expectations of support, rather than ... adjusting concepts or improving mutual understanding’. Yan Xuetong, ‘The Instability of China-US Relations’, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 3 (2010), pp. 263–92. Indeed, Yan finds such Westphalian thinking rooted in ancient Chinese philosophy. Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

³⁹ Yan, ‘Instability of China-US Relations’, p. 291.

⁴⁰ Wang Bin, ‘*Zhongguo heping jueqi yu minzuzhuyi sichaode xingqi*’ (‘China’s Peaceful Rise and the Ideological Trend of Emergent Nationalism’), Master’s Thesis, Department of International Politics, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Yanbian University (23 May 2010).

⁴¹ Peng Zhen, ‘“*Zhongguo weixie lun*” – *yingxiang yu duice*’ (‘On the Impact and Countermeasures of ‘China threat’ Theory’), Master’s Thesis, Department of International Relations, School of Philosophy, History, and Culture, Xiangtan University (8 May 2010), p. 28. The Hungarian General Turr seems to have first coined the term ‘yellow peril’ in relation to Japan in June 1895. Kaiser Wilhelm also used the term in September 1895, again in relation to Japan. Around this time, other Western thinkers started to construct China as the yellow peril – most notably the scientific racist thinkers Charles Henry Pearson (1893), Alfred Mahan (1897), and especially Lothrop Stoddard (1920). See Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*, p. 108, and chaps 4–5, 6. I thank my anonymous reviewer for this reference.

⁴² Peng proposes the following ‘long-term strategy’ for China: (1) rationally take up the responsibilities of a great power to combat the image of a ‘China threat’; (2) enhance communications and exchanges to expose the ‘China threat’ thesis through world opinion; and (3) pro-actively participate in various international agencies and organisations to further China’s global integration. *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30, author’s own translation.

⁴³ Qin Yaqing, ‘International Society as a Process: Institutions, Identities, and China’s Peaceful Rise’, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 3 (2010), p. 138. For more on his views, see a recent interview, *Theory Talks* (online forum), (30 November 2011) available at: {<http://www.theory-talks.org/2011/11/theory-talk-45.html>} accessed 1 February 2012.

Because Chinese dialectics ‘does not seek certainty’, Qin explains, it could not sanction hegemony for China or any other state.⁴⁴ *Contra* Hegelian/Marxian dialectics, Chinese dialectics ‘stresses change and inclusiveness’, leading to a dynamic co-production of identity or what Qin calls ‘co-thesis or inter-thesis complementation’.⁴⁵ From this basis, the peacefulness of China’s rise will not depend on China alone. Nor does it necessitate conformity or adaptation to the norms, rules, and practices of today’s international society. Rather, international society reflects ‘a complexity of relational networks’; consequently, the nature of China’s rise will involve an ‘interaction between China and international society, the United States, and other members of the international community’.⁴⁶ In short, China’s rise unfolds in a context. And it is China’s engagement with this context that will shape the agenda for global politics, not an unchanging set of ‘deep and durable practices’ that emanate from a fixed ‘international society’.

But here lies the problem. Westphalian IR cannot accommodate Qin’s dialectics, despite its palliative appeal. Had Qin embedded his approach in Hegelian dialectics or Marxist doctrine, Westphalian IR could have relegated it to a well-known, albeit dusty, corner of intellectual history. But coming from Chinese dialectics, Qin’s approach literally has no referent in Westphalian IR. Like a colonial household, Westphalian IR cannot admit ‘unreformed’ non-Western Others into the formal sitting room of IR theory, to engage in a discourse among equals, even though non-Western labour, resources, ideas, and practices are sneaked in daily through the back door.⁴⁷ How else could the House of IR sustain itself? Equality between the theorists ‘upstairs’ and the native informants ‘downstairs’ would ‘roil the waters’ of IR’s epistemic hierarchy. Only the Westphalian Self can theorise about the rest, not the other way around. There is no reciprocity in Westphalian IR.

Westphalian IR thus entrenches the ‘China threat’ thesis. Not only does it exclude alternatives, but Westphalian IR also rationalises the colonial binary of conversion vs. discipline: convert to be like us or suffer discipline from us.⁴⁸ In this way, Westphalian IR normalises a condition of constant, mutual mistrust and hostility. Each nationalist camp expects the other to attack and/or conquer through hard or soft power. State elites subsequently hinge all negotiations on the supposedly inviolable signposts of Westphalian IR like sovereignty, borders, and national security, regardless of any actual collaboration that takes place on an everyday, concrete basis.⁴⁹ Both camps enhance their military capabilities to prepare for worst-case scenarios. Military expenditures increase, along with predictable socioeconomic

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 138, pp. 130–1.

⁴⁷ Anna M. Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling, ‘The House of IR: From Family Power Politics to the *Poiesis* of Worldism’, *International Studies Review*, 6:4 (December 2004), pp. 21–49.

⁴⁸ L. H. M. Ling, ‘Neoliberal Neocolonialism: Comparing Enron with Asia’s “Crony Capitalism”’, in Dirk Wiemann, Agata Stopinska, Anke Bartels, and Johannes Angermüller (eds), *Discourses of Violence – Violence of Discourses: Critical Interventions, Transgressive Readings and Postnational Negotiations* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 93–105.

