

# China's Quest for Peaceful Development —— Rethink Power and World Order

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Abstract. Since the emergence of modern nation-state in Europe, the International Relations (IR) discipline was born out of relevant research on modern states. Further, IR is generally dominated by the Western perspective during its development. Western IR theory (IRT) based on western history and western philosophy, the Westphalia system makes western scholars believe that states are in an anarchic self-help system, and the best way to keep a state actor safe is to gain more power. Thus the Anarchy international system and the State's pursuit of material power have become the theoretical assumptions recognized by the Western IRTs. Based on the western IRTs, states prefer take radical foreign policy to improve material power. However, the rise of China has challenged the traditional Western IRT. Since 2008, China has believed in the grand strategy of peaceful development, which is different from the western concern about the power imbalance caused by the rise of great powers, Chinese leaders have constantly emphasized the idea that great powers can also rise peacefully on various occasions. As a country with rich historical and ideological legacies, China has formed the Chinese IRTs based on its distinctive philosophy and history. This article argues that Chinese IRT's emphasis on the Balance of Relations and the Tianxia system could help us reassess the traditional Western IRTs view.

Keywords: Peaceful Development, Balance of Relations, Tianxia System

# 1 Introduction

The discipline of IR was born from an Anglo-American perspective. With the development of international relations theory (IRT), most theories are based on Western history and philosophy. Among them, an anarchy world order and the pursuit of power among states are regarded as the presuppositions of most IRTs. The indigenous Chinese IRTs recognized these concepts, but fostered a rethinking of world order and power. These reflections are based on Chinese experience and historical culture. Drawing on Chinese IRT, this essay takes China's quest for peaceful rise as an example, arguing that China's pursuit of long-term interests and stable bilateral relations is paramount. The perspective of Chinese IR is different from the Western assumption based on the Westphalian system, and the balance of power under anarchy is not the main logic of China's grand strategy. Seeking "balance of relationship (BoR)

"between major powers and using self-restraint to display the idea of Tianxia is a supplement to Western IRTs by Chinese experience.

In general, relying on China's experience and strategic expectations of peaceful rise, this essay argues that the BoR and Tianxia system is an appropriate complement to the concepts of Balance of Power (BoP) and Anarchy in Western IRTs. China's experience has enriched the IRT's understanding of world order and power. In the following, this article will be divided in to three parts. First, this essay briefly introduces the strategic connotation of China's peaceful rise. The second part occupies more paragraphs and discusses the differences between the BoR offered by SIHI[14] (2016) and the BoP. The third part compares the Tianxia system in Chinese IRT and the concept of Anarchy in Western IRT, and argues that Chinese IRTs have made necessary complements to these concepts.

#### 2 Rethink Balance of Power -- Chinese Experience

Realism believe that states quest for security through the Balance of Power theory. For security reasons, it is hard for state actors to accept a rival far beyond their own power in the self-help system. Therefore, when the material power among states changes, actors will actively pursue the comparison of power and return to a state of balance[17](Waltz 1979). Under such standards, China's peaceful development is unimaginable[11] (Mearsheimer 2001). The IRT based on the Western Westphalian system emphasizes the self-help nature of the international system. Thus, the rise of great powers is often accompanied by conflicts and wars[2] (Allison 2017). On the one hand, from the perspective of power transition theory, the United States, as an offshore balancer in East Asia, through its strong security system and its East Asian allies is constantly trying to drag China into a hegemonic order that suits its interests[7] (Goh 2019). In terms of bilateral relations, since 2008, the US strategy towards China has gradually shifted from hedging to containment[5] (Jean and Wall 2016). The strategy to contain China's development is based on a BoP theoretical presupposition. On the other hand, there are still many states in the world, at least in East Asia, where most of China's neighbors complain about China's authoritarian leadership model and its rejection of multilateralism on territorial disputes.

Out of such reasons, this essay needs to answer why China chooses the path of peaceful development in the struggle for power and world order? Wang[18] (2010) believes that China's peaceful development is still essentially a smart way of hidden power and waiting for an opportunity, and that soft balance in a unipolar world are its strategic purpose of continuously releasing goodwill. However, China does not export a certain ideology or political model. Most of the provocations of small states are verbally condemned, and its policy logic of sensitivity to bilateral relations and self-restraint is still unclear. Combining the relational turn in Western IRT with the BoR and Tianxia concepts in China's native IRT, this essay argues that China's peaceful rise has its own endogenous logic that is different from that of Western IRT.

