

Introduction

Translating Confucianism as a Pluriversal Engagement

This book discusses the component of China's internationalism, in thought and practice, that is deeply informed by Confucian perspectives to show the (un)learning everywhere that both accommodates and revises Confucian ways of coping with differences, confrontation, and coexistence. The application of classical Chinese literature to cosmological relationality is not simply another way to achieve a reflexive explanation of China's internationalism; rather, Confucian relationality reveals and fills a lacuna in international relations (IR) theory and foreign policy analysis in general that pertains to the need of all lives to imagine and maintain mutual relations. Being a relational project, the book further aims at a fresh and more comprehensive understanding and explanation of the following four aspects:

1. Relational necessities: Confucianism reveals aspects of the relational necessities unattended to by other types of relational thinking, especially the preferences for any relationship over no relationship in the long run and for a nonsolution over a compulsory solution to preserve relationships.
2. Chinese internationalism: Confucianism frames constitutive relations into incongruent relational configurations, which are simultaneously hierarchical, performative, and reciprocal, as opposed to equal, sincere, and multilateral.

3. Confucian selves: Confucianism is ready to adapt through adopting, preaching, boycotting, or forgoing selective relational arrangements and, therefore, oblige the interacting parties to likewise unlearn and adapt.
4. Pluriversal skill: Confucianism interacts with other civilizations, but all remain distinctive as cultural trajectories while becoming increasingly hybrid on their own terms in the long run.

Background

Against the background of the perceived rise of China and the intensifying US-China rivalry, the importance of understanding the theoretical foundations of Chinese international policy has become apparent. This challenge is both philosophical and practical in nature—Does there exist a revisionist threat to the American international order or not? Simpleminded answers are consistently positive, as the balance of power between the two strongest national actors is allegedly shifting in favor of China, as is the relative influence of the two in the rest of the world.

However, before any determination to challenge the world order can be evidenced in Chinese documents anywhere, academic as well as official, intentional, albeit unconsolidated, attempts to rock the ontological and epistemological boat of the American worldview are emerging from the Global South through the claim of pluriversalism.¹ Having engaged in the provincialization of Western and American IR, such a revolutionary claim extends the quest for self-identities in post-Western, non-Western, and global IR,² despite the clear variety of thoughts thus incurred, and has engendered two shared themes: (1) a difference theme, which stresses how there can be no single way to engage in IR; and (2) a relational theme, which evokes the mutual constitution of all, in one way or another, to substitute for the exclusionary ontology of American IR, informed by anarchy between autonomous actors and their balance-of-power sensibilities.

Chinese revisionism, if any, is rarely narrated from the pluriversal point of view. That said, the pluriversal turn is consciously revisionist in its diverse renovative ontological configurations but does not represent

the familiar or alarming kind of revisionism that defines the political correctness of the United States' China policy. After all, the turn's intellectual nature by no means inflicts any directly or immediately felt deconstruction of US-China rival relations. Even so, the hiatus in the dialogue between the Chinese and pluriversal IR is mind-boggling, given that the two characteristic claims of Chinese IR are likewise China's being different and relational.³

In brief, Chinese foreign policy makers are facing Washington on the latter's terms of a balance of power. They are far from thinking of any ontological revolution desired by the pluriversal turn. Moreover, their plausibly revisionist claims of difference and relationality are, puzzlingly, registered in the lukewarm interest of Chinese IR scholarship in joining an arguably friendly, nascent pluriversal lineup. In the current situation, the consensually conceived rise of China poses a power threat from the US policy perspective but might also constitute an ontological thread of revisionism that would be welcomed by pluriversalism. This leaves Chinese IR debating between serving intellectually as a potential bridge for Washington to access pluriversal IR and serving as a gap that protects the American world order from pluriversal critiques.

