Constructing a chinese international relations theory

A sociological approach to intellectual innovation

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Chinese scholars are debating whether and how to innovate a Chinese theory of International Relations. This article examines the driving forces behind this theoretical debate. It challenges the commonsensical link between external events in the subject matter (i.r.) and theorizing (IR), in this case that the innovation of a Chinese IR theory is a natural product of China's geopolitical rise, its growing political ambitions and discontent with Western hegemony. We propose instead a sociological approach to intellectual innovation that opens the black box of knowledge production and argue that the theoretical innovation, in China and elsewhere, is best understood as an interplay between internal and external layers: the internal academic context of intellectuals pursuing prominence where each intellectual tries to carve out a maximally distinct position in order to receive attention from peers—theorizing a Chinese IR theory being *one* important way of doing this; the external layer ranging from power politics and sociopolitical developments that affect this process *indirectly* by providing more research funds and autonomy to the more immediate institutional environment where the control over rewards such as research funds, promotion and publications affects what kind of work is done—theorizing is increasingly being rewarded.

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Introduction

The International Relations discipline (IR) has long been known as an "American social science" dominated by U.S. scholars, theories and methodologies (Hoffmann 1977; Wæver 1998; Smith 2000).[1] A recent study of IR communities around the world shows that this has changed little, with the possible exception of China (Tickner and Wæver 2009:336). Reading through the literature on IR in China, one is struck by references to debates about developing "IR with Chinese characteristics" (Liang 1997; Chan 1998; Callahan 2001; Song 2001; Geeraerts and Men 2001) or, more recently, a "Chinese school of IR" (Qin 2007, 2011; Ren 2008; Yan 2011; Wang 2007, 2009). The Chinese attempt to produce a distinctly national international theory is a unique case, and the puzzle of this paper is why has there been an innovational drive to develop Chinese IR theory? Our main argument is that theoretical innovation should be understood through the micro-sociological lens of intellectuals seeking attention and prominence, rather than through the macro-lenses of power transition and counter-hegemony.

Most existing research on the Chinese IR theory debate takes a 'history of science' or 'philosophy of science' approach. History of science studies present general overviews of the development of the discipline and review the heated discussions between positions in the debate (Song 1997, 2001:45-50; Geeraerts and Men 2001:264-271; Zhang 2002:102-108; Ren 2008:293-306; Shambaugh 2011). 'Philosophy of science' studies analyze the Chinese concept of theory (Geeraerts and Men 2001), how a Chinese IR theory could be created (Qin 2007), whether it can be 'national' (Liang 1997) and "why there is no Chinese IRT?" (Qin 2007; Ren 2008; Wang 2009). Both approaches are useful, particularly in studying the 'how' and 'what' of Chinese IRT, but few ask *why* there has been a drive towards theorizing in the first place. The most commonsensical explanation for the Chinese innovational drive is that macro-political factors external to science, such as China's growth in economic and political power and/or its authoritarian politics, have caused Chinese scholars to innovate alternative perspectives on international relations. Indeed, changes in the social and political context external to science will affect the overall direction of a discipline, but the simplistic formula that the field of reality (i.r.) drives theorizing (IR) is reductionist (Wæver 1998). It has difficulties explaining the way theorizing occurs and the fact that it occurs in more than one way. It is far from obvious how geopolitical changes affect individual scholars, like Qin Yaqing and Yan Xuetong, and the very different ways they theorize from a Chinese perspective.

To address this lacunae in the literature, we turn to the sociology of science. Sociological studies of IR are usually divided into *internalists* who explain IR by its internal social life, debates, and theoretical developments (Schmidt 2002, 1998), and *externalists* (sometimes called contextualists) who incorporate political events, institutional setup, political culture, or other external elements (Hoffmann 1977; Wæver 1998; Guzzini 1998; Jørgensen 2000; Breitenbauch and Wivel 2004). This dichotomy is unproductive since social context need not be external to science. Intellectuals are located in a much more immediate social context—than the geopolitical 'rise of China'—as the work of Collins, Latour, Skinner, and other "new sociologists of knowledge" shows (Camic and Gross 2004). What is needed is a model geared towards analyzing debate and innovation in a way that focuses on the micro-level and integrates internalist and externalist explanations. The work of Randall Collins, a sociologist of

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knowledge, is particularly relevant here.

A Micro-sociological Theory of Intellectual Innovation

In *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (1998), Randall Collins develops a micro-sociological theory of intellectual innovation. His micro-sociological argument is that theories are shaped by their most immediate setting, the academic scene (Collins 1998:20). The motivation behind theorizing is rarely external political factors but the move against a rival theory. Collins does not rule out external factors but constructs a model of three layers: the local academic scene, its material and organizational base and the sociopolitical environment surrounding it. The three layers are embedded but the inner layer is the primary driver of innovation: "One layer does not reduce to another; least of all do the concerns of the philosophers reduce to the outermost material and political conditions." (Collins 1998:622).

The inner layer consists of a structure called the attention space in which academic networks engage in rivalry and debate. Opposition is the main driver, "to deny it is to exemplify it" (Collins 1998:1). The point of departure is micro-sociological: intellectuals are in a constant search for attention and recognition from peers. They engage in *interaction rituals* such as scholarly conversations and conferences where they can use their knowledge to attain attention and recognition (Collins 1998:24-37). However, the structure of the intellectual world "allows only a limited number of positions to receive much attention at any one time" and thus "conflict [for] attention space is a fundamental fact about intellectuals" (Collins 1998:75, 876). Because there are only limited available openings for distinctive positions to gain an audience, intellectuals cultivate lines of difference and uniqueness because disagreeing with others will "gain an audience of at least one" (Collins 1998:38). It is not truth, but "conflicts—lines of difference between positions—which are implicitly the most prized possessions of intellectuals." (Collins 1998:38). The result of this competitive situation is that intellectuals "thrive on disagreement, dividing the attention space into three to six factions, seeking lines of creativity by negating the chief tenets of their rivals" (Collins 1998:876). This proposition called the "law of small numbers" explains why innovation occurs—one has to be different from one's main rivals. We would thus expect Chinese theoretical innovation to be driven by opposition between a small number of prominent positions.

