(Re)negotiating China’s Place in the House of IR: 
The search for a ‘Chinese School’ of international relations theory

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Abstract

In recent years a number of prominent scholars working within the Chinese academy have invested significant time and resources into searching for or attempting to define a distinctly Chinese approach to theorising international politics and a still others have lamented its absence.

This paper considers a number of recent attempts by Chinese scholars to examine, explore and/or challenge the position of their scholarship in relation to the global “discipline” of international relations. It is concerned particularly with their attempts to define an international relations theory with “Chinese characteristics” or a “Chinese School” of IR.

It considers the potential for such imaginings to destabilise dominant ‘truths’ in the discipline of international relations and to provide us with alternative modes of understanding and studying world politics. The paper views theory and theorising as a site of cultural practice, a place where the boundaries of acceptable knowledge of/about the world are negotiated; as a site of politics. It is in this context that I consider the “Chinese school” debate as a source for a possible subversive politics of international relations theory.

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The representation of international relations (IR) as “an American social science” (Hoffmann 1977) has become one of the most “persistently and speculatively reproduced self-images in the field” (Turton & Freire 2009: 1). It is now one of the most frequently levelled critiques; that international relations, as an academic discipline, has failed, quite spectacularly, to live up to its name as a truly global scholarly enterprise (see for example, Holsti 1985, Wæver 1998, Smith 2000, Holden 2001, Tickner 2003, Acharya & Buzan 2010). In order to gain a better understanding of how this so-called Anglo-American centrism in international relations operates, this paper considers debates from China about disciplinary international relations and how Chinese scholars might begin to engage with/in it. It explores some of the contributions Chinese scholars have made to debates about Anglo-American centrism in IR and how some are attempting to redress this seeming imbalance by creating their own rival school of international relations theory.

Chinese scholars have been reflecting on their discipline a great deal since the 1980s and considering how their research may or may not ‘fit’ with the wider discipline beyond China. Frequently such debates have centred around either supporting or rejecting the notion of a specifically Chinese way of understanding international politics. Since the late 1980s scholars have been asking what international relations theory with “Chinese characteristics” might look like and whether it is necessary (Liang Shoude 1994, 1997, Chan 1998, 1999, Song Xining 2001); debating what must be done in order for China to establish its own discipline of international relations (Wang Jianwei 1986, Zhang Yahang 1992) and, more recently, have argued for the need to build a “Chinese School” of international relations theory (Ren Xiao 2000, 2009, Qin Yaqing 2006, 2010, forthcoming). This so-

2 Throughout the paper I follow Agathangelou and Ling (2004) in using the term IR as shorthand for international relations; however, I have tried to resist making distinctions between international relations (as practice) and International Relations (as “the discipline”). Whilst I am primarily discussing Chinese scholars’ engagements with the so-called “formal discipline” of IR, I believe it is unhelpful to draw such stark contrasts between what we say and what we do, between the act of theorising about the world and our everyday lives in the world. These are the type of distinctions under scrutiny in this paper.
called “marathon style” debate (Wang & Dan 2008: 341) has taken many forms over the past 20 or more years and in many senses it is difficult to treat the various contributions to it as one coherent unit. Nevertheless, all share the common thread of discussing a specifically Chinese approach to world politics; a definitively Chinese way of doing IR.

Those engaging with notions of Anglo-American centrist in international relations have frequently looked to Other scholarly groups as a way to diversify the field. They have sought to add new, different, sub-altern/third world voices into the mix in an effort to supplant, or at least balance, the Anglo-American or ‘western’ voices that dominate the field (see Tickner & Wæver 2009, Acharya & Buzan 2010). Few such attempts, however, have gone beyond this kind of ‘additions approach’. Yet merely “filling in the gaps, restoring the excluded narratives from beyond the confines of Europe,” is wholly insufficient and reflects only a superficial understanding of the problem of Eurocentrism in IR (Jones 2006: 8). In order to create a more diverse and inclusive discipline, “the ontological premises of western IR theory must be rethought not merely ‘enriched by the addition of new voices’ from the global south” (Shani 2008: 723). Working toward such a “post-western” international relations involves therefore an undoing of IR (Anand 2007: 2); an intimate understanding of how, as a discipline, it works to include some and exclude Others, to create and sustain certain truths and silence or deny Others. We must investigate how IR works as a site and a culture of knowledge production, as a site of politics.

Therefore, rather than searching for some unique or original contribution put forward by Chinese scholars (or potentially occurring out of the ‘Chinese School’ and related debates), this paper looks instead at the politics of gaining acceptance for Chinese IR. It considers the approaches and strategies used by Chinese scholars to engage with the discipline of international relations. It looks at the ways in which Chinese scholars are attempting to challenge their own position (or portrayal) as marginal scholars; as consumers not producers of theoretical knowledge. The paper asks what the “Chinese School” might mean for the discipline of International Relations. In what ways is it working to diversify the discipline, or open up new (critical) space and in what ways is it complicit with existing boundary practices that
work to uphold IR’s coherence as a discipline, to exclude/include (il-)legitimate sources of knowledge about the world.

