

H-Diplo | ISSF

Roundtable, Volume IV, No. 3 (2012)



A production of H-Diplo with the journals *Security Studies*, *International Security*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, and the International Studies Association's Security Studies Section (ISSS).

<http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF> | <http://www.issforum.org>

H-Diplo/ISSF Editors: **Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse**

H-Diplo/ISSF Web and Production Editor: **George Fujii**

Commissioned for H-Diplo by **Thomas Maddux**

Introduction by **Victoria Tin-bor Hui**

Wang Yuan-kang. *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-231-15140-5 (cloth, \$50.00/£34.50).

Published by H-Diplo/ISSF on **15 October 2012**

Stable URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Roundtable-4-3.pdf>

Contents

Introduction by Victoria Tin-bor Hui, University of Notre Dame	2
Review by Kirk W. Larsen, Brigham Young University	8
Review by Peter C. Perdue, Yale University	13
Review by Morris Rossabi, City University of New York and Columbia University	19
Review by John E. Wills, Jr., University of Southern California	21
Author's Response by Yuan-kang Wang, Western Michigan University	25

Copyright © 2012 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online

H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the H-Diplo Editors at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu

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

Yuan-kang Wang's *Harmony and War* challenges claims of Chinese exceptionalism and Confucian pacifism. Kirk Larsen, Peter Perdue, Morris Rossabi, and John Wills – all of whom are prominent historians of China – agree with Wang's refutation of Chinese pacifism, though they dispute his championing of structural realism.

Wang examines whether “Confucian culture constrain[ed] Chinese use of force in the past” (3). He argues that “Chinese strategic choice is a function of relative power: China adopts a defensive/accommodationist grand strategy during periods of relative weakness and an offensive one during periods of relative strength” (192). To measure relative capability, he analyzes “the number of troops and horses, grain production, government budget, fiscal balances, and domestic rebellions” based on assessments by key decision-makers as recorded in official dynastic histories, anecdotal data as gleaned from various historical accounts, and assessments by historians in the secondary literature (32). To trace how relative capability shaped strategic decision-making, he compares the relatively weak Song dynasty (960-1279) with the relatively strong Ming dynasty (1368-1644). This variation in relative power allows Wang to test for the proposed relationship -- in Political Science terminology, Wang's argument is falsified if grand strategy does not vary with relative power as hypothesized. And because Wang pits Confucian pacifism against power politics, he focuses on Chinese dynasties which were supposed to be more influenced by Confucian culture and excludes alien dynasties such as the Yuan and the Qing dynasties which should be more influenced by Inner Asian culture.

In Political Science (as opposed to History), it is almost unheard of that anyone would bother to devote over ten years to ‘getting the history right.’ Judging from all four reviews, Wang's time was well spent. Perdue suggests that Wang offers “a correct analysis of much of Chinese imperial history.” Wills concurs that Wang's historical base is “very sound” -- even though he is disappointed with a few omissions. Wang's commitment to historical research is particularly remarkable given that he self-consciously follows the realist paradigm . In International Relations (IR), realists are notorious for making unhistorical, even anti-historical, assertions.¹ In recent years, scholars working on Chinese IR have criticized realism's claim to universalism by emphasizing China's unique Confucian tradition.² Yet, such works have focused on Confucian pacifist norms in the abstract instead

¹ Paul Schroeder, “Historical Reality Vs. Neo-Realist Theory,” *International Security* 19, 1 (1994): 108-148.

² See the explosion of related articles in the *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, and *Shijie jingji yu zhengji (World Economics and Politics)*. See also QIN Yaqing, “Why is there no Chinese international relations theory?” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 7, 3 (2007): 313-340; YAN Xuetong, edited by Daniel A. Bell and SUN Zhe, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2011); Huiyun Feng, *Chinese strategic culture and foreign policy decision-making: Confucianism, leadership and war* (New York: Routledge, 2007); David C. Kang, *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Sujian Guo and Blanchard Jean-Marc, *Harmonious world and China's new foreign policy* (Lanham: Lexington Books 2008); Amitav Acharya, and Barry Buzan (eds.), *Non-western international relations theory*, (New York: Routledge

of Confucian principles in practice. As Rossabi points out in a different review of David Kang's *East Asia Before The West*, the prevalence of violence in Asian history "belies Kang's thesis about peace and an international system based upon hierarchy, status, and hegemony. There were as many wars in an East Asia allegedly dominated by the tribute system as in a Europe unable to implement the Westphalian peace."³ Unfortunately, it is this rapidly growing body of research that has perpetuated the myth of Confucian pacifism. Wang thus, as Purdue notes, makes a key contribution to Chinese IR with, [?], his "focus on hardheaded strategic planning, as seen in actual policy documents, not in generic ideological statements." This is the background for why Wang paradoxically "uses history to make the ahistorical argument that China is an example of how all states behave essentially the same."⁴

As a structural realist, Wang highlights the primacy of the international structure of anarchy. Reviewers take structural realism as the synonym of offensive realism and fault Wang for bracketing defensive realism. In fact, structural realism's focus on anarchy is shared by both offensive and defensive realism. Wang's "main hypothesis" is that "[t]he anarchic structure of the system pushes China to prefer the offensive use of force (33). This is why the key alternative explanation for Wang is not defensive realism, but culture – whether Confucian pacifism or Iain Johnston's cultural realism.⁵ Following the convention in IR, he does not argue that cultural factors are completely irrelevant. Rather, he argues that anarchy generally trumps culture with rare exceptions – and such exceptions of "structurally indeterminate situations" are discussed in the concluding chapter (186-187). Whether or not one agrees that structural realism subsumes cultural realism, Wang's argument should be more fathomable to the Chinese than is Johnston's argument. Chinese IR scholars have combed through Confucian classics to argue that China's strategic culture is pacifist rather than parbellum. As Wang emphasizes, "nothing in this study suggests that Imperial China was inherently aggressive or culturally hardwired for hegemony. The main point is that the root of aggressive behavior lies in the anarchic structure of international politics, which forces states to pursue power regardless of their domestic politics, ideology, or culture. Imperial China might well have a peaceful culture, but the structural imperatives of anarchy overrode the peaceful inclination of Confucianism" (185). In dismissing the relevance of cultural influence in matters of war and peace, Wang paradoxically clears for the Chinese any doubts about their much cherished Confucian heritage.

2010); William A. Callahan and Elena Barabantseva (eds.), *China orders the world: Normative soft power and foreign relations* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012). See my critique of this body of work in "History and Thought in China's Traditions," *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 17, 2 (2012): 125-141.

³ Morris Rossabi, review of David Kang's *East Asia Before the West*, *Political Science Quarterly* 126, 3 (2011): 511-512.

⁴ William Callahan, "Sino-speak: Chinese Exceptionalism and the Politics of History," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 71, 1 (2012): 12.

⁵ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

If culture does not present a viable challenge to structural realism, Larsen highlights a potentially more serious frontal attack: “Wang’s structural explanation... seems ill-suited to explain critical moments in which the Chinese dynasty possessed both the capability and the momentum necessary to complete aggressive expansionistic designs but decided not to do so.” For Larsen, “The case of Ming-Chosôn (Korea) relations provides a good example. The Ming arguably had the capacity to conquer and subjugate the Chosôn Kingdom at any time. Sino-Korean border disputes in the early years of the Chosôn (1392-1910) would appear to have been sufficient *casus belli* during the capability-rich and expansionistic Hongwu and Yongle eras. The actual presence of Ming soldiers and commanders on Korean soil during the Hideyoshi Invasions (1592-1598) caused no small fear among many Koreans that the Ming would dominate if not annex some or all of Korea. However, the Ming never chose to do so.” Given that this point is so central to Wang’s argument, it is not surprising that there are ready responses in *Harmony and War*. Most notably, in assessing China’s relative power, it is necessary to simultaneously study China’s foreign relations with all its neighbors. As Perdue highlights, Wang is correct to “treat...crucial events of the fifteenth century -- the Zheng He voyages, the invasions of Mongolia, Vietnam, and the oases of Hami and Turfan -- together as a single process, while most historians discuss them separately.” Thus, while the Ming under Yongle was unquestionably more powerful than Korea, his “multiple adventures– the relocation of the capital from Nanjing to Beijing, the five offensives against the Mongols, and the Zheng He fleets in addition to the annexation of Vietnam – involved costs that ‘exceeded the normal income of the state by two or three times’ (118).” The Ming withdrawal from Korea after the Hideyoshi invasions is even less puzzling. The war “cost the treasury more than 7.8 million taels of silver, roughly equaling two years of the nation’s annual income” (177). The Ming dynasty was suffering from both internal rebellions and external threats (*neiyou waihuan*) so that it hardly had the capability to subjugate Korea.