Purpose: The Post-Western Pluriverse

This book retrieves and develops Chinese political thought, especially Confucianism, in contemporary Chinese international relations theory and international policy analysis. Applying decolonial and denationalizing sensibilities, the book responds to the call by (1) post-Western IR⁴ to re-world Global South actors in the understandings and practices of world politics that have hitherto been ostensibly dominated by the former colonizer states and (2) pluriversal IR,⁵ where many coexisting relationalities embedded in differently framed justice and motivation co-constitute as well as intersect one another. Its philosophical stance is registered in the pursuit of a critical intellectual capacity that emancipates theorists and practitioners from national and, for that matter, any other epistemic binaries to reach a horizon where all relationalities cohabit in any particular mode of thinking that is familiar and comfortable to each of them in its own terms. Through these interconnections, all can

acquire a more comprehensive self-understanding and become ever more relationally conscious.

Accordingly, this book contributes to the debate on the relational turn in the social sciences in general and the pursuit of pluriversal and post-Western theories specifically, using Confucianism and China's internationalism to illustrate and apply denationalistic, decolonial, and nonbinary sensibilities. Not only does it interrogate the place of Confucianism in the pluriversal turn, but it also reinterprets the US-China rivalry away from the self/other binary. To that extent, rivalry can become a window of opportunity for unlearning ontological correctness in the long run due to the enlightenment that a self-understanding is always incomplete, insufficient, and inconsistent.

This book is distinctive in that it bridges three academic gaps. First, it establishes a dialogue between postcolonial studies and Chinese studies. Surprisingly and disappointingly, as already mentioned, the latter are largely absent from the literature of the former. Second, the book unites cosmological perspectives that are traditionally considered to be in opposition, especially liberalism and Confucianism. It shows how each attempts to include the other epistemologically, on the one hand, but mingles practically, unobstructed by much intellectual debt, on the other. Third, it traces further threads between political theory and international relations by adding Confucianism to the current literature, in which Western thought is predominantly embedded.

As such, China-in-IR is not only a name invoked by policymakers, a source of theory making, or a system of distribution but also a method of cultural translation for a specific audience on each occasion. The translation is powerful if something perceived in common can emerge to reconstitute the identities of strangers, and hence a relation, to make both mindful of the consequences of their actions for the other and reflect critically on the self/other divide. Learning and unlearning through cultural translation, an interrogator, including one who identifies as Chinese or American, can realize that they are constantly making nuanced, decentering, and relational sense of someone else, as in the case between China and the US, in the pluriversal order. Given that international policy making is increasingly divided over internally inconsistent and externally incompatible identities, and so in need of rehabilitation, a relational agenda that illustrates how, in practical life, divisions are not destined or perpetual is timely.

Significance of the Topics: Nature, Order, and US-China Relations

THE STATES OF NATURE

Above all, the cosmological origin of modern international relations, or the state of nature and laws of nature,⁶ deeply affect the theory and practice of foreign policy establishments everywhere. While the state of nature has been a foundational concept of Western political thought, there exist clear parallels in the history of political thought elsewhere, noticeably in ancient Chinese political thought,⁷ although these are retrievable only through inference. One significant Western feature that appears to be widely accepted, even among historians of natural science, is that, within the Judeo-Christian tradition, the rational creator, the author of nature, is external to what He creates. The consensus is that this transcendental power is absent from the Chinese history of thought, in which heavenly reason, *Dao*, or *qi* (“vapor”) informs the phenomenon of oneness that proliferates and constitutes everything, constantly changing and in different forms.⁸ These two cosmological beliefs have led to two dramatically different paths of development concerning the nature of the state of nature,⁹ arguably resulting in different understandings of contemporary international politics.¹⁰

What has escaped the literature is a relational sensibility shared by the modern European history of thought and ancient Chinese history of thought about how people in the state of nature are related. For modern European thinkers, including those most relevant to contemporary international theory such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant, all humans are equally entitled to the rights of nature that God allows them, despite these thinkers’ incongruent imaginations about the conditions of security for humans or the realistic/idealistic state of governance that provides order for them.¹¹ According to their formulations, God is the common lord, and his laws of nature connect all. Therefore, women and men who are strangers to one another and states that are involuntary rivals due to the lack of a common authority in the mundane world cannot be true strangers. Rather, they are God-made like strangers. They share the likeness provided by God and know each other as common subscribers to the laws of nature, even if they are not direct acquaintances. The anxiety would

be intense if even a nonacquaintance should suffer the violation of their rights of nature, because that violation would allude to the breakdown of the laws of nature that constitute the identities of all humans and, for that matter, all nation-states. Rational humans—males of property and nobility, in this case—give their consent to a social contract that protects each of them from the threat of the breakdown of their rights.