Although the explanatory power is primarily located at the inner layer, Collins' model incorporates external factors in a "two-step causality" in which (1) sociopolitical structures can shape (2) the organizations supporting intellectual life that (3) allow intellectuals to face inward at intellectual controversies (Collins 1998:20). The most macro part of the external layer consists of socio-political events. The analytical focus is changes in politics, economics, societal Zeitgeist as well as how "the geopolitical and economic rise or fall of states shifts the location of resources" (Collins 1998:623). When applying this model to IR, it is necessary to take foreign policy direction into account. Since geopolitics is the subject matter in IR, it may affect the overall direction of IR and the questions asked. Social sciences, like IR, study the empirical world and analyzing them requires an awareness that 'real world' influences are expected and not necessarily indicative of pollution from external factors. Sociopolitical changes are rarely the direct causes of intellectual innovations, however, but have an indirect impact on intellectual life insofar as they change its material and organizational base. The reason is that intellectuals, like other human beings, have to make a living and a career. They do so in a certain material and organizational context and this is the transmission belt through which the external world can influence them. By controlling the material bases, institutions such as universities, publishing houses, or political

patrons thus mediate between the sociopolitical world and intellectual life (Collins 1998:51). Two main dynamics are degree of overlay and material shifts. Sociopolitical *overlay* happens when the external world determines ideas and intellectual dynamics are weakened (Collins 1998:164). In this scenario intellectuals are unable to control their own material base, and in consequence their knowledge production. Another dynamic is when *shifts* in the material base, such as the appearance of new educational systems, remuneration schemes or the re-allocation of resources among universities, shape the opportunity structure of different intellectual positions by favoring certain intellectual factions over others (Collins 1998:177). Some intellectual networks will be strengthened by these shifts, others will be weakened.

To summarize, material and sociopolitical dynamics can affect the *conditions* for intellectual innovation, but what makes certain ideas innovative among intellectuals is that they are new and distinctive in their own field of argument (Collins 2002:48). The engine of innovation is thus found in the inner layer of intellectual life. We expect the external layers only to be indirectly influential by either facilitating certain intellectual debates or factions (material shifts) or simply by leaving intellectuals alone to a greater extent (degree of overlay). Our analysis proceeds in two steps: it maps the attention space and its theory debate and then traces how the events in the external layers have facilitated this.

Internalist Layer: Theory and Prominence

Our main argument is that theoretical innovation should be understood through the micro-sociological lens of intellectuals seeking attention and prominence. Positioning oneself in the Chinese theory debate is becoming important in this respect. We first focus on the shape of the network structure between intellectuals, the internal stratification following from the law of small numbers. Second, we show that the debate on 'Chinese theory' is an important line of opposition in Chinese IR. Third, we illustrate how the innovation of Chinese IRT works through oppositional moves between different positions in the attention space. Our primary empirical material is in-depth qualitative interviews with 27 Chinese IR scholars and a minor questionnaire distributed to 305 scholars at top universities (49% general response rate).[2]

Structure of the Attention Space

The law of small numbers predicts that intellectual innovation is driven by rivalry between a few prominent positions in an attention space. We operationalize the law of small numbers as the number of prominent *positions* in the Chinese IR discipline, but start by mapping the most prominent *individuals*. We conceptualize prominence as reputation among contemporary peers and ask Chinese IR scholars to list their most prominent colleagues. The survey yields the following table:

[2] We selected a panel of respondents from eight of the ten top ranked universities: Tsinghua, Peking, Zhejiang, Shanghai Jiao Tong, Nanjing, Fudan, Sun Yat-sen, and Wuhan universities (Chinese Academy of Management Science 2010). We substituted University of Science and Technology of China and Huazhong University of Science and Technology, which do not have IR or political science departments, with IR departments at Renmin University, China Foreign Affairs University, Tongji University, Shanghai International Studies University, Chinese Academy of Social Science and Shanghai Academy of Social Science. Some questions have a lower response rate than others and the survey is by no means a comprehensive mapping of Chinese IR, but merely indicative of certain trends in the field.

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#	Scholar	Votes	% of respon-dents selecting this scholar	Affiliation	Alma Mater
1	Qin Yaqing	48	57,8%	China Foreign Affairs University	University of Missouri (PhD)
2	Wang Yizhou	46	55,4%	Peking University	CASS (PhD)
3	Wang Jisi	43	51,8%	Peking University	Peking University (MA)
4	Yan Xuetong	38	45,8%	Tsinghua University	UC Berkeley (PhD)
5	Shi Yinhong	21	25,3%	Renmin University	Nanjing University (PhD)
6	Ni Shixiong	15	18,1%	Fudan University	Fudan University (undergrad.)
7	Tang Shiping	5	6,0%	Fudan University	UC Berkeley (MA) (PhD in Biology)
8	Shen Dingli	4	4,8%	Fudan University	Fudan University (PhD)
9	Chu Shulong	2	3,6%	Tsinghua University	George Washington University (PhD)
9	Jin Canrong	2	3,6%	Renmin University	Peking University (PhD)
9	Tao Wenzhao	3	3,6%	CASS	Hangzhou University (undergrad.)
9	Wang Zhengyi	3	3,6%	Peking University	Nankai University (PhD)
9	Zhang Ruizhuang	3	3,6%	Nankai University	UC Berkeley (PhD)
9	Zhang Yuyan	3	3,6%	CASS	CASS (PhD)
15	Chen Qiren	2	2,4%	Fudan University	Ministry of Education (postgrad.)
15	Hu Angang	2	2,4%	Tsinghua University	CASS (PhD)
15	Li Shaojun	2	2,4%	CASS	Hebei University (undergrad.)
15	Liang Shoude	2	2,4%	Peking University	Renmin University (undergrad.)
15	Song Xinning	2	2,4%	Renmin University	Renmin University (PhD)
15	Su Changhe	2	2,4%	Shanghai Int. Studies University	Fudan University (PhD)
15	Yang Jiemian	2	2,4%	Shanghai Institute for Int. Studies	Shanghai Int. Studies University (PhD)
15	Yu Xiaofeng	2	2,4%	Zhejiang University	n/a
15	Zhang Yunling	2	2,4%	CASS	CASS (MA)
15	Zhao Tingyang	2	2,4%	CASS	CASS (PhD)
15	Zhou Fangyin	2	2,4%	CASS	Tsinghua University (PhD)

Table 1. Most prominent Chinese IR scholars (each survey respondent has four 'votes')

Number of votes indicates how many times respondents have listed a given scholar as one of the four most prominent. The percentage indicates how large a percentage of respondents select this scholar. N = 83.

When asked who is the most prominent in Chinese IR, respondents select Qin Yaqing (CFAU) closely followed by Wang Yizhou (Peking University), Wang Jisi (Peking University) and Yan Xuetong (Tsinghua University). Answers cluster around only 4-6 very prominent Chinese IR scholars corresponding well with the 3-6 positions expected from the law of small numbers. Although the survey produces an attention space of a few prominent individuals, there is no clear image whether they represent schools of thought. The meta-IR literature characterizes these individuals as representatives of different variants of *theorizing*. Wang Yizhou, Qin Yaqing, and Ni Shixiong are often praised as introducers of Western theories—both for their textbooks and translations of Western works (Wang 2002:11; Zhang 2002, 2003:102; Johnston 2002:35). Moreover, Qin Yaqing, Wang Yizhou, Yan Xuetong (and arguably Wang Jisi) and Shi Yinhong have been categorized respectively as constructivist, liberal-globalist, realist, and English school proponent (Deng 2008:40; Lynch 2009:95-99; Zhang 2002:104-5, 2003:97). Compare this with the TRIP survey where the three top scholars are key exponents for the three most prominent IR paradigms—(neo)liberalism (Keohane), constructivism (Wendt) and (neo)realism (Waltz) (Maliniak et al. 2009:43-44). Categorizations along the lines of Western IR theories hardly present the only, nor a wholly consistent, account of China's top IR scholars. These individuals can also be represented as rivals in the debate about the development of a Chinese school of IR: Qin Yaqing is known as the main proponent (Ren 2008; Wang 2009; Qin 2007). Wang Yizhou, Wang Jisi, Ni Shixiong and Shi Yinhong are proponents of a Chinese perspective on IR—albeit in different ways (Geeraerts and Men 2001:268-269; Ren 2008:294; Song 2001:68; Yu 2008:122; Zhang 2002). Yan Xuetong is known as a staunch opponent emphasizing a universal approach to IR (Johnston 2002:41, 54; Ren 2008; Wang 2009:117; Yan 2011). For example, at a 2003 conference on building

