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Introduction by Victoria Tin-bor Hui, University of Notre Dame

History in Search of Theory

It is a pleasure to read Feng Zhang's *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History*. This book is an exemplar in its serious treatment of Chinese history, its holistic approach to East Asian history covering Inner Asia as well as Korea and Japan, its simultaneous analysis of the foreign policy strategies of both imperial China and its neighbors, and its meticulous examination of fluctuating normative and instrumental strategies in particular periods and in particular relations. It will no doubt become required reading in the International Relations literature.

Chinese Hegemony aims to study, first, the grand strategies of imperial China and its neighbors in their relational interactions in early Ming times (1368-1424), and, second, the institutional practices of regional politics (3). Zhang's project may be characterized as one of history in search of theory. The excellent case studies of Sino-Korean relations (chapter 3), Sino-Japanese relations (chapter 4), and Sino-Mongol relations (chapter 5) are based on his dissertation research. The book adds a new relational theory of grand strategy. Judging from the reviews, Zhang may have searched too hard for a new theoretical and methodological framework. This book is unusual in devoting as much space to theorizing as to empirical analysis. The case chapters, which are themselves intensely theory-driven, are sandwiched between the "introduction" (chapter one) and "a relational theory of grand strategy" (chapter two) on the front end, and the "fundamental institutions of Chinese hegemony" (chapter six) and a plea for "ethical relationalism as a critical IR theory" (chapter seven) on the back end. Zhang has been very proactive in seeking comments and advice from a wide range of scholars interested in historical IR. His most interested readers have known the case studies for some time and tend to begin reading the book with preconceptions. His efforts at striking a balance between his English School training and American positivism and between Confucianism and realism may leave scholars on both sides somewhat dissatisfied. This book is thus particularly vulnerable to comments, as noted by Yongin Zhang, that "reproach [the] author for not having written a different kind of book altogether."

Ian Chong, James Holmes, and Y. Zhang provide very helpful summaries of Zhang's argument and there is no need to repeat their efforts. This introduction hopes to weave together and elaborate on key criticisms raised in their reviews.¹ To begin, Y. Zhang argues that "the principal purpose" of the "constructed historical narratives of Sino-Korean, Sino-Japanese, and Sino-Mongol relations" is "not so much to explain historical Chinese hegemony per se as to demonstrate the explanatory power of Zhang's newly constructed relational theory of grand strategy." This is a criticism that Zhang violates his own principle of not "subordinating history to theory" (45). Nonetheless, for a book that seeks to break into the mainstream IR literature, this could be taken as a compliment rather than a criticism. However, Y. Zhang's statement also highlights the fundamental dilemma of the book: the relational theory and method may be seen as too positivist for interpretivists and too unfalsifiable for positivists.

Zhang aims at a normative theory, but Y. Zhang reckons that "this project, unwittingly or otherwise, [has] put its critical edge and normative bent back into the positivist prison." He especially faults Zhang for "taking

¹ I thank Ian Chong for comments on an earlier draft of this introduction.

cues” from Kenneth Waltz in “constructing a relational theory of grand strategy as an explanatory theory” and in “reducing Confucian relationalism to instrumental rationality and expressive rationality.”

I agree that the book wavers between positivism and interpretivism in assessing instrumental rationality and expressive rationality. The former involves “consequentialist means-end calculation” and “self-interest maximization” while the latter embodies “Confucian relational affection and obligation” (7, 9). Zhang faces the familiar problem that coercive policies can be compatible with both instrumental rationality and expressive rationality (41). Positivists have an obvious solution – they treat interest calculation and normative concerns as alternative explanations and then rule out the causal role of one or the other. In contrast, Zhang is a relationalist with a preference for “the inclusive ‘both-and’ rather than the exclusive ‘either-or’ solution” (28). He sees instrumental rationality and expressive rationality as mutually compatible and the difference is only a matter of degree (33, 38, 169). Yet, Zhang also slips into the positivist mode of trying to differentiate the two types of rationality and weigh them as alternative explanations (41-42).

Zhang’s “empirical adjudication” (42) is so positivist, Y. Zhang observes, that he even “quantif[ies] the duration (in terms of the number of years) of instrumental and expressive strategies adopted respectively by China and the three neighbours collectively in the early Ming period.” He concludes that expressive strategies accounted for 75 years or 21 percent of the overall duration, compared with 79 percent for instrumental strategies (177). For Zhang, this means that expressive rationality should be taken seriously by IR scholars. However, positivists could readily respond that the 79:21 ratio proves that instrumental rationality is the proper focus of analysis for the sake of parsimony while expressive rationality can be safely bracketed as a “residual variable” (178).

Positivists are also unlikely to be converted to the method of historical narratives (15). It does not help that “behavioral evidence” and “motivational analysis” can point in opposite directions (108). How does Zhang tally scores for expressive rationality? In Sino-Korean relations, the explicit reference to the term “sadae” or “serving the great” in internal deliberations counts toward expressive rationality (79). However, the case study also offers a tale of Choson confrontation with the Ming over territory and sphere of influence as well as resistance to the Ming’s requisitions for horses, eunuchs, and virgins. King T’aejong is reported to have complained that he had to “endure” the Ming and restrain his “anger” (77). He urged his officials to both “serve [the Ming emperor] with utmost integrity” and “strengthen... fortifications and store ... supplies” in the same sentence (76). In Sino-Japanese relations, a “relationship of mutual benefit” gives another score to expressive rationality (104). Yet, liberal IR scholars who follow instrumental rationality have long argued that shared interest is the foundation for international cooperation.

Zhang offers a surprising finding that expressive rationality was more prominent in Sino-Mongol relations than in Sino-Korean and Sino-Japanese relations (119). This challenges other scholars who divide historical East Asia into two distinctive Confucianized and nomadic societies. Zhang contends that Emperor Yongle in several short periods “mainly” adopted expressive strategies “by trying to create a hierarchical tributary relationship of Confucian propriety with the Mongols” (139). Nonetheless, if “[o]btaining Mongol submission was simply the cheapest way to ensure the security and legitimacy of Ming rule” under Emperor Hongwu (128), it is not obvious why this would stop being the case under his son Yongle.

Zhang credits this period to expressive rationality also because instrumental rationality should have counseled a divide-and-rule strategy against the Oirats and the Eastern Mongols (140). Intriguingly, it was the Mongols who “manipulated” Ming power as a “self-strengthening strategy” in their own struggle for steppe hegemony

by alternately breaking off and restoring relations with the Ming (140, 146-148). Repeatedly, “no sooner had conflict ended than the Mongols came to the Ming court to present tribute” (149). Yongle’s response to such “deceitful” tributary missions was to handsomely reward them. Does this account of “Mongols’ use and abuse of Ming power” (148) prove that Yongle was acting on expressive rationality based on “mutual benefit” (141)? Both Holmes and Y. Zhang warn about the limits of any kind of rationality, expressive or instrumental. The Ming emperor is not unlike other world leaders whose decision-making was clouded by “honor and fear” (Holmes), or “hubris, miscalculation, stupidity, folly and mischief” (Y. Zhang).

Yongle’s “strategic folly” (141) also takes us to Chong’s contention with Zhang’s claim that “China’s foreign relations were always bilateral and never multilateral” (15). Zhang is right that foreign relations were bilateral. The problem is that he aims to study grand strategy, which should be multilateral, as Chong suggests. Zhang argues that the proper approach to studying grand strategy is not to presume that political leaders have “any overarching grand strategic plan” but to identify the emergence of strategies in “contingent and piecemeal steps” through relational interactions (16). Yet, when Yongle alternated between expressive hierarchy and instrumental hierarchy (141-142, 152), was he developing a grand strategy or was he improvising in the face of Mongols’ alternating tactics?