Larsen also points out that there is a “distinction between ‘invasion’ of territory that is perceived to be beyond China’s borders and the oft-invoked idea of ‘unification’ (*yitong*) of territories and peoples that once were part of ‘China’ however conceived.” The best response comes from another historian Arthur Waldron, who highlights in a separate review of Wang’s book that “China rarely owns up to conquering new territories, but rather only ‘recovers’ them.”⁶ Rossabi suggests that “[n]either dynasty actually incorporated additional territory.” It is noteworthy that Wang distinguishes the decision-making process from the policy outcome. “Although the final policy outcome – defense and accommodation – would seem to support Confucian pacifism, a close look at the decision-making process reveals much more than simply looking at the outcome: top leaders still preferred offensive warfare.” (182). This process-tracing approach is in line with mainstream Political Science

⁶ Arthur Waldron, review of *Harmony and War*, *Journal of Asian Studies* 70, 4 (2011): 1146-1148.

methodology. In addition, Wang could also discuss the Ming's incorporation of the Yungui plateau.⁷

Where Wang does come up short is his equation of Confucianism with pacifism. In Perdue's view, Wang's "view of Confucianism is highly oversimplified, nearly a caricature of its teachings, and he exaggerates the degree to which the classics, which all students were forced to study for examinations, actually influenced their thinking." Larsen concurs that Wang's "articulation of 'Confucian pacifism' is derived from a literal reading of Confucian texts that describe an ideal that was never actually put into practice." It is easy to see why Wang makes this mistake – his goal is to challenge the caricature of Confucian pacifism taken for granted by scholars of Chinese IR. Indeed, such a caricature is what Chinese are taught, Wang himself (and myself) included. Thus, "this book is also a journey of self-reflection" that overthrows what he learned about Confucianism as a child (xiv). It is not easy for Chinese IR scholars to break out of this trap. Wang comes close to doing so as he discusses "muscular Confucianism" and "Confucian expansionism" in the concluding chapter. Wills adds "territorial Confucianism" or the obsession with the recovery of lost territory. A more systematic discussion of the militant aspects of Confucianism would have strengthened the challenge to claims of Confucian pacifism.

Larsen is also correct that, "[g]iven that capability is the lynchpin of how foreign and military policy is driven, perhaps the reasons behind the differing pursuit of capabilities at different times are as important as the anarchic structure of the system in driving foreign policy decisions." Here, structural realism, which emphasizes the international structure and brackets domestic politics, indeed presents a hindrance. As I argue elsewhere, structural realism omits domestic politics to its peril.⁸ This is where Wang and I part ways.

In the last analysis, "the real bite of this debate" (Perdue) concerns whether Wang's historical analysis provides better insight to how we should interpret China's rise today. Wills suggests that the concluding chapter "give[s] strong support to the case for the need for historical perspective in discussion of contemporary international relations." For a social scientist, Wang is unbelievably lucky in being able to witness variations in China's relative power over the course of writing and publishing *Harmony and War*. When China was still catching up in the early 2000s, it "adopt[ed] a defensive posture and avoid[ed] provoking the United States" (208). At the time, David Kang's argument that Asian states did not balance against a rising China made much sense.⁹ However, when China's relative power grew further in the late 2000s, it switched to a more aggressive posture toward

⁷ See Victoria Hui, "China's Expansion to the Periphery: Why Some 'Peripheral Regions' Became Parts of China But Korea and Vietnam Did Not," in Geoffrey Wade, ed., *Asian Expansions: The Historical Experiences of Polity Expansion in Asia* (Routledge, forthcoming in 2012).

⁸ Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁹ David C. Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Asian neighbors as hypothesized by structural realism. If Perdue is right that “[t]he purest believers in realism are the ruling elite in Beijing,” then Wang’s analysis will have lasting power.

Harmony and War is a rare gem in the genre of historical Chinese IR. That the most prominent historians agreed to participate in this roundtable is a mark that Wang has at least partially bridged the disciplinary divide. “As for the differences over theory,” as Waldron puts it, “those are the differences between history and political science.”

Participants

Yuan-kang Wang is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Western Michigan University. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Chicago, and was an International Security Fellow at Harvard University’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs and a Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institution’s Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies. He is author of *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (Columbia University Press, 2011). He is currently working on how a hegemon manages dominance in its region of the world, comparing Qing China with the United States.

Victoria Tin-bor Hui is an Associate Professor in Political Science at the University of Notre Dame. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from Columbia University and her B.S.Sc. from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her research examines the dynamics of international politics and state-society relations in historical China and historical Europe. She is the author of *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), which won the 2006 Jervis-Schroeder Award from the American Political Science Association and the 2005 Edgar S. Furniss Book Award from the Ohio State University’s Mershon Center for International Security Studies. Hui’s current research examines the centrality of war in the formation and transformation of “China” through the whole span of Chinese history.

Kirk W. Larsen is Associate Professor of History at Brigham Young University. He received his Ph.D. in History from Harvard University. He has previously taught at the University of Texas—Austin and The George Washington University. At GWU he served as Director of the International Affairs Program and the Sigur Center for Asian Studies. His publications include *Tradition, Treaties, and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosôn Korea, 1850-1910* (Harvard, 2008). He has published, presented, and commented on a variety of contemporary issues including North Korea, nationalism and elections in South Korea, and Sino-Korean relations. He has appeared on ABC, MSNBC, VOA, the Canadian Broadcast System, and Al Jazeera. He is currently writing an examination of Korea-centered historical disputes and their impact on contemporary identity and international relations in Northeast Asia.

Peter C. Perdue is Professor of History at Yale University. He obtained his PhD from Harvard University in History and East Asian Languages. He focuses on East Asian environmental and frontier history. He is the author of *Exhausting the Earth: State and*

Peasant in Hunan, 1500-1850 A.D. (Harvard University Press, 1987), *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Harvard University Press, 2005), and the coeditor of two books on empires: *Imperial Formations*, (SAR Press, 2007) and *Shared Histories of Modernity: China, India, and the Ottoman Empire*, (Routledge, 2008). His new projects include a comparative study of Chinese frontiers, Eurasia in world history, and a global history of tea.

Morris Rossabi received his Ph.D. from Columbia University and is Distinguished Professor of History at City University of New York and Adjunct Professor of Chinese and Inner Asian History at Columbia University. He is the author of *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times*; *Voyager from Xanadu*; *The Mongols and Global History*; *Modern Mongolia: From Khans to Commissars to Capitalists*; *The Jurchen in the Yuan and Ming*; Editor and writer, *China among Equals*; *Governing China's Multi-Ethnic Frontiers*; "The Ming and Inner Asia" in F. Mote and D. Twitchett, eds., *Cambridge History of China: Ming*; and chapters in Metropolitan Museum of Art catalogs: "When Silk Was Gold" and "The Legacy of Genghis Khan." His current project is writing Global History volume, 1100-1500 in the Oxford University Press World History.

John E. Wills, Jr. received his Ph.D. at Harvard University under the direction of John K. Fairbank and Yang Liansheng. From 1965 until his retirement in 2004 he taught Chinese history and the history of the early modern world at the University of Southern California. His research into the history of maritime China and its foreign connections, 1500-1800, led him to archives from Beijing to Madras to Lisbon, and to the sense of an interconnected world expressed in *1688: A Global History* (2001) and *The World from 1450 to 1700* (2009). He also is the author of two monographs on early Sino-European relations, *Pepper, Guns, and Parleys: The Dutch East India Company and China, 1662-1681* (1974, second ed. 2005), *Embassies and Illusions: Dutch and Portuguese Envoys to K'ang-hsi, 1666-1687* (1984, second ed. 2011); a survey of Chinese history, *Mountain of Fame: Portraits in Chinese History* (1994); two chapters of the *Cambridge History of China*, now available in Wills, ed., *China and Maritime Europe, 1500-1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions* (2011); editor of *Eclipsed Entreports of the Western Pacific: Taiwan and Central Vietnam, 1500-1800* (2002) and *Past and Present in China's Foreign Policy: From "Tribute System" to "Peaceful Rise"* (2011); and co-editor of *From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century China* (1979).

Review by Kirk W. Larsen, Brigham Young University

Yuan-kang Wang has written a provocative exploration of Chinese foreign and military policy that constitutes an important addition to the small but growing fields of (English-language) Chinese military history and international relations scholarship. *Harmony and War* deserves to be widely read and seriously studied by students and scholars of the history of Imperial China as well as theorists and practitioners of international relations.