Chinese IRT the debate stood between Yan Xuetong strongly advocating the scientific method, Shi Yinhong in favor of a humanistic, historical approach, and Qin Yaqing who adopted the middle ground by proposing a "third culture" in the intersection of scientific and humanistic approaches (Ren 2008:301-304). Overall, the survey indicates that prominence is related to theorizing and that the Chinese theory debate is an important line of opposition.

The Chinese Theory Debate as Central Line of Opposition

The central role of the debate on developing Chinese IR theory—and its acrimoniousness—is emphasized by several observers (Callahan 2001; Chan 1998, 1999; Geeraerts and Men 2001; Wang 2009; Zhang 2002). The debate itself is not new, Chinese scholars have debated whether and how to construct a Chinese theory for more than two decades. In the 1980s, the debate stood between first generation scholars in favor of a socialist theory with Chinese characteristics, the 'scientific socialists', and second generation scholars returned from the US who favored American theories and social science methods, the 'social scientists'. The former is exemplified by Liang Shoude's original proposal for "IR with Chinese characteristics" which emphasized Mao's theories about "Three Worlds", "The Great Triangle", and "Multipolarity" (Liang 1997). The "young" generation of Chinese IR scholars presented themselves as opponents of the politicized scientific practices related to "IR with Chinese characteristics" and instead as exponents for a value-neutral scientism. The generational divide is utilized by several of our interviewees and is well documented in the literature (Wang 2002:9-10; Geeraerts and Men 2001:266). This makes it even more remarkable that this debate is still considered cutting edge, as an assistant professor at Tsinghua notes:

> The most notable debate in recent years has been whether we need a Chinese school of IR…The other trend, I think somewhat related, is the attempt to recover ancient Chinese thoughts or practices in international relations.

The debate has been transmitted across generations through sustained interaction rituals at the numerous academic conferences held on this topic (Chan 1998; Song and Chan 2000; Song 2001; Geeraerts and Men 2001). Our survey data supports the relevance of the debate: 69% agree or agree very much that "building a Chinese IR theory or IR school is an important task"—only 18% disagree or disagree very much. But the debate has changed connotation from characteristics to school, from isolation to integration, and from scientific socialism to social scientism as a young associate professor at Peking University explains:

> After 15 years if we talk about this debate, now the connotation has changed much. Now professor Qin Yaqing has become the major representative of the Chinese school. Of course there are some differences between a Chinese school and a theory with Chinese characteristics…if we talk about Zhong Guo Te Ze, theory with Chinese characteristics, that is very strong. It is very very strong. So if you say Chinese characteristics that means our theory should be very very different from Western theories [but] if we talk about a Chinese school actually it is a very very moderate expression. So Chinese school means we are not going to put forward an independent theory, we just want to provide some Chinese thoughts.

This presentation shows that theorizing a Chinese IRT has been transferred to younger scholars in a more Western-oriented version. Not only is the debate taken over by the prominent scholars, it is also considered important by several not-yet-prominent scholars, as exemplified by another young associate professor at Renmin University:

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> He [Qin Yaqing] is also educated in the Western countries. So I would say this is very symbolic. Those who have a very solid knowledge about what social science is began to be involved in this discussion. So it is not such a political discussion, more an academic discussion. So in this way, it is more meaningful nowadays…the most important scholar that I am paying attention to, Qin Yaqing, I found that actually he is also involved in this discussion, this was surprising at first.

The key is social scientism, which in this representation is connected to U.S.-returned scholars. What may be equidistant as seen from the West—Chinese school and Chinese characteristics—carries different connotations to Chinese scholars and a different ability to mobilize young scholars in the discipline. Our argument is not that all Chinese IR scholars are engaged in some collective effervescence, but rather that it is debate and opposition, not consensus, that mobilizes scholars.

The centrality of this opposition line creates a structural pressure—cf. the law of small numbers—that forces prominent scholars to adapt in order to stay prominent. Consider the biographical shift of some prominent scholars. Qin Yaqing, China's leading constructivist has become the main proponent of a Chinese school. Yan Xuetong, China's leading neorealist is leading a team of researchers to theorize ancient Chinese thoughts in IR. The words of prominent scholar Ni Shixiong who built his reputation by introducing Western theories exemplify the structural pressure of the attention space:

> Some people said that in the North there was professor Liang Shoude from Beijing University doing Marxist and Leninist theories and Chinese theories and there was professor Ni Shixiong in the South doing Western [laughing]. So when people mentioned my name, 'professor Ni, he is pretty strong in the Western'. Nobody said 'professor Ni is strong on Chinese'. But for me, I should know something about Chinese, right? But I cannot equally spend my energy and time on both. I am still doing more about Western. So this is why I co-authored a book on Chinese Contemporary International Relations to show them that I also know something about that.
>
> *To show who?*
>
> To show the academics. Now it is different. In the early eighties everybody knew that to begin with it is natural to introduce more Western theory into China because by that time we did not have our own…But now, if we just do the Western of course it is not adequate.

Here the aim of theorizing is "to show the academics" and mastering Western theories is no longer adequate to do this. As an intellectual move, this articulates neither translations nor theory applications as enough to be original, which opens the space for homegrown theories. The structural pressure of the law of small numbers forces even the most prominent scholars—many of whom became prominent as proponents of Western paradigms—to renew their position in the attention space. For scholars to achieve or retain attention space they have to present their ideas as *new* (by combining Chinese thoughts and scientific methods) and *important* in relation to ongoing conversations (the Chinese theory debate) (Collins 1998:31).

From a distance this may look like a consensus that Western theories are inadequate and Chinese theories must be developed. But from a micro-sociological perspective, the moves in this *less Western*, *more Chinese* dynamic are not homogenous. There is a plurality of moves along this opposition line that oppose existing Western theories differently, replace it with different forms of 'Chineseness' and try to create attention space by opposing other Chinese scholars.