Zhang further maintains that “complaints and disagreements are normal... in the case of conflict of interest” (80). He hypothesizes that conflict of interest is correlated with instrumental rationality while amity is correlated with expressive rationality (18, 37, 39). The question then is how conflict of interest endogenously emerged through interaction dynamics. Y. Zhang observes that the Ming’s presumption of hierarchy presented an “insurmountable conceptual barrier” to the cultivation of “intersubjective” “ethical relationalism.” Indeed, neighbors’ refusal to “serve the great” (65, 160) was repeatedly the cause for conflict because insubordination was seen by the Ming emperor as a violation of propriety (41, 160), even a crime (110, 132, 134, 139), that deserved “punishment.” In Sino-Korean relations, Choson formally launched the “sadae” policy “upon hearing the Yongle emperor’s invasion of Vietnam,” drawing the lesson that “[i]f our country has a little lack of the propriety of serving the great, [he] will send a punitive expedition against us” (76). If Korean leaders could not afford offending the Ming emperor, Japanese leaders could. In Sino-Japanese relations, “national pride” motivated such defiant statements as “the world is the world’s world; it does not belong to a single person” (94). The Ming emperor was “outraged” (94) but was deterred by the memory of the Yuan dynasty’s failed invasion of Japan a century earlier (95).²

If both Korea and Japan avoided “punitive expeditions,” the Mongols were the key targets. Yongle personally commanded five campaigns against the Mongols when they “resist[ed] and compete[d] with the Central Kingdom” and “violated” his orders, trust, and propriety (134-137, 141). Zhang argues that “none of the Yongle emperor’s campaigns into Mongolia could be justified purely on the grounds of Confucian punishment.” Nevertheless, he insists that such wars could still have “a positive role” in “maintaining the international society of Chinese hegemony” (165-166). This argument could be strengthened by an in-depth discussion of Yongle’s “punitive expedition” against Vietnam (Holmes). Sino-Vietnamese relations are critical

² Ji-Young Lee’s forthcoming book *China’s Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination* (Columbia University Press, 2016) examines Chinese-Korean-Japanese relations in Ming and Qing times from the perspective of domestic political needs.

to Zhang's effort at differentiating expressive rationality from instrumental rationality (41) and should not be dismissed out of hand as being "unlikely to offer methodological benefits" (15).

In terms of "methodological benefits," the cases of Sino-Korean, Sino-Japanese and Sino-Mongol relations were selected because they "offer variations on both the independent and the dependent variables" (15, 174). It is noteworthy that a relational approach that studies "patterned relationships" rather than "actor attributes" (5) would employ terms that make sense only to positivists (e.g., in how they study dyads of interstate relations). Zhang also objects to the positivist presumption of preconstituted identities and interests prior to strategic interactions (16, 21, 25, 175, 177). Yet, East Asian polities were not born in the early Ming. In Zhang's empirical studies, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Mongol leaders all had preconceptions of each other based on historical precedents (48-49, 86-88, 120-121).

All three reviewers also point out that the conception of "Chinese hegemony" is less "Chinese" than it appears. First, China was not always "the undisputed regional hegemon" as it was in the early Ming (2) and so it remains to be seen, Y. Zhang suggests, if the "key findings and theoretical claims... can be equally applied to other periods." Second, hegemony is a familiar world phenomenon not limited to Chinese history. Chong cautions against exceptionalist views and observes that "the fundamental questions of order, leadership, compliance, and system management for preeminent states seem to translate across time and space." If Zhang desires to appeal to positivists, a detour to comparative hegemonies in chapter six would have been more useful than the current abstract analysis of whether early Ming hegemony was an international society or an international institution (157).

Zhang's ultimate aim was not to make "a justification for hierarchy, but a plea for humaneness" (183). He advocates "a judicious blend of exceptionalism and liberalism to guide future Chinese strategy for a peaceful and cooperative regional order that can absorb the impact of China's rise" (188). Y. Zhang observes that this discussion of contemporary Chinese strategy is paradoxically "purged of the expressive hierarchy that is said to be characteristic of Confucian relationalism in the earlier discussions." This omission would matter less to positivists. Holmes wonders if "the Chinese Communist Party—a party that once sought to destroy China's Confucian bequest— [can] simply resume the methods used by Ming China." This concern also does not matter because both coercive and normative methods could be consistent with Confucianism. Chong issues a helpful reminder that Confucianism – not to mention China's history – "necessarily included contradictions and significant variation."

In all, Zhang's *China Hegemony* should be applauded for putting Chinese history at the center of IR theorizing. This introduction most likely commits what Y. Zhang calls "the most egregious sin of reviewers" – regretting that the author did not develop the kind of theory that I was hoping for. I should leave it to general readers, who do not have "preconstituted" ideas from prior interactions, to judge if Zhang's meticulous history found the right theory.

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Review by Ja Ian Chong, National University of Singapore

There are the occasional books that provoke thinking on long-held views. Feng Zhang's *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asia History* could be one of them. Most notable to this reader is the volume's ability to bring the many limitations of various contemporary international relations theories into sharper relief. *Chinese Hegemony* introduces new evidence from a series of under-explored cases from late fourteenth and early fifteenth-century East and Inner Asia. Zhang's rigorous effort to develop and evaluate what he terms a "relational theory of grand strategy" against this backdrop highlights a number of temporal constraints as well as conceptual struggles with hegemony and empire that many existing international relations theories face. The empirical richness and conceptual insights Zhang brings to the table also challenge some of the exceptionalist views about East Asian and Chinese regional politics that have recently gained some popularity in academic circles.

Conceptualizing Politics of East and Inner Asia

At the heart of Zhang's project, which is a crystallization of several years of intense, text-based dissertation research, is a desire to better understand and conceptualize regional political order under the primacy of a China-based empire. To do so, this volume examines the relations between early Ming (明) China (CE1368–1644) and three of its immediate neighbors: Korea under the Koryo (고려 高麗) and Choson (대조선국 大朝鮮國) kingdoms, the Mongols under the Chinggisids and Oirats, and the Northern and Southern Courts of Japan during the Nanboku-cho (南北朝) period. Zhang's meticulous survey of historical documents from China, Korea, and Japan, in addition to secondary literature put his study on par with the best recent efforts to put cutting-edge social science theory in conversation with under-studied historical cases from Asia.¹ *Chinese Hegemony* finds that the interactions between a pre-eminent Ming empire and its neighbors create both expressive concerns about normative positioning in relations and instrumental considerations that center on self-interest.

Zhang contends that the grand strategies the Ming and its weaker neighbors adopt reflect a simultaneous awareness of normatively informed, relative social positions and consequentialist calculations of practical loss and gain. Grand strategies under hegemony in the East and Inner Asian context results from the interplay between the intensity in conflicts of interest and the degree to which interactions reciprocate expressions of relative social standing. (36-9) Consequently, greater conflicts of interest encouraged the Ming regime to seek centralization of control over scarce resources or use hierarchical norms and institutions instrumentally to further its interests. (32-4) it tended to pursue a strategy of expressive hierarchy, which emphasizes mutual obligation and affection based on its primacy when conflicts of interest were less stark and when a neighbor reciprocated recognition of Ming preeminence. (34-6)

¹ See, for instance, V.T.-b Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Y.K. Wang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); B. Buzan, and Y. Zhang, *Contesting International Society in East Asia* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); D. Zhao, *The Confucian-Legalist State: A New Theory of Chinese History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

In response to the Ming's strategic approaches, its weaker neighbors developed their own sets of relational grand strategies. (39-40) At moments where conflicts of interest were more acute and reducing ties with the Ming was preferable, less powerful actors may have sought to exit the system of hierarchical relations with the Ming. When there was high conflict of interest with Ming China and contemporaneous Confucian norms exerted some constraint on the behavior of weaker actors who also desired resources from China, the Ming's weaker neighbors engaged in deference. If interest conflict was high as was demand for resources, but the Confucian-inspired norms of the time did not significantly limit behavior, weaker actors pursued access. These same actors took an identification strategy when conflict of interest was low and the Ming reciprocated subordination with expressive hierarchy. Zhang sees such regularized patterns of Confucian-influenced interaction under Ming primacy as forming the institutions of an East and Inner Asian international society that is akin to the normative order that shaped the European international society examined by English School scholars. (153-73)

A New Perspective on Hegemony

Chinese Hegemony and its focus on the politics of hegemony and empire is a useful reminder that such conditions are historically far more common than much of the academic work on international relations would care to admit. The contemporary study of international-relations theory has its intellectual origins in Interwar Europe.² Central considerations at the time were how and why ties among juridically equal, materially comparable, socially similar, and culturally proximate European nation-states—hence the term ‘international relations’—collapsed into World War I. A key intellectual task was to explore ways to avoid a repeat of the Great War. The experiences of major power contestation and conflict during World War II and the Cold War prompted further focus on these themes. Questions of empire, colonization, and de-colonization largely featured as afterthoughts in the mainstream study of international relations. This is a legacy that the field continues to grapple with and is only starting to move beyond.

