Taking the English School Forward: Back to and beyond Wight¹

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Abstract:

In his search for intellectual and historical foundations of international theory, Martin Wight engaged in a series of enterprising and pioneering efforts to ruminate among classical thinkers for relevant ideas in constructing what emerged as the three traditions of international thought. The conversation with classical political philosophy and the engagement with the history of ideas have since been one of the Wightian legacies in inventing the English School (ES). While such attempts at historicizing international theory have fruitfully differentiated the ES from other mainstream IR theories, the potentials of this Wightian legacy remain arguably underexploited. This paper sets out to contend that one way of taking the ES forward is to cultivate fully the potentials of this Wightian legacy. More specifically, it argues for a global renaissance in the history of international thought as a viable intellectual project for the ES to move forward. This entails not only going back to Wight, but also going beyond Wight. A truly global project at historicizing international theory must, therefore, be inclusive of traditions of international thought of different civilizations; and the longue durée intellectual history of the international has to go into deeper world history beyond the Enlightenment and the Renaissance in Europe. The purpose of this project is not, however, to search for any foundations, ancient, pre-modern, modern, or post-modern, of international theory, but to understand and elucidate the contested nature of the ‘international’ in different historical and civilizational context.
Introduction

A few years ago, in a contributing chapter to Guide to the English School in International Relations Studies edited by Cornelia Navari and Daniel Green, I claimed, with conviction, that the English School (ES) has become unmistakably a globally recognized and influential contending approach to theorizing IR. The global diffusion of the ES, I further argued, is one of the most significant achievements accomplished by the second generation of the ES scholars. More specifically, I also argued that it is through intensive intellectual manoeuvring of the ES scholars in reconstructing, representing, repositioning and networking the ES in the previous two decades that makes this achievement possible. From a Collinsian sociological perspective, socio-political changes and economic transformations in the previous twenty years had indirectly set off a period of intellectual change by opening up structural opportunities for reorienting and reconfiguring major debates in the global discipline of IR. More specifically, this means the restructuring of the attention space—the intellectual territory of limited size—in IR. The ES scholars collectively have taken advantage of the opportunities offered by this restructuring to establish successfully the ES as one of a small number of contending occupants in the attention space of IR, because the intellectual field is structured by rivalries and because conflict over the attention space is a fundamental social fact for intellectuals (Zhang 2014a).

As a distinctive approach to the social production of ideas/knowledge in IR, the ES is confronted now by different challenges at a time when for some, IR theoretical innovation seems to have stagnated; and for others, IR has become an increasingly insecure discipline (Dunne, Hansen and Wight 2013; Lake 2011; Mearsheimer and Walt 2013; Maliniak et al. 2018). Put it bluntly and differently, the challenge is how to take the ES forward so that it continues to produce innovative knowledge. This is challenge is perhaps more acute to what we might call the third generation of the ES scholars than those of the second. There have been already many commendable attempts at trying to tackle this challenge. The proposition made in this paper, as suggested in the title, is that one fruitful way to take the ES forward to go both back to and beyond Wight in order to fully cultivate potentials of Wight’s legacies. The specific Wightian legacy I have in mind is the ‘conversation’ with classical political philosophy Wight diligently practiced and was exemplified by his construction of the three Rs traditions of international theory, Realism, Rationalism and Revolutionism. Taking the English School forward in this fashion, however, does not mean simply taking further the lines of enquiries that Wight had opened up, as Bull (1991: x) suggested, but more importantly it impels overcoming the limits of Wight’s approach and broadening what Wight calls the ‘conversation’ with classical political philosophy and internationally-minded philosophers into a global enterprise through engagement with other cultural traditions and civilizations in world history and beyond the West. As an exercise of provocation, I would propose a global renaissance in the history of international thought as a viable intellectual project for the ES to move forward.

