
BOOK REVIEW

Principles and Laws in World Politics: Classical Chinese Perspectives on Global Conflict, by Walter Lee. Singapore: World Scientific, 2022. 522 pp. US\$158 (Hardcover). ISBN: 9789811232138.

In the academic field of international relations (IR), international law and politics, which are highly monopolized by Western theories, the voices of Asian scholars have been on the rise during the past decade. *Principles and Laws in World Politics: Classical Chinese Perspectives on Global Conflict* by Walter Lee is a perfect example of the scholarly undertaking that addresses the current international need for reinterpretation of classical Western theories and representation of the non-Western ideas, which jointly should form the base for the reinvention of modern internationalism and cosmopolitanism. In the words of the author himself, this “book is an epochal treatise on reinventing a globally negotiated system of thought for better peace, security, and justice in the years to come.”

In his endeavor, Walter Lee joins the quest of Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, who, in their forum in International Relations of the Asia-Pacific (IRAP) on “Why is there no non-Western IR theory?,” attempt to formulate and make public the histories of Asian international relations scholars in a global debate on how to frame IR through the world history of ideas rather than exclusively through the history of Western civilization. Lee perceives this challenging task through the unbiased lens of his proposed methodology of “Knowledge Archaeology of Chinese International Relations” (KACIR). This scientific tool enables the author to assess human history from a macro-view and apply classical Chinese thought to innovate the Chinese theory of international relations. As a result, Lee comes to an understanding that, on the one hand, the problem of hermeneutics in the reading of classical Chinese texts holds the key to the solution to the conundrum liberal internationalism versus communism in the interpretation of the military interventions and the use of military force; on the other hand, there exists an urgent need for a “paradigm shift in global political imagination, which is indispensable to the search for common principles and laws in world politics” (p. 3).

Put differently, this book invites its readers to “revolutionize” their understanding of political and legal reality. Firstly, it encourages them to extend the interpretation of Chinese philosophical thought from the

narrow Confucian-Legalist perspective to a more inclusive pluralist approach. Secondly, it suggests using the China-case as an example to move beyond the old hermeneutics, with its pertaining dualism Liberalism versus communism in IR, in order to formulate a new idealistic outlook on political reality. This new outlook is embodied in a picture of a “post-liberal emancipated Leviathan,” as will be elaborated in the next section of the review.

The book begins by positioning the central problematics within the historical framework. Geopolitical changes in the world order, such as globalization, the world pandemic, an increasing number of military conflicts, and the U.S. clinging to global domination, are presented as the main factors influencing the theory of IR and international politics. In this context, pursuing the idea of international well-being and peace through the common conscience of humanity becomes a legitimate impulse for the author to dwell in scientific research.

The volume is divided into three parts that help address the main research question: how to resolve the China-liberal West conundrum. This division allows for a structured exploration of the topic.

Part One, “Conundrum,” represents the main three challenges for the reinvention of Chinese IR: (1) the predicament of Chinese international ethics and global justice, (2) the conceptual divergence between China’s non-intervention doctrine and liberal internationalism’s norms and principles of humanitarian intervention and R2P, (3) limitations in the application of classical resources for the innovation of Chinese IR theory (p. 33). The author addresses these challenges in two consecutive chapters.

Chapter 2 illustrates a historical review and current debate on Chinese IR, with special attention paid to the origins of moral awareness in Chinese IR. The first open critique of the Western-borne “two-faces liberal internationalism” is also presented at the outset of the research. The overview of the historical development of Western international relations theory (IRT) leads the author to the understanding that “Chinese tradition carries values that are compatible with those found in liberal internationalism, especially the Kantian type of liberal internationalism” (p. 69). Lee suggests that the rise of China’s IRT might keep a balance of power within the global liberal family. As a result, the liberal West “should fundamentally reflect on and reform the liberal architecture by taking China and other non-Western nations’ criticism and feedback seriously” (p. 71).

Chapter 3 elaborates and redefines the existing methodology of KACIR. A thorough analysis of the three main approaches to Chinese