Works like Zhang's *Chinese Hegemony* are helpful in expanding the intellectual horizons of international relations theory, building on insights developed by English School scholars.³ Specifically, they remind readers that there is a tangible, empirical world outside of the myth of functionally equivalent, formally autonomous polities where politics also happens. Developing theories about this wider reality can help advance both theoretical understandings and foreign policy practice. Beyond Ming paramountcy, there are historically other moments of hegemony—as well as contestation on more equal footing—in East and Inner Asia, including in the geographical area that is today's China. There are, of course, too the histories of modern overseas colonialism in addition to older imperial projects ranging from the Romans through the Ottoman empires.

Modern sovereign polities—nation-states—only represent limited temporal and geographical slices of human experience with large-scale political institutions. Zhang's examination of the grand strategies of the Ming and

² A common frame of reference for the intellectual origins of contemporary—and decidedly modern—international relations is the work of E.H. Carr during the Interwar Period. See E.H. Carr and M. Cox, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (Houndsmill; New York: Palgrave, 2001).

³ See H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 3rd. ed. (Houndsmill, Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave, 2002); B. Buzan and Y. Zhang, *Contesting International Society in East Asia* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

its neighbors juxtaposes the institutions of East and Inner Asian regional order against instrumentally rational explanations for statecraft familiar to contemporary international relations. This contrast recalls the possibilities for change in the ordering principles of world politics that Robert Gilpin termed “interaction change” and “systems change.”⁴ Comfort with statist assumptions in the study of international relations creates a tendency to overlook such potential developments. This despite the fact that the effects of fragile and failing states, along with possible modifications to the post-World War II order associated with a more prominent China, may serve to alter the nature of world politics. *Chinese Hegemony* and other works like it prompts readers to guard against such intellectual complacency.

Another contribution of *Chinese Hegemony* is to bring more analytical rigor and empirical grounding to the study of politics in historical East and Inner Asia. Several efforts over the years have tried to marry historical Asian cases, particularly those relating to China, with efforts to develop new theoretical insight. Recent attempts include discussions about creating a ‘Chinese School’ of international relations and ‘humane authority,’ which stress a form Chinese exceptionalism rooted in ancient Chinese philosophy, notably readings of the broad Confucian intellectual tradition.⁵ Such work tends to prescribe normative positions over rigorous testing of evidence. In contrast, this volume seeks to build a theory of world politics by taking the normative commitments of real actors in fourteenth and fifteenth century Asia on their own terms and evaluating them competitively against available historical evidence.

A result of Zhang’s efforts is an underlining of the parallels between politics in late fourteenth and early fifteenth East and Inner Asia and elsewhere. The story of emphasizing status for domestic and external acceptance, whether by a newly dominant polity on the world stage or weaker actors trying to carve out a space for survival, is a familiar one. This was the case with the Holy Roman Empire and its many European neighbors as it was with American dominance in Western Europe and the Asia-Pacific after World War II.⁶ The institutional vocabulary that these hierarchies took may vary from capitalism and democracy to Christianity, but tensions among primacy, legitimation, authority, autonomy, opportunity, stability, and exit seem to remain. The main preoccupations of Ming hegemony look much like those facing preeminent polities elsewhere in time and space, even if the solutions the Ming Empire and its neighbors undertook reflected the particularities of their social, political, and economic conditions.

⁴ R. Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 39-44.

⁵ See Y. Qin [秦亞青], “Guanxi benwei yu guocheng jiangou: Jiang Zhongguo linian zhiru guoji guanxi lilun” [關西本位與過程建構：將中國力念植入國際關係理論 Relationality and Processual Construction: Brining Chinese Ideas into International Relations Theory], *Zhongguo shehui kexue* [中國社會科學 *Social Sciences in China*] no. 3 (2009): 69-86, X. Ren [任曉], “Traditional Chinese Theory and Practice of Foreign Relations: A Reassessment,” in Y. Zheng [ed.], *China and International Relations: The Chinese View and the Contribution of Wang Gungwu* (London: Routledge, 2011); X. Yan, D. Bell, Z. Sun and E. Ryden. *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁶ A. Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992); G.J. Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Odds and Ends

Like all works there remain a few loose ends in *Chinese Hegemony* that are useful to tie up, even though it is understandable that limits exist for any study. Of particular interest is Zhang's strong claim that, "China's foreign relations were *always bilateral and never multilateral*." (15, emphasis mine) Yet, the empirical cases the volume explores all deal with multilateral ties, even if the expressions of hierarchy were largely in bilateral terms. Changing anxieties about Jurchens and the Mongols under Nughachu shaped relations between the Ming court and the Koryo as well as Choson kingdoms in the Korea case; ties, intrigues, and competition between the Northern and Southern courts colored Ming exchanges with fourteenth and fifteenth century Japan. Contestation and shifting allegiances within and among the Chinggisid Northern Yuan (北元), Oirat, and Nughachu polities similarly molded interactions between the Ming and the Mongolian world.

Moreover, Zhang's examination of the use of *tianxia* (天下), or all-under-heaven, by the Ming strongly suggests that the court recognized the plurality of polities it faced around its borders and the need to simultaneously deal with the webs of relations among them. For instance, emphasis on "no outer separation" (無外), "all-under-heaven as one family" (天下一家), "no separation between Chinese and (the common plural term for) non-Chinese" (華夷無間) that Zhang cites as common to Ming writing on foreign policy indicate acknowledgement of the diverse world the dynasty inhabited.⁷ (158-9) Zhang's translations of Ming perspectives on relations between the imperial court and neighboring polities from classical Chinese to English as well use the term "peoples." (159)

Concurrent Ming interest in its multiple neighbors likewise remains clear when the court referred to distinctions between the emperor and subordinate (rulers or officials) (君臣上下之分), the desire for peace by ensuring that different peoples were in their proper place (惟欲又安咸得其所), or sharing the fortunes of peace with all peoples (共享太平之福). (159) Further clarifying the relationship between the articulation of formal relations in largely bilateral terms and the reality of multilateral relationships in Ming foreign policy can help readers acquire a more sensitively toward the regional politics and order at the time.

One other area where I would welcome greater attention to detail is an explanation and a conceptualization of the micro-foundations that led polities in East and Inner Asia to focus more on either instrumental rationality or relational and expressive rationality. I agree with Zhang that the two types of logic are not mutually exclusive and are concurrently present in the Ming's relations with its various neighbors, albeit to varying degrees at different points. (26-8, 80-4, 114-8, 149-52, 176-91) This is unsurprising. After all, the 'substantialist' reasoning in 'Western' social theory that sees entities as having discrete and distinct pre-relational qualities Zhang refers to also has strong roots in the *gewu zhizhi* (格物致知) tradition of neo-Confucianism that arose in the eleventh century.⁸ (22-5) *Gewu* remained part of mainstream neo-Confucian

⁷ *Yi* (夷) was originally a pre-Qin dynasty (秦, 221–201BCE) term non-Sinicized people to the east, but later became a loose plural term for non-Chinese peoples. See M. Chien [錢穆], *Guoshi dagang* [國史大綱 *General History of China*] (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1995), Chs. 1-4.

⁸ R.T. Ames, "Meaning as Imaging: Prolegomena to a Confucian Epistemology." in E. Deutsch [ed.], *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophic Perspectives* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1991), 227-244; D.L. Hall and R. T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany: State University of

thought through the fifteenth century and such ‘substantialist’ logic would later inform the *kaozheng* studies (考證學) that later became prominent during the Qing (清, CE1644–1911).⁹ Since ‘substantialist’ views were also important to the Chinese intellectual tradition and were a feature of Ming foreign policy, readers would gain from seeing when such approaches were more or less important relative to “relational” considerations.

Finally, I would like to caution readers against over-extrapolating the conclusions *Chinese Hegemony* makes about Ming-era statecraft in East and Inner Asia as they pertain to China. Zhang is careful to note that Confucianism “represents not a monolithic thought but rather a cluster of problems and themes that have evolved over time.” (10) It included a wide range of debates among thinkers whose primary interests range from the metaphysics and ethics of Cheng Hao (程顥), Cheng Yi (程頤), and Zhu Xi (朱熹) to the practical administrative reforms of Wang Anshi (王安石), and the imposition of order of Xun Yu (荀彧).¹⁰ Those in the Confucian tradition often competed with and drew from insights from other elements in the Chinese intellectual tradition, including but not limited to Daoism, Legalism, Buddhism, as well as the schools of diplomacy and military strategy (縱橫家、兵法家), as they sought to have influence at court and beyond.¹¹

As an evolving tradition, Confucianism necessarily included contradictions and significant variation over time, mainstream approaches to statecraft and even hegemony in East and Inner Asia during the Ming may diverge substantially from other periods. Ming grand strategy and normative concerns may be no more similar to those of today’s People’s Republic of China than, say, the Holy Roman Empire’s foreign policy is to that of contemporary Austria or the Ottoman Empire’s to present-day Turkey. Historical statecraft in China featured the politics of equality among polities and even subordination to more powerful non-Chinese regimes as

New York Press, 1998), K.-l. Shun, “Gewu (Ke-wu) and Zhizhi (Chih-chih): Investigation of Things and Extension of Knowledge,” in A.S. Cua [ed.], *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2013), 267-269.