I begin with an image of international relations, which portrays IR as a colonial household (Agathangelou & Ling 2004). This image will guide my discussions of Chinese scholarship and how it might be engaging with the “discipline” of IR. I then examine how Chinese international relations scholarship has engaged with, and is currently engaging with this colonial household, with particular reference to debates surrounding specifically Chinese approaches to the subject. I explore how the House has responded to Chinese engagement and with what consequences for Chinese international relations scholarship and for the House itself. I conclude by asking what this might mean for the future of international relations theory – does the House remain intact; what do we do now?

**International relations: a colonial household**

If we are to have any hope of *undoing* IR we must first consider what it is that holds IR together; how international relations as a discipline maintains its coherence and what grants it the privileged position of authoring understandings of world politics. I argue that to understand the logics of international relations and the related the problem of Anglo-American/Eurocentrism we must begin with IR’s colonial past. Not only this, but we must understand, too, its colonial present. As Jones argues, “imperialism is inextricable from the very foundations of modern international relations and world order” (Jones 2006: 4), yet the discipline of international relations writes out its colonial past. European colonial expansion and the founding of the so-called Westphalian order happened together at the same time(s) and in the same place(s). These two very different kinds of political and international interaction coexisted and cannot be understood in isolation, yet that is precisely what the discipline of international relations does. “The modern intellectual division of labour conveniently separates these processes. Europe’s internal history is treated as pristine and the source of Enlightenment, modernity, democracy... taken as the basis for theorising modern international relations. Meanwhile, it is more specialised scholars of history or area studies who might focus on topics such as slavery and colonialism” (Jones 2006: 4). As international relations is divorced from its colonial
past, the histories of Europe’s Others are erased/denied. The story that international relations (European colonialism) tells about the world becomes the only legitimate story, whilst at the same time the foundational role of Europe’s colonial past, the material encounters between Europe and its Others that have been complicit in writing this story, are silenced. As a result, international relations, as a discipline, a site of knowledge production, a place where understandings about the world are produced and promoted, continues to operate according to (hidden) colonial logics and Eurocentric conceptions of how the world works.

Agathangelou and Ling (2004) have summarised this problematic in their characterisation of international relations as a colonial household. I find this image particularly helpful for understanding how the colonial logics of international relations discourse are continually upheld and reproduced. Using the Greek concept of poieses they present an alternative epistemology for understanding, engaging with and reconstructing international relations. Poieses, commonly taken to mean “creativity” or “poetic inspiration”, here takes on an enlarged meaning, reflecting the term’s original meaning: that is, “creativity that comes from an act of reverberation or ‘putting language in a state of emergence, in which life becomes manifest through its vivacity’ (Bachelard 1964:xxiii)” (Agathangelou & Ling 2004: 21). The concept of poieses opens up space to recognise the existence of multiple worlds and multiple stories about those worlds. “In seizing upon the specific reality of world politics as a trans-subjective mode of imagining, poieses pushes us to recognise that becoming and being have countless forms, various voices and changing scripts” (Agathangelou & Ling 2004: 21). This allows us 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. The House seeks to stave off such “disorder” by imposing “order”. But the House does so by appropriating the knowledge, resources, and labour of racialized, sexualized Others for its own benefit and pleasure while announcing itself the sole producer – the father – of our world. Others qualify as “innocent” children, wards, or servants at best, or
“unteachable” barbarians at worst. In either case, Others must wait faithfully for their admittance, if ever, into the House of IR” (Agathangelou & Ling 2004: 21).

For Agathangelou and Ling, identifying IR as a colonial household exposes some of the most damaging effects of “the discipline” of international relations; “its constitution of boundaries that fence off a majority of the world” (Agathangelou & Ling 2004: 22). As a site of knowledge production, international relations relies on practices of exclusion and commits colonial violences against those who might try to enter without permission. Like any colonial household, the House of IR closely regulates who is inside and outside, upstairs and downstairs and works to actively maintain those boundaries (Agathangelou & Ling 2004: 23). Agathangelou and Ling consider many (not all 3) of the agents – here, schools of thought – that live inside and outside the House of IR, demonstrating how their positions in relation to the House have been (re)negotiated and sustained (see appendix 1 for list). The colonial household provides a useful metaphor for thinking about the relationships between the different schools of thought, individuals and other actors that participate in the industry of international relations theory. Drawing on their analyses, this paper will consider the ways in which Chinese scholars have engaged with and in the House of IR. It examines their attempts to seek admission into the House and the difficulties that may be faced in so-doing. It questions the logics behind the Chinese School’s claims for legitimacy and acceptance and interrogates how these are viewed by the House of IR. In this effort, the paper seeks not only to gain insights into Chinese international relations scholarship over the past three decades but to gain a better understanding of how disciplinary international relations functions and how we might begin to undo it.