Wang asks “To what extent does culture influence a state’s use of military force against external security threats?” (3). His answer is not much. He considers and quickly dismisses “Cultural Realism” (à la Iain Johnston¹). He then spends much more time and energy considering Confucian pacifism, the notion that Confucianism has traditionally inspired Chinese decision makers to eschew aggressive militaristic solutions to foreign policy problems. In the end, however, he concludes that despite their frequent use of Confucian rhetoric, Chinese leaders and decision makers were not particularly passive or defensive-minded.

Instead, what drove their decision-making was capability. When China was strong, it was aggressive and expansionistic. When it was weaker, it was defensive. When it was weaker still, it was accommodationist (the type of behavior perhaps most consistent with the ostensible Confucian ideal). This explanation, labeled “structural realism” (21) seems fairly consistent with the “offensive realism” advocated by Wang’s Ph.D. dissertation advisor John Mearsheimer.²

Wang tests his theory through a thorough examination of Chinese foreign and military policy decision making during the Song (960-1279 CE) and Ming (1368-1644 CE) periods. For the Song period, his primary focus is on Song conflicts with northern ‘barbarians’—Khitan Liao, Tangut Xi Xia, Jurchen, Jin, and (briefly) the Mongols. For the Ming, he considers conflicts with the Mongols but also examines Ming relations with other peoples and powers on its periphery. His book ends with some meditations on the implications of a structural realist explanation of Chinese behavior for today’s China and its place in the world.

Wang’s book and its conclusions are noteworthy for several reasons. First, it constitutes a welcome example of considering Asian cases as legitimate sources of inquiry for testing universal international relations theory.³ Second, it presents a lucid, accessible, and

¹ Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

² John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, NY: Norton, 2001).

³ Other examples of this fairly new trend include David Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), and David Kang, *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

fascinating summary of centuries of Chinese military and foreign policy. Third, it is most welcome for its direct confrontation with the shibboleth of Chinese peaceful pacifism. Simply put, the historical record contains too much war, too many cases of aggressive pursuit of territorial expansion or the destruction of enemies for one to simply accept at face value the statements of Chinese leaders such as Qian Qichen that “China has never had the tradition of expanding abroad” (2).

While I find myself broadly and enthusiastically supportive of Wang’s conclusions concerning actual Chinese military and foreign policy behavior, there remains room to quibble with the process by which he reaches these conclusions. First, his articulation of ‘Confucian pacifism’ (defensive, anti-military, accommodationist, etc.) is derived from a literal reading of Confucian texts that describe an ideal that was never actually put into practice. This observation extends far beyond foreign policy. No Chinese government has ever truly put Confucian ideals to the test by relying only on moral suasion and example to rule in the domestic sphere. For every idealistic statement about the persuasive power of the Confucian gentleman (*junzi*), there is a section in the penal code that prescribes public flogging or the slow slicing of the extremities for those who weren’t persuaded. What we label ‘Confucianism’ has always been an amalgamation of high-minded idealism and much more pragmatic (dare I say ‘realist?’) strains of Chinese thought including Legalism. Wang briefly discusses Legalism but as a “competitor to Confucianism” (30) rather than as an integral part of the doctrines and practices that are commonly referred to as Confucianism today.

Second, Wang’s rather narrow interpretation of what constitutes Confucian culture, and particularly ‘Confucian pacifism,’ seems to downplay what may have been flexible and inventive ways in which self-described Confucians made sense of their priorities and decisions. Wang notes several cases in which Chinese decision makers invoked the idea that sometimes the best defense is a good offense (51, 57, 61, 115, 131, etc.). And yet this is never taken as evidence of a primarily defensive mindset of Chinese decision makers but rather as an indication of their desire to pursue offensive actions whenever feasible. In addition, Chinese officials’ calls for “temporary” defensive measures in order to buy time for future offensive action are generally interpreted as evidence of an essentially offensive mindset (83, 91, 131, etc.). This ignores the possibility that some Chinese Confucians were actually adept and diplomatic politicians who recognized that a pragmatic appeal for procrastination was much more likely to achieve the desired end result—peace and defensive measures—than was a full-throated denunciation of all militaristic or offensive action. A more fine-grained examination of the non-public writings of key figures in the Chinese policy debates may reveal when or whether such attempts at tactical persuasion actually took place. Finally, it is worth noting that there may be a useful distinction between ‘invasion’ of territory that is perceived to be beyond China’s borders and the oft-invoked idea of ‘unification’ (*yitong*) of territories and peoples that once were part of ‘China’ however conceived.⁴ One might expect an ideal Confucian to oppose the former but

⁴ Writing of the Ming, Timothy Brook notes that “Phrases such as ‘the unification of all under heaven’ (*tianxia yitong*), ‘the unification of the present dynasty’ (*guochao yitong*), or ‘the unification of the ten thousand places’ (*yitong wanfang*) clogged national discourse not just during Zhu’s reign but for the rest of

perhaps be more accepting of the latter. Nearly all, if not all, of the offensive actions considered or taken by the Song can arguably be rationalized to have fit within the category of 'unification' as the Khitan, Jurchen and Tangut were occupying territory once claimed by the Tang or the Han or another earlier Chinese dynasty. As for the Ming, any territory conquered would likely fit within the realm that was 'unified' by Khubilai Khan. That many Chinese today see their current territorial extent as a natural product of 'national unification' rather than the aggressive expansion of the Qing Empire (1644-1912) is an indication of the continuing persuasive power of the idea and acceptability of 'unification.'

Third, Wang's narrative highlights (as Wang often acknowledges) several cases in which Confucianism clearly did influence Chinese decision making. One such case is the role of status in a Confucian-inspired regional hierarchy which inspired Chinese behavior ranging from the refusal of the Northern Song to grant equal status to the Xi Xia (60) to the Ming demand for Mongol acknowledgment of the Ming's possession of the Mandate of Heaven (106). Even when Ming capabilities were relatively weak vis-à-vis the Mongols, Wang notes that some Chinese officials called for offensive campaigns against the Mongols: "For them, the insubordination of frontier nomads was an insult to the Chinese world order and [had to] be remedied through military expeditions" (134). Similarly, in an era that Wang characterizes as one of "Defensive Grand Strategy," Ming China refused the repeated requests of Altan Khan for a regular trade relationship, a move that would appear to be at odds with the imperatives of the power imbalance between the Mongols and the Ming (127). Another example of a more Confucian culturally-derived motivation for Chinese behavior is the Southern Song insistence that its accommodation with the Jin include the return of the coffins of recently deceased emperors, a demand that satisfied the requirements of filial piety but did not meet any obvious realpolitik-based interest (85-86). Regarding these cases, Wang generally concludes that Confucian culture may have had an influence on the margins but that relative power and capability meant much more. This may very well have been the case but it is not always clear why culture is an acceptable motivation in some cases and not in others.

Fourth, the historian in me can't help but note that in at least some cases, the broad cultural proclivities of Chinese elites (as measured by indices such as the number of *jinsi* exam passers) probably mattered far less to the actual decisions made than the 'culture of one': the Chinese emperor. For those who are still somewhat sympathetic to the idea that culture influences behavior at least in some instances, the cases of the Ming Hongwu and Yongle Emperors are illustrative. That their reigns coincide with the period of greatest Ming expansion (154) may indeed be due to the unprecedented capabilities of the early Ming state. But the notion that both the Hongwu and Yongle Emperors were influenced by Mongol notions of statecraft (use of *tanistry* etc.), a received tradition of aggressive militaristic expansion, and indeed the notion of what 'the dynasty' could and should look like appears to be another possible explanatory candidate.

the dynasty." Timothy Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 2010, 28.

Fifth, Wang's structural explanation appears to be weaker in some cases than in others. It seems ill-suited to explain critical moments in which the Chinese dynasty possessed both the capability (or at minimum the belief that it possessed the capability) and the momentum necessary to complete aggressive expansionistic designs but decided not to do so. Examples of this include the 1005 peace agreement between the Song and the Liao which was criticized by many Song generals who argued that the "Song actually stood a good chance of winning the war" (54). The 1159 Jurchen invasion and the successful Song counterattack is another moment in which the initiative was not seized despite the fact that structural realism might predict that it should have been (91). But perhaps even more puzzling is the Ming Yongle Emperor's decision to abandon the "eight outer garrisons" in an era of unquestioned Ming strength and expansionism (116-119). In addition, Wang's relative neglect of the war between the Southern Song and the Mongols (covered in barely a page, 98-99) is curious. In other cases discussed by Wang, the discovery that complete victory over the enemy would be difficult to achieve appeared to have been sufficient cause for a shift from an offensive to a defensive or accommodationist grand strategy. What kept the Mongols at the task for more than forty long and often difficult years? Did the Song seek to accommodate the Mongols? If so, why did such efforts fail? Finally, while structural realism does provide a consistent and often compelling explanation of events that took place, it is not always clear how to explain courses of action not taken. The case of Ming-Chosôn (Korea) relations provides a good example. The Ming arguably had the capacity to conquer and subjugate the Chosôn Kingdom at any time. Sino-Korean border disputes in the early years of the Chosôn (1392-1910) would appear to have been sufficient *casus belli* during the capability-rich and expansionistic Hongwu and Yongle eras. The actual presence of Ming soldiers and commanders on Korean soil during the Hideyoshi Invasions (1592-1598) caused no small fear among many Koreans that the Ming would dominate if not annex some or all of Korea. However, the Ming never chose to do so. It would appear to be somewhat difficult to invoke a purely structural realist explanation of this and other cases of roads not taken.