Moves in the Debate

One observer of Chinese IR notes that "nowadays more and more Chinese scholars turn to traditional Chinese thinking seeking similarities and differences between Chinese and Western philosophical traditions, and [their attempts] are regarded by many academics as the correct approach to building up a Chinese IR theory" (Song 1997:51). There are many ways of theorizing ancient culture, however. A central fault line in the Chinese IR debate is linked to two of its most prominent scholars—Qin Yaqing and Yan Xuetong—and revolves around the question of how to create a Chinese IR theory from traditional Chinese thinking. Consider how Qin Yaqing, a prominent proponent of a 'cultural school', presents the "two major schools" in the Chinese attention space:

> In China now, there are two major schools. One believes that all International Relations social theories are universal. The other believes that all social theories do have their birthmark of geography, culture, civilization and so on…
>
> *And among those who do theory within those schools…who would you consider the most influential scholars in these two schools?*
>
> In the universal school very perhaps Yan Xuetong. Because he believes that all sciences should be like natural sciences, that is universal. And in the cultural based theory, maybe me. That is, we do have cultural birthmarks, we do have traditions. But the key part is not only to tap into the cultural, historical and civilizational tradition, but how can you abstract them to the level of, at least somewhat, universal applications.

With this move the interviewee organizes the attention space along the cultural-universalist opposition line and places himself at the very top. The universalist-culturalist opposition line is presented as a metatheoretical debate about what theory is and should be. Note, however, that the culturalist strand is presented not as particularist and purely Chinese, but as somewhat universal: "My question is if we go deep into Chinese traditional philosophy what can we find to enrich International Relations theory in the world." Simultaneously, the move simplifies his major competitor, Yan Xuetong of Tsinghua University, as a prominent proponent of the universalist approach to whom "all sciences should be like natural sciences".

In the light of this simplifying move it is interesting to turn to Yan's network at Tsinghua University for an elaboration. Indeed, Tsinghua University can be considered the institutional base for the universalist school that stresses social scientific methodology and theoretical universalism. But even in the center of universalism, where we would intuitively expect little interest for ancient Chinese thoughts, a research project on traditional Chinese philosophy on IR is being carried out. Consider how a young faculty member at Tsinghua makes a move against Qin Yaqing:

> But it is definitely correct for you to visit Tsinghua because we are leading the effort to...you know. Yan Xuetong does not want to say that we are developing a Chinese school of IR because he thinks that is impossible…But in fact he has lead a team of researchers in the past 3 or 4 years trying to dig into traditional Chinese or ancient Chinese traditional philosophical thought to discover the relevance of these thoughts for contemporary international relations…Qin Yaqing at Foreign Affairs University is probably the most prominent advocate of a Chinese school of IR. But he himself, I do not think he has done as much as professor Yan, for example in recovering ancient Chinese thoughts.

In this move against Qin Yaqing who has not "done as much as professor Yan", the young scholar associates himself with Yan and his prominent conflict line with Qin about whether efforts to recover Chinese ancient thought should result in a 'Chinese school' or not. Elsewhere he states "My position is somewhat similar to professor Yan's. I think we should first try to develop theories before we can say a Chinese school of IR, because we do not even know what it would look like. Unless we have something to show." This captures the universalist-culturalist debate well. Many of the moves made along this opposition line are more concerned with form than content. The debate is not

so much about whether the thoughts of Xunzi or Laozi should be theorized, but how to approach their thoughts. Note how Qin Yaqing labels his rival when asked about Yan's work:

> You use the Western existing theoretical schema to explain the Chinese. That is Yan Xuetong's work. He put Laozi into realists. He put Mencius into the liberalist school. And by that logic, Confucius perhaps constructivism. The whole analytical framework is Western, then he puts the Chinese, especially pre-Qin philosophers, into these different categories…This is their approach to this Chinese tradition. I think it is very useful. People can understand who is who…The key part behind Yan Xuetong's research is that he believes the three major schools of IR theories, especially realism, is very much universal…My approach is very different, my approach is to try to use the Chinese ideas as the nucleus of the theory. But the reasoning methodology might be a mixture with some Western logical reasoning. But I believe the key part, that is the nucleus, should be Chinese. I do not want to set up a Western analytical schema to put the Chinese ideas in. I try to combine the two. So I call my approach an integrative analogical interpretation.

This move simplifies the prominent rival as an interpreter of Chinese philosophy who uses Western paradigms and simply puts Chinese thinkers into one Western school or the other. Interestingly, the Yan article referred to stresses that Xunzi's Confucian thoughts contain constructivist, realist and institutionalist elements (Yan 2008:153). The point here is not to correct misrepresentations but to study how this simplifying move allows this prominent scholar to reject, or at least derisively tolerate, the opponent's research as a "who is who" of Chinese IR. This simultaneously brings out the sophistication of the interviewee's own approach. While labeling the opponent 'a realist'—limiting his uniqueness and essentially making him a follower—he refrains from labeling himself with Western idea emblems. The dynamic of simplifying others and complexifying oneself is all too evident when he labels himself "an integrative analogical interpretation". The culturalist-universalist opposition line illustrates that differences may look minor from a distance—both positions synthesize ancient culture and Western IR and believe the result should have somewhat universal application—and yet differences are cultivated in the local attention space. Remember that it is "conflicts—lines of difference between positions" that drive intellectual innovation (Collins 1998:6).

Chinese culture serves a function not only in national debates, but also in interactions with international scholars. Another explanation why Chinese researchers theorize ancient Chinese resources is that this allows them to maximize their distinctiveness internationally. According to the law of small numbers, "the strategic choice is between formulating a distinctive position to contend for first-rate attention, or to become the follower of an existing position." (Collins 2000:160). A conversation with a scholar who is critical of theorizations of ancient Chinese philosophy sheds light on the "contender" move:

> *But you cannot think of other reasons why scholars like Yan Xuetong start to dig into ancient thought?*
>
> Yan Xuetong mentioned a very practical reason. He said 'For Chinese scholars, if you are doing research with American style theory you cannot surpass those American scholars. Because all these theories are rooted in Western culture. So you can only follow up, you cannot surpass that. So if you want to do a real achievement, you need to do something that the Westerners cannot understand.' [laughing] So Confucius is a good thing.

Cultural difference can serve a very practical purpose, namely to attract international attention. Another example is worth mentioning. Qin Yaqing, the leading proponent of a Chinese school, presents a very practical reason why *guanxi* (relations) became the core concept in his work:

> In 2005 my focus began to fall on one thing, I asked many foreigners 'if you come to China what are the first ten words that come up to your mind?' Many of them mentioned

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> Guanxi, relations. And you go back to Confucius, Confucius' moral argument rests on the management, not of individuals, but of relations…So I think, for three to four centuries in Europe basically, of course you could go back to the renaissance but basically you could go back to the Enlightenment, rationality became the dominant word, if we choose one word that forms the foundation of social sciences *and* natural sciences. I think the counterpart in Chinese society, not natural science but social science, is relationality.

