

*Memo for the Presentation on*

**Week 10: International Relations in Political Science Context**

*Non-Western IR Theories*

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Following the culmination of the Cold War, the global community entered a phase that championed the ideals of globalisation across both economic and political domains. In the wake of post-World War II independence movements, the demand for the democratisation of international politics emerged among newly born states. This shift highlighted a critical reflection of traditional International Relations (IR) Theories, which were increasingly critiqued for their Eurocentric or Western-centric perspectives. This critique was particularly vocal among scholarly people from the Global South, who sought to challenge and expand the theoretical frameworks to better reflect a multiplicity of geopolitical histories and contexts.

Since then, there has been a concerted effort within the field to address the dichotomy between 'the West and the Rest' under the Global IR idea. These works aim to cultivate a more diverse and inclusive foundation for International Relations research by transcending traditional Eurocentric models. Among the significant strides towards this objective, scholars from China have been very notable, offering theoretical contributions deeply rooted in China's rich historical narrative.

This short memo intends to introduce some of the seminal theories and ideas proposed by Chinese and scholars from India and Islamic world. By doing so, we can better resonate with the complexities and diversity characterising the contemporary international relations research.

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**1. Chinese International Relations Theories**

In the four decades following China's Reform and Opening Up, the country has experienced remarkable development in its overall strength, which has been mirrored in the establishment and advancement of Chinese International Relations Theories (CIRT). This growth has coincided with China's increasingly leading role on the global battleground. A distinctive feature of the CIRT is their deep roots in China's rich traditional heritage, ancient philosophy, and culture, which are ingeniously intertwined with contemporary geopolitical dynamics. The development of CIRT represents a pioneering effort to create a framework for International Relations that diverges from Western-centric paradigms.

**a. Moral Realism**

- A rising power narrows the power gap with leading powers and eventually rises to become a global power;
- Moral concerns as key for states making strategic decisions on how to achieve maximum national interest;

- MR is a contributing factor to leaders' strategic preferences in that leaders will be judged according to the accepted codes of conduct pertaining to national interests and national capability; and, are required to lead by example that is conducive to international order;
  - Similar to realist idea in IRT, remaining being anarchic, which means that the power still matters and the creation of international stability and provision of public goods rest on the shoulders of "leading powers"
- (Yan, 2019; Acharya, 2019)

The theory of Moral Realism (MR) is quite popular among scholars of Chinese International Relations. This theory, an offshoot of neoclassical realism, posits that a country's national strength as its capacity, and its power as its influence. The progenitor of this theory, Professor Yan Xuetong of Tsinghua University, critiques classical international relations theories, such as the theory of hegemonic stability, for their focus solely on the decline of powers without addressing the causes behind the rise of new powers. According to Yan, the redistribution of international hegemonic power occurs when a rising power overtakes an established power in terms of both capacity and efficiency of leadership (Yan, 2019).

However, this theory faces criticism for its handling of the concept of "morality" (道义). Professor Qin Yaqing of the China Foreign Affairs University points out the ambiguity in MR's definition of morality and the potentially misleading equation of strategic credibility with moral righteousness, suggesting a scenario where alliances are supported unconditionally, regardless of whether it is right or wrong (Qin, 2014). Qin argues that within MR, "morality" does not align with Hans Morgenthau's notion of morality or universal values but is instead interpreted through the lens of national interest, signifying a realist juxtaposition of morality (Qin, 2014).

## **b. All-under-Heaven (*Tianxia*)**

- World as a unit, but not state (in the international relations), and the "World" as inclusion of all people and all lands, as well as the starting point for political building
  - Harmony (i.e. reciprocal dependence) over sameness a key element
  - An institution is good if and only if it can be applied on all political levels and from local to global.
- (Zhao, 2009; Acharya, 2019)

Another significant contribution to Chinese International Relations (CIRT) is the All-Under-Heaven (*Tianxia*) concept, deeply rooted in ancient Chinese philosophy. Professor Zhao Tingyang (2009) elaborates on his *Tianxia* concept in the paper "*A Political World Philosophy in terms of All-Under-Heaven (Tian-xia)*." He presents the idea that the world should be viewed as a unified entity, a foundational political philosophy concept aiming to establish a global institution. This institution would approach all global issues as collective problems, necessitating collective solutions. According to this philosophy, global governance should prioritize harmony and integration over competition and domination. This aligns with ancient Chinese political ideals, advocating for a world order that is both inclusive and equitable.