In comparison, in ancient Chinese political thought, without an external authority governing the relationships between people, they are nonetheless considered related in their genesis as, cosmologically, heaven and earth combined are believed to have given birth to all phenomena.¹² In other words, a certain quality of likeness likewise constitutes both the living and nonliving in ancient Chinese thought, except that no external, omnipotent force provides the laws of nature that could oblige people of hundreds of different kinds to imagine their likeness to each other. Consequently, an unnoticeable likeness in ancient Chinese thought implies no rights of nature but a shared, amorphous origin, which can only be revealed when varieties of life are looked at collectively but which vanishes if each variety of life is viewed individually. Consequently, life, which continues in different forms, belongs to oneness, and yet belonging, while fulfilling the desire for life, must not accentuate the right to individual life. Rather, life finds security in the harmonious order that only the benevolence of the collective can guarantee. The ruler of the collective is unable to abuse their role, however, without being noticed and punished by heaven, which is composed of the hearts of the people collectively.

THE NORMATIVE ORDER

Nevertheless, the abovementioned quest for harmony informed a variety of platforms that cherish collective life in the long run. For example, Confucianism adopted the metaphor of kinship to require benevolence in substitution for killing, Daoism equalized the haves and have-nots to neutralize the meaning of and desire for killing, Moism preached military defense on behalf of universal love to eventually deter killing, and legalism resorted to the threat of killing to establish unity and order, among others. In ancient Chinese thought, the people were bound to be related by nature but, in practice, were dependent on the guidance of the rulers and their advisers, who created differential roles for them

to adopt and practice belonging accordingly. The rulers could anticipate which roles were teachable, acceptable, and practicable. Roles are thus intersubjectively evolved expectations to be fulfilled. Intersubjectivity suggests that even higher rulers had to make self-sacrifices in order to merit the submission of their populaces convincingly. Losing the people's hearts would grant all the legitimacy to slay the ruler. Therefore, that bad autocrats necessarily fall is the Confucian law of nature.

Deeply rooted in these discourses lies the same anxiety registered in Western thought about anarchy and the threat to life. Such anxiety about the loss of the relational order, to which the people are capable of subscribing in both intellectual and practical terms, is not distinctive of either the Chinese or the European history of thought. That said, none of these ancient Chinese schools were preoccupied with God-bestowed ontology. No Christian kind of individual transcendence made sense. Instead, this thought consisted primarily of relationships, each undergirding a particular art of governance. The art was consistently about teaching the rulers and people how to remain related rather than contriving durable rules for the rulers or the populace to observe. Given the European ontological sensibilities' abhorrence of the absence of the rights of nature in Chinese thought, together with the contrasting Chinese preoccupation with the metaphoric art of belonging to collective circles, which is not essential to the European state of nature, these might provoke mutual anxiety.

In practice, however, becoming related through marriage, gift giving, ritualized brotherhood, or belonging to a greater encompassing group or site of living and thus transcending genetic relations is not only common but also ethical. This is why and how the Confucian role relations, embedded in metaphoric kinship, strive to create ever-expanding relations until all become nominally or compulsorily related. Improvising extended kinship is the ultimate resort of Confucianism: to obligate the fulfillment of the expectations to establish common points of identity, cut across binaries, prevent estrangement, and reconcile strangeness in a consensual order that does not depend on any universal laws and rights that are suitable only for like people. Belonging, as necessity, cannot but practice pluriversalism. In an ultimate sense, international relations involve a transient yet secular transcendence of the self through the making of sacrifices that accredit the role in context and bind the specific other to honor peaceful coexistence in their collective.