Finally, much akin to one of Wang's criticisms of the idea of 'cultural realism' (that it "does not explain the source of realpolitik thinking" (24)), structural realism seems to offer little explanation for why states' pursuit of capability is sometimes more forceful and aggressive than at other times. Wang notes the Song statesman Wang Anshi's "New Policies" (1069-1073) which were aimed at "enriching the state and strengthening the military (*fu guo qiang bing*)" (66-67). At other times, Chinese statesmen focused on other domestic priorities at the expense of military capability, especially offensive capability. Given that capability is the lynchpin of how foreign and military policy is driven, perhaps the reasons behind the differing pursuit of capabilities at different times are as important as the anarchic structure of the system in driving foreign policy decisions. Wang notes that "It must be emphasized that nothing in this study suggests that Imperial China was inherently aggressive or culturally hardwired for hegemony" (185). If this is so, the underlying (cultural?) reasons for the determined pursuit of capability would seem to be an important determinant of whether China would pursue an aggressive policy or not.

Any attempt to craft and explain an overarching theory of human behavior is likely to elicit quibbles such as those articulated above. Such quibbles are particularly likely to come from

historians whose stock response to attempts at theorizing is “it is not that simple.” However, Yuan-kang Wang is to be commended for nonetheless jumping into the breach and providing scholars of East Asian history and international relations much to discuss for years if not decades to come.

Wang Yuan-kang argues for a simple, provocative, and disturbing proposition, which has implications both for interpreting Chinese history and for evaluating the position of China in the world today. He argues that Chinese states have almost never been influenced by principles of Confucian pacifism. Instead, they have consistently followed ruthless principles of power politics, preferring offensive military campaigns over defense and peace, seeking to exploit the weaknesses of their opponents, acting out of mistrust and competition in an anarchic international system. In other words, they have acted just like every other great power. China did not have special political values that influenced the behavior of strategic elites. He supports his argument with detailed examination of military decision making during the Song and Ming periods, from the tenth to sixteenth centuries.

Wang loyally follows the principles of his teacher, John Mearsheimer, advocating the theory of “structural realism” as the best explanation of Chinese imperial actions.¹ According to this theory, states always act so as to increase their military and economic power in an environment of structural anarchy. They act in a Hobbesian world of purely individual self-seeking competition, but unlike the Hobbesian analysis of domestic politics, in which a single sovereign with absolute power ends the brutish state of nature, in the nasty world of international politics competition continues without an end. Sometimes a hegemon achieves total domination over its region of the world, as in the Ming and Qing dynasties; more often a balance of power prevails. In either case, cultural values have little or no effect on state behavior.

Until recently, nearly all of this theoretical analysis focused exclusively on the origins of World War I and policymaking in the Cold War, and its primary targets of analysis were the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Now the rise of China to great power status has raised similar questions, calling for equally detailed historical analysis, but so far only a few scholars have had the skills to do it. Wang, like Iain Johnston and Victoria Tin-bor Hui, deserves congratulations for bringing Chinese policy documents of the past into this analytical debate.²

Wang recognizes that the elites of the Song and Ming dynasties studied Confucian classical texts in order to advance in the examination system, and they often invoked the rhetoric of benevolence, moral suasion, and harmony in their writings. Yet this discourse had mainly ‘symbolic’ value: it did not affect the way they discussed questions of peace and war with rival states. When Song leaders debated whether or not to go to war with their enemies, the

¹ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).

² Alastair Iain Johnson, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Ming China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Liao and Jin, or the Ming ruler determined to invade Vietnam, they mainly considered the balance of power and logistics of invasion routes, not the moral justification of war.

Wang's analysis is a very refreshing change from the all-too-common uncritical repetition of concepts of an unchanging peaceful Chinese system, dedicated to harmony, hierarchy and stability and the perpetuation of a 'tribute system.' He is right to be skeptical of this rhetoric. Ever since John K. Fairbank and his Chinese collaborators promoted the concept of a uniquely Chinese tribute system, in the 1950s, far too many intelligent analysts have taken it for granted that Confucian philosophy added a special moral quality to Chinese relations with foreign powers.³ (But let us also recall that Fairbank also coedited an excellent volume on *Chinese Ways in Warfare* in 1974) Wang's focus on hardheaded strategic planning, as seen in actual policy documents, not in generic ideological statements, shows how the elites, including the emperor, really thought when they addressed the crucial issues of security. He also adds a new perspective by concentrating on the Song and Ming periods, the times when China was ruled by Han elites. Those of us who have studied conquest dynasties like the Qing tend to ascribe a great deal of the expansionary goals of these states to their Central Eurasian heritage. Wang shows that the Song and Ming, during certain periods, likewise pursued active policies of expansion and extermination of enemy regimes. It is indeed depressing to realize how often terms like 'extermination' [jiao] and 'annihilation' [mie] occur in Chinese official documents. Peaceful coexistence was not the Chinese imperial way.

For the Chinese government today, which asserts that its doctrine of 'peaceful rise' is deeply rooted in China's history of 'never seeking hegemony,' and for sympathizers with China who would like to see a smooth integration of this huge, powerful state into the world order, these are inconvenient facts. They are, however, broadly speaking, based upon a correct analysis of much of Chinese imperial history. The 'Confucian pacifism' argument against all warfare, with its associated doctrine of the inevitable assimilation of Central Eurasian barbarians to the civilized values of the Han core, was not in fact commonly used in the imperial period. It is a product of the 1930s and 1940s, when the new Chinese nation was desperately defending itself against Japanese invasion and sought to appeal for foreign aid on the basis of humane values. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, in his tract *China's Destiny*, invoked Confucian principles to claim that China's history was one of peaceful unification, and China had never invaded its neighbors.⁴ Of course, the Mongols, Tibetans, Vietnamese, and Uighurs of Xinjiang might beg to disagree. Only the Koreans, China's most loyal vassal, would express appreciation for Ming China's intervention to drive out the Japanese in 1592 and 1597.

³ John King Fairbank, ed. *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968); John K. Fairbank and Frank A. Kierman, eds. *Chinese Ways in Warfare* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974).

⁴ Chiang Kai-shek. *China's Destiny* (New York: Roy Publishers, 1947).

Wang's interpretation of historical incidents, although not particularly original, follows carefully the current secondary literature, and it adds important references to original Chinese sources. He covers most of the canonical events of the Song and Ming in which officials debated war and peace policies: the wars with the Liao in the early tenth century, the humiliating peace treaty with the Jin in 1138, Ming expansion into Vietnam and the Zheng He voyages, and the Ming disaster in 1449, when the emperor was captured by the Mongol Khan. To his credit, he does treat these crucial events of the fifteenth century -- the Zheng He voyages, the invasions of Mongolia, Vietnam, and the oases of Hami and Turfan -- together as a single process, while most historians discuss them separately. The basic pattern is clear: When China faced weaker states on its borders, it expanded in order to dominate them; when its neighbors were strong, it took defensive measures as a temporary expedient, waiting for a better opportunity to strike back.

I have some trouble, however, with Wang's use of this evidence to support the much-debated theory of 'structural realism.' Loyal to his teacher, John Mearsheimer, he endorses the 'offensive realism' theory, in which states always try to expand to the extent that their power situation allows, and in which the actions of states can be almost entirely predicted from the geopolitical situation alone. Like his mentor, he simply dismisses without serious argument alternative views of the implications of realist reasoning. Other scholars, who support the 'defensive realism' school, like Barry Posen, Jack Snyder, and Stephen van Evera, argue that states may miscalculate the relative balance of offense vs. defense; they may be strongly influenced by domestic power interests; or they may have mistaken perceptions of the strategic balance.⁵ They argue that offensive realism alone does not predict whether states will bandwagon with a rising hegemon or seek to balance against it; its analysis is indeterminate. Perceptions, and even cultural tendencies, need to be included for a better understanding of state policy. (In the interests of full disclosure, I should state that several proponents of this school were former colleagues of mine at MIT). He also does not address seriously the argument of Iain Johnston that Chinese policy elites practiced 'cultural realism,' that is, that they were predisposed to the use of force not only by geopolitical logic, but also by their own historical tradition.⁶ Like Mearsheimer, Wang pushes the offensive realist logic as far as possible. Although he does admit in passing that it has limitations, he does not try to weigh the explanatory power of offensive realism against rival theories.