Living outside the House: “Chinese characteristics” as resistance

As Chinese IR scholars consistently remind us in their attempts to narrate the field, international relations as an academic discipline emerged in China only in the late

3 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 or new approaches. I hope to demonstrate this, at least to some extent, with my application of their model to Chinese scholarship.
1950s (Liang Shoude 2004, Qin Yaqing 2010: 28) or, as some accounts suggest, as late as twenty years ago (Wang Yizhou 2005a). In any case, there has been a substantial effort by Chinese scholars in the past 20 years to reflect on their research and to define/distinguish IR as a distinct discipline within the Chinese social sciences (Wang & Dan 2008, Wang Yizhou 2006). Chinese scholars’ engagement with the discipline of international relations, with the House of IR, is perhaps best understood by examining more closely the debates surrounding disciplinary identity and notions of “Chinese characteristics” and/or a “Chinese School” that have been widespread in the field since the 1980s. While there is still little consensus amongst Chinese scholars as to what precisely “Chinese characteristics” might be, or what is notably Chinese about a “Chinese School” of IR, it is not the purpose of this paper to consider such questions. The goal of this paper is, rather, to consider how Chinese scholars, with particular reference to the debates surrounding Chinese approaches to the study of international relations, have engaged with the House of IR. It is with this in mind that I look first to the debates surrounding the notion of an “IR theory with Chinese characteristics”.

Initial calls for an “IR theory with Chinese characteristics” can be seen in many ways as a natural outworking of Deng Xiaoping’s grand strategy for the country of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” (Wang Yizhou 2006: 520). As Chan points out, during the late 1980s calls for “… with Chinese characteristics” pervaded every area of the social sciences (Chan 1998: 3). As a result, the debates surrounding “IR theory with Chinese characteristics” were highly motivated by political rhetoric. The concept of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” was itself a by-product of the reform and opening movement that had begun under Deng’s leadership in the late 1970s. It is often described as a tool used by Deng Xiaoping and the Party to negotiate the many challenges associated with the introduction of market reforms,

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4 Deng Xiaoping’s opening address to the 12th Party Congress in September 1982, which called for the “establishment of socialism with Chinese characteristics”, is seen as the official introduction of the phrase “Chinese characteristics” (中国特色). However, Wang Yizhou’s chapter suggests perhaps an earlier origin to the underlying concept of writing China-specific approaches to international relations (Wang Yizhou 2006: 520).

5 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 many more (Chan 1998: 3)
often characterised as “western influences”, into China’s socialist state system (Callahan 2001: 77).

The reform and opening up 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 many “Western theories of IR” (Qin 2010: 29). A number of “classical” works were translated\(^6\) and many more introductions to “Western International Relations” were published. Wang and Dan argue that these early works of translation had a major impact on Chinese international relations research (Wang & Dan 2008: 19).

Mirroring in a sense how the phrase was used in Party-State rhetoric, a number of Chinese scholars sought to use the notion of “Chinese characteristics” as a defence against what they saw as encroaching western influence on their discipline and their research. Emphasising “Chinese characteristics” was 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. Chan argues that “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 1998: 12), yet many scholars at the time felt the need to protect their ‘fledgling’ work from the encroaching west. “Chinese characteristics” represented a strategy by Chinese scholars to protect what they saw as a valuable position living outside the household altogether; living in isolation from the colonial relationships of “Western IR”. It was a strategy of resistance against western influence, against the influence of the House of IR.

“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 1998: 22-23).

\(^6\) These include Hans Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations*, published in 1990, the translation of which is described by Qin Yaqing as the milestone in Chinese IR theory research; Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics*, published in 1992 and a number of works by Robert Keohane (see Qin Yaqing 2010: 30-31 for complete list of translations from early 1990s).
These Chinese scholars, usually described as conservatives or the “old guard”, used the notion of “Chinese characteristics” as a way to remain outside the influence of the household of international relations theory, as a way to prevent their “purity” being contaminated by mixing with members of this (western) household. Yet when we look more closely at their contentions, the absurdity of such claims becomes more apparent. By looking more closely at the claims made by such conservative scholars, we can see the categories that the House of IR constructs in order to make sense of the world it begin to collapse. The “purity” or isolation from western influences conservative scholars were trying to protect was very closely tied to the centrality of Marxism as the basis for social science theories. It is perhaps more useful to see the desire to keep out “western” influences as a desire to keep out capitalist challenges to a socialist system. Yet even these categories begin to blur under more critical scrutiny. For most Chinese scholars writing on the concept of “Chinese characteristics”, IR theory should always take Marxism as a guide (Liang Shoude 2004, Chan 1998: 8). Both Yang Zheng and Zhang Zhi also point to the tenets of Marxism as the foundation for any theory of IR with “Chinese characteristics”, though this Marxist base is to be combined 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” (in Song Xinning 2001: 68).

It is some form of Marxism then that forms the basis of Chinese scholars’ desires for isolation from the House of IR. Yet Marxist theories of the international, according to Agathangelou and Ling, already occupy a place within the House of IR. They are, according to the logics of the “discipline”, familial members of this household: they are sons born of the house yet rebel against it. Whilst they “challenge realism’s standing as their paternal authority given mater liberalism’s youthful fling with critical theory”, Marxist approaches share with realism “an exclusive reliance on Western intellectual traditions, concepts and methods” (Agathangelou & Ling 2004: 28). 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”, influenced by the theories of the PRC’s great leaders Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.
Looking at the arguments for an “IR theory with Chinese characteristics” begins to reveal the contingency of the categories Chinese and Western, socialist and capitalist, outside and inside. It begins to show how they might be deployed at different times and in different contexts in order to maintain order within IR’s colonial household and at the same time to demand a separation from that household. These contingencies, I argue, become even more apparent as we look more closely at attempts by Chinese scholars to enter into the colonial household of international relations theory and find a place within it. Looking more closely at such attempts to enter the House of IR helps to expose many of the contradictions that already exist within it.

