

## Book Review

A.W. Callahan and E. Barabantseva (eds), *China Orders the World: Normative Soft Power and Foreign Policy*, Washington, D.C: Woodrow Wilson Press, 2011, 280 pp. + xiv

This is a very rich opus which presents us with a complex discussion of the relationship between China's historical ideas and China's foreign policy. The book comes out during the time of China taking a high profile in international affairs. President Hu's "Harmonious World" pronouncements, and the Beijing-championed economic initiatives come from a different understanding of the world by China's foreign policy elite, which goes beyond merely being a *status quo* power, and implicitly challenge the Western-led international order. Therefore to understand China and its intentions, we must first look inside the country, and understand how China sees itself and the world, which is precisely what the book engages in. Based on a panel "Tradition and Modernity in China's Foreign Policy", which was a part of the launch conference for the British Inter-University China Centre, the edited volume features a collection of eight essays written by both Chinese and Western scholars who engage in Chinese philosophy and international relations. According to Callahan, one of the editors, the book strives to explain China's intellectual debates in the search for a post-Western world order and to raise new questions about a topic that is growing in importance.

The edited volume is thematically divided into three parts. The first part shows the richness of international relations theorizing in China and features three Chinese scholars invoking distinct Chinese conceptual themes to think about the world. In the second and the third parts, Western scholars analyze how the past and present are put together in Chinese discussions of domestic and international politics.

The first section of the book is perhaps the most interesting and innovative, and crosses the boundaries between philosophy and international relations. Zhao, Qin and Yan are not only distinguished scholars but also part of the policy-making elite in China, which makes their ideas even more pertinent. In their respective chapters, Zhao discusses the traditional Chinese concept of world governance, the "All under the Heaven" (*tianxia* 天下), Qin ponders the possibility of a Chinese school of international

relations theory, and Yan tries to explain the thought of the ancient Chinese philosopher Xunzi 荀子 from the perspective of international relations. Particularly intriguing is Zhao's essay in Chapter 2, where he argues that *tianxia* would provide a better alternative to the current anarchic international system, which is, according to him, not capable of solving global issues efficiently. Zhao's approach is also interesting from the methodology aspect; he shifts the attention to the international system, where only the solution to the world's problems can be found. Nevertheless, while Zhao discusses the nature of *tianxia* in detail, he is silent about how can it be achieved.

Many of the ideas invoked in the first section are further discussed in the later parts of the book. In Chapter 5, which is perhaps the most analytical one, Callahan critically discusses the Chinese concept of world governance, *tianxia*. After a meticulous interrogation of the geographical, psychological and institutional meanings of *tianxia*, he concludes that rather than a solution for the world, it is merely a new version of hegemony. In Chapter 6, Hughes argues that Chinese exceptionalism cannot be successful on its own, but only when it is combined with thought from other systems. In the remaining chapters, Kerr suggests an understanding of China's foreign policy based on the interactions between China and Islam; and Barabantseva draws upon insights from contemporary Chinese cinema to analyze how China negotiates its relationship with the world. Finally, in another absorbing essay, Billiard traces the re-emergence of traditional culture as well as Confucius in the official discourse in China. Through a careful examination of official documents, Billiard demonstrates how Confucius and his ideas have been increasingly drawn upon and whether the dynamics between Confucian rhetoric and Marxist orthodoxy in the official discourse can be sustained.

*China Orders the World* not only shows the richness of international relations theorizing in China, but also offers insights of how China perceives both itself and the world and how that impacts international relations. Although written mainly for political science scholars, the book is also rich in discussions of Chinese philosophy, and even culture. All chapters are meticulously researched and contain many useful references for future research. One of the themes alluded to by all contributors is the connection between China's past and the present, how both the past and Chinese philosophy inform China's present understanding of the world. Nevertheless, the diversity of the volume is also its weakness, as the chapters make an incoherent whole and some hardly engage with international relations at all. Fortunately, the introduction and the conclusion, both written by Callahan, wrap up nicely the themes discussed and make the diverse volume a bit

more consistent. All in all, the edited volume contains a very stimulating and diverse collection of essays and should be recommended to anyone attempting to understand the international relations of China.

*Filip Viskupic*  
*Department of Political Science*  
*Lingnan University*  
*Hong Kong*

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Filip Viskupic is an M.Phil. candidate at the Department of Political Science, Lingnan University, Hong Kong. He graduated with a BA Politics from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Filip's research interests include the international relations theory and the international relations of China. He enjoys traveling around Asia and likes to eat Chinese dumplings. <Email: *filipviskupic@ln.hk*>

# International Journal of China Studies

Volume 3

Number 1

April 2012

ISSN 2180-3250

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