By asking foreigners what is most Chinese, a very different theoretical core is created. Not Truth, but distinctiveness in the eyes of "many foreigners" drove this scholar to innovate. Cultural difference is useful in the intercultural scholarly encounter. Posing Chinese relationality as the opposite of Western rationality, this scholar challenges the philosophical core of all Western thinking. Confucianism and *Guanxi* are useful to this scholar because they contribute with a distinct and positively defined Chinese content rather than exclusively negating the West. Confucius is deployed to provide a theoretical anchorage to define what China is, rather than what it is not. This move represents the transition from the resigned marginality of 'IR with Chinese characteristics' to the marginal participation of a 'Chinese school'. Developing a Chinese school that achieves international attention*,* whether as criticism, praise or repressive tolerance, may translate into national prominence.

Qin and Yan's debate has attracted the attention of many other scholars who utilize the universalist-culturalist opposition line to attach themselves to these prominent individuals or criticize their positions and instead put forward their own ideas. For example, a Fudan University professor opposes Yan Xuetong's position, arguing that "his belief in realism actually limits him to fully embrace the rich sources in the Chinese traditional thinking about international relations…he has actually joined the traditional literatures and tries to justify his belief in realism which I do not think adds too much". Instead he attaches himself to Qin's work:

> So what Qin Yaqing and I believe is that if we want to have something, we have to combine other things, not only one school of realism combined with this Chinese experience and the Chinese traditional thinking.

This move rejects partial and simplistic theories, and the scholar moves on to further oppose Yan whose efforts are dismissed as "an easy work". Almost too consistent with Collins' actor model, this move allows him to "participate in the hot center where ideas have the greatest sacredness" and also "attach one's own identity to such ideas" (Collins 1998:31) and persons—"Qin Yaqing and I"—in a very direct way. Not all Chinese scholars support the theorization of ancient Chinese culture, however.

Others place themselves in opposition to both culturalist and universalist theorizations of ancient philosophy. Instead they place modern *issues* such as the peaceful rise of China as the core question for a Chinese IRT. The utility of China's peaceful rise for Chinese IRT is exemplified in a conversation with an associate professor at Shanghai International Studies University:

> In fact, you know, the realist IR theory has a very hard time to explain how a rising power can rise peacefully. You know the power transition theory argues that in a period of power transition or power parity there is a danger that the rising power will resort to war or force…So many Chinese scholars think that China will not follow the way of conquest. In fact China's way, the course of China's development mainly will make use the economic development, domestic economic development, and the open-door policy and engage with the international society. We will not resort to force…That was the main motivation behind Chinese IR scholars' attempt to establish their *own* IR theory.

Realist IR theory is simplified by making "power transition theory" its representative. Liberal institutionalist or English School explanations are conspicuous by their absence in this move, considering the empirical puzzle to be explained (economic development, liberalizing reforms and engagement with the international society). But correcting

these moves misses the point. The point is not whether the representation of existing theories as inadequate is correct or not, but what it *does*. The move appears to falsify existing theories on empirical grounds—mainstream theories have been tested on facts and deemed unable to present a true account of Chinese foreign policy. But are theories falsified empirically because they are untrue, or rejected to make room for new theoretical endeavors? The move carves out attention space. Peaceful rise is protected as an issue only a Chinese IR theory can explain. According to Collins unresolved puzzles are the most prized possession of intellectuals. The most important cultural capital "does not merely solve puzzles but creates them." (Collins 1998:32). And as an 'issue school' proponent notes, new problems are scarce: "I think *all* the problems were found by Western scholars first. Nothing is left for us." The 'issue' approach to developing a Chinese school is also closely connected to the most prominent figures in the attention space:

> Professors like Qin Yaqing, I think you should know him, he is a professor at the Foreign Relations University. He says that every theory has its core question. For China the possible future of China's International Relations theory should focus on the peaceful rise. That is the hard core of Chinese International Relations. He calls upon scholars to do that.

Qin Yaqing appears again as a motivating figure, a prominent position to associate with. This attests to the ability of prominent scholars to set the agenda and mobilize the less-prominent. "Peaceful rise", a political concept linked to government and foreign policy, can thus play an academic role as a move against Western theories and rival approaches in the Chinese school debate. Note how the scholar motivated by Qin Yaqing's call goes on to make a move against him and Yan for using ancient philosophy to create a Chinese IRT:

> So I think China needs a theory to explain why China can be peacefully developing and can achieve a peaceful rise. But you cannot find a theory to explain that. Because by realism you can find that all rising powers will have a conflict with the hegemon…I think the only way you can do that is to look back on the history of the past three decades. We have had a very successful development in the past three decades, and this development is peaceful…I think that Qin Yaqing and Yan Xuetong both, just like the same one. In China there is a saying called 'Tuo Gu Gai Zhi'. It means 'we look back to the ancient and try to reform the reality'…I think the reality of the problems we are facing today are more complicated. It is a totally different world, of today's China and ancient China. All those ideas developed by those classics cannot be fully used to help and understand today's reality.

By opposing prominent scholars, he not only associates with prominence but also carves out a distinctive scholarly position—it is China's recent experiences and its peaceful rise that should serve as the theoretical foundation of Chinese IRT.

Given the plurality of moves and positions, a few of which were presented in this brief glance into the internal layer of Chinese IR, it is hard to talk about a consensus on whether and how to theorize from a Chinese perspective. Rather the Chinese innovational drive is a debate. Several of the most prominent figures have engaged in this debate and the Chinese attention space increasingly rewards local theorizing over the application of Western theories. It is important to emphasize the internal and micro-sociological point that this debate itself and the struggle for attention space is the main driver of theoretical innovation.

Externalist Layers: Sociopolitical and Material Changes

This section moves from the micro and science-internal to the macro and science-external. Externalist studies of IR mostly focus on geopolitics and foreign policy changes, which may explain the overall development of the discipline, yet "the causal connection between external events and developments in theory is, as usual, vague"

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(Wæver 1998:692). We also wish to stress how domestic political reforms affect the conditions for science. We trace how sociopolitical events external to IR scholars feed into the organizational and material bases of science and indirectly affect the innovational drive at the micro. We argue that the increasing institutional and financial independence of Chinese intellectual life has augmented the impact of internalist factors on the IR debate in China. The following section starts at the most macro-political external layer and moves towards layers closer to science: the geopolitical rise of China, domestic politics and the dissolution of overlay, economic growth and expanding material bases, and university politics and improving career opportunities.

Geopolitics and the Rise of China

Considering that the attempt to construct a distinctly Chinese theory is a unique case in a global comparative perspective (Tickner and Wæver 2009:336), it is tempting to assume that it is related to the geopolitical rise of China. The trends are concurrent but it is worth questioning exactly how major geopolitical events produce ideas. Therefore, we turn to the two-step causality and trace foreign policy changes through the material base to intellectual life. First, a rising political power has expanding foreign policy interests and thus demands advice from scholars. Second, a rising economic power has more money, some of which go to universities, fewer of which to IR research, and even less to theorizing—a material explanation we will explore later.