Buzan[3] (2014) argues that the view about China lacks a sustainable grand strategy can be stopped because "China has already articulated a grand strategy that is based on

the home-grown idea." That means the idea of peaceful development is the basis of China's foreign grand strategy. Among the first generation of Chinese leaders, Zhou Enlai put forward the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", and even Deng Xiaoping once said: "China is not a superpower, and will never be a superpower. In case one day, China will become aggression everywhere, A superpower that interferes, bullies, and exploits other countries, the people of the world should unite and join the Chinese people to overthrow it." Until around 2003, the concept of peaceful rise and peaceful development began to be widely concerned by the world.

In 2003, when Premier Wen Jiabao delivered a speech at Harvard University, he used the concept of "peaceful rise" to describe China's development strategy. However, the word "rise" quickly misunderstood the connotation that Chinese leaders wanted to express in Western public opinion. Since 2004, mainstream voices in China have changed it to "peaceful development". From peaceful rise to peaceful development, we can actually see different views on power between China and the West, and we can also feel China's unique understanding of the international order. In 2011, the State Council Information Office released the White Paper "China's Peaceful Development", which systematically explained the discourse system of "peaceful development" and "harmonious world", and put forward the concept of "a community with a shared future for mankind" for the first time.

After President Xi Jinping came to power, China followed the strategic logic of peaceful development and proposed to build a "community with a shared future for mankind". Xi Jinping has repeatedly explained China's plan to "build a community with a shared future for mankind" at the United Nations and other multilateral diplomatic occasions, made bold innovations in the discourse system of "peaceful rise", and proposed a series of more inclusive and original peaceful diplomatic discourses, the most representative of which is "New Great Power Relations" and "Correct View of Righteousness and Profit". The new type of major power relationship implies a sensitive bilateral relationship. Unlike the BoP, the BoR takes a longer-term perspective and pursues a stable long-term coexistence pattern. Xi's statement that "the Pacific Ocean is wide enough to accommodate China and the United States" is a vivid illustration of this idea. The correct view of righteousness and interests is the principle of self-restraint rooted in Confucian culture. Both of these points will be elaborated on in the following sections.

To conclude, China's strategic concept of peaceful development contains two connotations: 1) Peaceful development pursues the BoR between major powers, not the BoP. China pursues stable and peaceful long-term mutually beneficial relationships, not driven by more power and short-term interests. 2) Peaceful development believes that Anarchy is a system between countries, not a world system. The standard of the world system exists in "Tao", and the country will be willing to exercise self-restraint in order to maintain the operation of "Tao", in order to maintain the stability of the Tianxia system. Yan[20] (2016) argues that the implementation of the 'humane authority' (Wang Dao) is the best way for major powers to conduct diplomatic strategies.

#### 3 Meaning of Power: Balance of Relationship

From the perspective of neorealism, security is the primary factor in the international system, and power is the primary means for states to obtain security[17] (Waltz 1979). When power is threatened or challenged, state actors tend to choose a more radical approach. One example is Mearsheimer's[12] (2014) view of the Ukraine crisis as Russia's response to NATO's eastward expansion. Balancing NATO's eastward expansion is an important reason for Russia to send troops to Ukraine, which also verifies the realism's emphasis on security and power. However, the agendas that China cares about often do not fit into the power and interest considerations that mainstream IRT is accustomed to. On the contrary, in order to ensure the stability of long-term relations, China is sometimes very obsessed with the order of status and identity, and from time to time has been asking its opponents to repeat their positions through various ceremonies to guarantee them.