⁴⁹ China-Taiwan relations suffer from such a chimera. Despite increasingly intimate relations across the Straits involving trade and investments, religion and worship, marriage and children, not to mention general cultural interaction through films, music, and so on, Taiwan and China still treat each other *politically* as hostile states. See, Boyu Chen, Ching-Chane Hwang, and L. H. M. Ling, ‘Lust/Caution in IR: Democratising World Politics with Culture as a Method’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 37:3 (2009), pp. 739–62.

adjustments and sacrifices. Westphalian IR's eager and intimate partner, the military-industrial complex, gears up for another round of mega-million profits while the rest of us brace for the future.⁵⁰

Violence sets in, both internally and externally. On the Chinese side, the belief that great power status can remove accusations of a 'China threat' serves only to underscore the pitfalls of Westphalian education. Postcolonial studies fully detail how a former great power like Britain threatened all it encountered, including its own populations like the Irish and the Scots, or the working class.⁵¹ Why less so the Chinese state?⁵² As for 'rational nationalism', how does a state manage it without descending into mob rule, jingoism, and/or demonisation? History amply shows the tendency for nationalism to run amok, especially under conditions of war or its imminence.⁵³ And what are the checking mechanisms to prevent 'superficial enmity' from sliding into 'real enmity'?

On the US/Western side, attempts by the English School to maintain an international society or liberal world order further affirm the hegemony of the West and, by extension, Westphalian IR. No one is fooled and many are angered, leading to alienation, rejection, and worse, reproduction. As for realists, laments of the 'tragedy' of great power politics have not deterred them from rationalising power for power's sake at every turn and to the world's detriment.⁵⁴

The late Chalmers Johnson cautioned precisely against such myopia-cum-hubris. With distinguished careers in government, the military, and academe, particularly regarding the Asia-Pacific, Johnson was the ultimate establishment 'insider'. Yet in his last book, *The Sorrows of Empire*, he warned against an American 'empire of bases' that occupied other peoples' lands and impinged on their sovereignty. This implicit imperialism, Johnson stressed, threatens the very democracy that the US claims to represent and seeks to export overseas. 'We had mounted the Napoleonic tiger', Johnson wrote in 2004, shortly after the Bush Administration invaded Iraq. 'The question was, would we – and could we – ever dismount?'⁵⁵

Sorrows, indeed, flood this *New York Times* report from 2008. The reporter recounts what she observed of US troops in Afghanistan on the ground in their camps:

⁵⁰ See, for example, Rita Abrahamsen and Michael C. Williams, 'Selling Security: Assessing the Impact of Military Privatization', *Review of International Political Economy*, 15:1 (February 2008), pp. 131–46; Andrew E. Kramer, 'In Rebuilding Iraq's Oil Industry, US Subcontractors Hold Sway', *New York Times* (16 June 2011), available at: {<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/17/business/energy-environment/17oil.html?pagewanted=all>} accessed 1 February 2012.

⁵¹ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: The Psychology of Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁵² The Chinese state's mishandling of its Tibetan and Muslim communities is well-reported. But the case of the 'blind lawyer', Chen Guangcheng, underscores the state's inability to handle dissent regardless of who is involved. Thomas Kaplan, Andrew Jacobs, and Steven Lee Myers, 'Dissident From China Arrives in US, Ending Ordeal', *New York Times* (19 May 2012) available at: {<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/20/world/asia/china-dissident-chen-guangcheng-united-states.html?pagewanted=all>} accessed 16 August 2012.

⁵³ John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

⁵⁴ Realists like Mearsheimer have opposed the Iraq War, for example, claiming it was not in America's national interest. Yet they do not consider that their theory of insatiable hegemony invariably leads to impulsive acts of geopolitical bullying, just because the hegemon has the power to do so. Here, feminist analyses of the Westphalian state are most insightful. See V. Spike Peterson (ed.), *Gendered States: Feminist (Re) Visions of International Relations Theory* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992).

⁵⁵ Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004), p. 284.

'I hate this country!' [the young sergeant] shouted. Then he smiled and walked back into the hut. 'He's on medication,' [26-year-old Capt. Dan] Kearney [commander of the unit] said quietly to me. Then another soldier walked by and shouted, 'Hey, I'm with you, sir!' and Kearney said to me, 'Prozac. Serious P.T.S.D. from last tour.' Another one popped out of the HQ cursing and muttering. 'Medicated,' Kearney said. 'Last tour, if you didn't give him information, he'd burn down your house. He killed so many people. He's checked out.'⁵⁶

No less sorrowful are the 'desire industries' that swarm around military bases, infecting buyers, and sellers alike.⁵⁷ America's traditional allies in Asia mentioned by Fargo in his 'rebalancing' strategy – Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Australia – have all served as centres of prostitution for US military bases since World War II, especially during the Korea and Vietnam Wars. His 'rebalancing' strategy would not only revitalise these centres but also add new ones like India, Malaysia, and Singapore to the roster. As for the communities in which military bases are located, rarely do they receive due compensation for confiscated land or due justice when local women and girls are raped and assaulted by US military personnel.⁵⁸

Even deviation from the 'China threat' thesis bears a catch. Those who abide by Westphalian IR but disagree with the thesis can only do so by denying the problem in the first place. It is not that the 'China threat' thesis is wrong or inaccurate; it is that China does not (yet) qualify as a threat. One implication, of course, is to keep China from qualifying. This warrants a whole host of policies and strategies that either portends violence or induces it.⁵⁹ Even more, the analysis begs the question: what should happen when China, eventually, does qualify as a so-called threat? No stable or safe future can be in the offing. Significantly, any suggestion of reform or even introspection within the West must come *sotto voce*, lest it annoy Westphalian IR.

But what if we were to take Chinese dialectics seriously?⁶⁰ How would this approach reconfigure the 'China threat' thesis? Following, then, is a thought experiment. It applies the root of 'Chinese dialectics' – that is, Daoist dialectics – to US-China relations, specifically, and world politics, generally. What results from this brief thought experiment is necessarily preliminary but also instructive.

To begin, let us review what is meant by dialectics and the *dao*.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Rubin, 'Battle Company is Out There', *The New York Times Magazine* (24 February 2008) available at: {<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/24/magazine/24afghanistan-t.html?pagewanted=all>} accessed 23 November 2011.