OF WIGHT’S LEGACIES

In his search for philosophical and historical foundations of international theory, Martin Wight engaged in a series of enterprising and pioneering efforts to ruminate among classical thinkers for relevant ideas in constructing what emerged as the three traditions of international thought (Wight 1991). This conversation with classical political philosophy and the engagement with the history of ideas have since been one of the Wightian legacies in
inventing the English School (ES). Arguably, this is one of Wight’s most profound contributions to International Relations. For Wight, ‘There is some rhythm or pattern in the history of ideas which is there, waiting to be uncovered (Bull 1991: xvii).’ The purpose of his inquiries is, in Wight’s own words, ‘to learn that the same moral predicaments and the same ideas have been explored before (Quoting Wight, Bull 1991: xx).’ It is, as Bull (1991: xi) put it, ‘to rediscover, to assemble and to categorize all that had been said and thought on the subject throughout the ages’. Wight (1991: 5) quoted fondly Tocqueville’s 1852 presidential address at the annual public session of the Academie des Sciences Morales et Politiques:

> It is unbelievable how many systems of morals and politics have been successively found, forgotten, rediscovered, forgotten again to reappear a little later, always charming and surprising the world as if they were new, and bearing witness, not to the fecundity of the human spirit, but to the ignorance of men.

For Wight, unhistorical and unphilosophical IR theory is impossible. He always associated his attempts at theoretical inquiry with historical enquiry and firmly believed that an exercise in the history of thought about international relations can help understand and explain contemporary issues of world politics in historical and philosophical depth. Wight emphasized, however, that ‘the student will not find the history of thought about International Relations in ready-made and accessible form: the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle have to be disinterred and put together (Bull 1991: xxi).’ In Wight’s own words,

> International theory can be discerned existing dimly, obscured and moreover partitioned, partly on the fringe or margin of ordinary political philosophy and partly in the province of international law. This is owing to a historical accident, due ultimately to the cultural cleavage in Western society that occurred in the sixteenth century (Wight 1991: 1).

It is not, therefore, ‘the absence of literature which is the difficulty’, Wight (1991: 3-4) insisted, ‘but its scatteredness.’ Wight’s own works, from constructing the three Rs traditions to his works on four seminal thinkers (Wight 2005), demonstrate admirably his efforts to deal with the challenges posed by such ‘scatteredness’. As Coral Bell vividly remembered,

> He [Wight] made his students see the history of thought in the subject from Thucydides to Henry Kissinger as a sort of great shimmering tapestry of many figures, a tapestry mostly woven from just three contrasting threads, which he called realist, rationalist, and revolutionist. What made him such a charismatic teacher, and those lectures so fascinating, was the elegance of his analysis, and the breadth and depth of his learning, literary as well as historical (Bell as quoted in Yost 2005: xix).

What ‘a voyage of discovery’ (Howard 2005: vi) Wight had taken his students on!

Wight’s attempts at historicizing international theory have had profound influence in the evolving ES approach to theorizing IR and have helped fruitfully differentiate the ES from other mainstream IR theoretical approaches. While this line of enquiry has continued to produce notably works (Jackson 2005; Keene 2005; Jahn 2006; Hall and Hill 2009), the potentials of this Wightian legacy remain arguably underexploited.

There are notable limits of Wight’s ‘conversation’ with classical thinkers. For one thing, they are all European, white, male and of course, dead. Bull (1991: xxiii) was also critical of Wight’s Eurocentric view, as Wight ‘saw modern international society as the product of Western
culture’ and ‘had no deep understanding of the non-Western world.’ However, as I noted in my 2013 Martin Wight Memorial Lecturer, Wight was keenly aware of the importance of going beyond the West in search of international theory. Grotius, he once critically noted, ‘does not have sufficient knowledge of the non-European world to develop a more complex picture’ of international society because of his traditional Christian view of history (Wight 1977: 128). Wight is also one of the few classical international theorists of his generation to have shown more than a passing interest in ancient China (non-European world). In his pioneering attempts at outlining a historical sociology of states-systems in ‘De systematibus civitatum’, Wight (1977) not only cited three clear examples of ancient states-systems, namely, ‘the Western, the Hellenic-Hellenistic or Graeco-Roman, and the Chinese between the collapse of the Chou Empire in 771 b.c. and the establishment of the Ts’in Empire in 221 b.c.’; he also posited that the Chinese suzerain system was similar to the Byzantine basileus but different from the ancient Greek poleis and the Hellenistic kingdoms in terms of its constitution. Most enlighteningly, Wight discussed, though only tentatively and in exploratory fashion, ‘a triad of philosophical traditions’ in ancient China: Confucian as rationalist, Daoist as revolutionist, and the Legalist as realist (Zhang 2014b).