His view of Confucianism is highly oversimplified, nearly a caricature of its teachings, and he exaggerates the degree to which the classics, which all students were forced to study for examinations, actually influenced their thinking. During the whole period of the domination of the examination system, from about 1000 CE to 1905, there were constant

⁵ Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Stephen van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.)

⁶ Johnston, *Cultural Realism*.

complaints that the exams had little effect on anyone's moral or intellectual qualities: in the view of many critics, they were merely rote exercises in memorization.

Classical teachings, in any case, were not uniformly pacifistic. Confucius himself thought that all 'gentlemen' should learn the arts of horsemanship and archery. Within the Confucian tradition itself, the idealistic stance of Mencius, who advocated light government and moral suasion, contrasted with that of the stern Xunzi, who insisted on rigorous discipline and punishment, since human nature was essentially evil. Although nominally Mencius held the orthodox position, everyone read Xunzi as well and often echoed his jaundiced view of human motivation. Outside the legitimate orthodox teachings lay the enticing, heretical doctrine of Legalism, which openly justified maximum state power and the use of fear and greed as the essential tools of statecraft. These Legalist doctrines were not merely 'techniques', as Wang describes them; they persisted as a latent, powerful undercurrent, seldom openly expounded, but extremely influential. The first unifier of the empire, Qin Shihuangdi, explicitly relied on Legalist advisors. His reign was brutal and short, but his legacy of unification and dedication to military might never vanished. The most common way of discrediting an opponent in a strategic debate was to slander him as a 'Legalist,' but just like calling someone 'socialist' or 'Fascist' these days, the label had little explanatory meaning, and by itself this accusation never conclusively won a debate.

Before becoming top strategic advisors, most officials served in other offices of local government, where they quickly learned that the ideals of the classics corresponded only partially to the practices of their subjects. Like the diligent British students who mastered Greek and Latin poetry in order to administer India, they may have found their school teachings not very helpful in their official practice. As judges they meted out torture, punishment, and executions; they were also military leaders who led militia bands to exterminate rebels. For instruction in the practice of local government, they read magistrates' handbooks, filled with advice on how to raise revenue, repress revolt, and develop the economy. They also read with close attention the dynastic histories, and the popular novels based on them, which glorified warriors, battles, and bloodshed. Military manuals, nominally a despised genre, were still a valuable source of technical information, and thousands of them were published during the Ming dynasty. The great Ming scholar-general Qi Jiguang, famed for his victories against nomads and pirates, publicized his strategies in an influential handbook entitled *Records of Military Training*. If we call all of this the 'Confucian' tradition, its broad reach includes violence just as much as moral teachings.

When it came to pastoral nomads beyond the Han tradition, classical writings were seldom ambiguous. They justified war in moral terms, and saw no obstacles to exterminating rebels, who were seen as literally inhuman, no different from birds, insects, or worms.

In short, as anthropologists have reminded us, values are expressed in practice, not only in the maxims of philosophical texts. We cannot simply separate idealistic norms of 'culture' from 'realist' motivations of material interest. In this sense, the strategic theorists' debate over the relative role of culture vs. material interest is a false dichotomy. Preconceptions about the value of force strongly shape one's evaluation of the relative balance of power. If

offensive realism had strong predictive power, there would never be any unexpected wars or unpredicted disasters: states would calculate precisely their chances of winning and only go to war when victory was certain. The long history of shocking surprises, from Hitler's invasion of Russia to Pearl Harbor and the Tet offensive, shows that underestimating one's enemy is a constant of strategic thinking.

Of course, the real bite of this debate, which makes it more than simple philosophical musing, involves its implications for the future behavior of the People's Republic of China. In general, until recently nearly all analysts have drawn solely on Western examples to predict the behavior of China. Will China, as a rising economic and military power, behave like Imperial Germany in the late nineteenth century? Or, like the U.S. in relation to Britain, will it supersede the reigning hegemon and take up its imperial burdens? Wang argues that China has adhered to a defensive grand strategy, and sincerely pursues 'peaceful development,' but not out of deep conviction to harmony and pacifism. It lays low because the U.S. is a unipolar hegemon, and because it would make no strategic sense to challenge U.S. domination.

In this respect, Wang's analysis is no different from those who argue for 'engagement' with China so as to make it a cooperative member of a world order. The real question concerns the future. As China becomes economically and militarily more powerful, even perhaps exceeding U.S. GDP, will it seek to expand once again? If so, should the U.S. try to contain it?

This debate suffers from a great lack of economic realism and historical accuracy. As Wang notes, in 2007 China's GDP was less than one quarter of that of the U.S., and its military spending was one-ninth. Contrary to the predictions of bestselling visionaries who believe that China will soon rule the world, the PRC is nowhere near the level of the U.S. in any significant measure.⁷ Linear projections of China's current growth rates for two more decades are very unlikely to prove correct. Taiwan, we may note, grew at the same rate as the PRC for thirty years, from the 1950s to 1980s, and then slowed down. It also went through dramatic political change. And the PRC leadership clearly faces the massive challenges of environmental destruction, corruption, political factionalism, and loss of legitimacy that do not promise it a happy future. Of course, pessimists could retort that the U.S. is in equally bad shape, and it's hard to refute them definitively.

John Mearsheimer, confident that China will challenge the U.S. strategically, has argued that far from engaging China and aiding its growth, the U.S. should aim to constrain China's economic and military opportunities. This is, of course, exactly what the Chinese Politburo believes that the U.S. is already doing.⁸ The purest believers in realism are the ruling elite in Beijing, yet their publicly promoted view of Chinese history directly contradicts their

⁷ Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World : The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009.)

⁸ Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi. "Addressing U.S. China Strategic Distrust." *John L. Thornton China Center Monograph Series 4*, March 2012.

strategic reasoning. Their historical argument sounds very much like that of Chiang Kai-shek: China has always been a peaceful power, which incorporated [never conquered] its many peoples harmoniously, and it has been a victim of imperialist aggression, never an invader itself. By exposing the falsity of this doctrine, Wang helps us to base our judgments of Chinese action on accurate historical interpretation instead of fantasies and dreams.

But do we really need to choose between two abstract models of international politics? Theories are not really predictive tools; as Einstein famously declared, politics is not physics. Mao himself saw theory as merely a guide to practice. Accurate history is an equally valuable tool for deciding current policy: policymakers ignore both theory and history at their peril. Mistaken commitment to pure realism, like mistaken dreams about a purely peaceful China, can lead to unwise decisions. Only the greatest statesmen successfully integrate theory, historical evidence and practical action. I see no one in the world today who can accomplish such a feat, but that does not make the goal useless. Wang Yuan-kang helps us to push forward an important and useful search.

Professor Wang Yuan-kang offers an excellent summary of the research on traditional Chinese foreign relations over the past forty years. These studies questioned the dominant paradigm that embraced Confucian culture as the primary factor in decision making about foreign relations. Instead recent analyses have suggested that *realpolitik*, or what Professor Wang calls “structural realism” (21-23), shaped discussions and implementations of foreign policy. The traditional interpretation, which the Confucian scholar-official elite purveyed in the dynastic histories and classical texts, asserted that China pursued a defensive strategy and sought to defuse conflicts with foreigners through non-violent means. The relatively short shrift accorded to military science and the dominance of civil officials over the military reputedly attested to China’s defensive posture. When conflict proved to be inescapable, China allegedly had limited war aims and did not seek to annex additional territories.

Most Western scholars accepted this interpretation, but researchers since the 1980s have challenged this view.¹ They have noted that the Chinese courts adopted *realpolitik* policies. When they were powerful and had the requisite military and financial and military resources, they became more belligerent and attempted to conquer neighboring lands. Veering away from the Confucian paradigm, they did not shun violence. When China was weak, they assumed a defensive posture, rationalizing their policy by citing the Confucian emphasis on non-violence. Chinese leaders believed that the tribute system, by which they allowed foreigners to obtain Chinese essential and luxury goods in return for peace, would compensate for their weakness and would deter attacks and warfare.