⁵⁷ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Ling, *Postcolonial International Relations*; Anna M. Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling, 'Desire Industries: Sex Trafficking, UN Peacekeeping, and the Neo-Liberal World Order', *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 10:1 (Summer/Fall 2003), pp. 133–48.

⁵⁸ Note, for example, the history of rapes of Okinawan women and girls by US military personnel stationed there. Yumiko Mikanagi, 'Okinawa: Women, Bases, and US-Japan Relations', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 4:1 (2004), pp. 97–111. The latest report comes from Chris Hogg, 'New US Rape Allegation in Okinawa', *BBC News* (21 February 2008), available at: {<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7256056.stm>} accessed 19 August 2012.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Craig Whitlock, 'US, Australia to Broaden Military Ties Amid Pentagon Pivot to SE Asia', *Washington Post* (26 March 2012) available at: {http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-to-expand-ties-with-australia-as-it-aims-to-shift-forces-closer-to-se-asia/2012/03/19/gIQAPSXlcS_story.html} accessed 14 April 2012.

⁶⁰ Due to space constraints, I refrain from discussing other theoretical schools of thought within Westphalian IR and why they fail to transform the 'China threat' thesis. For greater elaboration, see Ling, *The Dao of World Politics*.

Daoist dialectics in IR: reconfiguring the ‘China threat’

Dialectics provide a method of cognition or reasoning that systematically interrogates ‘the interrelations among constituent parts and part-whole relations’.⁶¹ No categorical ‘black box’ can survive in dialectical thought. All is subject to examination because all comes from dynamic interactions with others, whether positive or negative. In IR, according to Shannon Brincat, ‘[d]ialectics offers [sic] nothing less than a means to reframe the social ontology of world politics, from one of alleged stasis and immutability, to one of process, change and the social relations that generate them’.⁶² Brincat adds:

What makes social-relational dialectics such a capable method for understanding processes is how it informs on particular phenomena *within* the totality of social relations rather than their isolation or abstraction . . . [Dialectics] provides the contextual analysis of these social relations, rendering the interconnectedness between such phenomena and the immanent tendencies for social transformation that this engenders.⁶³

Daoist dialectics, however, differ in one key respect: internal co-implication, or what Qin Yaqinq calls ‘co-thesis or inter-thesis complementation’. Whereas Hegelian-Marxian dialectics may posit that polarities – for example, ‘master’ and ‘slave’ – are mutually created, Daoist dialectics place this co-implication within the polarities as well: that is, the ‘master’ within the ‘slave’ and the ‘slave’ within the ‘master’. Change and transformation operate internally as well as externally, rendering unnecessary, for example, a forcible synthesis of the polarities through violent revolution.⁶⁴ Rather, Daoist dialectics teach non-coercive action (*wuwei*) since a natural order of change operates from *within*. To Daoists, a new regime unfolds naturally and organically to redress the ills of an old regime, thereby eliminating the need for forcible revolution. (In this sense, Marx was more Daoist and Mao more Leninist.) In this way, the *Daodejing* advises, we arrive at the new with minimal violence to the old.

The *Dao*

Change and transformation most concern the *dao* or ‘the Way’. More accurately, it translates as ‘becoming’ or ‘way-making’.⁶⁵ Daoism views all things, especially polarities, as the product of on-going processes of mutuality. Specifically, ‘[t]he process of change is conceived as a generative unity of polarities which exist in opposition as well as in complementation; in terms of this unity, change is not only explained but

⁶¹ David Y. F. Ho, ‘Dialectical Thinking: Neither Eastern nor Western’, *American Psychologist* (September 2000), p. 1064.

⁶² Shannon Brincat, ‘Towards a Social-Relational Dialectic for World Politics’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 17:4 (December 2011), pp. 679–703.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 680–1, emphasis in original.

⁶⁴ For an example of applied Hegelian-Marxian dialectics resulting in a rationale for coercive action through revolution, see Mao Zedong, ‘On Contradictions’ (1937) available at: {<http://marxistphilosophy.org/oncontrad.pdf>} accessed 24 July 2012.

⁶⁵ ‘The Daoist understanding of “cosmos” as the “ten thousand things” [*wanwu*] means that, in effect, the Daoists have no concept of cosmos at all insofar as that notion entails a coherent, single-ordered world which is in any sense enclosed or defined. The Daoists are, therefore, primarily, “acosmotic” thinkers.’ Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall (trans.), *Dao De Jing, A Philosophical Translation: ‘Making This Life Significant’* (New York: Random House, 2003), p. 14.

Daoist Yin-Yang Dialectics

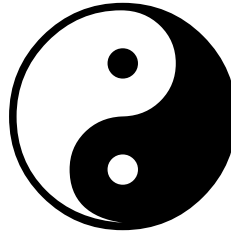


Figure 1. *Daoist yin-yang dialectics*

the variety of things (*wanwu*) is also explained'.⁶⁶ Such 'relativity and mutual transformability' account for the source of conflict as well as complicity between and within each pair; accordingly, '[d]istinction and difference between things are ontologically transcendable; conflict, antagonism, hostility arising from distinction and difference are naturally and ontologically transcended and absorbed into the *Dao*'.⁶⁷

Daoism's *yin-yang* diagram encapsulates this philosophy (see Figure 1). It shows two S-shaped curves (one black, one white) comprising a whole, with each half retaining within it a small dot of the other (one white, one black, respectively). Each dot signifies, in today's language, the Other in the Self, or what postcolonial feminists call intersectionality, multiplicity, and intersubjectivity.⁶⁸ With this mutual identification and penetration, the polarities of *yin* and *yang* are co-implicated even as they oppose each other.