A similar situation with Russia does not apply to China. When faced with the blockade of the island chain and the sale of arms to Taiwan, China did not take substantial BoP behavior. In fact, if China feels that its uncompromising position has been undermined, it will usually show a tough stance for a period of time and launch bilateral boycotts and condemnations against all parties, but after a period of time, it believes that the sanctions have achieved a warning effect. , and took the initiative to restore relations with all parties, and even delegated power and interests to encourage opponents to maintain a stable relationship. Many countries have gone through and understood this process and know that China will not be tough all the time, which provides them with an incentive to wait and reassure at the right time about the agenda that China cares about. In theory, China's self-restraint and maintenance of bilateral relations are closely related to the BoR. This concept will be discussed in detail from three points below

First, to discuss the concept of BoR, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of relationship in Chinese IRT and its connection with power. Many ancient Chinese traditional books emphasize the importance of a space in between relationship (Guanxi 关 系). In Confucian worldview, the relationship between people occurs in a special field. "Guanxi" in Chinese refers to the network of connections between actors based on identity. This kind of "Guanxi" is formed in acquired exchanges, rather than the collective multilateral relations based on a priori rule in Western theories[13](SIHI 2016). In other words, the relationship in China's IRT is formed by continuous confirmation in bilateral interaction.

The Chinese IRT accepts the classic Western definition of power, "A has power over B, which means that B will do what B would not do upon being asked by [4] (Dahl 1957)." Further, the Chinese IRT cares about the affiliation between A and B. Relationships link the Western concept of power with Chinese IRT, thus evolved a key assumption of Chinese IRT that "power arises from relationships"[21]. (Qin 2009, 16-17) In other words, China's IRT believes that power is derived from relationships, the relationship constructed by state actors through interaction is the essence of power, and power is contained in relationships. In practice, this also explains why China places so much emphasis on the interaction and stability of the bilateral relationship, rather

than the advantages of power. Because for state actors, power is contained in the affirmed relationship of superiority and inferiority.

Second, after clarifying the concepts of relationship and power, this paper needs to explain the difference and connection between BoP and BoR. Neorealism regards the state's fear of survival as a motivation for gaining power[17] (Waltz 1979, 121). The BoR agrees that states use the BoP as a rationale to defend their interests. However, the theory of BoP is limited in the material behavior of foreign policy in some states. Therefore, Huang (2015) proposes that BoR can be used as a supplement to BoP to explain the behavior of countries changing foreign policy in the pursuit of long-term interests[8]. Different from fear-driven BoP, what BoR pursues is not to break the original stable relationship network, but to correct the wrong relationship through concessions and self-restraint, so that the other party can maintain a stable track. One example is the secret alliance between Singapore and Taiwan in the 1970s[13] (SIHI 2016), and another example is China's tolerance for constant US provocation over Taiwan. In both cases, concessions and self-restraint are fundamental to a country's foreign policy.

Huang(2015) argues that beyond the question of survival, the state has a relationship that transcends uncertainty, while relationship also contains power[8]. The ultimate goal of the state's self-restraint is to obtain stable relations or correct wrong relations, and it is ultimately for the long-term interests of both parties. This motivation, based on maintaining stable relations, transcends the anarchy and fear of neorealists in the international system. Specifically, BoR is a feeling of security, not physical absolute security[14] (Sihi 2019, 60). BoR believes that the path to achieving national security is not limited to acquiring more power, and countries more often adopt self-restraint methods under the premise of freedom from existential fear. BoR emphasizes a wisdom that does not sacrifice future long-term benefits for immediate benefits, and it leaves room for crisis management between countries. Therefore, for the sake of long-term relationships, it is necessary in some cases to give up obvious, direct national interests[8](Huang 2015). BoR believes that using self-restrain to remind each other to continuously confirm and evaluate each other between countries is an effective means to achieve long-term balance in the relationship.

Third, BoR implies two principles in practice: 1) Remind the other party not to destroy the existing stable relationship through self-restrain. 2) When confronted with obvious provocation, destroying existing relationships becomes an option[13](Shih 2016). While the second principle is hard to come by, in the recent Russian-Ukrainian war, we have seen how Russia has gradually abandoned self-restrain and chose to destroy the wrong relationship with NATO. When the second principle is triggered, states tend to be more inclined to take substantive action in the BoP. Russia tried to establish a solid relationship with the West after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but NATO did not give Russia an Affirmative Balance of relationship. Therefore, Putin said in his speech on sending troops to Ukraine that "Russia has been deceived by the West".