Stanley Hoffmann (1977) once argued that IR was born with the globalization of American interests and the democratization of American foreign policy-making. The global reach of U.S. interests meant that "to study the U.S. foreign policy was to study the international system" and democratization meant that scholars were invited into the kitchens of power (Hoffmann 1977:47). The same two variables could be applied here. China's international interests now concern relations to all great powers, international organizations and the global conditions for its economic growth (Huang 2007:178). China has signed strategic partnerships and trade agreements with countries on all continents. China's growing involvement in the international community has increased demand for IR research and foreign policy advice (Glaser and Saunders 2002:597; Medeiros 2004:285). Its foreign policy making is pluralizing and no longer limited to a small cadre, which has increased the relevance of IR research because different policy factions can use it to mobilize support for their line (Medeiros 2004:287). There are examples of scholars transgressing the border to policy-making, but entrance to policy-making is still far from the U.S. "revolving door" model which allows many U.S. academics to serve temporarily in government posts (Medeiros 2004:287; Wortzel and Scobell 2004:2).

The Chinese government demands not only foreign policy advice, but also new ideological concepts to guide Chinese foreign policy. As Callahan (2004:569-570) argues, material power is insufficient, "world leadership demands an ideology to order the globe symbolically". The Hu administration has put forward two important official foreign policy concepts in recent years. *Peaceful Rise*, originally developed by scholar Zheng Bijan from the Central Party School, was a response to 'China threat' theories developed by U.S. scholars in the 1990s (Glaser and Medeiros 2007). It used the language of interdependence theory: "there is nothing to fear from China's rise because the only way the country can develop is through economic interdependence and political cooperation" (Lynch 2009:88). Due to the problematic connotations of 'rise', the concept later became *Peaceful Development*. Hu Jintao later put forward the vision of a *Harmonious World*, which explicitly draws its inspiration from the ancient Chinese culture of harmony and peace. In the face of rising regional and economic disparities, order and stability have been revived as the guiding principles to ensure stable

economic growth and retain one-party rule. In Hu Jintao's discourse, order derives from Confucian tradition rather than Communism, that is, harmony and order is something particularly Chinese (Callahan 2008).

It is broadly recognized that early calls for 'IR with Chinese characteristics' cannot be seen in isolation from Deng Xiaoping's notion of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (Callahan 2001; Chan 1999; Geeraerts and Men 2001; Liang 1997; Song 2001; Wang 2009). Similarly, it could be argued that Hu's call for a Harmonious World explains why academics theorize Chinese culture and harmony. But it is important to note that foreign policy concepts are relevant to IR scholars who make their career by addressing important policy puzzles in the empirical world. It is hard to analyze IR without addressing political concepts such as Peaceful Rise and Harmonious World. These concepts are—like 'Axis of Evil'—puzzling questions for academic analysis and not necessarily the product of government determination. Second, the dynamic works both ways. As observers note, the vision of a Harmonious World may have been inspired by Zhao Tingyang's book on the Tianxia system (Callahan 2008:758), while Yan Xuetong and Wang Huning's ideas on how to use traditional culture as soft power were inspirations for China's soft power strategy (Callahan 2005:275; Glaser and Murphy 2009:12; Li 2008:292). Third, it is difficult to see how the individual theorist at a Chinese university is motivated *directly* by the government's foreign policy. The rise of China provides important puzzles for Chinese IR, but its impact on theoretical innovation should be traced through the material and organizational base of intellectual life.

Domestic Politics and the Dissolution of Overlay

Domestic political reforms are important here. The gradual dissolution of political overlay following Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening-up policy has enabled intellectual dynamics of conflict and opposition to emerge. Although not causing creativity directly, this is an important facilitating factor for the innovational drive. During the Maoist era 1949-1976 there was one source of political and intellectual legitimacy: Communist ideology and its promise of proletarian revolution. Communism was enforced in every level of society, including IR, with officials being assigned to positions throughout the higher education sector (Julius 1997). Inspired by the Soviet model, research was moved to ministry-level academies and think tanks focused on policy planning, which meant an almost direct control of IR research (Shambaugh 2002:578). Academic departments mainly focused on teaching (Geeraerts and Men 2001:254; Shambaugh and Wang 1984:763; Wang 2009:104). During the Cultural Revolution, intellectual life at universities was dismantled altogether. Even when reopened in 1970-71, they were administered by revolutionary committees, the national entrance exam was abolished, and the Party dictated admission, hiring and promotion based on political rather than intellectual credentials (Julius 1997:144; Ogden 1982:103). To trace this through our model: The sociopolitical world only supported Marxist-Communism and thus only Marxist IR scholars were supported by the material and organizational base. Since only *one* intellectual network existed, the possibility for intellectual debate was very limited.

From the late 1970s, this organizational overlay was gradually dissolved. Deng Xiaoping's "reform and opening up" is highlighted by several observers as the major political event enabling IR studies to develop in China (Song 2001; Wang 2002). Most emphasize the "opening up" component of China's foreign policy (Huang 2007; Qin 2009; Wang 2009), but we argue that the "reform" component also played a key role for IR. Starting at the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee (1978), Deng and his pragmatic supporters advocated for economic growth by the promotion of market

mechanisms to deal with inefficiencies of allocation and distribution in the centrally planned economy (Saich 2004:52-53). Deng also encouraged learning from the West in all areas of society and specifically called for making up for "missed lessons" in political science, law, sociology and world politics (Geeraerts and Men 2001:254). The gradual opening up and internationalization of universities facilitated the import of non-Marxist theoretical ideas. In the early 1980s, Chinese academics and students were allowed to travel to the U.S. for the first time in 40 years and U.S. scholars were invited to China whereby new academic ideas were exchanged (Zhang 2003:99-102). Internationalization and exposure to the outside world and its knowledge systems were important facilitating conditions behind the innovational drive. Without China's opening up, the non-Marxist, American theories and scientific methods that elevated some scholars to prominence would not have been introduced.

Institutionally, the IR discipline was reformed along the lines of Western, particularly American, IR, and Soviet-style separation of teaching and research was supplemented with the "American practice of establishing genuine research centers at universities" (Shambaugh and Wang 1984:763). Government control over university IR at key institutions such as Peking, Fudan, Renmin, Nanjing, Nankai and Foreign Affairs College was relaxed during the 1980s (Geeraerts and Men 2001:255). The government was reluctant to take advice from the newly independent university researchers, however, and instead funded the establishment of several government think tanks (Tanner 2002:560). The institutional separation which placed 'foreign policy research' with think tanks and gradually isolated 'IR research' at universities made the latter more theoretical and academic, or, more disciplinary and less 'useful' (Geeraerts and Men 2001:258). But from a disciplinary point of view, Chinese IR moved from ideological dictates towards more empirical, neutral analysis (Shambaugh 2002:578) and became "moderately more pluralistic" (Geeraerts and Men 2001:272). Chinese intellectuals are still facing political limits on scholarship and every university has a party secretary who ensures that education and research does not stray too far from the party line. Research activities that reflect criticism towards the government risk severe penalties including loss of academic position or prosecution (Altbach 2007:4). Nevertheless, the overall trend has been decentralization and greater pluralism within IR. The organization of IR at the (somewhat more) independent universities is a key facilitating condition for the innovational drive. The dissolution of political overlay tells us little about the content of today's theoretical debate, except that it is no longer limited to Marxism, but it was perhaps *the most* important condition for its emergence.