Yin signifies the female principle and *yang*, the male. These serve as analytical categories, not just substantive emphases on women and men, *per se*, or femininity and masculinity, respectively. Rather, *yin* refers to all those qualities associated with the feminine such as cold, soft, and weak; and *yang*, hot, hard, and strong. Does this mean *yang* supersedes *yin* in value? After all, a critical reader could ask, who wants to be cold, soft, and weak instead of hot, hard, and strong? Herein lies the wisdom of the *dao*. Each trait bears value depending on circumstance and context. Due to their equal valence, *yin* and *yang* co-create, co-govern, and co-exercise power. The *Daodejing* cites the *dao* as the 'sire of the many' (*zhongfu*) and the 'mother of everything' (*wanwu zhi mu*). 'It should be noted', write Roger Ames and David Hall, 'that mother is the impregnated female, and father is the siring male. Each of them entails the other.'⁶⁹

No less a master strategist than Sunzi understood such wisdom.⁷⁰ One should never make assumptions, Sunzi taught, especially in war:

⁶⁶ Cheng, 'Towards Constructing a Dialectics of Harmonization', p. 28. See also, Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration and the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1999 {orig. pub. 1975}).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁶⁸ Geeta Chowdhry and L. H. M. Ling, 'Race(ing) Feminist IR: A Critical Overview of Postcolonial Feminism', in Robert A. Denemark (ed.), *The International Studies Encyclopedia*, pp. 6038–57 (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2010).

⁶⁹ Ames and Hall, *Dao De Jing*, p. 109.

⁷⁰ For more on Sunzi, see Ching-Chane Hwang and L. H. M. Ling, 'The Kitsch of War: Misappropriating Sun Tzu for an American Imperial Hypermasculinity', in Bina D'Costa and Katrina Lee-Koo (eds), *Gender and Global Politics in the Asia Pacific* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 59–76.

Disorder comes from order, cowardice stems from courage, and weakness is born of strength. Order or disorder depends on organization, courage or cowardice on circumstances, strength or weakness on disposition.⁷¹

Specifically, Laozi likened the *dao* to water.⁷² ‘The highest efficacy’, the *Daodejing* quotes him saying, ‘is like water’.⁷³ It may be the ‘meekest in the world’ but it can also ‘[p]enetrate the strongest in the world’; Laozi concludes: ‘[n]othing in the world can match it’.⁷⁴ Not only does water inhere with its own dialectics of transformation (hot/cold, soft/hard, weak/strong) but water also contains multiple layers of meaning, significance, and judgment that flow ceaselessly, one into the other, one affecting the other. No one condition is fixed as intrinsically good or bad, desired or repulsed, useful or not. It depends, as Sunzi noted.

Binary thinking evaporates. Let me illustrate by way of a story.

‘Seven Times Caught, Seven Times Released’

The fourteenth-century epic, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi*), centres on third-century Chinese politics. I focus on one episode titled, ‘Seven Times Caught, Seven Times Released’ (*qiqin qizong*).⁷⁵ It refers to the decision of Zhuge Liang, prime minister of the Shu Kingdom and renowned in Chinese history as a master strategist, to release Meng Huo, King of a Southern ‘barbaric’ tribe in what is today’s Yunnan province, despite the latter’s capture seven times.

Meng Huo would not accept Shu rule ‘in his heart’ (*xin fu*). For this reason, the prime minister frees him after each capture – until the seventh time. Caught alive, Meng is brought into the Prime Minister’s tent in chains only to find before him a table full of fine meats and wine. A soldier unshackles Meng. Zhuge’s trusted general announces to the King: ‘The Prime Minister feels ashamed to meet you in person.’⁷⁶ He commands me to let you to return home, to battle us another day. You may leave as soon as you like.’ The King is so moved tears begin to flow. ‘I may be a person outside of Chinese culture (*huawai zhi ren*),’ the King weeps, ‘but I still know what’s right and proper (*liyi*). How could I [alone] be [so] shameless (*xiouchi*)?’ As legend has it, Meng Huo finally accepts Shu rule.

⁷¹ Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*, chap. 31 in Volume II on ‘Potential’ (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1993), p. 65.

⁷² From ancient times, many have appreciated water’s philosophical properties. Note this observation:

Thales, the first Greek philosopher, declared water the first principle of all things. The Greek poet Pindar called water ‘the best of all things’. An Indian *Purana* praises water as ‘the source of all things and existence’. Sounding somewhat like a Daoist, St. Francis celebrated water as the mirror of nature and the model of his conduct.

Kirill Ole Thompson, “‘What Is the Reason of Failure or Success? The Fisherman’s Song Goes Deep into the River’”: Fishermen in the *Zhuangzi*”, in Roger T. Ames (ed.), *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 18.

⁷³ Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, p. 87.

⁷⁴ Laozi cited by Thompson, “‘What is the Reason of Failure or Success?’”, p. 17.

⁷⁵ This episode comes from chap. 89 of *Sanguo yanyi*. The full text in Chinese is available at: {<http://cls.hs.yzu.edu.tw/san/bin/body.asp?CHNO=089>} accessed 22 September 2011. Author’s translation.

⁷⁶ Zhuge’s shame refers to Meng’s shame. Zhuge does not want to aggravate Meng’s sense of humiliation at being captured a seventh time and having his captor witness it in person.