BUILDING ON WIGHT’S LEGACIES

Nevertheless, the Eurocentric nature of Wight’s ‘conversation’ with classical political philosophy and philosophers, and more broadly of IR as a discipline, is undeniable. Further cultivating the potentials of Wight’s legacies therefore impels going beyond just ‘entering this tradition, joining in the conversation (Wight 1991: 1).’ It means going on a different and perhaps more ambitious ‘voyage of discovery’ (Howard 2005: vi) that moves both deeper into and beyond European traditions and history. It means searching for and constructing traditions of international thought in world (global) history.

Armitage and the renaissance in the history of international thought

There are two fortuitous circumstances for embarking on such a journey. First is an ongoing ‘renaissance in the history of international thought’ in the trans-Atlantic IR scholarship noted by David Armitage (2014). This revival of the history of international thought, in his view, ‘marks the most recent of three phases of relations between intellectual history and international history: an age of engagement that lasted from roughly the end of the First World War until the 1950s; an age of estrangement running from the early 1960s to the mid-1990s; and an age of rapprochement which is still very much in progress (Armitage 2014: ).’ The fifty years’ rift between intellectual history and international relations was coming to an end and the ‘dawn of a historiographical turn’ was breaking in the studies of international relations at the turn of the century (Bell 2001; Armitage 2004). New conversations have been opened up therefore between historians, political theorists, International Relations scholars and international lawyers. That renaissance has produced the first bunches of fruits and facilitated intellectual history’s international turn. In David Armitage’s (2013: 1) rather upbeat assessment, international intellectual history—i.e. intellectual history of the international—has developed within just over a decade between 2000 and 2013 from a field that ‘had neither a local habitation nor a name’, ‘had no common agenda, no coherent body of scholarship and no self-identifying practitioners’, and ‘occupied no territory on the broader map of contemporary historiography’ to ‘an identifiable field, with an expanding cannon of works, a burgeoning set of questions and a fertile agenda of research’. This is a return to a tradition in social science research, which sees that history and theory ‘are inextricably linked’, and ‘not
only are they both inseparable; they are also in a specific sense interminable’. (Runciman 1969: 174)

In *Foundation of Modern International Thought*, Armitage (2013: 8) paraphrases Kant evocatively,

> In the international realm (as elsewhere), intellectual history without material history will be empty, while material history uninformed by intellectual history will be blind.

He further asserts that ‘the formation of modern international thought was in itself a transnational, indeed global enterprise’ involving debates in council-chambers and committee rooms and the studies of scholars and philosophers who ‘attempted to formalize concepts being thrashed out elsewhere on battlegrounds, in maritime arenas and along imperial frontiers around the world’. It follows, Armitage suggests provocatively that ‘Demonstrating this will be a major task for the next phase of research in international intellectual history (Armitage 2013: 8).’ As will be contended below, the return of intellectual history to longue durée suggested by Armitage (2012) has serious limitations.

‘International turn’ in the studies of ancient Chinese political thought

Parallel to the ‘renaissance in the history of international thought’ in the trans-Atlantic IR scholarship is an ‘international turn’ in the studies of ancient Chinese political thought. Not widely known internationally, this ‘international turn’, however, complements the international turn in intellectual history in the trans-Atlantic IR scholar noted by Armitage and raises important questions about the limits and promises of the international turn in intellectual history.