⁹ W.J. Peterson, “Confucian Learning in Late Ming Thought,” in D. C. Twitchett and F. W. Mote [eds.], *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 8: The Ming Dynasty, Part 2: 1388-1644* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998); X.T. Ding [丁旭輝], “Qingdai kaojv xue xingqi de yuanyin yu beijing yanjiu de shidai yiyi” [清代考據學興起的原因與背景研究的時代意義 The background research and historical meaning behind the rise of Qing-era Kaojv studies], *Guoli zhongyang tushuguan Taiwan fenguan guankan* [國立中央圖書館台灣分館館刊 *Journal of the Taiwan Branch of the National Central Library*] 10:3 (2004): 109-120; P.K. Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2008).

¹⁰ See G. Xiao [蕭公權], *Zhongguo zhengzhi sixiang shi* [中國政治思想史 *The History of Chinese Political Thought*] (Taipei: Zhongguo wenhua daxue chubanbu, 1980), W.T. De Bary, I. Bloom, W.-t. Chan, and R. J. Lufrano [eds.] *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd ed. (New York, Columbia University Press, 1999), Chs. 17-18; P.R. Goldin, P. R. and T. Hsèun, *Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi* (Chicago, Ill.: Open Court, 1999)

¹¹ De Bary et al, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*; Y. Yu [余英時], *Zhu Xi de lishi shijie: Song dai shidafu zhengzhi wenhua de yanjiu* [朱熹的歷史世界：宋代士大夫政治文化的研究 *Zhu Xi's Historical World: A Study on the Political Culture of Song-era Literati*] (Taipei Shi: Yunchen wenhua shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 2003), Y. Yu [余英時], *Song Ming lixue yu zhengzhi wenhua* [宋明理學與政治文化 *Song Ming Lixue and Political Culture*] (Taipei Shi: Yunchen wenhua shiye gufen youxiangongsi, 2004); B.A. Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2013).

much as primacy of China-based imperial courts, depending on shifting social and material circumstances.¹² Consequently, the degree that Confucianism or any other intellectual tradition still influences the thinking and practice of foreign policy, statecraft, and grand strategy in various parts of East and Inner Asia today requires further exploration.

Reflections on China and the Politics of Hegemony

Chinese Hegemony's incorporation of Chinese intellectual traditions and approaches to statecraft with highly sophisticated social science and empirical meticulousness is a valuable and timely addition to the study of international relations and world politics, not least because theory development and testing in the field over represents perspectives derived from European and North American cases and experiences. Zhang's careful depiction of the Ming dynasty's use of threats, negative sanctions, and even force destabilizes misplaced notions that see Chinese statecraft as inherently pacific and based on some mixture of moral suasion and cultural attractiveness. The volume also indicates that for all the differences in approaches to statecraft, the fundamental questions of order, leadership, compliance, and system management for preeminent states seem to translate across time and space. Other scholars may find fertile ground comparing hegemonies and empires, perhaps starting with evidence from East and Inner Asian cases.

Moreover, the theoretical and empirical richness of Zhang's work suggests significant payoffs from examining other moments of Chinese history through social scientific perspectives. The conceptual vocabulary that political science offers in terms of studying institutions, power, and strategy may prove especially useful. This remains the case whether one is trying to study moments of primacy such as the Ming or Qing, or periods of relative parity among East and Inner Asian polities, say during the Song (宋, CE960-1279) or the almost four centuries between the fall of the Han empire (漢, 201BCE—CE220) dynasty and the rise of the Sui (隋, CE581–618).

Comparisons of Ming and Qing hegemony may be especially interesting given the wealth of historical material and their relative temporal proximity to the contemporary period. Scholars of the Qing have been remarkably productive in bringing new evidence from sources in a variety of Asian languages to rethink the dimensions of empire in Eurasia, even if some power brokers in today's Beijing seem somewhat uneasy with this New Qing History.¹³ Actively engaging historians and historical evidence, as Zhang has done, may be one of the more exciting paths to advancing the big questions of theory-building in the study of the world and

¹² See M. Rossabi, *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); N. Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asia History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe*; Wang, *Harmony and War*.

¹³ J. Waley-Cohen, "The New Qing History," *Radical History Review* 88:1 (2004): 193-206; P.C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Z. Li [李治亭], 'Xuezhe ping "Xin Qingshi": "Xin diguozhuyi" shixue biaoben' [學者評「新清史」:「新帝國主義」史學標本 Scholars Assess "New Qing History": An Instance of "Neo-Imperialism"], *Zhongguo shehui kexue xuebao* [中國社會科學學報 *Journal of Chinese Social Sciences*] No. 728 (2015); Y. Yang [楊益茂], "Xin Qingshi" beihou de xuefeng wenti? [「新清史」背後的學風問題 The Question of Academic Atmosphere behind the "New Qing History"], *Zhongguo shehui kexue* [中國社會科學 *Social Sciences in China*] No. 761 (2015).

Asian politics. With sufficient nuance and care, insights from such efforts may even help inform contemporary understandings of Asia, notably in the wake of China's rise.

Review by James Holmes, Naval War College

I employ a simple standard for reviewing a book: did it expand my insight into my profession—namely the profession of arms at sea—or into life at large? Feng Zhang's *Chinese Hegemony* succeeds by that standard. It merits a strong endorsement.

Zhang, a fellow at the Australian National University's College of Asia and the Pacific, accomplishes several worthwhile things in this book. First, plaudits to him for using the H-word! Officialdom in China rejects the term *hegemony* as a moniker for its grand strategy. It's an epithet Beijing affixes to powerful outsiders such as the United States. Washington, after all, retains its dominant position in the Western Pacific and China seas, and can be cast as the inheritor of Western imperialism. Combating hegemony remains a central theme in Chinese statecraft. It would muddle Beijing's message to confess that it too is a hegemon.

And yet Confucius implores us to call things by their proper names. If a hegemon is a power that commands the diplomatic, ideological, military, and economic wherewithal to get its way in most things most of the time, the label fits a burgeoning China. That does not mean China is a hegemon like post-Cold War America, or Great Britain during the age of sail, or any other bygone power. Under communist rule, indeed, its grand strategy may not even resemble that of dynastic China. That's an enigma worth probing. Past hegemons harnessed national might for vastly different purposes, and so will China. Still, Zhang's getting the terminology right furnishes his readers with the proper frame of reference for evaluating Chinese strategy.

Second, Zhang takes aim at Western international-relations (IR) theory—rational choice in particular—in the course of explaining why and how Chinese grand strategy departs from Western expectations. IR theorists, he says, appraise nation-states' actions largely in quantitative terms. Scholars search out quantifiable interests in an effort to explain how states think and what they do. In imperial China, by contrast—Zhang uses the early Ming Dynasty to review how China related to its neighbors—officials thought as much about cultivating relationships with Asian neighbors as about pursuing national gain.

Realpolitik governed by cost/benefit calculations played its part in Chinese statecraft, to be sure. At the same time, though, what Zhang calls "expressive rationality" (which is explored in depth in Chapter 2, 20-46) molded China's relations with and strategy toward lesser neighbors—as well as these neighbors' strategies toward Ming China. For Ming rulers each bilateral relationship held value in itself. It was not simply a means to some realpolitik end. This humane approach to international relations stirred mutual affection between the parties while imposing mutual obligations on them. The less its affections and obligations conflicted with realpolitik goals, the more expressive the bent of China's grand strategy.

Expressive rationality tempered Ming China's conduct. Small wonder Sino-Korean ties, for instance, were amiable during the early Ming. Friendly relations advanced "instrumental" interests for both partners, while amity and worldviews held in common supplied the lubricant for cooperative ventures (covered in Chapter 3, 47-84). The more disparate the parties' worldviews and interests—China and Japan were frequently at odds—the stormier the relationship (Chapter 4, 85-118). Zhang's excursion into such topics is valuable not just for its intrinsic interest but because it will help readers guard against 'mirror imaging,' the habit of assuming foreign peoples think precisely the way one's home society does. China may defy outsiders' expectations.