Zhugé Liang's strategy reflects a balancing of *yin* and *yang* dialectics.⁷⁷ He combines the *yin* of 'hearts and minds' with the *yang* of warfare as a military strategy (*gong xin*).⁷⁸ He also perceives the co-implications within. After Meng Huo accepts Shu rule, Zhuge enacts a policy that draws on the *yang*-within-*yin*: that is, having local, 'barbaric' talent – including Meng Huo himself – serve in the administration of the new territory (*wei cheng*). (Indeed, the 'barbaric' King later becomes a high-ranking official in the Shu court).⁷⁹ Zhuge also draws on the *yin*-within-*yang*: harmonious governance (*wei he*).⁸⁰ For example, Zhuge orders his men to transfer important technical knowledge regarding agriculture and construction, salt and metals, to the local people. In this way, he improves their material lives while leaving alone their customs and traditions, lifestyles and religions.⁸¹ Meng Huo's people thus prosper on their own terms rather than those of the outsiders.⁸²

Daoist dialectics compel considerations of the opposite as well: in this case, imbalance. Should *yin* and *yang* fail to match, or each polarity is paired with itself rather than its opposite, then disaster necessarily results. This episode closes with Zhuge Liang's considerations of what *not* to do, guided by the Daoist ideal of harmony and non-coercive action (*wuwei*). Referring to colonisation of Meng Huo's tribe and territory, Zhuge states:⁸³

It would not be easy (*yi*) for three reasons. Stationing outsiders would require a military occupation [*yang*-occupation], but there is no way the troops could sustain/feed themselves [no *yin* counterpart], that's one difficulty. The barbaric peoples have suffered much [*yin*-emptiness], losing fathers and brothers (on the battlefield). If I were to station outsiders here without troops [another *yin*-emptiness], it would be a disaster in the making. That's a second difficulty. The barbaric peoples have murdered and killed [*yang*-aggressiveness], naturally they harbour suspicions (that would lead to other aggressive acts), especially of outsiders [more *yang*-aggressiveness]; that's a third difficulty. (For these reasons), I don't leave anyone behind [*yin*-withdrawal] and I don't transport away any supplies (that is, he leaves behind supplies and sustenance) [*yang*-advance], thereby allowing us to remain in mutual peace (balance) and without incident (*wushi*).⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Daoist thinking for politics was introduced three centuries before Zhuge's time in the *Huainanzi* (Master Huainan), a Daoist canon. See Liu An, *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China*; John S. Major, Sarah A. Queen, Andrew Seth Meyer, and Harold D. Roth (eds and trans) (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

⁷⁸ The Chinese language does not recognise a Cartesian duality between the mind and the body. The word for 'heart' (*xin*) also refers to the chamber where 'thinking' takes place. Hence, to ask 'what's on your mind?' in Chinese, one would say: what is your heart thinking (*xinli xiang sheme*)?

⁷⁹ Li Ming, 'Zhuge Liang "qiqin meng huo" chuanshuode wenhua nei han chutan' ('An Initial Examination of the Cultural Implications of Zhuge Liang's "Seven Captures of Meng Huo"'), *Lincang shifan gaodeng zhuanke xuexiao xuebao* (*Journal of Lincang Teachers' College*) 17:1 (March 2008), p. 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸¹ For more on this policy of acculturation or *huairou yuanren*, see James Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the MacArtney Embassy of 1793* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

⁸² Here, we see that the Chinese designation of 'barbarian' (*man*) entails its own *yin-yang* dialectics. The term does not have the same fixity in role or meaning as it has in the West. As with Meng Huo, *man* indicates geographical and cultural distance from the Confucian centre; it is not an objectified condition but subject to change, depending on circumstance. For greater elaboration on the Chinese concept of 'barbarian' and its appropriation by the West, see Lydia H. Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁸³ Parentheses indicate implications from his speech not explicitly stated in the text. The square brackets indicate my identification of the kind of *yin-yang* strategy taken by Zhuge Liang.

⁸⁴ Author's translation.

To this day, the descendants of Meng Huo revere Zhuge Liang.⁸⁵ From Daoist dialectics, we gain another way to think about and act in world politics. Let us apply these insights to US-China relations.

Politics of engagement

Daoist dialectics help us reframe the ‘China threat’ thesis into a politics of *engagement*. Contrary to assimilation and its implicit demand for submission to an established standard, Daoist engagement involves at least three, dialectical moves. First, Daoist dialectics place China and the US in *yin-yang* relationality, where the complicities bind as much as the conflicts tear at the two poles. I begin by designating China as *yin* and the US as *yang* to accord with the ‘China threat’ thesis. This designation does not indicate one pole’s superiority to the other, as it would in binary logic. Because *yin* and *yang* have ontological parity, one does not overshadow the other; moreover, each attribute changes over time and space as the interactions between *yin* and *yang* generate hybridities with their own permutations of complicities and conflicts. My point is that even if we begin with China-as-*yin* and US-as-*yang*, as prescribed by the ‘China threat’ thesis, Daoist dialectics lead us to a very different set of perspectives, strategies, and outcomes. Secondly, Daoist dialectics identify the co-implications within each pole – china-within-US, us-within-China – thereby surfacing complicities within conflicts, as well as contradictions within complementarities. Their resonance, or lack thereof, indicates sources of imminent change and transformation. Thirdly, Daoist dialectics compel us to see beyond bilateral relations between US and China to consider the whole: that is, world politics. This larger context may shape US-China relations but it also depends on them. How we construct this bilateral interaction, then, relates intimately to world politics as a whole. In turn, it will affect bilateral relations and so on.

Let us see how:

1. *China and US as yin-yang relations.* In placing China and the US in *yin-yang* dialectical relations, we access both what pushes them apart as well as what binds them together. Since the ‘China threat’ thesis offers a good summary of the former, let us here consider the latter. Toward this end, we find that the West, as a cultural progenitor of the US, has played a significant role in *making* contemporary China into what it is, just as China has done the same for the West.