**Knocking on the door: science as engagement**

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 1998: 4). For some, however, it was a political straight-jacket that prevented them from disputing the project (Song 2001: 68). Song argues that, despite appearances to the contrary, 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 dissent was rarely recorded in publications but was often voiced in discussions at academic conferences where the topic was hotly debated through the late 1980s and early 90s (Song 2001: 68). By the time Song’s article was published in 2001, it had become less difficult to openly critique the notion of “Chinese characteristics” and a number of scholars could be found making similar claims. It is therefore important to recognise the existence of an opposing side in the debate on IR with “Chinese characteristics”, made up of scholars who saw the House of IR as a desirable place to take up residence. These scholars, predominantly younger scholars who had trained in US universities, were attracted by the promise of universality offered by the head of the household, pater realism.

Highlighting “Chinese characteristics” was therefore seen as problematic because it contradicted claims of universality made by these existing (western) theories. Chinese scholars, like Song, argued that IR 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 2001: 68-9).
The main opposition to the notion of “Chinese characteristics” was that it prevented
Chinese scholars from entering into conversations with other (American/western)
scholars of international relations; it was preventing them from entering the House
of IR. According to Alistair Iain Johnston, some 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). Their training at American institutions had given these
scholars the opportunity to visit the House of IR, where most had received a warm
welcome. They were therefore critical of their colleagues’ attempts to remain
outside in the cold. They saw learning of English, application of “Western theories”
(usually realism of one form of another) and adoption of scientific approaches by
Chinese scholars as the way to cross the threshold (back) into the House of IR.

Song Xinning, for example, was highly critical of the fact that many of his
more senior colleagues did not have a working knowledge of English and were
therefore unable to communicate with the wider field of IR. At the time of writing
(2001), Song complained that of the 40 or so doctoral supervisors in the country
more than half could not read English (Song 2001: 72). His solution therefore, was to
send graduates to the US to learn the skills and aptitudes necessary to reside in the
House so that they could then return to China and pass these skills on through
teaching and translation. This mirrors the logic of many speaking from within the
House too (see Johnston 2002, Lieberthal 1986). Song has also criticised the
“shackles” of Marxist-Leninist theory, which he claims prevent the introduction of
western theories of IR into China. Here Marxism is claimed as Eastern (and
outmoded) and is pitted against Western (modern) theories of IR. The “Western”
theories Song refers to are the “American” realism of Hans Morgenthau (himself a
Jewish refugee from war-torn Europe) and Kenneth Waltz.

We witness again the colonial logics of international relations, which both
produce and rely upon the categories of Western self and native/outside Other,
being deployed in an effort by Chinese scholars to assimilate into the House. Yet
again the fuzziness of these categories is revealed in the Chinese discourses
reviewed. Both sides of the “Chinese characteristics” debate saw the project, at least in part, in terms of their engagement with western international relations – the House of IR. Many of those advocating such an approach saw it as a method to maintain a safe distance from the House, those opposing it did so because they believed it represented a barrier to their entry into the House. Both sides, however, produce the same household logics. They create and perpetuate the same categories of China and West, where the West is the House and the Chinese Other is outside of it, either through choice of misfortune. Yet, as I have begun to demonstrate, these categories are not pure or “original” but are rather constructed and maintained by the colonial discourses of the House, their meanings constantly in flux.

**Getting inside the House: socialisation as requirement**

Since Song’s rejection of “Chinese characteristics” in favour of “scientific theory” that allows Chinese international relations scholars to speak to their counterparts in the west, there have been countless attempts by Chinese scholars to get inside the House of IR. There is little appetite left for strict isolation, as with earlier debates about “Chinese characteristics” or “spiritual pollution”. Instead Chinese scholars wish to participate more fully in the discipline of international relations. Yet IR’s colonial logics dictate that the House must authorise such admissions and, as I argue below, only permits Chinese scholarship to enter under certain conditions and to play certain roles.

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 certain exclusions and condoned certain violences 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 “Frenchness.” Yet other mixed-blood progeny were granted European status if they could demonstrate due “cultural competence,” such as feeling alienated when place among “natives”” (Agathangelou & Ling 2004: 23). This example demonstrates the civilising logic of the House: mixed-blood progeny must prove they have been adequately socialised into
the culture and etiquette of the household such that they no longer belong with the other natives on the outside, only then can they be granted a place within the colonial household. In their recent encounters with the discipline of international relations we witness a similar logic at work in the writings of many Chinese scholars. Yet, as I argue below, like the half-Vietnamese son or the other mixed-blood progeny mentioned, the position of Chinese scholars in the House is contingent. They can be admitted only on the say so of the masters of the household, which is by no means guaranteed.