Now, I would be remiss not to point out that Zhang oversells how novel his thesis is. It may be true that academic IR theory as a whole oversimplifies by framing research into social and political behavior in mathematical terms. What are the units of measurement for ‘utility,’ anyway? How much utility did Ming China get out of relationships with Korea, or Japan, or the Mongols? The answers to such questions depend on not-strictly-rational motives like the ones Zhang classifies as part of expressive rationality. In my own IR subfield, strategic studies, we place great weight on such motives. For example, we regard the Greek historian Thucydides, who portrays honor, fear, and interest as prime movers impelling human endeavors, as a major strategic theorist. Interest may—or may not—be quantifiable. Honor and fear certainly are not.

The Prussian military sage Carl von Clausewitz urges generals and statesmen to keep the rational cost/benefit calculus in charge of martial pursuits.¹ At the same time he acknowledges how hard subordinating operations and strategy to rational policy can prove when competition and conflict inflame human passions. Clausewitz teaches that the value of the political objective governs how many lives, how much treasure, and how many other resources a combatant expends to obtain that objective—and for how long. That is cost/benefit logic to a tee. But gauging the value of the political objective depends not just on objective measures but on intangible motives like honor, fear, and interest.

In any event, Zhang is correct to spotlight subjective factors at work in international relations, Western or Eastern. No book review would be complete without a critique of substance, so here is mine. First of all, I would quibble with his research design. As noted before, Zhang enlists Ming China’s relationships with Korea, Japan, and the Mongols as case studies for comparison. That is good. But at least one other case clamors for attention, and the author dismisses it with one line. After contending that three cases are enough, and pleading space constraints, Zhang proclaims (15) that “[f]urther cases, such as Sino-Vietnamese relations, though interesting from a historical point of view, are unlikely to offer methodological benefits.” (15).

One would think that the Vietnamese experience with early Ming China—namely, invasion and conquest—warrants scrutiny. If not, Zhang should have explained his reasoning more fully and persuasively. Sino-Vietnamese relations looks like a disparate case that would yield abundant insight. Better yet, the author could have incorporated the case into the book as a counterargument to be mulled over at length and rebutted, showing why the logic of instrumental and expressive rationality prevailed on the whole, despite Sino-Vietnamese warfare. Waving the case aside detracts from *Chinese Hegemony’s* texture and worth.

Next, depicting the early Ming as the exemplar of Chinese hegemony begets a rather flat portrait of a fascinating topic. Confining the inquiry to a brief interval in China’s long history leaves the reader wanting more. For example: if indeed the Ming Dynasty represented the summit of China’s influence vis-à-vis its neighbors, what impact did memories of that golden age exert on posterity? Did subsequent Ming rulers, or the Qing Dynasty, aspire to regain that influence—and how did their quest shape or distort strategy toward China’s neighbors, and the strategies of China’s neighbors toward China? Adding a vertical dimension to the inquiry, even as a brief addendum to the closing chapters, would have enriched the study while giving readers much to ponder.

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans., ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

In the same vein, Zhang displays a rather soft touch toward contemporary China (184-191). He maintains that Chinese strategy remained self-interested and instrumental during the early decades following founding Chinese Communist Party chairman Mao Zedong's death. He also entertains hope that Beijing's foreign relations will take on the expressive character he discerns in Ming statecraft. If so, it will become more humane in outlook. Here, too, questions linger. Can the Chinese Communist Party—a party that once sought to destroy China's Confucian bequest—simply resume the methods used by Ming China? Perhaps so, if the Ming leadership's mix of instrumental and expressive rationality is something innate to China, transcending the type of regime that holds power. China could become a hegemon others can live with.

If not, austere realpolitik could continue impelling Communist Party deliberations, even as China amasses the economic and military power to put its designs into effect. That's a worrisome prospect. One hopes Feng Zhang will grapple with such questions in his future work. These are matters of real and growing import not just to China and its neighbors, but to all stakeholders in Asia's future.

Review by Yongjin Zhang, University of Bristol

Chinese Hegemony: Theoretical Promises Fulfilled?

The spectre of the rise of China that has triggered a putative global power shift has fuelled intense speculation about the future of regional and global order. It has spawned more than a cottage industry in the studies of ‘China rising’ with competing visions and claims about its implications for the systemic transformation of global politics in the twenty-first century. How is this ‘awakened lion, friendly and civilized’ (in Chinese President Xi Jinping’s description) going to use its rising power and for what purpose? What does China want? What does a world ruled by China look like? Is the putative return of Chinese hegemony to the East Asian region imminent? These are among the searching questions that have been grappled with in recent publications.¹ Feng Zhang clearly and consciously locates his monograph, *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History*, in this stream of literature in the first instance, but at the same time attempts to transcend it. Zhang is undoubtedly interested in the question as to how we can “think about a future Chinese hegemony if it is possible?” (2). But it is not through the existing conventional theoretical lenses, be they realist, liberal, constructivist, or post-positivist persuasions, that his investigations are conducted. Nor has he attempted to offer any theoretical deductions from the usual suspects to answer that question. Rather, it is through a combination of historical exploration of Chinese hegemony in the early Ming period and a new theory construction that he wrestles with the questions about China’s grand strategy and international institutions in a particular period of East Asian history and their contemporary implications.

Chinese Hegemony is atypical of comparable work in the existing literature, as it navigates between history and theory in mounting a serious challenge to the Eurocentrism in the existing IR scholarship. If it has identified Chinese hegemony in the early Ming period (1368-1424) as an analytical focus of its historical investigation, the principal purpose of such historical investigation in three empirical chapters is not so much to explain historical Chinese hegemony *per se* as to demonstrate the explanatory power of Zhang’s newly constructed relational theory of grand strategy. More specifically, it is to evaluate the validity of three main theoretical claims made in Chapter 2, namely, ‘the explanation of grand strategic possibilities, the identification of expressive rationality, and a hypothesis about the relational condition of rationality and strategy’ (47).

The volume is marked out conspicuously by its theoretical ambition. This is in part because of its insistence on the nature of its enquiries being at the same time empirical, critical, and normative, but more importantly perhaps, because of what it attempts to achieve simultaneously and in parallel in this single volume, namely to construct a relational theory of grand strategy rooted in Confucian relationalism, to demonstrate its explanatory power through historical exploration, to map out the constitutional structure of Chinese hegemony and fundamental institutional practices thereof, and to sketch out ethical relationalism as a critical

¹ See for example, Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011); Martin Jacques, *When China Rules The World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* 2nd edition (London: Penguin, 2012); Alastair Iain Johnston, ‘How New and Assertive is China’s New Assertiveness?’ *International Security* 37:4 (Spring 2013): 7-48. ‘What China Wants’, *The Economist*, 23 August 2014.

and normative theory that “proposes re-establishing the Confucian value of humaneness as the central moral purpose of international relations and suggests why it is possible” (4).

Zhang executes his research methodically. The introduction articulates well his theoretical ambition and critically contextualizes his research in the existing landscape of theoretical and empirical literature. Before proceeding to three empirical chapters, Chapter 2 contains some tenacious efforts at constructing “a relational structural theory of grand strategic interactions between China and its neighbours by synthesizing and applying the insights of both Chinese and Western relationalism” (21). A bold theoretical move made here is to give the term ‘relations’ (vis-à-vis states or system/society) some ontological status and to use it “as the primary unit of analysis” (5), drawing upon inspiration from and wisdom of Confucianism. Yet, parallel to this, and taking cues, curiously, from none other than Kenneth Waltz,² the attempt is made to extract from Confucian relationalism two major ordering principles, namely, instrumental principle and expressive principle, of East Asian international relations, each of which “produces a distinct rationality and logical relational action” (26). Zheng claims that expressive rationality is a theoretical innovation, as the Eurocentric International Relations literature “has hardly any conception of expressive rationality at all” (7). As a logical extrapolation, instrumental rationality and expressive rationality become two central analytical concepts in the theoretical construct of Zhang’s relational theory of grand strategy. Chinese hegemony is said to be constituted of both an instrumental hierarchy and an expressive hierarchy as a relational structure, which acts “as a constraining and disposing force” (quoting Waltz 1979: 69) to shape grand strategic choices of China and its neighbours (32). Accordingly, a range of distinct instrumental relational grand strategies and expressive relational grand strategies are identified to account for the patterns of strategic interactions between China and its neighbours under the conditions of Chinese hegemony.