Wang subscribes to this reinterpretation and selects two Chinese dynasties, the Song and the Ming, to confirm the structural realism hypothesis about traditional foreign policy. Neither dynasty actually incorporated additional territory, and the distinguished Chinese historian Wang Gung-wu labeled the Song a “lesser empire.”² Moreover, the Ming, coming to power after about four centuries during which foreigners ruled part or all of China, sought to restrict relations with foreigners. The alien rulers of the Mongol or Yuan dynasty and the Manchu or Qing dynasty, not the indigenous Song and Ming dynasties, incorporated additional territories into China. The lack of an expansionist policy during the eras of the native dynasties would appear to clash with the views of Wang and earlier researchers he relies upon about China’s offensive strategies.³ Yet Wang, based on Paul Forage’s dissertation, shows that the Song often adopted an aggressive posture after a realistic

¹ See, for example, Morris Rossabi, ed., *China among Equals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

² Wang Gungwu, “The Rhetoric of a Lesser Empire” in Morris Rossabi, ed., *China among Equals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 62.

³ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) and David Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007)

assessment of its enemy.⁴ Similarly, the Ming invaded Annam and the Mongol lands and sent troops to resist Japan's invasion of Korea in the 1590s. Moreover, in a chapter on the Ming in the forthcoming *Cambridge History of War*, I have provided evidence to confirm Pamela Crossley's view that "the Ming Empire (1368-1644) was perpetually engaged in a struggle against various peoples along its northern borders."⁵ Importantly, the Ming also produced 33.3% of all military writings from the Zhou (1027 BCE to 221 BCE) through the Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

In sum, I concur with Professor Wang's summary of the works on traditional Chinese foreign policy, but I am wary about applying this analysis in trying to understand China's present and future policies. Such speculation can be misleading and may lead to misunderstanding of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) leadership. It could also generate a paranoid view of PRC intentions, for it could imply that as Chinese power increases, China could threaten what Professor Wang refers to as "U.S. unipolarity" (191). There is an implicit suggestion that China would use force to get its way if it assessed itself to be stronger than another country. I don't think this is provable.

In any event, that is my major caveat about this very useful survey of China's traditional foreign policy.

⁴ See Paul Forage, "The Sino-Tangut War of 1081-1085," *Journal of Asian History* 25 (1991): 1-28.

⁵ Pamela Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 57.

It is easy to find in surveys of China's history and foreign relations assertions that the Chinese tradition was less supportive of military expansion and territorial conquest than many others, especially the Muslim and the Christian European ones. A classic version of this belief focuses on the long continuity of the 'tribute system' and its ideology, in which the Chinese Son of Heaven was the only real sovereign on earth and Confucianism the core of the only really civilized order. If Chinese rulers and ministers focused on the proper teaching of their people and care for their material needs, the empire would be strong and peaceful within its boundaries. Foreign peoples, influenced by China's example of peaceful prosperity and moral and cultural refinement, would 'come and be transformed', bringing tribute gifts that acknowledged the supremacy of the Son of Heaven and requesting that he confirm them in their dependent sovereignties. Chinese politics were dominated by Confucian scholars who were not at all interested in or impressed by heroic military deeds. Chinese deliberations on foreign relations were strongly biased against aggressive military action and not interested in conquest and expansion.

Yuan-kang Wang's important book tests this picture of Chinese inter-state relations with detailed accounts of the Song (960-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties and finds it seriously at variance with the evidence. Song deliberations on conflicts with their northern neighbors, the Liao and Xi Xia, and then endless debates on possible responses to the Jin conquest of north China in the 1120s, rarely made use of the above Confucian ideal; balance of forces was central, aggressive action was definitely a possibility if it has a chance of success, Confucian rhetoric was of some use for window-dressing when the balance of forces was not favorable and defensive policies were necessary. The author makes the same point for the very important Ming confrontation with the Mongols and less central cases from Vietnam to Central Asia to Korea. The book's base in Chinese primary sources, modern scholarship, and in the best recent English-language scholarship is very sound; neglect of a recent basic work on the Ming-Japanese-Korean conflicts of the 1590s is a rare exception.¹ I will suggest some expansions of discussion that would have made the book stronger, but note first that its basic argument is convincing. This book deserves to be widely read by scholars of diplomatic and military history and their students.

Wang's central academic commitment is to international relations theory. My occasional encounters with IR theoreticians find them asking very interesting and well-formulated questions, but not often as interested as they should be in getting a rich sense of a particular situation. Wang is not much help in showing historians why they should read IR theory; his references to it are brief, and many of them seem to me to add little to the historian's less formalized inquiry. When focus on internal political structure and external environment are presented as mutually exclusive alternatives (184), the way to fruitful discussion of how they interacted with one another seems to be blocked. In Wang's 'structural realism' the external environment is characterized as anarchic; it is not clear if

¹ Kenneth M. Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).

that anarchy can be shown to have elements of structure, as most external environments do. For the Song and Ming, internal structural changes that must be addressed in order to understand foreign relations include the massive Song efforts to consolidate unified rule over south China, the debates over management of a rapidly commercializing economy, the long struggle of the Neo-Confucians for cultural hegemony, and the endless Ming struggles between scholar-officials and court eunuchs; Wang makes only passing mention of these basic changes. This very much limits the usefulness of the book for scholars and students not specializing in China who may be looking for new angles or connections in addition to those well developed by Wang.

Some rather casual comments in Wang can lead us, if we are looking for them, toward a richer account of the interaction between values and force calculations, between internal and external developments. Wang notes in passing (182) that at times, especially in the late nineteenth century, there was a more “muscular” Confucianism. It was there in the cases on which he focuses as well. The obsessions with the recovery of territory around modern Beijing from the Liao, with the recovery of the north China plain from the Jin, and perhaps with the recovery of lands within the Ordos loop of the Yellow River from the Mongols under the Ming, can be seen as examples of what might be called a “territorial Confucianism”, in which the loss of territories that had been under regular bureaucratic ‘commandery and prefecture’ jurisdiction and have Han Chinese populations was found to be morally intolerable. Territoriality has deep roots in the Confucian tradition, in the altars of earth and grain that represented sovereignty from the last centuries BCE to 1911 CE and in the temples of the god of the city walls in every county town. In Song and Ming times this set of values interacted with an obsession with loyalty; someone who had earned favor or taken office under a certain dynasty absolutely had to defend it to his death and not take office under the dynasty that had overthrown it. The intertwining can be seen especially clearly in the stories of military heroes still very much alive in books for young people today: Zhuge Liang in the 200s CE and especially Yue Fei right in the middle of the loss of the north to the Jin. Yue Fei’s passionate cry to “give us back our rivers and mountains”, *huan wo he shan*, is Confucian, militarist, and territorialist.²

And of course the world outside China was changing. Liao, Jin, and Xi Xia were new kinds of mixes of non-Chinese politics and culture with Chinese statecraft and very strong commitment to Buddhism, at a time when Buddhism was losing some ground to Neo-Confucianism in the Song. After the unprecedented trauma of the conquest of all of China by the Mongols, it’s understandable that cultural chauvinism reached new heights under the Ming, contributing to the dysfunctional distrust of the Mongols which Wang so ably describes.

Wang also misses an opportunity to be of use to his readers with his failure to cite some of the relevant earlier scholarship in English to which readers might want to turn. Ruth

² For summaries of these figures, later stories about them, and references to modern scholarship see John E. Wills, Jr., *Mountain of Fame: Portraits in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), Ch 7, 11, and pp. 383-384.

Dunnell's chapter on the Xi Xia in the *Cambridge History of China* is drawn on but her book is not.³ A monumental early study of the Liao is nowhere to be found.⁴ Only one of many important works by the eminent Henry Serruys is cited. There is no use of the many well-researched biographies of Chinese emperors, statesmen, and generals and the foreigners with whom they interacted in the *Dictionary of Ming Biography*.⁵ I have not noticed any place where wider reading would have led to a different conclusion, but an author owes to his readers reasonably full guidance to related reading in the language in which a book is written. A reference to two important monographs in German on Song-Liao-Jin relations would also have been in order.⁶

The book ends with a chapter linking the structural realist approach to discussions of present-day Chinese military buildup and grand strategy. The author's reading in the recent scholarly literature and in Chinese statements and position papers seems substantial. The topic certainly is a live one, taking up four pages in a recent issue of the *Economist*.⁷ The chapter seems to me to give strong support to the case for the need for historical perspective in discussion of contemporary international relations. It could have been strengthened even more by showing a continuity between past and present in the very large size of China, some of the resulting fragilities of internal order, especially involving outlying areas like Xinjiang and Tibet, and the resulting 'defensive' need to limit or control contacts with foreigners. The evidence for the centrality of the Taiwan issue to Chinese thinking in these matters is very nicely laid out.