In seeming attempts to prove they have been adequately socialised into the House of IR, Chinese scholars often go to great lengths to prove they are fully conversant in western international relations theory. Qin Yaqing, one of the most vocal proponents for a “Chinese School” of international relations, begins his explorations into this area with a “genealogy of western international relations”. He conducts this survey in order to gain a greater understanding of how a discipline develops and draws on a number of western philosophers of science to explain the nature of scientific progress and how this might be applied to IR (Qin Yaqing 2003). Chinese scholars have also discursively linked their “progress” or achievements in recent years to the importation of more theories and scholarship from the US, or “the West” (Wang & Dan 2008: 18). They frequently make claims that theoretical innovation can only be achieved on the basis of importation and critique of existing (western) theories of IR (Tang Yongsheng 2004, Wang Fan 2008). According to Alistair Iain Johnston, “by the mid 1990s Chinese scholarship was much more self-conscious about understanding and situating Chinese research in relationship to US and Western IR theory” (Johnston 2002: 34, emphasis added).

The use of English has become more widespread amongst Chinese IR scholars and significant numbers of translated works are widely available and frequently cited. More importantly, however, Chinese IR scholars have become fully conversant in the technical language, the etiquette, of international relations. 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. Chinese texts on international relations frequently frame theoretical debates in terms of the three “-isms”, or three main theoretical approaches to IR: realism, liberalism and
constructivism. Even some recent studies that attempt to incorporate ancient Chinese thinking into contemporary IR use these three theories as reference points (Yan Xuetong & Xu Jin 2008). One such study equates 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 (Shi Bin 1996, Hu Chuanrong 1997), have also been taken up by Chinese scholars in recent years. Wang Yizhou’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 Yizhou 2006). Key IR concepts, sovereignty, national interest, balance of power are found throughout Chinese discussions of international relations and IR theory. For Liang Shoude the interests of “China’s state sovereignty” (Zhongguo guoji zhuquan) are at the heart of an IR theory with “Chinese characteristics” (Chan 1998: 8). Thus “sovereignty” is for Liang the foundation of a Chinese theory of IR, yet this concept, firmly rooted in IR’s colonial past (and present), is stable neither in the west nor in China (Callahan 2001: 83). Household language is therefore widely used in Chinese discussions of world politics, carrying with it all the same contradictions and exclusions of any colonial discourse.

Chinese IR scholars are keen also to instruct their own progeny in household etiquette. Introductory textbooks produce the same theory categorisations and tell the story of IR according to household rules. For example, Li Shaojun’s popular textbook introduces IR theory as a choice between realism, liberalism and constructivism (Li Shaojun 2009). When textbooks do include discussions of possible Chinese 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 a small sub-section of the introduction (Liang Shoude and Hong Yinxian 2000). Undergraduate courses in IR include key readings from English-language journals and are sometimes taught in English by visiting scholars from abroad. Johnston observes that “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:
New students of international relations in China are also well-versed in the language and culture of the House of IR.

One of the consequences of this drive to prove their acculturation into the colonial household is that narratives about the discipline ‘in the west’ are habitually retold by Chinese scholars. In discussing the development of international relations in China, they frequently refer to IR’s three Great Debates (Ni Shixiong & Xu Jia 1997), the role of the Peace of Westphalia in shaping the international order (Wang Yizhou 2007: 20-27, Yan Xuetong 2009: 155-6) and even the founding at Aberystwyth of the first chair in international politics as marking the official birth of the discipline (Wang Yizhou 2005a). Chinese scholars are demonstrating that they too possess IR’s “Westphalian common-sense” (Grovogui 2002), consistently reproducing IR’s founding myths in their own scholarship. Yet it is these very myths that provide the foundations upon which the House of IR is built, that permit and indeed require the household’s exclusionary practices. IR’s myths of origin (stories about how international relations was founded and has developed) are complicit in silencing the discipline’s colonial past. They help to sustain the imaginary based on an idealised history of the west that grants it the role of “father of our world”, whilst also silencing or denying the historicity of non-western societies such that they are absent completely from the work of world-making.

Not only has the House been built upon myths that ignore the imperial context of the discipline’s modern origins but “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). This narrative too is (re)told by Chinese scholars, reinforcing the idea that it is just common sense to root our understandings of the world in European pasts. Hou Ying, for example, reminds us 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, see also Wang Yizhou 2007: 27-49). Yet, as Agathangelou and Ling reveal, the architects of IR’s House have appropriated only certain readings of such texts that support pater realism’s perspectives on empire and power in world politics. Reading the History of the Peloponnesian War as Athens’ struggle against Sparta for hegemony in the
ancient world, “realists ignore Athens’ demise due to ambition and greed [which] 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 & Ling 2004: 24). Building the House on such foundations reaffirms to Other scholars that it is a western household to which they do not belong. “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).

By reinforcing the idea that international relations is a “western phenomenon” (Hou Ying 2003: 27), Chinese scholars are helping to preserve the House of IR and its European foundations. In so-doing they consistently reiterate their own position outside of it, awaiting permission to enter.

Chinese scholars therefore 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, nonwhite 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 & 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 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 & Ling 2004: 30-1).