Chapters 3, 4, 5 provide constructed historical narratives of Sino-Korean, Sino-Japanese, and Sino-Mongol relations respectively in the early Ming period (1368-1424) through exploring “a vast understudied area of international relations in world history” (5). These chapters are particularly valuable in providing a detailed and descriptive account of how China’s East Asian neighbours exercised agency in shaping Chinese hegemony as a relational network through adopting a variety of grand strategies ranging from identification, deference, and access, to exit. To the extent that these historical narratives are purposively constructed to evaluate and to test the validity of the theoretical claims advanced in Chapter 2, these chapters are the empirical component of Zhang’s project of theoretical construction. International historians may fault Zhang for not using any original source materials in the non-Chinese languages in constructing his historical narratives of Sino-Korean, Sino-Japanese, and Sino-Mongol relations. If this is a useful comment and astute observation, it is an unfair criticism for a project of social science and international relations whose principal aim is theory construction. But the question that they may raise in regard to the historical peculiarities of the early Ming in terms of China’s predominance (or hegemony if you prefer) in East Asia, in material, ideational and civilizational terms, will be difficult to dismiss. Even if it is accepted that the early Ming period does offer “the best methodological fit in case selection” (12) in this project, the question remains whether the key findings and theoretical claims validated and tested in this project can be equally applied to other periods of Chinese hegemony, for example to the putative Chinese hegemony in the Yuan before the Ming, and in the Qing after the Ming.

² Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley).

Chapter 6 shifts back to theory. This theoretical move, which notably drops the two key analytical concepts, namely instrumental rationality and expressive rationality, has dual thrusts. One is to offer an institutional account of Chinese hegemony to complement a largely structural one in the relational theory of grand strategy that is elaborated and tested in the previous chapters. The other is to critique and challenge the venerable paradigm of the tributary system in the studies of traditional Chinese foreign relations. On balance, more convincing arguments are made in the second thrust than the first one. This is in part because the case for conceptualizing Chinese hegemony as “a primary international society” (157), itself a conceptual innovation, is not convincingly made before it embarks on an examination of its constitutional structure. Is there any conceptual difference between Chinese hegemony as a primary international society and an East Asian international society of Chinese hegemony? The two terms seem to be used interchangeably (153-173). Further, if Chinese hegemony *per se* is conceptualized as an international society, not just an institution, then the three modified normative assumptions in the constitutional structure of that society, namely “the moral purpose of international relationship, the central principle of relational rationality and the systemic norm of procedural appropriateness” (158), should reflect and embody “coherent ensembles of intersubjective beliefs, principles and norms that perform two functions in ordering international societies” shared by all members of the said society.³ As elaborated in the chapter, these normative assumptions seem to be more appropriately characterized as China’s hegemonic imposition that can claim very limited intersubjectivity, if at all.

Chapter 7 is purported to be a concluding chapter. If that is the purpose, it is for all intents and purposes an unconventional one, as it traverses another new, though not entirely unrelated, theoretical terrain to look at the potential of Confucian ethical relationalism “as a critical and normative theory distinct from critical IR theories based on Western intellectual traditions” (179). There is a conspicuous return of expressive rationality as part of a more broadly conceived “relational rationality” in this discussion, which is however largely purged of the expressive hierarchy that is said to be characteristic of Confucian relationalism in the earlier discussions. There is a bewildering attempt here to quantify the duration (in terms of the number of years) of instrumental and expressive strategies adopted respectively by China and the three neighbours collectively in the early Ming period that have been examined (177). As well as teasing out the potential of ethical relationalism as a distinct critical and normative theory, the chapter applies its perspectives to evaluate “contemporary Chinese strategy” (19) and the “contemporary policy issues of China’s rise” (179). This is where the book seeks to convince those whose interests are mainly in contemporary policy issues of the value of its theoretically and historically oriented research project and findings.

As an ambitious theoretical project of this nature, *Chinese Hegemony* naturally opens itself up to a broad range of criticisms from its critics, who are likely to appraise the success (or not) of the project in terms of its theoretical ambition. By way of illustration, it may be useful to tease out four criticisms below. First, one would argue for the need for greater conceptual clarity of hegemony as the key analytical concept. How is it different from authority, hierarchy, and domination, for example? The conceptual difference is not always clear in the discussions throughout the book when these terms are used interchangeably. Four out of five cardinal social relationships in the Chinese society identified by Confucians are undoubtedly hierarchical. So is the *zunzun* (respecting the superior) principle in Confucian ethics. The sovereign-subordinate relationship is hierarchical, but not hegemonic. In the extreme cases, father-and-son type of social relations may be authoritarian domination. This is again different from hegemony. Is there a conceptualization of hegemonic

³ Chris Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 30.

social relationship in Confucian relationalism? Is there any place for hegemony in the universal moral order envisaged by Confucians?

Second is the hazard of reducing Confucian relationalism to instrumental rationality and expressive rationality and of constructing an explanatory scheme based on the assumption that rationality itself is “the first major condition that makes particular strategies possible” (36). The limits of a rationality account—be it instrumental, communicative, or expressive (in this instance)—in explaining the all-too-human problems of social science and international relations have long been demonstrated.⁴ International relations in world history is simply littered too often with hubris, miscalculation, stupidity, folly and mischief, not to mention various contingent factors that are beyond human control.

Third, in constructing a relational theory of grand strategy as an explanatory theory based on rationality, in looking into Confucianism for “the major causal variable” in accounting for the strategy of expressive hierarchy (44), and in seeking to provide “the actual causal processes whereby tributary diplomacy exerted its institutional effects on actor behaviour” (170), has not this project, unwittingly or otherwise, put its critical edge and normative bent back into the positivist prison?

Fourth, the image of the social world in Confucian relationalism is quintessentially hierarchical. For more than two thousand years, the Chinese world order was more than metaphorically imperial. Ethical relationalism based on Confucianism, even in its contemporary incarnation, cannot be sanitized of its classic assumptions of hierarchy and inequality among China and other political entities and of its universalist claims of Sino-centric *Tianxia*. If this is accepted, how can such a seemingly insurmountable conceptual barrier be overcome in cultivating the potential of ethical relationalism as a critical and normative theory for contemporary IR?

As it is, *Chinese Hegemony* embodies valiant and commendable efforts at theory construction through a purposive exploration of Confucianism and East Asian history of international relations. A compelling case has certainly been made here for engaging in non-Western philosophical traditions and ideas and non-Western world history as valuable intellectual and historical sources for theorizing IR. Each of the four parallel attempts made in this volume, as briefly discussed earlier, adds to our stock of knowledge in its own way. The most important contribution of the volume is perhaps best seen as opening up a new and potentially fruitful avenue to theorizing rather than in the theoretical claims made. As much as it has accomplished, however, most of its theoretical promises remain arguably unfulfilled because it starts by offering perhaps too many in a single project in the first instance. One is tempted to suggest that the volume could have had a modified theoretical ambition that focuses on a more modest theory construction project combined with richer historical investigations. To do so, though, is to reproach an author for not having written a different kind of book altogether, the most common but perhaps also the most egregious sin of reviewers.

⁴ For a classical statement on this, see Miles Kahler, ‘Rationality in International Relations’, *International Organization* 52:4 (Autumn, 1998): 919-941.

Author's Response by Feng Zhang, Australian National University

Rethinking Chinese Hegemony in East Asian History: A Response

It is my great fortune to have received incisive and insightful comments and criticisms from three leading scholars in the field of East Asian international relations. The three reviewers, Ja Ian Chong, James Holmes, and Yongjin Zhang, whose scholarship I greatly admire, have provided generally positive and very encouraging comments on the book's major themes and arguments. Of course, as is often the case with an author waiting for high-quality reviews, I anticipated concerns and criticisms and looked forward to a fruitful intellectual engagement. I hope my brief response below does justice to the thoughtful comments from the reviewers while also clarifying the central themes of the book.

Research Design and Case Selection

James Holmes thinks that I should have included at least one more case study—the early Ming dynasty's relations with Vietnam, a crucial case from Southeast Asia—to complement the largely “northeastern Asian” focus on Korea, Japan, and the Mongols. Waving the Vietnam case aside “detracts from *Chinese Hegemony*'s texture and worth,” Holmes avers. This is not an isolated criticism. In the book talks I have given over the past year, especially in Singapore where I spent four months of a visiting research fellowship, many in the audience wondered why I did not include a Southeast Asian case, particularly Vietnam.