All first-time authors of academic books feel at the mercy of their publishers, not knowing what to expect. There are extra stresses for authors writing in a language they learned as adults; China scholars who learned Chinese as adults will remember cringing when they tried to write a few paragraphs for publication in Chinese and got back from the editor a fiercely marked-up copy. Wang has not been well served by his eminent publisher. Very few of his small misuses of English impair understanding of his sense, but they do distract the reader; it seems clear that the book did not have a rigorous copy-editing. The footnotes take up more space than was necessary because of a very repetitious format. I am sorry to

³ Ruth W. Dunnell, *The Great State of High and White: Buddhism and State Formation in Eleventh-Century Xia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996).

⁴ Karl A. Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng, *History of Chinese Society, Liao (907-1125)* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1949).

⁵ L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, eds. *Dictionary of Ming Biography*. 2 vols. (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1976).

⁶ Christian Schwarz-Schilling, *Der Friede von Shan-yuan (1005 n. Chr.): Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Chinesischen Diplomatie* Asiatische Forschungen, Band 1 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1959); Dagmar Thiele, *Der Abschluss eines Vertages: Diplomatie zwischen Sung- und Chin-Dynastie, 1117-1123* Münchener Ostasiatische Forschungen, Band 6 (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner, 1971).

⁷ "China's military rise" and "The dragon's new teeth", *Economist*, April 7-13, 2012, pp. 13, 27-32.

end on this negative note a review of an intelligent book that should find a wide, multi-disciplinary audience.

Author's Response by Yuan-kang Wang, Western Michigan University

As a political scientist who has benefitted from the works of historians, I appreciate this opportunity to respond to the reviews of *Harmony and War* by prominent historians of Asia. Political scientists working in the subfield of international relations (IR) have long used historical case studies to build and test their theories, though historians may have reservations about their work. Professor John Wills has, in this roundtable, also raised an important question about why historians should read IR theory. How can our two disciplines enrich each other?

This roundtable format provides an excellent opportunity for interdisciplinary exchange. The first “behind-the-scenes” step of this roundtable was the inviting of historians to read *Harmony and War*, a book on Chinese military history written from an IR perspective. Second, the individual reviews and this author’s response that together comprise the roundtable allows for cross-disciplinary exchange. In this response, I’ll first summarize our main agreements on *Harmony and War*. Then I will respond to the critiques from the perspective of IR theory, finding in part that many of the questions raised by the reviewers result from disciplinary boundaries between history and political science. Third, I discuss the importance for IR theorists of linking the past to the present. Finally, I attempt to suggest ways by which both historians and IR theorists can enrich each other’s research.

Main Agreements

First, all four reviewers agree with the gist of my argument: China expanded when strong and retracted when weak. Considerations of relative power were key to Chinese security policymaking. Military violence, conquests, and wars of annihilation are common in Chinese history. The historical facts do not support the popular view that the Chinese world order was relatively peaceful and harmonious.¹

Second, the reviewers agree that Confucian pacifism did not have much influence on actual Chinese strategic behavior. In the words of Professor Kirk Larsen, the Confucian ideal “was never actually put into practice.”

Third, we need accurate historical perspective to better assess the implications of China’s rise today. Wills notes of “the need for historical perspective in discussion of contemporary international relations” and Professor Peter Perdue rightly cautions that “policymakers ignore both theory and history at their peril.” Mythmaking and misrepresentation of history leads to both self-righteous nationalism and an inability to appreciate the viewpoints of neighbors.

¹ Yet, despite facts to the contrary, the idea of a peaceful Chinese tribute system remains popular. Henry Kissinger recently wrote: “In its imperial role, China offered surrounding foreign peoples impartiality, not equality: it would treat them humanely and compassionately in proportion to their attainment of Chinese culture and their observance of rituals connoting submission to China.” Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 19.

Response to Critiques

These agreements aside, there are disagreements that arise, in part, out of disciplinary boundaries between history and political science.² IR theorists' tendency to simplify seems at odds with the historians' perspective of a complex world. As Larsen pithily writes, "it is not that simple."

First, while the social world is complex, I think this complexity makes it ever more important to simplify and to tease out what matters the most. Many factors may influence a policy decision—leadership, personality, psychology, factional rivalry, domestic politics, to name just a few—but among them, is there a factor that has overwhelming influence over the decision? In *Harmony and War*, I identify the relative power between China and its adversary as the most important factor influencing its decisions to go to war or sue for peace. This consideration of relative power still obtains across different time periods and among different leaders. Both the Song and the Ming dynasty had emperors with different worldviews and personalities and these two dynasties had different domestic factions and political calculations. Despite these variations, however, their military policy bears a striking similarity when we consider the role of relative power. Here, it may be worthwhile to quote from *Harmony and War*:

This structural view of realpolitik does not rule out the possibility that there could be nonstructural motives for conflict. For instance, nationalism, pursuit of glory, factional politics, or even revenge could lead a nation into war. Structural realism does not have much to say about these nonstructural causes, except that when these causes conflict with structural pressures the latter usually win out. In essence, structural causes carry more causal weight than unit-level factors (185).

As a broad-gauged theory, structural realism tells us much about a state's tendency toward certain types of behavior as well as the broad contours of its military policy. But the theory is not equipped to explain all the details. Structural realism is better understood as a probabilistic theory rather than a deterministic one (216, n. 8). *Harmony and War* shows that for six hundred years of Chinese history, structural realism does a good job of explaining the general pattern of Song-Ming military policy. Of course, there is a cost when we focus on the big picture: some of the issues internal to the country will not be examined in detail, for instance, as Wills notes, "the massive Song efforts to consolidate unified rule over south China" or "the endless Ming struggles between scholar-officials and court eunuchs." When we move down from generality to specificity, we need more fine-grained theories, such as neoclassical realism that seeks to combine both structural and unit variables.³

² IR theorists not subscribing to the version of structural realism I'm using may also raise similar critiques to those made by the historians.

³ Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (October 1998): 144-172.

Second, the participants in this roundtable and I have different conceptualizations of Confucian culture. Specifically, we disagree about whether imperial China's actual practices should be construed as part of 'Confucianism.' In my view, practices should be separated from a definition of culture, but the reviewers suggest otherwise. Both Perdue and Larsen think that practices should be included in how we conceptualize Confucian culture and they consider my view of Confucianism "highly oversimplified" and "rather narrow." As Larsen observes, imperial China's Legalism is "an integral part of the doctrines and practices that are commonly referred to as Confucianism today." Similarly, Perdue writes, "values are expressed in practice." I have anticipated this line of critique by arguing in *Harmony and War* that "Legalism is not a culture, but a type of practice" (30). It is often said that imperial China practiced "Legalism with a Confucian façade" or *wai ru nei fa*. But as a social scientist, I do not think actual practices are the same as 'culture.' I adopted the definition of culture accepted by most IR theorists: "shared ideas, beliefs, and values collectively held within a society or by its elites that are transmitted from one generation to the next through a process of socialization" (12). Practices are not included in this definition because whether a cultural norm influences actual practice is something to be tested, not assumed. It is possible that some beliefs and values (such as Confucian ideals) may not be expressed in actual practices. As noted in *Harmony and War*, "for theory testing, behavior and practice should be separated from a definition of culture" (226, n 103). If we broaden the concept of culture to include practices, this conceptualization risks becoming tautological: we read Legalist practices back into 'Confucian' culture; this culture is then said to have influenced practices. This conceptualization does not allow for the possibility that a particular cultural norm may not have influenced actual behavior. To put it bluntly, if everything is cultural, it tells you nothing.

Third, the reviewers point out the possibility that imperial China's offensive military campaigns can be construed as a defensive act to recover lost territories. Wills discusses "territorial Confucianism," in which the loss of territories formerly administered by the Chinese was considered "morally intolerable" and those territories had to be recovered. Similarly, Larsen mentions the idea of "unification" (*yitong*) in influencing Song-Ming leaders' decisions for war; they simply wanted to unify the country, and nothing more. These are excellent points and I would also like to add that they are part and parcel of the narrative of a defensive, nonexpansionist China. Although the Chinese frequently use recovery of lost territories to justify their wars, the search for a unified China is consistent with the pursuit of a powerful China. Historically, a 'unified' China is usually a dominant power in East Asia. A China that has 'recovered' all the lost territories will become a regional hegemon. Hence, unifying China and pursuing power are two sides of the same coin. Furthermore, as *Harmony and War* shows, an in-depth look at the decision-making process reveals that Chinese war aims were not limited to simply the recovery of lost territory but rather included expansive goals such as the destruction and conquest of the adversary. Recovering lost territory such as the Sixteen Prefectures was viewed as a stepping stone to the annihilation of the Liao. That is, Chinese leaders were not simply content with recovering lost territory; they wanted more. The territorial boundaries of historical China waxed and waned. That both the Nationalist and Communist leaders opted

for the maximal boundaries that include Tibet, Xinjiang, and all or some parts of Mongolia shows how elastic and manipulable the concept of unification can be.