### c. Relational Theory/Relationality (*guanxi*)

- Relationality as a crucial determinant of world politics;
- State actions based on relationships instead of rational calculations of self-interests and needs;
- Self-existence, self-identity and self-interests all related to other's existence, identity and interests.

(Qin, 2018; Acharya, 2019)

The third dominant idea in CIR is the relational theory or relationality or Guanxi (关系理论)。Qin (2016) introduces the Chinese style of understanding in social interaction and dynamic into the international relations theory, emphasising the social relations and interactions among national actor in the international society. Qin (2016), in his paper *A Relational Theory of World Politics*, argues that the nature of international politics is shaped by the long-term cultural and historical relational mode. In this relational interaction, the countries in global society influence and shape each other. This theory emphasises the importance of interdependence and reciprocal relations in shaping global affairs. (Qin, 2018)

## 2. Indian International Relations Ideas

The development of Indian International Relations (IR) theories represents a dynamic process, intricately woven with India's unique cultural legacies and complex colonial history. Unlike China, which has carved out its own niche in IR theory reflecting its unique historical and cultural context, India has not yet established a distinct school of IR theory. This absence is notable given India's rich philosophical traditions and significant global presence.

India's colonial past is a critical determinant in shaping its IR ideas and discourses. Scholars such as Mallavarapu (2009) emphasize that colonialism has profoundly influenced Indian national identity, foreign policy perspectives, and scepticism towards Western norms of sovereignty and state behaviour. This backdrop has led Indian IR to prioritize sovereignty, non-alignment, and anti-colonialism, with the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" (*Panchsheel*) emerging as a hallmark of India's approach to foreign policy and international engagement (Nayar and Paul, 2003).

Furthermore, there is a conscious effort among Indian scholars to merge India's historical and cultural depth with contemporary IR theories. The ancient text, the *Arthashastra*, known for its insights on statecraft, diplomacy, and military strategy in India, is frequently cited by Indian IR scholars as a source that could enrich current IR theories (Boesche, 2008). Malone, Mohan, and Raghavan (2010) advocate for the integration of India's rich historical experiences and wisdom into the framework of IR theory, suggesting that India's ancient philosophies and strategic thoughts offer valuable perspectives for global IR discussions with principles that have universal applicability, which extend beyond the Western canon.

Despite the India's unique cultural heritage and colonial history offer rich soil for developing distinctive IR theories, the integration of these elements into a cohesive Indian IR school requires

overcoming significant challenges. The task ahead involves not only critiquing Western paradigms but also systematically building and articulating theories that reflect India's historical depth, cultural diversity, and contemporary geopolitical strategies.

### **3. *Islamic International Relations Ideas***

Islamic International Relations theories draw upon Islamic philosophy, ethics, and legal principles to offer a supplement to the prevailing Western-centric paradigm in the field. These theories assert that Islamic tenets provide valuable insights into diplomacy, justice, and sovereignty within the international community. In his work, *The Many Faces of Political Islam*, Mohammed Ayoob (2020) suggests that Islamic principles advocate for a more equitable global order by underscoring justice ('*adl*') and the welfare (*maslaha*) of the Muslim community (*ummah*). Ayoob posits that Islamic thought is not only compatible with contemporary IR theories but also enriches the discourse of International Relations.

Abdelkader, Adiong, and Mauriello (2016) delve into how Islamic principles might enhance IR theory, particularly in addressing global challenges such as poverty, conflict, and global governance. Their work underscores the potential for Islamic principles to contribute to a more humane and just international order.

Islamic scholars endeavour to weave Islamic traditions and principles into contemporary IR theoretical frameworks, advocating for a more inclusive approach that contributes to the IR theories with Islamic thought.

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