This criticism has made me much more aware of the importance—and sensitivity—of the China-Vietnam relationship across history. But, even at the time when choosing early Ming China's relationships with Korea, Japan, and the Mongols as three case studies, I did not doubt the importance of Vietnam's and Southeast Asia's relationship with Ming China. After all, the Ming period was a key era when a flurry of diplomatic and economic activities between China and Southeast Asia took place, including China's conquest and subsequent retreat from Vietnam and Admiral Zheng He's celebrated voyages to East Africa through the crucial gateway of Southeast Asia. The *Ming Shi Lu* (Veritable Records on the Ming Dynasty), my chief primary historical source for the book, contains a wealth of information on Southeast Asia.¹

My case selection choice of Korea, Japan, and Mongols is based on a dominant methodological consideration, namely, the need to find a specific set of early Ming China's foreign relations that would represent the full spectrum of regional relations (15). I judged the value of a Southeast Asian case such as Vietnam against this criterion. Since the three dyadic relationships of Sino-Korean, Sino-Japanese, and Sino-Mongol relations already represent China's regional relations from the most cooperative to the most confrontational, an additional case seems unnecessary. It may be argued, I now realize, that a Vietnam case could replace the Japan case to allow a Southeast Asian regional variation, since the Vietnam case, like the Japan case, was also marked by both cooperation and confrontation in the relationship. Although that may indeed add “texture and worth” to the book, the absence of a Vietnam case does not undermine my key methodological criterion of finding three cases that represent the full spectrum of early Ming China's regional relations.

¹ Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo [Institute of History and Philosophy, Academia Sinica], *Min Shi Lu* [Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty] (Nangang; Hongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962-1966).

Holmes also questions the book's limitation in focusing on a brief interval (the early Ming, 1368-1424) in China's long imperial history. Similarly, Yongjin Zhang wonders if the book's findings and claims can be equally applied to other periods of Chinese hegemony. My argument, however, is not that the early Ming is "the exemplar of Chinese hegemony," as Holmes puts it. It is rather that, from a methodological perspective, it was both a hegemonic power and one that also achieved the first institutionalization of the tribute system in East Asian history. The latter fact is particularly important, as the book also aims to evaluate the venerable tribute system paradigm in the long-standing historical scholarship.²

I make no claim about the validity of the book's arguments against other periods of Chinese hegemony. To make a general claim about the dynamics of Chinese hegemony across East Asian history would require a comparative study of different periods of Chinese hegemony, such as those during the Han, Tang, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. That would go far beyond the scope of the book. I hope this study on Ming China's hegemonic practices can shed some light on how a powerful China has behaved in the past and might behave in the future, while also stimulating some interest in a more ambitious comparative study of Chinese hegemony across history.

With respect to the book's research design, Holmes raises an important question about the possible impact of China's historical hegemonic statecraft on contemporary Chinese foreign policy. He thus suggests adding "a vertical dimension" to the inquiry in order to enrich the study. I fully welcome this suggestion of connecting the historical with the contemporary, and have tried to do so in the book's concluding chapter. But given space constraints, the connection is not fully spelled out. I hope to add a bit more "flesh" to this aspect of the book in a later section of this response on the question of China's possible new hegemony in contemporary East Asia.

Micro-foundations of Strategic Rationality

Ja Ian Chong raises an important but also tricky conceptual question: how to establish the micro-foundations of the different strategic rationalities theorized in the book. The book identifies two strategic rationalities—expressive and instrumental—and hypothesizes different strategies endowed with these two distinct rationalities that could be adopted by China and its neighbors in East Asian history. At heart, Chong's question is about the causality of rationality: how to explain different strategic rationalities and how to understand the conditions under which a particular rationality becomes more prominent?

From a different angle, Zhang points out the limits of a rationality account. Citing the extensive social-science literature on rationality and all the potential hazards of relying on rationality for explanation, Zhang implies the limited value of rationality explanation because world politics "is simply littered too often with hubris, miscalculation, stupidity, folly and mischief, not to mention various contingent factors that are beyond human control."

I agree with Zhang that rationality is far from able to explain everything in international politics. Many events are caused by 'irrationality,' so to speak, as well as by sheer chance and accidents. The starting point of the

² J.K. Fairbank and S.Y. Teng, "On the Ch'ing Tributary System," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 6:2 (1942), 135-246; Fairbank, "A Preliminary Framework," in Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1-19.

book, however, is to challenge the traditional realist and rational-choice view that almost all actions in international politics are caused by instrumental rationality. The identification and theorizing of expressive rationality in a historical Confucian East Asian context is meant to establish a different kind of strategic rationality, and thus to enrich our understanding of rationality in international politics.

I do acknowledge, however, that the book's theoretical setting may have given the unwitting impression of reducing Confucian relationalism to a rationality account by pitting expressive rationality against instrumental rationality. That was not the intention. And, if given more space and resources, I may have explored irrationality and contingency in early Ming East Asian politics. The consequence of that move, however, would have been an orientation of the book toward a political-psychology direction, and potentially could have made it unwieldy given the already large and diverse analytical tasks of the project. The problem of the relative dearth of primary source for a deep political-psychology work would also loom large.

Returning to Chong's question about micro-foundations, rationality is, in the ultimate sense, a psychological and even biological question, and it is not clear how much political scientists can contribute to its final resolution. I have therefore tried in the book to explore the conditions under which expressive or instrumental rationality may become more prominent—a more modest research goal. The central hypothesis is that in the Confucian context, the degree of the conflict of interest in a relationship is a major facilitating condition of instrumental or expressive rationality (37). The book also tried to suggest the conditions that might lead to different strategies adopted by China and its neighbors in their interactions (39).

In this way, the book does not so much try to offer a strict causal theory of strategic rationality as to develop a conceptual framework for validating strategic possibilities and testing the correlation between the degree of the conflict of interest and the resulting strategic pattern. The three case study chapters try to establish, as much as the evidence allows, the strategic patterns in the interactions between China and its neighbors and the correlation between those patterns and the degree of the conflict of interest in those interactions. In this sense, the empirical work is descriptive and analytical in applying the conceptual framework advanced in the theory chapter, but less than fully causal in establishing neat causes of rationality. I feel full causality is somewhat hard to establish, especially given the limits of first-hand diplomatic accounts in the pre-modern world. But I would of course welcome future work that takes a more focused political-psychology look at strategic rationality in East Asian history.

Rationality and Motives

Holmes wonders if the book oversells the novelty of its thesis in its criticism of the existing international relations (IR) literature's focus on quantifiable utilities as actor motives. Such a criticism would indeed be well worn and uninteresting. However, what Holmes describes as some of the existing literature's obsession with quantifying "utilities" is not the target of the book's criticism. Rather, the book sets out to challenge the long-held rational choice view of instrumental rationality as the predominant form of human rationality in social and political life. That kind of instrumental rationality emphasizes consequentialist self-interest maximization. The book's identification of expressive rationality of affection and obligation hopes to convince readers that beyond the instrumental rationality of self-interest maximization, there are other kinds of human rationality that cannot be reduced to consequentialist instrumentalism. Such a thesis is not in itself novel either, as rational choice theory has repeatedly been challenged over the years. The exploration of expressive rationality in the historical Confucian East Asian context, however, is something new in the IR literature and is where the claim of novelty lies.

Given Holmes's approving citation of Thucydides and Carl von Clausewitz, he may agree with me on the importance of studying human motivations beyond self-interest maximization. As he points out, in the field of strategic studies, motives such as honor, fear, as well as interest, carry great weight in scholarly analysis and have proven extremely consequential in historical events. Richard Ned Lebow, in his celebrated works on ancient Greek thought and international theory and history, has demonstrated this point in a magisterial fashion.³ Those motives continue to drive the great power competition of the present day, particularly between the United States and China. I would be particularly interested in finding out whether and to what degree contemporary Chinese leaders are applying a version of the modern variant of expressive rationality in their foreign policy.

The Three Faces of Theory

The book consciously seeks to develop a relational theory that is simultaneously empirical, critical, and normative. Zhang wonders whether there is an irreconcilable contradiction in developing such a theory. He asks, "has not this project, unwittingly or otherwise, put its critical edge and normative bent back into the positivist prison?"