In claiming an ‘international turn’ in the studies of ancient Chinese political thought, I take ‘international thought’ to mean, following Robert Jackson (2005: 1), principally three inquiries, namely, ‘an inquiry into the fundamental ideas and beliefs involved in the arrangement and conduct of world affairs over time’; ‘an inquiry into the values at stake’ such as peace, security, independence, order, and justice, among others; and an inquiry ‘into the language and discourse of world affairs’. Such an understanding of international thought is transtemporal as well as transhistorical. It does not necessarily share the assumptions taken to be fundamental and foundational for modern international thought, namely, ‘the separation of the domestic and the foreign; the primacy of states over all other actors in the external realm, ...; international law as the positive law of a system of states under conditions of international anarchy; and the states-system as a self-policing club with its own hierarchical standards of admission and exclusion (Armitage 2015: 117).’ This claim of an international turn also assumes that international thought as a body of knowledge as understood above can be (re)discovered and (re)constructed through close and contextual readings of classical canons of ancient Chinese history and philosophy and by creative interpretations of ideas and concepts articulated by key classical thinkers in ancient China under the rubric of the history of international thought, following the Wightian tradition. Two such projects are worth discussing here in some length (See Zhang and Chang 2016 for more discussions on this).

(Re)discovering International Thought in Ancient China

First is the so-called Tsinghua approach has been led and advocated by Yan Xuetong, which aims explicitly at (re)discovering International Thought in Ancient China. It is labelled the Tsinghua approach because a distinctive research program aimed at rediscovering ancient
Chinese international thought has been conducted by a small group of researchers with institutional links with Tsinghua University’s Institute of International Relations headed by Yan. The Institute runs two key journals, one in Chinese 国际政治科学 (International Political Science Quarterly) and the other in English The Chinese Journal of International Politics now published by Oxford University Press. It is through these two journals that new scholarship and knowledge produced by this research program has been disseminated both in China and internationally. The publication by the prestigious Princeton University Press in 2011 of Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power edited by Daniel Bell makes available to a global audience selected works by Yan as well as works by his associates and critics. It helps stimulate further debates about the promise and the peril of the Tsinghua approach to theorizing IR in the global discipline.

Empirically, the historical period in ancient Chinese history that the Tsinghua approach chooses to focus its attention on is the so-called Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period (771-221 BC), a prolonged period of incessant warfare when anarchy prevailed in a highly competitive inter-state system with the fragmentation and annexation of states the order of the day. This period happens to overlap with the age of philosophers (551–221 BC) in ancient Chinese history, which is closely identified with the wellspring of Chinese philosophical, political and social thought. The ‘battle of ideas’ among ancient philosophers in this period produced substantially different propositions for dealing with the problem of war and peace, power and authority and order and justice and led to plurality and variety of Chinese political thought, which the doxographers of the early Han (206 BC–AD 220) would retrospectively categorize as Rujia (Confucianism), Daojia (Daoism), Fajia (Legalism), Mojia (Moism) and Zajia (Eclecticism). For Yan and his associates, it is the common philosophical and political discourse for all contending schools of thought that they are interested in exploring, which constitute what they call the inter-state political philosophy.

For this purpose, seven key philosophers in the pre-Qin China: Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, Mozi, Guanzi, Hanfeizi and Xunzi have been closely examined. Their ideas and conceptualizations of power, authority, hegemony, war, and justice have been scrutinized. Their deliberations of how morality informs interest and is related to order, and why hierarchy is conducive to stability, and in which way moral leadership fosters humane authority as supreme power have been interrogated. One crucial finding of this excavation of knowledge is that the conceptualization of power by ancient Chinese philosophers differs conspicuously from that of classical and contemporary Western thinkers. While not denying the importance of material power, ancient Chinese philosophical/political discourse sees power as derived mostly, if not exclusively, from non-material sources with a firm moral claim. Morality therefore is the core of any claim to political power, as it gives legitimacy to the claim of power. There is, in other word, an ethical dimension in any claim to power, if the legitimacy of power is not based on coercion. There is at the same time an emphasis on ‘the context sensitivity of Confucian ethics (Yan 2011).’