For instance, Ravni Thakur and Tan Chung detail a series of ‘enchantment and disenchantment’ between intellectuals in Asia (India and China, in particular) and those in the West (US and Europe), rendering contemporary Asia a hybrid of both.⁸⁶ Extending this argument, I demonstrate elsewhere how the development

⁸⁵ Li Ming, ‘Zhuge Liang “*qiqin meng huo*” *chuanshuode wenhua nei han chutan*’ (‘An Initial Examination of the Cultural Implications of Zhuge Liang’s “Seven Captures of Meng Huo”’).

⁸⁶ Ravni Thakur and Tan Chung, ‘Enchantment and Disenchantment: A Sino-Indian Introspection’, in Tan Chung (ed.), *Across the Himalayan Gap: An Indian Quest for Understanding China* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1998), pp. 91–103. For a related argument that includes Japan, see Shogo Suzuki, *Civilisation and Empire: China and Japan’s Encounter with European International Society* (New York, Routledge, 2009); and Xavier Guillaume, *International Relations and Identity: A Dialogical Approach* (London: Routledge, 2011).

of Asian capitalism emerged from interstitial learning between the Confucian and Westphalian world orders.⁸⁷

Without the East, John Hobson argues, there would be no West.⁸⁸ He details how Asia's 'resource portfolios' consisting of 'Eastern ideas, institutions, and technologies' helped to make the rise of the West possible. One small example comes from Vasco Da Gama, credited in the West for pioneering the route around the Cape of Good Hope to the East Indies 'where he made first contact with a hitherto isolated and primitive Indian race'.⁸⁹ In fact, Hobson notes, Muslim, Javanese, Indian, and Chinese traders had travelled this route decades before, with Sassanid Persians and Black Ethiopians sailing across to India and China from the first millennium. Hobson adds:

It has no less been forgotten that Da Gama only managed to navigate across to India because he was guided by an unnamed Gujarati Muslim pilot. No less irksome [to Eurocentrists] is the point that virtually all of the nautical and navigational technologies and techniques that made Da Gama's journey possible were invented (and certainly refined further) in either China or the Islamic Middle East.⁹⁰

Europe's 'Age of Discovery' thus depended on numerous discoveries, big and small, made by non-Europeans. Jack Weatherford makes a similar point regarding the Mongol Empire. It introduced markers of modernity like paper money and management of a continental economy, usually attributed to mercantilist and later industrial Europe.⁹¹

2. *The co-implications within.* Daoist dialectics further embed one polarity into the other with internal co-implications. One example of us-within-China comes from the fact that China's latest generation of IR scholars receives its training primarily in the US and, more often than not, in the 'offensive realism' advocated by Mearsheimer and company.⁹² A bridge of common incentives arises. In speaking the same hypermasculine-nationalist language of Westphalian IR, elites from both sides of the Pacific gain greater access to the state and its resources through funds, promotions, influence, and the like.⁹³ Professors and politicians alike flush to flatteries of their 'brilliance',⁹⁴ while generals and contractors siphon their respective nations of blood and treasure to protect 'national security'.⁹⁵

⁸⁷ Ling, *Postcolonial International Relations*.

⁸⁸ John Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Jack Weatherford, *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004).

⁹² Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell, 'How China Sees America', *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2012) available at: {<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138009/andrew-j-nathan-and-andrew-scobell/how-china-sees-america>} accessed 25 August 2012.

⁹³ We note the same kind of complicity between establishment elites in Taiwan and the US. L. H. M. Ling, Ching-Chane Hwang, and Boyu Chen, 'Subaltern Straits: "Exit", "Voice", and "Loyalty" in the United States-China-Taiwan Relations', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 10:1 (2010), pp. 33–59.

⁹⁴ John Trumbour, *How Harvard Rules: Reason in the Service of Empire* (Boston: South End Press, 1989); Ido Oren, *Our Enemies and US: America's Rivalries and the Making of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

⁹⁵ Ling, 'Neoliberal Neocolonialism'.

Conversely, the co-implication of china-within-US refers to a vibrant and long-standing Chinese community in America. No homogeneous ‘model minority’, the Chinese in America cover a spectrum of interests, ideologies, languages, ethnicities, memories, social classes, and relations to Chinese culture and civilisation, if not the state.⁹⁶ Still, the Chinese-American community offers critical insight to ‘white’ America on how it treats Others, both ‘over there’ and ‘at home’.

David Henry Hwang, for example, unravels the mystery of Asia’s (hyper-feminised Other) allure to the (hypermasculinised Self) West in his play, *M. Butterfly*. It tells of an actual case of a French diplomat who lived with a Chinese woman for twenty years but who, to his great surprise, turned out to be a man. The play turns upside-down and inside-out the mythic tale of ‘Madame Butterfly’, popularised by Puccini’s opera of the same title, by revealing the West’s deep psychological and emotional investment that Asia must be a woman and, therefore, ripe for the taking.⁹⁷ Such ‘racist love’, Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan charge, accounts for how ‘white’ America has always set up a ‘good’ Other to check its ‘bad’ twin.⁹⁸ For every evil Fu Manchu whose anti-imperialist plots threaten ‘civilisation as we know it’, for instance, there is one Charlie Chan. He is the avuncular detective who solves cases with broken English (even though he’s from Honolulu), sometimes aided by his Number One Son who spouts friendly, familiar Americanisms like ‘Hi, Pop!’⁹⁹

These internal critiques would serve US foreign policy well, especially in Asia. But the US national security state rarely draws on this domestic resource, with devastating results as epitomised by the Vietnam War.¹⁰⁰ With China today, the US national security state risks repeating the same negligence by demanding acquiescence from the ‘good’ China in repudiation of its ‘bad’ twin. This foreign policy will redound, invariably, to discriminatory domestic practices. How accurately, then, can the US still claim to lead an ‘open and rules-based system’?