Economic Growth and Expanding Material Bases

Yet, it is insufficient to be able to disagree if there is neither time nor money to care about disagreements. Another facilitating external condition is thus the expanding material base following from China's economic growth. Deng Xiaoping's reforms initiated a decentralization of fiscal and managerial control, privatization of state-owned enterprises and establishment of Special Economic Zones, which started a period of sustained economic growth of approximately 10% annually (Bergsten et al. 2009:105).

IR is now receiving more budget funding and the diversification of funding sources might pull in the direction of more research and theorizing. The Chinese government has been active in increasing the global competitiveness of research and postgraduate education in its pursuit of world-class universities. This has resulted in increasing funding, particularly for top universities (Mohrman 2008; Mok 2005; Liu and Liu 2005). Yet, research funding goes primarily to the natural sciences and engineering, while student body is an important source of funding in humanities and social sciences (Mohrman 2008:36; Yan 2010:107). Only 1.4% of gross R&D

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expenditure and 5% of university R&D expenditure goes to social sciences and humanities (Huang 2010:74, 370).

Mundane issues such as salaries, health care, library holdings and weekly working hours matter for periphery IR (Tickner and Wæver 2009:1). Early reviews of Chinese IR indicate that poor financial conditions forced scholars to rely on dated materials and very little contact with international colleagues (Shambaugh and Wang 1984:764; Chan 1997, 1998:12-14; Geeraerts and Men 2001:24). IR is still short on research funding (Geeraerts and Men 2001, 275), but increasing general budgets have improved the conditions for research. It is significant that per capita income at Peking University more than tripled from RMB 22,612 in 2000 to RMB 75,738 in 2008 (Yan 2010:104). As one scholar told us, increasing salaries enabled him to purchase books the university library still cannot afford. The Internet, despite its limitations in China, has improved both international communication and access to international journals. It is no longer necessary to travel overseas to acquire state of the art knowledge, new foreign theories have become public goods. This is a material explanation why traveling to the U.S. and returning as a 'translation theorizer' may not yield the reputational payoff it did in the early 1990s, and why the IR theorizing debate has moved on.

A trend pulling in the direction of more research, and maybe even theorizing, is the diversification of funding sources (Chen 2003:125). For many key universities, central government funding represents only one-third to one-quarter of annual budgets and, even though absolute government funding increases, its proportion of total funding is declining (Mohrman 2008:34). From 1996 to 2005 the government proportion of funding decreased almost 50% (Yan 2010:108). Additional revenue is generated from tuition, profit-making enterprises and applied projects for the business sector (Mohrman 2008, 34-35). Today, 78.75% of a faculty's salary is generated by the university vis-à-vis the government proportion of 21.25% (Yan 2010, 112). Higher and university-generated salaries reduce the dependence on government funding, which often favors applied research (although a scramble for additional revenue-generating projects may not favor theorizing either). The general trend for social science research funding in China is the move from block to project funding (Huang 2010:74). In IR, project funding is generated by producing research projects and policy reports for the government. So if scholars want to conduct large research projects, they need research grants from government foundations—grants that come with conditionalities.

There are three major social science foundations in China: the non-ministerial National Social Science Foundation (NSSF), the Humanities and Social Science Foundation of China under the Ministry of Education (HSSF), and the funding system of CASS. NSSF is the largest in terms of projects and broadest because it supports all types of institutions (Wei 2010:269) and the primary foundation for IR research (Chan 1997:13). IR ('International Studies') is one of 22 disciplines supported and accounts for 3% of funded projects from 1993-2009. Although the absolute number of IR projects has increased, its proportion of total social science projects funded 1993-2009 is low. On average, IR received 5.3% of social science projects, which ranks it last. The NSSF issues an annual list of topics and large grants come only with these predefined topics. In the calls for applications 2005-2008 most topics are categorized as "applied policy research" (76%), but the NSSF also encourages applications for "basic theory" projects (24%). NSSF has encouraged 'basic theory' projects with themes such as 'Peaceful rise and harmonious world theory' and 'IR with Chinese Characteristics'. In a 2004 speech, Hu Jintao himself even encouraged academics to investigate national cultural traditions and construct social sciences with Chinese characteristics, Chinese style and Chinese dynamics (Southcn.com 2004). Despite the calls for Chinese style theorizing, what gets funded is primarily policy projects, either because few theoretical projects are applied for or because few are approved. The IR scholars we interviewed

found it difficult to attract NSSF funds, particularly "If your project program is too theoretical", and there is reason to be cautious about the positive impact of NSSF on theoretical innovation.

University Politics and Career Opportunities

More important than funding policies are the organizational changes that have allowed individuals to pursue academic careers. Our argument is that organizational changes have (1) increased mobility and made life as an IR intellectual a viable career and (2) have introduced performance management, competition and increased the drive for excellence among intellectuals. Control over rewards (degrees, positions, publications etc.) have increasingly been given back to intellectuals themselves, which has made them more dependent on each other and have facilitated the development of IR disciplinary identities, common debates and theoretical work.

The main reform in university politics is that from the danwei system to a market system of employment. During the danwei (work unit) system, Chinese academics were provided an "iron rice bowl" (Chen 2003:108). Faculty were tenured for life, paid the same, housed on and confined to campus. They were stovepiped into vertical hierarchies where research products were exclusively transferred upward and communication between different institutions was limited (Tanner 2002:563). Scholars at different universities had little in common and the discipline *per se* was of little concern. In recent years, universities have adopted a more "western organization" where academics engage in activities beyond campus, which has fostered horizontal relationships between specialists (Yan 2010:101). Moreover, the marketization of employment has made the boundary between university and non-university IR less rigid in terms of career mobility and "a direct result of this enhanced mobility is the migration of scholars and officials toward university-based IR research programs." (Medeiros 2004:286). Four of the six most prominent scholars identified in our survey, and those involved in the Chinese school debate, migrated from think tanks to universities (Yan Xuetong, Wang Jisi, Wang Yizhou and Shi Yinhong). Increasing mobility has contributed to the academicization of Chinese IR since the migration into the university system increases the ability to 'face inward' compared to working in government think tanks where the general purpose is to produce policy-relevant, applied knowledge. Adding to this mobility, societies and associations have organized nation-wide conferences that bring together IR scholars from different subfields (Glaser and Saunders 2002:597). The debate about a Chinese IR theory has been a key topic at academic conferences ever since the first national IR conference in 1987. This debate gave IR scholars a common topic that concerned disciplinary identities (social scientists versus scientific socialists and later universalists versus culturalists) rather than specialty areas. Disciplinary identity has also been strengthened by the introduction of the PhD program in the early 1980s and the formation of an institutional structure of 'departments of equals' where most faculty members identify as 'PhD's in IR'. The 2004 revival of the national association (CNAIS) underpins this trend.