Fourth, Perdue questions why I did not “try to weigh the explanatory power of offensive realism against rival theories,” specifically defensive realism, which argues that states are better off defending what they have rather than going out to pursue more power. As part of our interdisciplinary dialogue, I find the historian’s familiarity with defensive realism quite encouraging. My research, however, is guided by the central question I ask: To what extent does culture influence a state’s use of military force against external security threats? In the context of China, Confucian pacifism is the main alternative explanation to power-based theory; that is why *Harmony and War* is a test of structural realism against Confucian pacifism. Had I asked a different central question, whether states strive to maintain the existing balance of power or to maximize their share of relative power, I would have tested defensive realism against offensive realism. But that is not what I set out to do. Additionally, as I noted in a lengthy footnote (220-21, n. 56), defensive realism is not persuasive because 1) “balancing may not always be efficient”, 2) “the conceptualization of the offense-defense balance is often conflated with two other variables that determine war outcomes: balance of power and military skill”, and 3) “it is inherently difficult to determine what constitutes an ‘appropriate’ amount of power—the amount of power that is considered appropriate today may not be so tomorrow.”

The Past-Present Link

Although historians may study the past for its own sake, most political scientists study the past in order to shed light on the present. Theory plays a central role in the latter’s endeavor. As *Harmony and War* shows, structural realism has empirical support from Chinese history; its explanatory power is thus expected to hold in today’s world. The link between the past and the present is thus IR theory.

Harmony and War ends with a chapter on the People’s Republic of China’s strategy vis-à-vis the United States. The reviewers seem to agree with my analysis in general, but they also raised concerns about implications for the future. Professor Morris Rossabi worries that applying my analysis of traditional Chinese foreign policy to the present “can be misleading” and that it “could also generate a paranoid view of PRC intentions.” I beg to differ. As I emphasized in *Harmony and War*, my study does not claim that China harbors aggressive intentions or that it is culturally hardwired for hegemony (185). In international politics, capabilities matter more than intentions do. A state’s intentions are difficult to know, and even if known, they can still change in the future. China may well have benign intentions today, but its neighbors cannot be so sure. Conversely, Americans may see their foreign policy as well-intentioned, but do other nations see it in the same way? Not likely. Capabilities are what really matter in international politics, not intentions. Hence, despite Washington’s repeated assurances that the United States does not seek to constrain China’s economic and military development, constraining China, as Perdue aptly observes, is “exactly what the Chinese Politburo believes that the U.S. is already doing.” A security dilemma, in which one state’s actions to increase its security will be viewed as threatening

by others, is operating in U.S.-China relations. Just as Washington views China's military rise with suspicion, Beijing also sees American military activities in Asia with concerns.

So, what can we do to ameliorate the U.S.-China security dilemma? Sadly, not much. Perdue mistakenly puts me in the same category as those who argue for "engagement" with China, the idea that if we engage China and help it integrate into the world, China will behave cooperatively. I do not think that engaging China will solve the security dilemma between the United States and China. The core of the problem is uncertainty about each other's intentions. As a recent report by Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi (cited by Perdue) shows, strategic distrust runs deep between Chinese and American leaders.⁴ Two quotes from the report highlight the security dilemma:

[I]n Beijing's view, it is U.S. policies, attitude, and misperceptions that cause the lack of mutual trust between the two countries. (7)

For a variety of reasons, despite China's repeated assurances that it does not seek to push America out of Asia, American leaders remain deeply concerned that China seeks to dominate the region at significant cost to U.S. influence and interests there. (26)

Uncertainty about each other's intentions is driving the U.S.-China security dilemma. It is worth noting that Lieberthal and Wang's policy recommendations, such as more trade, more transparency, and more dialogue, still do not solve the fundamental problem of uncertainty about intentions.

A caveat is in order. The argument that the United States and China will be involved in an intense security competition is predicated on the assumption that China's economic and military capabilities will continue to rise. At present, China has numerous domestic problems that may derail its current rise. If the Chinese economy stalls, the U.S. will be less concerned about China. And let's not forget the lesson of Japan in the late 1980s, when that country was said to be in a position to overtake the United States. We all know what happened next.

Cross-fertilization

So far, I have provided a response to the historians' critiques of *Harmony and War* from an IR perspective. Although there are noticeable differences in how IR theorists and historians study Chinese military history and foreign policy, these differences can create opportunities for interdisciplinary dialogue and cross-fertilization. The historian's sensitivity to details can force IR theorists to conduct their case studies more rigorously. IR theorists need to take "inconvenient facts" more seriously and use them to amend their theory or better delineate the scope conditions under which their theory applies. Having

⁴ Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, "Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust," in *John L. Thornton China Center Monograph Series 4* (The Brookings Institution, March 2012).

read the historians' critiques, I realize that the scope conditions under which structural realism applies could have been made more salient. Similarly, the conditions under which culture supplements structural realism can be integrated more closely into the case studies. I could also have examined the Southern Song's long struggles with the Mongols in more detail, but balancing the length of the book with more case studies is not always an easy task.

In writing *Harmony and War*, I tried to read the scholarship of historians as extensively as possible, but unfortunately some important works are left out. I'm relieved that Wills found the omission "rare" and that it would not have led to a different conclusion. More future conversations between our two disciplines would likely lead to a more comprehensive coverage of each other's scholarship.

Asian history can enrich the IR subfield. For IR theorists accustomed to European and American diplomatic history, Asian diplomatic history can provide an alternative empirical domain to test out their theories or to build new ones. A subfield worthy of the name "international relations" needs to have a broader coverage of the world. Asia, with its distinct historical trajectory, is too important to be left out.

What, then, can IR theorists offer to historians? While respecting disciplinary boundaries and being aware of the limits in crossing them, let me offer a few preliminary thoughts for more interdisciplinary dialogue.

One way for cross-fertilization is to highlight the value of structural variables.⁵ Historiography and secondary literature tend to put more weight on individual and domestic variables. The Chinese emperors, throne succession problems, factional strife among officials, or other domestic political issues are all important variables to consider, but they do not prohibit a consideration of structural variables between China and its adversaries. To illustrate, most historians' accounts of the Treaty of Shanyuan of 1005 emphasize individual and domestic factors in making the peace. However, the bipolar power structure between the Song and the Liao could have also explained the peace. Most IR theorists consider bipolarity more peaceful and stable than multipolarity. The ensuing century of Song-Liao peace has much to do with the structure of the system. Similarly, more attention to the structural balance of power between the Ming and the Mongols would provide a richer account of Ming-Mongol relations.

Second, theory is a simplification of the complex world. As such, IR theorists can help historians see "the great outline" and identify "the significant detail."⁶ As diplomatic

⁵ Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, "Diplomatic History and International Relations Theory," *International Security* 22:1 (Summer 1997): 5-21 at 15.

⁶ As Lewis B. Namier wrote, "What matters in history is the great outline and the significant detail; what must be avoided is the deadly morass of irrelevant narrative." Quoted in Paul W. Schroeder, "History and International Relations Theory," *International Security* 22, no. 1 (Summer 1997): 64-74 at 65.

historian Paul Schroeder observes, “My own experience has convinced me that international historians can learn a lot from international relations theory and apply it usefully to their craft.”⁷ He notes that IR theory can help historians see patterns in what they might otherwise have seen only in unique circumstances.

Third, IR theory can encourage historians to use multiple approaches to the study of history. IR theory may lead to unexplored questions and intriguing puzzles in what would otherwise have been a ‘finished’ historical research. IR theory could also help historians strengthen the argument they are making. John Lewis Gaddis notes that there may be more “common ground” between historians and IR theorists than we think. Both rely on theory (implicitly or explicitly) to explain nonreplicable events in the past. He suggests that if historians make their methods more explicit, they might find more in common with IR theorists.⁸

In closing, I thank the reviewers for reading *Harmony and War* and offering their critiques. I hope this roundtable will lead to more exchanges between historians and IR theorists.

Copyright © 2012 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the H-Diplo Editors at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, “History, Theory, and Common Ground,” *International Security* 22, no. 1 (Summer 1997): 75-85.