The co-implications of US-China relations seem to work at cross purposes. But, as Zhuge Liang has shown, we must also consider the opposite case(s). Here, we find a mutually beneficial complicity across the two sources of co-implication between the US and China. Mounting evidence indicates that social groups outside of state elites in each camp seek alternatives to Westphalian IR’s hypermasculine-competitive nationalism by transcending it. An increasingly active environmental movement in China, for example, now links with counterparts not only in the US/West but also

⁹⁶ Tamar Lewin, ‘Report Takes Aim at “Model Minority” Stereotype of Asian-American Students’, *New York Times* (10 June 2008) available at: {<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/10/education/10asians.html>} accessed 25 August 2012. See also, Gary Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (3rd edn, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999 [orig. pub. 1994]); and Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (New York: Little, Brown 2008 [orig. pub. 1993]).

⁹⁷ For greater elaboration of this play and its significance for world politics, see Ling, *Postcolonial International Relations*.

⁹⁸ Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan, ‘Racist Love’, in Richard Kostelanetz (ed.), *Seeing Through Shuck* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), pp. 65–79.

⁹⁹ For more on Fu Manchu and IR/world politics, see L. H. M. Ling, ‘Globalisation and the Spectre of Fu Manchu: White Man’s Burden as Dark Irony’, in J. S. Fritz and M. Lensu (eds), *Value Pluralism, Normative Theory and International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 132–59; and L. H. M. Ling, ‘The Monster Within: What Fu Manchu and Hannibal Lecter Can Tell Us about Terror and Desire in a Post-9/11 World’, *positions: east asia cultures critique*, 12:2 (Fall 2004) pp. 377–400.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Jennifer Milliken and David Sylvan, ‘Soft Bodies, Hard Targets, and Chic Theories: US Bombing Policy in Indochina’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 25 (June 1996), pp. 321–59.

an unexpected neighbour, Taiwan.¹⁰¹ Similarly, a taste for common cultural products through film, music, literature, TV drama, food, medicine, religion, and other venues across the region suggest an emerging regional, trans-Asian subjectivity.¹⁰² And IR scholars in Asia are picking up on these cultural undercurrents, arguing that an ‘Asian epistemic community’¹⁰³ or ‘Asian school of IR’ is not only needed but already happening.¹⁰⁴

3. *The context of world politics.* Daoist dialectics necessarily bring in the larger context to US-China relations: that is, world politics *writ large*. It is no longer a Hobbesian State of Nature for individuated states competing murderously for survival. Rather, world politics under Daoist dialectics operates as an organic entity filled with hybridities, whose complicities and complementarities proliferate despite and sometimes because of the conflicts and contradictions between polarities.

How does this affect IR/world politics? To explain, I must resort to metaphor. Suppose Westphalian IR is an exclusive, much-sought-after club. It has dominated the scene of IR/world politics for a while (but in light of human history, just recently).¹⁰⁵ The club owners identify themselves as heirs to established traditions like Realism, the English School, the Princeton Project, and others previously mentioned. From their perspective, Westphalian IR is the only club around. Understandably, the club owners cannot admit a new, big customer like China unless it conforms to *their* rules and practices; after all, they founded Westphalian IR. Moreover, there are representatives of ‘China’ already inside the club, either in their tuxedos, smoking brand-name cigars and drinking well-aged cognac, or servicing the kitchen in chef’s whites and servants’ uniforms. (Female representatives, of course, may enter the club when properly escorted by husbands and other male relatives; or, they can entertain club members in other ways, both public and private.)

The club owners think: ‘*They* can do it, why can’t China?’ But should a different kind of China amble forth, not in the usual coat and tie, out for an evening of competitive bonhomie, but dressed in flowing dialectical garb and seeking dialogue or some other kind of deep engagement, the owners have no guidance other than to bellow: ‘Go home and change!’

¹⁰¹ Private communication with Li Bo, former secretary general of Friends of Nature, the oldest environmental organisation in China available at: {<http://doteco.org/partners/friends-of-nature/>} accessed 27 August 2012.

¹⁰² Ling, *The Dao of World Politics*. See also, a conference titled, ‘Transcultural Asia: Unlearning Colonial/Imperial Power Relations’, organised by Pinar Bilgin (Bilkent University) and L. H. M. Ling (The New School), to be held in Ankara in 2013, sponsored by SAM, the think tank for Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹⁰³ Binod Kumar Mishra, ‘Articulating an Asian Epistemic Community: Presenting the *Other* Worldview’, paper presented at an international conference on ‘Democratising International Relations’, at National Sun Yat-sen University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan (11–12 March 2009).

¹⁰⁴ Some examples include: Barry Buzan and Amitav Acharya (eds), *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives On And Beyond Asia* (London: Routledge, 2010); Chen Boyu, ‘*Guoji guanxi yazhou xuepai shifou keneng? Guoji guanxi yanjiude wenming zhuanxiang*’ (‘Emergence of an Asian School? A Civilizational Turn in International Relations’), PhD Dissertation, Graduate Institute of Political Science, National Sun Yat-sen University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan (13 June 2011); Rajiv Malhotra, *Being Different: An Indian Challenge to Western Universalism* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2011); Alan Chong, ‘Premodern Southeast Asia as a Guide to International Relations between Peoples: Prowess and Prestige in “Intersocietal Relations” in the *Sejarah Melayu*’, *Alternatives: Local, Global, Political*, 37:2 (2012), pp. 87–105.

¹⁰⁵ Steve Smith, ‘Singing Our World into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11’, *International Studies Quarterly* (September 2004), pp. 499–515.