In general, BoR adds to us another theoretical connotation of power besides BoP. The BoR emphasizes self-restrain and necessary concessions to pursue long-term stable relations between countries, with the aim of serving future bilateral interests. This also explains why China has exercised necessary restraint on the issue of US arms sales to Taiwan. China's peaceful development strategy essentially contains the BoR's view of power. Specifically, China wants to establish a stable bilateral relationship with the rest of the world, rather than compete for dominance of the world order. This also responds to China's desire to replace the United States and establish a hegemonic order in East Asia[6] (Goh 2013). China's concerns often focus on the maintenance of bilateral relations. An example is China's demonstration of nuclear norms in the Six-Party Talks. Necessary to maintain, but no real action has been taken to curb North Korea's nuclear weapons development, even though China is unlikely to allow itself an additional nuclear-armed territorial state. Another example is the "new type of great-power relationship" that China repeatedly emphasized at the beginning of Trump's presidency. Its purpose is to focus on the long-term interests of the future with the United States. Through continuous ceremonial confirmations, China hopes that the United States can confirm its identity of peaceful development and not seeking hegemony. This diplomatic strategy is inherently different from the Western IRT's presupposition of the BoP.

### 4 World Order: Tianxia and Anarchy

No matter realism, liberalism or constructivism accept the theoretical assumption that the world order is under an anarchy system . In the view of Western rationalists, state actors are in competition with each other under the Westphalian system. In this Hobbesian state of nature, the state must continually acquire power in order to survive[17] (Waltz 1979). While absolute cooperation is possible for liberals, anarchy is also a prerequisite for rational choice by states[9] (Keohane 2005). For constructivists, anarchy is mutually constructed by the interaction between states, and the state of nature is not necessarily Hobbesian, and a Kantian perpetual peace may be possible[19] (Wendt 1992). The Tianxia system is different from the Hobbesian anarchy, and is similar to the viewpoint held by constructivism at the beginning. However, based on the grand strategy and experience of China's peaceful development, the Tianxia concept still has three points worth discussing.

First, the Tianxia system differs from the Westphalian system based on the Hobbesian state of anarchy, which divides the state into individuals struggling for survival[10] (Ling 2013, 553). Tianxia emphasizes the relationship between people, and the relationship determines the country's pursuit of BoR. Self-restrain and the maintenance of the existing interactive network are the driving force of the country. Shih (2019) believes that the translation of Tianxia needs to use "a system of all bound to relate" to express its connotation, which distinguishes Tianxia from Democritus' atomic individual from a philosophical level[15]. Because of the existence of relations, in the Tianxia system, actors will not become confrontational individuals alone, and more countries will choose to maintain existing relations. It is the ideal state of the Tianxia system if actors accept each other through mutually agreed role relationships, free from supervision or interference by rules. In this situation, the actors are highly self-disciplined and even benefit.

The core of the Tianxia system stems from the Confucian observance of ritual and Dao, specifically, ritual and Tao represent an intangible, permeable, and equal principle of all things that exists outside or before the interactive order. The order evolved from this original idea is defined by Shih (2019) as "an interactive mode that has been formed in practice" [15]. This determines Tianxia's reciprocity, in other words, because of Tianxia's morality, even the weak can restrict the behavior of the great powers in bilateral relations. And great powers also need to constantly confirm their relationship position in the Tianxia system by showing goodwill and responsibility.

Secondly, Tianxia is a world theory, not a theory between nations. This is different from the still state-centric constructivist theory. Constructivism is still concerned with national issues, while Tianxia is concerned with world issues. Tianxia system is not an independent, sovereign political unit with very clear boundaries, nor is it the current state-centered international system. It takes the whole world as a unit rather than an individual as a unit to form order and design a system. Zhao (2006) believes that the present world is a "non-world", which does not deny the existence of the present world geographically, but emphasizes that the present world is in chaos[22]. Chaos means the disorder of the world. The existing institutional arrangements are all based on individual sovereign states and basic units. What can only be formed is a fragmented world, which is also a non-world. Global problem It cannot be solved in a non-world, the solution can only be to establish an overall, non-exclusivity order system or institutional system. Anarchy, on the other hand, focuses on sovereign states, ignoring the demands of nations, cultures, individuals and international multilateral organizations. The Tianxia system as a whole is an alternative to Anarchy, which focuses on fragmented individuals.