It follows that there are three distinctive ways of exercising power in constructing a hierarchical international order: humane authority (Wangquan 王权), hegemony (Baquan 霸权), and tyranny (Qiangquan 强权), Yan and his associates argue. Humane authority, based on the power of persuasion rather than coercion, is the highest form of rulership with strong moral claims, for example, from the Mandate of Heaven, for its legitimacy and leadership. The exercise and acceptance of humane authority (Wangquan 王权) does not, therefore, rest
on claims to material power. International order based on the exercise of humane authority is the most stable and long lasting, as ‘a humane authority under heaven relies upon its ultrapowerful moral force to maintain its comprehensive state power in first place in the system (Bell 2011: 13).’ Tyranny (Qiangquan 强权) on the other hand is ‘the lowest form of rule, relying exclusively on military force and stratagems.’ For such understanding and interpretation of the centrality of power in ancient inter-state relations, Yan has been labelled a ‘moral realist (Zhang F. 2012).’

The Tsinghua approach clearly seeks to make a distinctive contribution to IR theorization through exploring valuable indigenous sources related specifically to ancient Chinese history and philosophy. Such modest goal is explicitly stated in the preface of one of Yan’s edited book, when he remarked

The core goal of editing this book is the hope that through uncovering anew pre-Qin inter-state political thought I would provide new resources for Chinese scholars to enrich existing international relations theory (Quoted in Paltiel, 2011: 11).

Yan does envision a more ambitious goal for the study of ancient Chinese political thought in the long run. That is ‘to create a new international relations theory on the basis of both pre-Qin thought and contemporary international relations theory’, for ‘it is only by creating a new theory that we can fully prove the value of studying pre-Qin thought (Yan 2011: 221).’

**Reinterpreting Tianxia**

The other is a philosophical reinterpretation of Tianxia (all-under-heaven) engaged by Zhao Tingyang. A philosopher by training, Zhao’s intervention in the international turn in the studies of ancient Chinese political thought from a cognate discipline is largely unanticipated with the publication in 2005 of his *Tianxia Tixi* (The System of All-under-Heaven). It has been nevertheless most productive in generating debates among Chinese scholars about how ancient Chinese history and philosophy as a critical resource could and should be drawn upon for innovative theorization of IR. Zhao’s works since 2005 has sought to advance a philosophical critique of the worldview prevailing in Western philosophy and IR theory. It is his sustained attack on the ontology and epistemology of Western political thought that inserts him in the meta-theoretical debate in the trans-Atlantic IR.

The key claim that Zhao has made is that today’s world is a non-world, i.e. philosophically and institutionally it is not a world in its true sense. The only world that prevails today is geographical one that is institutionally failed and politically abandoned. The ontological world understood and interpreted by Western philosophy is a problematic one because it is a world constituted by rational state actors, who pursue their narrow national interests. The worldness of the world is sadly missing because Western political theory and international theory justify national interest in governing world politics, thus denying the world its world-ness. The existing institutions created by powerful states and for powerful states do not promote universal wellbeing (Zhao 2005). ‘The failure of world politics is essentially the failure of [Western] philosophy (Zhao 2009: 7).’ Zhao is scathingly critical of Kant at a time when ‘Kant has become variously the theorist of democratic peace, the avatar of institutional internationalism and the grandfather of globalisation (Armitage 2004: 107-08).’ The Kantian vision of perpetual peace and its modern incarnation (i.e. democratic peace), Zhao argues, fail to transcend, least of all overcome, the cultural and spiritual divides among civilizations.
The idea of ‘a federation of free states’ constructs insiders and outsiders in the world and it does more to divide than to unite the world. So does Western philosophy.