Under Daoist dialectics, such discrimination cannot take place. With water as a metaphor, world politics no longer segments into individuated actors like states or contained centres of hegemony. Instead, world politics turns into circulations of a myriad of things, both concrete and abstract, each with ontological parity. Multiple founts of subjectivity *and* trans-subjectivity appear. Westphalian IR must interact with others, especially newcomers like China, India, Brazil, indigenous peoples, the environmental movement, and so on; otherwise, it will find itself left out of the mainstream as a *social* relationship, regardless of economic, political, or even military asymmetries. Forced to mix with Others, Westphalian IR may begin to wade into a common pool of mutually-articulated and always-developing values.¹⁰⁶ In so doing, Westphalian IR may find that differences in approach do not necessarily lead to differences in outcome or aspiration. (Even radical fundamentalists appeal to fairness in global relations.) No longer restricted to the ‘deep and durable practices’ of Westphalian IR’s private club, reserved exclusively for hypermasculine-competitive types, partying deep into the night and at others’ expense, world politics may develop, instead, some alternatives that enable whole families to enjoy themselves in the full light of day.¹⁰⁷ Westphalian anxiety may seize the popular imagination now and then with conflicts always ready to flare. But with Daoist dialectics, we realise that all conflicts are laced with complicities. And these complicities will spread the consequences of conflict to all, regardless of borders, sovereignty, or national security. As we learn from Daoist dialectics, no one is immune. We are all responsible.

Conclusion

Political ads in the US routinely target China, and the 2012 presidential campaign season is no exception.¹⁰⁸ These blame China for the continued outflow of US jobs, investments, and incomes. And now there is the added challenge of a ‘rising’ China threatening to dismantle not just the American way of life but also world order as we know it. Geography, culture, race, gender, and ideology still sum up ‘China’ and ‘Chinese’ for the mainstream in the US/West.

Westphalian IR tends to rationalise these prejudices and stereotypes. It may speak of ‘hegemonic systems’, ‘durable practices’, and a ‘liberal world order’, but Westphalianism ultimately rehashes old colonialisms like the ‘China threat’ thesis.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Jung, ‘Confucianism and Existentialism’; Brooke A. Ackerly, ‘Is Liberalism the Only Way toward Democracy? Confucianism and Democracy’, *Political Theory*, 33:4 (August 2005), pp. 547–76; Siba N. Grovogui, ‘Mind, Body and Gut! Elements of a Postcolonial Human Rights Discourse’, in Branwyn Gruffyd Jones (ed.), *Decolonizing International Relations*, pp. 179–96 (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Yaqing Qin, ‘Development of International Relations Theory in China: Progress through Debates’, *International Relations of the Asia Pacific*, 11 (2011), pp. 231–57.

¹⁰⁷ See chap. 7 of Agathangelou and Ling, *Transforming World Politics*. See also, Meera Sabaratnam, ‘IR in Dialogue ... but Can We Change the Subjects? A Typology of Decolonising Strategies for the Study of World Politics’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 39 (May 2011), pp. 781–803.

¹⁰⁸ Mackenzie Weinger, ‘9 China Slamming Campaign Ads’, *Politico* (14 February 2012) available at: {<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0212/72834.html>} accessed 16 February 2012.

¹⁰⁹ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London and Dar Es Salam: Bogle-L’Ouverture Publications, 1973); Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair (eds), *Power, Post-colonialism and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender and Class* (London: Routledge, 2002); Sankaran Krishna, *Globalisation and Postcolonialism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

One means of redress, argues a core member of Westphalian IR in his latest book, *On China*,¹¹⁰ is for the US and China to adjust to each other in ‘fundamental’ ways of thinking so a common vision for the future, institutionalised by multiple venues of national cooperation and engagement, could forge a new international community jointly led by the US and China. This proposal from Henry Kissinger seems uncharacteristically Daoist except in one key respect. In not recognising the co-implications between the US and China, each dialectically interpenetrating and transforming the other, whether intended or not, cooperation cannot take hold precisely due to Westphalian IR’s binary logic: Self vs. Other, West vs. Rest, hyper-masculinised competition vs. hyperfeminised submission. At most, Kissinger’s proposal amounts to a re-imposition of Europe’s imperialist club of the sixteenth century, when ‘the lords of all the world’ (that is, the royal patriarchies of Spain, Britain, and France, under the leadership of the Pope) neatly divided the world amongst themselves, presuming their rule not only deserved but also just,¹¹¹ only to inaugurate five centuries of horror and shame and annihilation. We cannot repeat this bloody history.

Daoist dialectics help us *be* differently in the world. We realise that both IR and world politics entail far more than what Westphalianism can recognise or practice. With dialectically-interacting multiplicities, power (soft or hard) and war (defensive or pre-emptive) lose their standing as sole markers of world politics. In underscoring that we – all of us – make world politics, Daoism’s ontological parity recentres politics in global, democratic, and intimate terms:¹¹² it becomes concrete as well as abstract, with ‘high’ and ‘low’ concerns, cutting across and within the multiple, co-implicated trans-subjectivities that prevail despite the conflicts and contradictions. With this recognition, Daoist dialectics address a deeper, more profound source of violence. Hegemony not only discriminates against the Other; it also stultifies the Self. Blocked from flowing freely, our worldly co-implications cannot reach the right balance internally or externally. The Self becomes hostage to Westphalian IR as much as its projected Other.¹¹³ We need to emancipate ourselves, our worlds, and our world politics from this unnecessary tragedy. Daoist dialectics can show us how.

¹¹⁰ Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

¹¹¹ Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France c. 1500–c. 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

¹¹² One manifestation for policy, for example, would be Nancy Fraser’s theory of post-Westphalian democratic justice. Nancy Fraser, ‘Reframing Justice in a Globalizing World’, *New Left Review*, 36 (November–December 2005), pp. 1–19. I thank Shirin Rai for this reference.

¹¹³ See, for example, L. H. M. Ling, ‘Can the West Listen?’, *Kulturaustausch (Journal for International Perspectives)*, Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations), Berlin (forthcoming).