The contributions made to international relations by Chinese scholars have consistently been characterised in this manner, by both western theorists and many Chinese scholars themselves (see for example Zheng Shiping 2005, Acharya & Buzan 2010, Qin Yaqing 2010). Chinese research may be valuable and even contribute to western thinking in international relations but it is claimed to be non-theoretical,
non-systematic therefore unable to be accepted among the family members (the theorists) who occupy the upstairs parts of the house. As a result, Chinese scholarship is required to change, to become more theoretical, in order to reach the House’s upper floors. Qin Yaqing, for example, argues that until now Chinese contributions to IR theory have consisted only of testing and applying or critical analysis of existing theories. He argues that Chinese scholars have yet to produce original theory; that is, theory based on a new core problematic or paradigm (in a Kuhnian sense) (Qin Yaqing 2010: 27). Wang Yiwei argues that such a shift – from a period of “copying” to one of “constructing” – has now begun in Chinese IR research (Wang Yiwei 2009). It is to this latest phase of “constructing” that I now turn.

**Getting upstairs: the “Chinese School” as strategy**

As I have demonstrated above, Chinese scholars of international relations have been working in many respects to demonstrate that they are capable of being civilised members of the colonial household of IR. They can speak the language, participate in the House’s rituals and are instructing their own children (students) in the forms and etiquette of the household. Yet despite this, their Otherness is still conspicuous and many Chinese scholars are not content with their position in the House – downstairs, at the margins. To use Holsti’s (1985) terms, they wish to become producers not simply consumers of theoretical knowledge. The “Chinese School” project can be understood as one such attempt to challenge this marginalised position in the House and demand greater recognition for China’s (unique) contribution(s) to IR.

In contrast to what Alistair Iain Johnston describes as a “brief foray” in the late 1980s and early 1990s into a debate about distinctive Chinese approaches, the desire to set out a Chinese approach to international relations theorising has not been completely subsumed by efforts to engage with western science (Johnston 2002: 34). Despite showing great efforts, as described above, to learn the language and practices of western (mainstream) international relations theory, Chinese scholars’ desire to make their own contribution has also grown. Chinese scholars

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7 As before, I refer here to IR’s technical language, key concepts and disciplinary narratives rather than proficiency in English, though this too has become more widespread.
have attempted to move beyond the overt political implications of theory with “Chinese characteristics” and can now be found arguing, instead, for the indigenisation or Sinification of international relations theory or for a “Chinese School” of IR. Ren Xiao argues that this “Chinese School” project is far more confident and self-aware than earlier attempts to bring in “Chinese characteristics” (Ren Xiao 2009). What’s more, where the idea of “Chinese characteristics” was highly disputed, recent essays seem to suggest there is now almost universal acceptance or common agreement that Chinese scholars ought to be working toward establishing some form of China-specific approach(es) to international relations theory (Ren Xiao 2009: 1, Lu Peng 2006: 52, Shi Bin 2004: 8). Even scholars who had previously been sceptical of the “Chinese characteristics” project, due largely to its ideological implications, have since argued in favour of developing a distinctly Chinese approach to international relations (Wang Yizhou 2005b).

In many ways the “Chinese School” project is an outworking of Chinese scholars’ dissatisfaction with their marginalised position in IR’s colonial household. Chinese scholars are frustrated by their current role as native informants working away downstairs servicing the rest of the household (Agathangelou & Ling 2004: 30), desiring instead to become “knowledge producers” (Ren Xiao in Zhang Feng 2010: 13) eligible to enter the upstairs realms of the House. The “Chinese School” project, according to Ren Xiao, is about Chinese people having a spirit of independent thinking; not using others’ ideas but having their own; not always following others’ path. It is about “Chinese people making their own theoretical contribution” (Ren Xiao 2000, emphasis added). The “Chinese School” project is about Chinese scholars producing theory of their own: “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,

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8 There are a number of notable, high profile exceptions. For example, influential scholar Yan Xuetong, who continues to argue in favour of the universality of social science and the need for general theories of IR that are based on scientific principles (Yan Xuetong 2006, 2008). Yet even Yan is looking to make a contribution to IR theory from China. He has recently committed much time and effort to a project that seeks to introduce ancient Chinese thought/political philosophy into discussions about contemporary international relations theory (Cunningham-Cross 2011).
historical tradition, and practical experience” (Qin Yaqing in Zhang Feng 2010: 13). It is therefore about producing knowledge of the world that comes from “us” (China) not “them” (the West) (Callahan 2001: 77).

Qin Yaqing distinguishes between the idea of indigenisation of existing theories and the construction of distinct Chinese theory(ies). Indigenisation “to a certain extent consists of backward societies learning and borrowing from existing theories of advanced societies to explain native phenomena.” Qin wants to go beyond expressions of Chinese realism or Chinese constructivism, which he claims end up producing only localised explanations that help to verify western theories (Qin Yaqing, forthcoming: 18). A theory of international relations rising out of a distinct Chinese geo-cultural context would, on the other hand, present new knowledge about the world, based upon a distinct theoretical hardcore (a key problematic arising out of Chinese experience), that could make a contribution to the study of international politics (Qin Yaqing, forthcoming). It is Chinese theory not Western, ours not theirs.