Zhao calls for ‘a philosophical renewal of all-under-heaven’ (Zhao 2009: 9) and argues for an imaginative and creative use of ancient Chinese political thought, particularly the idea of Tianxia (all-under-heaven) to foster an all-inclusive worldview and to imagine a world that is of all and for all, where nothing is ‘foreign’ or ‘pagan’. ‘Viewing the world as a whole is an epistemological principle first used by Laozi’. As Chinese philosophy always considers the world more as a political body than a scientific object, it is a political epistemology not a scientific one that informs ancient Chinese philosophy. ‘Chinese philosophy deals more with the problems of relations and the heart, whereas Western philosophy concentrates more on the truth and the mind (Zhao 2009: 10).’ A global political philosophy constructed around the idea of Tianxia is to cultivate a worldview equivalent to, in his words, ‘a mind at peace, free from the trap of thinking in terms of war, enemy, winner and loser. It is different as political mentality from those of Machiavelli, Hobbes, Marx, Freud, Schmitt, Morgenthau, and Huntington, and different in a practical sense from the hegemonic order of Pax Romana, Christian cosmopolitanism and democratic peace under US leadership (Zhao 2005: 7; translation is from Qin: 2012: 74).’ For Zhao, ‘a philosophical renewal of all-under-heaven’ is indispensable in search of such a global political philosophy. It entails ‘rethinking China’; and ‘the historical significance of “rethinking China” lies in recovering China’s own ability to think (Zhao 2005: 7).’

In the Wightian interpretation, these two research projects aim at no more than rediscovering ideas of the international, dimly existing, obscured and always scattered and often partitioned and reconstructing traditions of international thought, but in Chinese history not European history. Intellectually, they engage with ancient Chinese history and philosophy from different analytical, historical and normative perspectives. Both assert, and attempt to establish, the epistemological legitimacy of rediscovering and resurrecting ancient Chinese philosophy and history as critical resources to draw upon to construct new knowledge, to contest exclusive epistemological claims of the Western-dominated IR. Tentative as they are, in rediscovering ancient Chinese international thought and wisdom in this fashion, both offer an implicit critique of the historicism—‘Europe first, then elsewhere’ in Chakrabarty’s formulation—the subalternity of non-Western, third world histories and the notion that only Europe is theoretically knowable (Chakrabarty 2001: 28-30) in the development of IR theory. In no small measure, both try to reverse the subject-object relationship in the studies of International Relations. It should also be noted that the purpose of such rediscovering, reinterpreting and reconstructing Chinese international thought is clearly to serve the present. If that is accepted, it is unsurprisingly a matter of political and moral choice how and whether each individual scholar embraces the so-called ‘motivational presentism’, i.e. ‘our reasons for why we study what we study in the here and now (Armitage 2015: 119).’

TOWARDS A GLOBAL HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL THOUGHT

To the extent that this international turn in the exploration of ancient Chinese philosophical and political thought adds a global dimension to and complements what Armitage claims to be ‘the renaissance in the history of international thought’ discussed above, it also helps highlight the limits and problems of the international turn in intellectual history in the trans-Atlantic IR evaluated David Armitage and exemplified by his own works. Three questions can
be raised in this regard that are worth teasing out that make the project of constructing a
global history of international thought both imperative and desirable.

First, what is ‘international thought’? David Armitage (2013: 7) defines international thought
as ‘theoretical reflection on that peculiar political arena populated variously by individuals,
peoples, nations and states and, in the early modern period, by other corporate bodies such
as churches and trading companies’. Is this definition too limiting and too bound up with the
European historical experience? Is such understanding of international thought parochially
embedded in culturally specific and historically situated experience and philosophical edifice?
What has been excluded from such a definition? If historical writings on war and peace,
diplomacy and law, sovereignty and the state are indeed what come to define the study of
international relations since Thucydides (Armitage 2004: 99), what about those historical
writings before the early modern period and beyond Europe? Putting it differently, is there
international thought before early modernity in Europe? Can international thought as ‘an
historical corpus of reflection on the international’ (Armitage 2015: 129) be found in the non-
European world? Armitage’s perspective and exploration remains very much regional, if not
strictly local. It cannot claim to be global.

