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**Yuan-Kang Wang. Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics. New York: Columbia University Press. 2011.**

Emilian Kavalski Ph.D.  
University of Western Sydney, Australia, e.kavalski@uws.edu.au

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**Yuan-Kang Wang. *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics*.  
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Perhaps few other actors had their standing in international life as profoundly altered by the end of the Cold War as China. China's expanding outreach and diversifying roles have provided a novel context for the ongoing reconsiderations of world politics. In this setting, Beijing's external relations draw attention both because of its agency and due to the specificities of its individual engagements. The established purview is that it is the complex interaction between the very turbulence of the post-1989 period and the ability to maintain consistent levels of economic growth that have allowed China to demonstrate an enhanced confidence and ability to fashion international relations. In fact, a number of commentators have interpreted China's growing prominence as one of the clearest indications of the emergence of a "world without the West." For at least 200 years, the rivalry over structural power in global politics seems to have been "the great game" of Western actors. Thus, agency (especially, global agency) was not a feature of their international identity. Yet, China's growing external outreach has challenged this perception and has demonstrated that non-Western actors are just as skilled and willing to engage in the global playground as Western ones.

This shift appears to attest both to the transformations in and the transformative potential of Chinese foreign policy attitudes. At the same time, such changes have backstopped the growing interest in (as well as anxiety about) the prospective trajectories of Beijing's international interactions. Reflecting this interest and addressing the anxieties, Yuan-Kang Wang's study provides a detailed account of Chinese strategic culture. His investigation offers effective and compelling historical contextualization of the conflicting opinions on China's global roles and aspirations and the contending views on whether its rise is a sustainable and positive phenomenon altogether. Thus, by examining distinct interpretations of the Confucian legacy and its impact on China's international behavior, Wang manages to construct a veritable interpretation of the past, current, and future trajectories of Beijing's external outlook. The central inquiry of the book is the extent to which culture has a bearing on a state's use of force. In this respect, Wang's analysis is a welcome contribution to the emerging literature assessing whether China's Confucian culture is a constraint on or a contributor to its potential use of force.

In order to respond to such query Wang develops an original approach for the analysis of Chinese foreign policy which brings together insights from both cultural studies and International Relations theory. As the same time, the investigation relies on an extensive list of Chinese-language sources that are made available in English for the first time. The prioritization of cultural factors in the explanation of China's international relations reflects Wang's examination of the claim that "cultural norms not only have 'constitutive effects' that define the identity of an actor, but they also have 'regulative effects' that prescribe appropriate behavior" (12). In this respect, the patterns of China's foreign affairs can be interpreted as an intriguing intersection of the discursive memory of the past with the contexts of the present and the anticipated tasks of the future. The contention is that the weight of the ideational baggage of history structures the cognitive grammars of China's external relations. Such proposition leads Wang to examine the three main theories that are usually referred to during the explanation and understanding of Chinese strategic choice: Confucian pacifism, cultural realism, and structural realism.

Yet, contrary to most scholars who start from a similar point of departure, Wang finds cultural factors to offer inadequate reading of China's international behavior. He stresses that because of the anarchical structure of global life, the international system "pushes states of various cultures to think and act in a similar fashion. Circumstances, not beliefs, therefore, largely determined Chinese behavior" (28). Thus, while culture is not an insignificant variable, according to him it is not the determining factor that many other commentators make it to be. More specifically, Chinese strategic behavior appears to have been consistent with the

expectations of structural realism – i.e., “considerations of the balance of power – not cultural aversion to warfare – dominated the decision to use force” (74). Wang’s inference draws on an extensive and rigorous process tracing of the historical record of Chinese external relations. Thus, despite “the preeminence of Confucian discourse among policymaking elites, Chinese behavior still largely conformed to the predictions of structural realism” (36). Confucian culture, did not seem to have impeded the use of force in the past, therefore, there are few (if any) reasons why it should not be so in the future (at least as long as anarchy remains the main organizing principle of the international system).

Thus, after developing the analytical framework for the study, Wang undertakes a meticulous hypothesis testing by developing four case studies: the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), and the Ming Tribute System. The evidence elicited from these case studies confirms Wang’s assumption that “structural realism provides a better explanation of Chinese strategic behavior than Confucian pacifism” (179). The compelling analysis provided by the case studies offers a much needed and an extremely erudite contextualization of China’s emerging international agency. Wang’s study offers a thoughtful reconsideration of the dominant frameworks for the explanation and understanding of Beijing’s external outlook. Time and again, his hypothesis testing reveals that despite “the humane and pacifist ideas embedded in Confucian culture did not translate into Chinese strategic choices, which were based on [the] assessment of the military balance of power” (100).

In this setting, Wang develops a contextual understanding of the motivation, practices, and ideas animating China’s external stance. His analysis seems to concur with the proposition that the current rash of attention to Beijing’s global outreach confirms the variety of new roles and attitudes that it has extended in world politics. Yet, he challenges all those who suggest that China’s rise to global prominence is idiosyncratic. On the contrary, Wang asserts that

the idea of “Chinese exceptionalism” appears overstated. Upon close examination, China’s policymaking on matters of security bore a striking semblance to the realpolitik behavior of other countries. On issues of war and peace, China was not much different, adopting an offensive posture when strong and shifting to a defensive one when weak. The historical record does not show a cultural preference for defense over offense. It is important to note that Chinese power politics was not rooted in culture, but rather in the anarchic structure of the international system in which no central authority existed to enforce order. The same structural context of anarchy in which China and other great powers in world history were situated accounted for much of the similarity in their strategic behaviors, despite their having different cultures. (184)

In this respect, Wang’s investigation offers an original perspective on China’s external stance. At the same time, it presents a wealth of solid knowledge and sharp insights on the evolution, patterns and practices of China’s foreign policy. One of its greatest strengths is its ability to draw a historically-grounded and unusually vivid account of the content, practices, and frameworks of China’s international agency that will be welcome by students, scholars, and policy-makers alike. Not surprisingly, therefore, the volume would benefit immensely those interested in the history and strategic culture of China’s foreign policy. Wang’s book will also be invaluable for the purposes of teaching and theorizing the ongoing transformations in global life as a result of China’s increasing centrality in the patterns and practices of world affairs.