The “Chinese School” project relies on these categories of China and West, us and them, without reflecting on what they mean or how they are complicit in constructing and maintaining the House of IR. This is perhaps most 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 to Chinese scholarship in the 1990s, the English School has proved popular amongst Chinese scholars, particularly those working on the “Chinese School” project (Zhang Yongjin 2003: 100). 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: 6). 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 English 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 distinction schools of thought in IR (Hou Ying 2003, Shi Xianze 2008). *World Economics and Politics* published a series of articles examining French and German IR scholarship, that share a common language with the “Chinese School” debates (Yuan Zhengqing 2006, Xiong Wei 2009, Yan Shuangwu & Chen Fei 2009). They seek to identify the particular “national characteristics” of the scholarship surveyed and to demonstrate its distinctiveness from (mainstream) American approaches.

The “Chinese School” project, in its use of the English School and other European examples, is defining difference along national boundaries. Yet once again upon closer examination we see some of difficulties with the categories employed. 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. 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 he conflates with US (neo)realism) and British IR (here, the English School), with respective core problematics of hegemonic maintenance and international society (Qin Yaqing 2005: 65-67). Here, difference is defined along national boundaries; US, Britain, China. Yet it does not take much to demonstrate that difference exists too within these national containers, disrupting Qin’s logic and the logic of the House. In the examples of Chinese scholarship mentioned above we see slippages 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 onwards. Yet Qin Yaqing’s list of “53 important Western IRT works” translated during the 1990s includes works from American but also British, Australian and even

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9 To some extent the terminology used is unhelpful in this regard; upon translation into Chinese the “English School” becomes the “British School”
Indian\textsuperscript{10} scholars (Qin Yaqing 2010: 30-31). At the same time Chinese scholars use the English School as an alternative to Western theories, here meaning American theory. Building these categories of West and non-West, American and British, them and us, is necessary for “Chinese School” scholars to distinguish their contributions from others already present in the House. Yet it is these same categorisations that are used to build the House in the first place. They permit the hierarchical ordering that has seen Chinese contributions marginalised and excluded. It is these very categories that allow the Chinese scholar to be labelled native Other and therefore not welcome at the table.

Thus, in terms of Chinese scholars’ goal of ensuring a place upstairs in the household, the “Chinese School” strategy has generally produced disappointing results. As Lu Peng points out to his Chinese audience, “the English School has still not gained recognition\textsuperscript{11} by the US mainstream”, even potential allies, US constructivists, have been hostile to it (Lu Peng 2006: 55). He warns Chinese scholars against investing too much in attempting to follow the English School model since it cannot deliver what Chinese scholars are seeking. Indeed, the English School is not mentioned by Agathangelou and Ling in their survey of the House of IR, suggesting perhaps it too has been unsuccessful at securing a place within the household or, at the very least, is not considered worthy of inclusion by these two scholars. Where discussion of the “Chinese School” have been included in English-language scholarship, it is not always treated in the same way as existing (western) schools of thought. For example, Chinese contributions have recently been included in a number of anthologies that cover international relations scholarship from the “non-West” (Acharya & Buzan 2010) or “beyond the west” (Tickner & Wæver 2009). These volumes, whilst making genuine attempts at achieving greater diversity in the field of international relations, continue to rely on categories of west and non-west that confer positions of privilege and marginality on the scholarship from respective locations. Western IR is simply IR and non-western approaches need to be

\textsuperscript{10} Amitav Acharya was born in Orissa, India and educated in India and Australia. A Canadian citizen, he has worked in Singapore and the UK and now works predominantly in the US. Looking only at this one example, demonstrates the futility of this kind of national labelling even in the case of an individual scholar.

\textsuperscript{11} The term used here for recognition (chengren) can also be translated as admission.
introduced from outside. In this way they help to sustain the colonial logic of the House that claims the West speaks for all, the “Chinese School” (Latin American, African, Japanese, South Asian IR) speaks only for itself (Agathangelou & 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 (see Acharya & Buzan 2010). By emphasising the “Chinese School’s” distinct identity, scholars such as Qin Yaqing are compounding this problem. “With a competitive mood to become another English School…, Asian aspirations for their national schools of IR still treat East and West as oppositional entities” (Chen 2011). Claiming to produce “new” knowledge from beyond the west to enrich international relations reinforces the non-west’s role as disciplinary outsiders. It suggests a separation between East and West that has never existed and which helps to sustain the very categories the House uses to keep them out. Indeed it was the material encounters of Europe’s colonial past that helped to create these categories in the first place (Said 1978, Jahn 2000). International relations silences these pasts (the multiple, complex and interrelated pasts of the world’s peoples) and helps to naturalise these distinctions. This is what allows IR to function as a colonial household in the first place.

Disrupting the House: the “Chinese School” as challenge

Some Chinese scholars wish not only for their contributions to be given a seat at the table but hope also that the “Chinese School” project might disrupt the order of the household. They are motivated by a desire to challenge US dominance over/leadership of the House of IR. For example, in one of the earliest essays to call for the establishment of a “Chinese School” of IR, young scholar Min Ran encourages her colleagues to actively promote a “Chinese brand” in order to expose the unfair/inequitable situation in the current field of international politics. She argues that “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 (Min Ran 2000). From Min Ran’s perspective, therefore, the “Chinese School” project can be seen as an attempt to challenge the House of IR, to displace pater realism from his position as head of the household. Instead, however, we witness the “Chinese School” getting into bed with him.