This leads to the second question, the question of longue durée in the historiography of the
international. Armitage (2012) argues strongly for the importance of longue durée intellectual
history, exemplified by his personal endeavour to explore the intellectual history of civil war
as a ‘big idea’ from ancient Rome to the present. Yet, he is also convinced that it is correct ‘to
see the full emergence of the international as post-dating the Renaissance, not least when
historiographical analysis converged with natural jurisprudence in the works of Pufendorf and
Vattel’ (Armitage 2015: 125).’ He anchors foundations, if not the origins, of modern
international thought firmly in the age of European empires and states and traces them back
genealogically to the Enlightenment thinkers in the long eighteenth century (Armitage 2013).
This view of longue durée intellectual history of the international has serious historiographical
implications, not in the least because it may lead to the production of what one critic of
Armitage calls ‘a new master narrative in which the revolution of 1776 comes to occupy a
similar status to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia in the historiography of International Relations
(Hutchings, 2014: 392).’ It may also come to legitimate the exclusion of longue durée
intellectual history, European as well as non-European, that have enabled as well as
conditioned the full emergence of the international in its modern manifestations in the long
eighteenth century. If there is a true transnational intellectual history of the international of
real longue durée, what is it like?

Finally, it is the question where to look for international thought? This is in search of an
answer to a quintessential Wightian question: Where is international theory (Wight 1991: 1)?
Armitage’s own exploration of the intellectual history of the international has heavily relied
on British historiographical sources. His excavation of international thought has been mostly
performed by looking into the canonical works of principally British political thinkers from
Hobbs to Locke. In responding to his critics, Armitage (2015: 125) acknowledges that
international thought in its various manifestations needs to be reconstructed ‘high, middle
and low’, i.e. such resources as ‘manuals for diplomats; collections of treaties (and the texts
of the treaties themselves); the works of journalists and publicists’, among others, must be
included. Although he has warned against ‘dangers in relying on predominantly Western
historiography for conceptions of the international’ (Armitage 2015: 126), his works have
rarely moved beyond Western historiography. The pivotal historical moments when ideas
concerning the international changed or were made are all found in European history.

_A Provocation_

The above discussions raise three further questions of fundamental importance for historicizing international theory in global settings: the question of the international in Western political thought vs. the international in non-Western political thought; the question of temporal specificity vs. transtemporal universality; and the question of internationality in modernity vs. internationality in premodernity or between modernity and axiality.

Terry Nardin (2015: 101) is hopeful that ‘the enterprise of international intellectual history is likely to become more inclusive as the study of ideas, thinkers, and texts in languages other than European ones, and by scholars in other parts of the world, increases’. This suggests that a lot beyond the European historiography needs to be interrogated and scrutinized for international thought. If Armitage (2015: 120) is right in claiming that theology remains ‘one of international thought’s foundations that is yet to be fully excavated’, one could legitimately ask what non-Western historiography, for example of the Axial Age (Bellah and Joas 2012), remains to be fully excavated in constructing a truly global intellectual history of the international in the longue durée? Can a Confucian tradition of international thought be meaningfully constructed not necessarily as a coherent intellectual edifice but as the grinding of the intellectual optics through which the world is seen and understood in the past and at present, perilous as such an enterprise may be? How can the excavation of the international in ancient Chinese political thought contribute to a comparative historical research project through a conversation with the international turn in intellectual history in the trans-Atlantic IR? Efforts to search for answers to these questions are indispensable to making the renaissance in the history of international thought a truly global enterprise.

A truly global project at historicizing international theory must, therefore, be inclusive of traditions of international thought of different civilizations; and the longue durée intellectual history of the international has to go into deeper world history beyond the Enlightenment and the Renaissance in Europe. The purpose of this project is not, however, to search for any foundations, ancient, pre-modern, modern, or post-modern, of international theory, but to understand and elucidate the contested nature of the ‘international’ in different historical and civilizational context. This is a challenging and promising intellectual project that the ES scholars can and should take up in taking the English School forward.
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ADD REFERENCES