Personnel system reforms have added to this professionalization of IR and have furthermore given IR scholars themselves greater control over the discipline. A series of reforms have given universities freedom to decide number of positions, hiring criteria and even remuneration independently. Moreover, qualification and performance is now emphasized over seniority and political credentials, which has given universities more control vis-à-vis the government. Hiring and promotion committees to a larger extent value uniform standards based on publications and formal education over political ones. Reforms have abolished the egalitarian salary mechanism and gradually adopted performance-based salaries and bonus-schemes (Yan 2010:104-6). Competent associate

professors can now earn more than full professors and salary differences can be as high as 17-fold (Chen 2003:113).

These reforms have strengthened IR scholars' control over the discipline because they control the distribution of reputational resources such as publications, citations, and degrees. This also increases their dependence on each other and makes it more important who controls editorial boards of journals or hiring committees than who is your local party patron. Over the past decade the second generation of internationalized scholars either educated overseas or familiar with Western theories has gradually taken over key professorial positions, PhD advisory and thus the control over reputational resources. Recent statistics show that 62% of doctorate supervisors studied or carried out research abroad (Yan 2010:104). The decreasing control of 'scientific socialists' over the management of faculty is key to understanding why social scientism and Western-inspired theorizing has become an important cultural capital. When prominent scholars from the second generation have attempted to theorize Chineseness and Confucianism using social scientific methodologies, their increased organizational power has improved their ability to mobilize younger scholars around this project.

Chinese journals are also increasingly important for academic careers. In fact, research publications constitute the key pillar of the performance-based remuneration and promotion system adopted by most universities and one article can generate a bonus equal to 1-10% of annual salary (Chen 2003:124; Mohrman 2008:38; Wei 2010:271). Although publication in international journals is encouraged and highly rewarded (Huang 2010:75; see also Mohrman 2008:36), our survey data shows that Chinese IR scholars find it most important to publish nationally (53%). The reliance on the national journal market is characteristic of the social sciences in China (Zhou, Su, and Leydesdorff 2010:1361). The creation of two Chinese equivalents to SSCI attests to the size of national social science markets and their importance for careers and university rankings (Liu and Liu 2005:219, 221; see also Su, Han, and Han 2001). The number of Chinese IR journals is growing rapidly (Wang 2002:9) and while most journals focus on policy research (Zhang 2002:107), *leading* IR journals have become more receptive to theoretical studies. Almost one third of the articles published from 1991 to 2000 in the most prominent journal, *World Economics and Politics* focused on IRT (Qin 2007:319, see also 2009). Another study shows that in terms of market shares, 11% of journal articles in IR carried by leading journals in 1996-2001 were devoted to 'theory-building' (Wang 2002:9).

As publishing in national journals has become the key to making a career, their editors have become more powerful. Although Chinese journal editors is not a uniform group, an observer notes that "the editorial boards of China's leading IR journals, including *Contemporary International Studies* and *World Economy and Politics*, tend to be dominated by those who are trained in the U.S. or who are familiar with the US-based scholarship of IR" (Zhang 2003:102). Consequently, the trend is Americanization, or scienticization, of journals. This development has been driven by some of the most prominent editors. Wang Yizhou, longtime editor of the leading journal *World Economy and Politics*, has been characterized as paradigmatic of scientism (Wang 2009:115). The English-language *Chinese Journal of International Politics* sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation and edited by Yan Xuetong takes scientism and American IR as the model (Wang 2009, 117) and encourages "modern methodology" such as quantitative and statistical methods (CJIP 2010). Despite, or maybe because, of its claim to scientism, Yan's journal has been the outlet for several articles exploring traditional Chinese thought on international relations. As several other editors become involved in the debate on China IR theorizing, it will leave an imprint on the rest of the discipline. The large size of the Chinese IR market makes it possible to pursue a career by only publishing in Chinese journals controlled by Chinese editors. Apart from

favoring scientific methods, it is reasonable to assume that these journals and their editors, ceteris paribus, have greater understanding of and receptiveness towards distinctly Chinese ideas than their international counterparts. This provides a material—albeit indirect—explanation why IR scholars try to combine Chinese characteristics, history, and philosophy with social science methodologies in their research. In sum, it is possible to identify factors at the external layers closest to science that are more than an indirectly facilitating, but may actually influence the direction of the discipline. External events can thus be influential by imposing or dissolving an overlay or by providing material resources or organizational reforms that favor certain intellectual factions or generations over others.

Conclusion

This article started with the puzzle why has there been an innovational drive to develop Chinese IR theory? Through a sociological analysis that bridges factors internal and external to science, we have shown that theoretical innovations are rarely a product of macropolitical factors alone. Contextual influences can be much more immediate and local than the 'rise of China'. Chinese scholars are trying to innovate a Chinese theory of IR because the debate on developing Chinese IR theory provides a useful opposition line to carve out intellectual attention. Since there is limited attention, only a few scholars can become very prominent, and scholars therefore have to struggle to innovate and create a unique scholarly position. The structural pressure of the attention space has made reliance on Western IRT alone insufficient to achieve or maintain prominence—therefore, the debate on developing a Chinese IRT. This opposition line thrives because it is useful; it divides and mobilizes scholars and facilitates labeling and name-calling. The social dynamics of the attention space provides the primary answer to our question.

Sociopolitical events are indirectly influential insofar as the geopolitical rise of China and its reform and opening up policy has increased the organizational and material independence of intellectual life. This independence has enabled IR scholars to produce their own factions and alliances. Economic growth has expanded the material bases that support intellectual life and has provided more funds for research and more room for theoretical activities. Organizational reforms have introduced performance based management that—whether one likes new public management or not—emphasize publications and degrees over non-academic credentials. This has provided more control over the discipline to scholars themselves.

This exercise in the sociology of IR has taken Randall Collins' model for intellectual innovation on a field trip to China, but is not limited to the Chinese case. Nor does it claim that there is anything unique about Chinese academia. The Chinese case does indeed have its own historical trajectories ('Chinese Characteristics') that still affect debates today, but our case study confirms Collins' most basic idea that competition and opposition drives intellectual innovation—anywhere and anytime. There is certainly room for a model that moves beyond the simplistic internalist/externalist divide and instead looks at the interplay between external events and internal debates and traces the latter into the former through a range of material and organizational layers closer to the everyday practices of scholars. 'Externalist' sociological studies of IR have tended to stress macro-political events, for example in foreign policy, and in studies of IR outside the West to apply IR's own, somewhat idiosyncratic, concepts of hegemony, dependency or core-periphery relations. As IR scholars, we are all located in a much more immediate setting where acrimonious debates at a conference or a dull university sector reform can have a greater impact on our lives than the tectonic shifts of world history.

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