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 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 within the colonial household. The global capitalist economy “accounts for realism’s birth into the world and its growth, sustenance, and eventual dominance of the House of IR.” Liberalism works in tandem drawing on the same “mirage of ‘politics’ and ‘economics’” to convince statesmen that power is a necessary condition for plenty and vice versa (Agathangelou & Ling 2004: 24). The global capitalist economy and its inequalities sustain the colonial household of IR. Yet rather than expose or challenge these underpinnings, Chinese scholars mirror them. The “Chinese School” project frequently claim that now is the time for China to contribute to international relations theorising because of the country’s recent economic growth and rising status in world politics. They argue that the PRC’s growing material power means that its theories deserve a place around the table – no longer servants providing sustenance, but at the head of the table, making a real contribution.

Wang Yiwei is just one of many scholars to make this connection, asking: “will China’s rise bring the rise of Chinese IR theory?” (Wang Yiwei 2009: 114). Most argue that it will or at least ought to. Wang claims that China’s geo-strategic rise will prepare the ground for the growth of Chinese IR theory, which in turn “will restore Western IR to the status of local theories” (Wang Yiwei 2009: 116). Chan argues that China’s growing economic, political and military strength demand other countries take greater notice of Chinese thinking on international relations (Chan 1998: 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 in Chen 2011: 23). We witness here the same colonial logics that link 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/understandings of our world (Agathangelou & Ling 2004: 22). By getting into bed with IR’s head of household, reproducing the same intimacy with global capitalism, Chinese scholarship again in this instance works to uphold and reproduce the House of IR.

**What now for this House?**

The purpose of this paper has been to begin exposing the deep-rooted colonial logics that underpin international relations theory and theorising and to understand how, in particular, they have impacted on Chinese scholars’ attempts to participate in theorising world politics. In other words, it has aimed to demonstrate some of the ways in which IR theory works to include some stories about the world and exclude Others. I have argued that by understanding the discipline of international relations as a colonial household we can see more clearly how it works to include/exclude (Other) sources of knowledge. I have shown how Chinese scholars have asserted their position outside the colonial household, through restating their uniqueness; how they have tried to charm their way through the door, by way of assimilation or socialisation; force their way upstairs by claiming they can be theorists too; and bribe their way to the top by reproducing the household’s intimate relationship with material power. I have shown how Chinese scholarship has often been complicit in the project of building IR as a House but, at the same time, has also been a victim of that process, its histories erased or denied and its outsider status reaffirmed. The House of IR is built upon the myth of an untainted European history in which the non-West played no part. It is this myth that allows Chinese scholarship, scholarship belonging to the non-West, to be kept outside or on the margins of the discipline. This myth also underpins the household’s civilising drive; it requires that Chinese scholars, as Native Others, demonstrate their civility in order to gain entry into the House. In its encounters with the House of IR, Chinese scholarship has drawn upon
many of the same narratives and categories that underpin the colonial household, frequently reproducing the very walls that have been the source of its exclusion.

Yet in each of these encounters we catch a glimpse too of the contingent nature of this colonial household. The categories the House relies on – East/West, self/Other, civilised/barbarian, inside/outside – begin to break down when Chinese encounters with the House are examined more closely. Debates surrounding the conception of an IR theory with “Chinese characteristics” reveal that Chinese scholarship, even as it tried to remain outside of the House was already an integral part of it. The Marxist heritage of much IR scholarship in China alludes to a past in which categories of East and West, Chinese and not are already all mixed up. Likewise, the household’s efforts to marginalise Chinese scholarship, admitting it only to the position of native servant, and Chinese attempts to challenge that role reveal further the flexibility of the House’s foundational categories. In discussing the potential of the English School, Chinese scholarship sees British IR shift from inside to outside and back inside again. Sometimes it is included as “Western” yet other times it is set against the House as something that is non-American. All the time its Englishness is also in question. Hybridity is ever-present in the household; revealing it helps to discredit the myths of pure origin and separation the House relies on to exclude or include the scholarship of the west’s Others. It also helps to destabilise the House itself. The categories the House is built upon are exposed as contingent, flexible, constantly shifting, thus the foundations of the House are neither stable nor complete.

In their encounters with the House of IR, therefore, Chinese scholars are active in both its making and its un-making; simultaneously doing and undoing IR. In much the same way, my own attempts to deconstruct the House inevitably contribute to its continuing reconstruction. For this reason, amongst others, this work is incomplete. Nevertheless, if we are truly to answer the field’s criticisms and establish a post-western international relations, these processes of doing and undoing IR must be better understood. The “Chinese School” project should not, therefore, be dismissed out of hand. Whilst it may be complicit in rebuilding the House of IR, it is also active in its demolition. Helping us to deconstruct the colonial household of IR may be the “Chinese School’s” most important contribution of all.
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