This is an entirely understandable and fair question from an English School scholar sensitive to the epistemological foundations of IR theory. As a general principle, however, there is no intrinsic reason why a theory cannot be empirical, critical, and normative at the same time. In fact, leading scholars have been calling for IR theory to move in this direction for some time already. As Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal—a constructivist and a rational choice scholar respectively—put it in an illuminating review article of the field, "Every international relations theory is simultaneously about what the world *is* like and about what it *ought* to be like," and therefore "all international relations theories already have empirical and normative dimensions."⁴ The conventional separation of empirical (or "positivist") and normative theory is more a reflection of the IR field's epistemological confusion than the nature of theory itself.

That said, the book does reflect the challenge of combining the empirical, critical, and normative dimensions of a theory all in one single project. The major focus of the book is the advancement of an empirical theory. It is only in the final concluding chapter that it seeks to outline, in a skeleton fashion, a critical and normative theory of ethical relationalism based on the book's empirical findings. But I believe it has been a worthwhile effort nonetheless.

Bilateralism vs. Multilateralism in Chinese Diplomacy

Chinese Hegemony claims that "China's foreign relations were always bilateral and never multilateral" (15). This is a strong claim, to be sure, but it did not occur to me that this is controversial. The historical record

³ Richard Ned Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁴ Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, "Between Utopia and Reality: The Practical Discourses of International Relations," in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), edited by Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, 3-37, at 6, 20.

does suggest to me that China's traditional diplomacy always took a bilateral form. Thus, it really strikes me when Chong points out, very perceptively, that "the empirical cases the volume explores all deal with multilateral ties, even if the expressions of hierarchy were largely in bilateral terms."

Chong has an excellent point. As he notes, early Ming China's policies toward all the major actors explored in the study—the Jurchens, Mongols, Koreans, and Japanese—reflected multiple considerations involving more than one external actor. Moreover, on the normative plane, Chinese rulers conceived of the world as a familial hierarchy, knitted together by a web of unequal relations between China and other polities. In those respects, the conventional wisdom about the dominance of bilateralism in Chinese diplomacy seems highly suspect.

There is one way to resolve the contradiction between bilateralism and multilateralism in traditional Chinese diplomacy, however. It may be called "bilateralism in form, multilateralism in substance." I maintain that in form at least, Ming China's official diplomacy largely took place in a bilateral fashion between China and other polities. Multilateral diplomacy as found in modern international relations was absent in Ming times. There may have been occasions conducive to multilateral diplomacy, such as when multiple delegations from a number of foreign polities happened to gather together in the Chinese capital for a common tribute presentation ceremony. But the historical sources I have examined tend to slight those settings, and their practical significance is hard to evaluate. Still, there is no doubt, as Chong points out and as my book details, that in making foreign policy decisions, Ming rulers often had to consider multiple actors and factors. This made their foreign policy multilateral in substance. But this multilateralism still differed dramatically from the multilateralism of modern international relations.

The question of bilateralism vs. multilateralism in Chinese diplomacy is of more than historical interest. As knowledgeable observers of modern Chinese foreign policy know, the People's Republic of China (PRC) also has a penchant for bilateralism, which is probably influenced by the traditional approach of its imperial predecessor. But the PRC has also been progressively socialized into modern international relations, and has wittingly or not embraced multilateralism in various areas.⁵ If imperial China's preference for formal bilateralism was rooted in ideology and conviction, the PRC's choice between bilateralism and multilateralism is based more on calculations of national interest.

Worrying about a Future Chinese Hegemony

Holmes approves of the concept of "hegemony" for describing the power and practices of early Ming China. He also considers it a fitting label for a rising PRC under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) today. But PRC officialdom has consistently rejected hegemony as an aim of its foreign policy ever since the country's founding in 1949. This is, however, more an issue of linguistic terminology than of policy substance. The Chinese translation of the English word "hegemony"—*ba quan* 霸权—denotes physical exploitation, domination, and conquest, evils of Western and Japanese imperialism and colonialism that the PRC has long condemned. But, if translated to mean international leadership based on material primacy and social legitimacy, which is the mainstream view in the IR literature and the definition adopted by the book, I

⁵ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980-2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

doubt the Chinese leadership would reject such a foreign policy goal out of hand. After all, China is now consciously seeking a form of regional and international leadership commensurate with its newfound power.

The crucial question arising out of the book, as Holmes notes, is what kind of hegemonic strategy the PRC might adopt in the future. And to what extent will the foreign policy of a powerful PRC resemble its imperial predecessor, such as the early Ming? I have tried to suggest a critical and normative theory of ethical relationalism as a conceptual framework for thinking about these questions. Focusing on the degree of instrumental and expressive rationalities in Chinese foreign policy, my hope is that expressive rationality will be able to check the excess of instrumental rationality if not actually dominate it.

Holmes describes my treatment of contemporary Chinese foreign policy as “rather soft.” Given the space constraints, it was impossible to thoroughly review recent Chinese foreign policy in the concluding chapter of the book. But he is right in being skeptical about the influence of the expressive tradition in Chinese foreign policy. In major security policy issues—a particularly salient example would be the South China Sea since 2009—current Chinese decision-making seems to be driven by nationalistic realpolitik rather than ethical relationalism based on expressive rationality.

Similarly, Chong points out that “substantialist” views, as opposed to relational views, were also important to the Chinese intellectual tradition and were a feature of Ming foreign policy. So it is important to explore the degree to which Confucianism or any other intellectual tradition still influences the thinking and practice of East Asian statecraft today.

I write in the book that “It would be highly unsettling if Chinese foreign policy were to be reduced to a crude instrumental logic of power politics and self-interest narrowly defined” (188). Such a worrisome prospect still exists. But I am hopeful that other intellectual and policy traditions in Chinese history will balance the tendency of nationalistic and exclusivist realpolitik to create a more even-handed approach. *Chinese Hegemony* has identified expressive rationality and instrumental rationality as the two major strategic rationalities guiding early Ming foreign policy. The balance between them—79% instrumental rationality and 21% expressive rationality—is not optimal, but could be one that the world can live with if the PRC were to adopt such a strategic mix. Elsewhere, I have argued that there are two major Confucian foreign policy traditions in Chinese history: inclusivism and exclusivism. On balance, inclusivism has been the mainstream approach.⁶ One hopes that this will continue to be the case in the PRC period. Needless to say, the question of the intellectual foundations of Chinese foreign policy is an extremely important one to explore, at a time when China’s rise is having a major impact on East Asian regional relations. I hope my book has provided a useful historical background to such explorations.

Finally, Zhang raises an astute question about the role of hierarchy in China’s foreign policy tradition. As he notes and as the book documents, traditional Chinese diplomacy in Ming times was based on the assumption of hierarchy and inequality between China and its neighbors. Can this barrier be overcome in China’s foreign relations when the PRC returns to become the preeminent power in East Asia? On the level of national principles and declaratory policy, China has fully embraced the norm of sovereign equality in modern international relations and adamantly rejected hierarchy as a principle of diplomatic conduct. Still, some

⁶ Feng Zhang, “Confucian Foreign Policy Traditions in Chinese History,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 8:2 (Summer 2015): 197-218.

outside observers cannot help but wonder whether a strong China will resort to a modern variant of hierarchy in its foreign relations, particularly in relations with its smaller neighbors such as those in Southeast Asia.⁷

This is another practical policy question worth serious study. The purpose of the normative theory of ethical relationalism developed in the concluding chapter, however, “is not a justification for hierarchy, but a plea for humaneness” (183). Indeed, if a hierarchical mindset somehow emerges in the foreign policy of a powerful PRC, I hope considerations of humaneness rooted in a sort of modern-day expressive rationality will help check it in balance. In the policy domain, a particular challenge reflecting this conceptual concern may lie in China’s relationship with Southeast Asia in the years to come, as astute regional diplomats have taken pains to point out.⁸

Conclusion

Writing this response has been an enormous pleasure to me, as book authors can ask for no better compliments than serious and critical comments from thoughtful reviewers. I am immensely grateful to the three reviewers Chong, Holmes, and Zhang for taking the time to read my book and write engaging reviews, and for their intellectual support and generosity. Tom Maddux deserves special mention for inviting those scholars with different but highly complementary expertise for reviewing the book, and for then patiently waiting for a response from this author. I hope I have addressed the main concerns and objections of the reviewers, while at the same time clarifying some of the major themes of the book. It would be extremely satisfying to me if the book succeeds in making a small contribution to the big task of understanding the complexities of international relations in East Asian history.

⁷ See, for example, Bilahari Kausikan, “ASEAN-China Relations: Building a Common Destiny?” *The American Interest*, 23 September 2014, available at <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2014/09/23/asean-china-relations-building-a-common-destiny/> (accessed May 30, 2016)

⁸ *Ibid.*