Thirdly, Tianxia is different from hierarchy or hegemony. On the one hand, East Asia has experienced a long tribute system in ancient times, so that some scholars understand Tianxia as another expression of hierarchical order, and explain China as the "Middle Kingdom", which is also the highest order. But in fact, Tianxia is completely different from the hierarchy. Zhao (2006) believes that the Tianxia system is an anti-imperial political system, a political system that is open to all people in the world as equals[22]. Tianxia is not only "non-exclusivity" but also "for Everyone". In practice, the Tianxia system confirms the relationship through superiority and inferiority. Its essence lies in maintaining a stable relationship through continuous bilateral interaction to seek "for Everyone". This is why China's grand strategy of peaceful development constantly emphasizes "a community with a shared future for mankind". At the same time, in the process of bilateral exchanges, China confirms the relationship between the two sides by constantly ceding profits.

On the other hand, the Tianxia system is more fundamentally different from the hegemonic order. The so-called hegemony in general international relations literature basically refers to total control, especially through the control of the right to speak, allowing everyone to automatically rationalize the existence of the existing order. For example, Goh[6] (2013) emphasized that the hegemony constructed by the United States in East Asia is a hierarchical order in which both China and Japan are involved. Logically, this hegemonic discourse helps to identify aliens and make them objects of transformation. Since "the world" is an order that covers everything in itself, it naturally

gives the outside world the impression that it must be another set of hegemonic control rhetoric. However, what Tianxia conveys in the Confucian tradition is only to maintain the harmony of the whole. In practice, it is through the interaction of each relationship to evolve a bilateral role suitable for both parties, so as to transcend the original social and cultural relationship between them. different forms. Bilateral actors interact for Tianxia's harmony and have no internal reference, which is also reflected in China's "principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs".

If Tianxia must convey a figurative order, then this order is based on the "Family-ship" order, because the family is a place full of love and care for everyone's feelings, and it is also the only constant principle[22] (Zhao 2006: 32-33). Furthermore, Tianxia differs from Anarchy's theoretical presupposition that there is no supreme being, the supreme in the Tianxia system must be filled by the most powerful nation, this role is described as "Mandate of Heaven (Tianmin)" whose mission is to Take care of everyone in the system and take on the responsibility of maintaining the stability of the Tianxia system. Therefore, the Tianxia system is not like Anarchy, because in the Hobbesian state of nature, each state actor wants to promote its own system as universal to obtain maximum security. The idea of Tianxia is a priori existing in ancient Chinese IRT, and at the same time it is constantly confirmed through interaction and practice. At the beginning of the end of the Cold War in the last century, the United States had the opportunity to undertake the test of "Mandate of Heaven", but its obsession with power and the abuse of force made it disqualified from "Mandate of Heaven".

#### 5 Conclusion

All in all, this essay uses China's grand strategy of peaceful development as an analysis case. The purpose is to explore how Chinese IRTs based on the endogenous logic of Chinese diplomacy could complement Western IRTs. The BoR and Tianxia systems provided by Chinese IRTs enrich the connotation of existing international relations theories. A non-Western perspective from the Chinese experience rethinks the world order and enriches the meaning of power. The BoR theory offered by Shih and the BoP theory developed by Western complement each other, make up the gap in the theoretical explanation of the country's self-restraining for long-term interests. Inspired by Chinese experience, we can know that the state does not always seek more power, and the stability of the relationship is also embedded in the state's foreign policy. The Tianxia system provides us with a vision of a great harmony world based on 'Family-ship', offering an alternative beyond Anarchy and hegemonic hierarchies.

At present, China's peaceful development and Chinese IRTs still have a long way to go. China's concept of peaceful development is still subject to many challenges. The impact of the Westphalian system makes it difficult for China to maintain the necessary self- restraint in some cases. Therefore, most of the time, China can only adopt a dual strategy, that is, on the one hand, it perfunctoryly abides by the rules of multilateralism based on hierarchical hegemony, while in fact, it shapes its own agenda in bilateral relations. Further, many political leaders who believe in 'power brings security' are also challenging China's Quest for Peaceful Development. But as Acharya[1] (2019, 428) argues, non-Western IRTs offer a non-western perspective and the possibility beyond Western theories. With the peaceful development of China, the concept of peaceful development may gain more understanding and recognition in the world. At the same time, with the efforts of scholars from diverse backgrounds and the development of non-Western IRTs, it can also make the IR discipline truly grow into a theory of the world rather than based on a narrow Western perspective. As the Tianxia system expects, it will create a world theoretical system about "For Everyone".

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