US-CHINA RELATIONS

The charge against China of revisionism in the Anglosphere targets both the growth of national power and the wielding of it by the authoritarian Communist Party in its practices related to domestic control and international expansion.¹³ This charge is justified by the perceived despotism of the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP), its revisionist foreign policy, and, ultimately, American IR's lenses of liberal rights and realist power. In contrast, the political thought preparation of the CCP leaders seems to have relied on relational rather than rival strategies—to preempt in the more remote regions, such as Latin America, by contriving a partnership through gift giving; to mitigate the alarm of the West by cyclically complying with liberal governance, as in anti-proliferation; and to impose punishment in the neighborhood to avoid appearing vulnerable, such as over the South China Sea. None of these stances appears to follow the pure logic of power, with China yielding when in a relatively strong position but confronting others when weak.¹⁴ While these responses can be explained by using the conventions of Chinese political thought, such an inward-looking rationality would simply reproduce the political correctness of the American self versus the Chinese other and thus fail to reveal the pluriversal coexistence or widespread cultural translation already occurring in practical life.

In other words, Chinese relationality contributes to pluriversal IR only when it shows how the binary thinking in the United States' China policy along either territorial or ideological divides fails to bind and subdue the agency of the actors at various levels, including that of the nation-state, because the actors can facilitate mutual roles to be learned and practiced and create relational intersections. In the Confucian context, this means that sophisticated gift giving, for example, is a plausible method of role making and self-unlearning to enable transcendence over different divides. Likewise, the relational strategies of the American liberal system can be plausible, too—for example, using the skill of marketing or the appeal to stability. Post-identities—in our case, post-Chineseness as well as, by extension, post-Americanness—would be the empirical testimony to pluriversal IR. The chance is always there that, at some point, actors will cease to exclusively reference their self-understanding to appraise others in the world. This is why a theoretical consciousness that reveals these practices and agencies is critical for the rise of pluriversal IR and

Confucian IR, which has coached such a significant populace to engage in coexistence and which empirically reifies this theoretical consciousness.

Theme: Relations and Roles

Past kings in European history resorted to dividing territories through religious war to attain emancipation from the Church. For them, dividing sovereign territories is the origin and the methodology of international relations. Defying the methodology would give the impression of being medieval, backward, and evil. However, sovereignty is a Christian norm, after all. Regardless, the principle of sovereignty guided subsequent colonial wars and decolonization to create ostensibly mutually exclusionary borders in the colonizers' own image in the postcolonial age and reproduce the myth of anarchy.

This book contrarily relies on the classical thought of Confucianism to infer and develop a general argument about relationality that is applicable to contemporary IR regarding why and how international policy necessarily involves a relational rather than a dividing logic. It advances the theme that relations constitute power. Specifically, policy-makers assess one another against the imagined points of their resemblance, as opposed to relative power, as having a particular disposition. The selected point of resemblance connects them and informs their relational lenses. According to the resulting disposition, they further create and adopt roles to establish stable relationships. Through the relational lens, no one is a complete stranger. Even a seeming stranger lives with a role expectation by becoming related as some kind of alien. Culture and identity make a difference to the arrangement of the relations and roles of those belonging to a different relational configuration. They make no difference in inevitably relying on a certain relational lens to understand each other. Inventing room for strangers is ultimately how an actor remains ontologically secure.

In both the Christian and Confucian tradition, therefore, strangeness is the common indicator of political incorrectness. However, the ways in which they each overcome strangeness do not correspond well. In the European tradition, the social contract, embedded in the laws of nature, reconciles strangeness except for those deficient in Christianity. Christianity, consent to rule, equality, and the rights of nature together

ensure solidarity between like individuals. Such likeness facilitates the system analysis of international politics, according to Kenneth Waltz,¹⁵ who relied on the imagined likeness of units to transcend their separateness. Although there is no central authority that coordinates states or allocates the values among them, they all think that they know with whom they are dealing in terms of aspirations and patterns of behavior that are shared by all. They differ only in terms of their capability, skill, and priority of preference, none of which is ontological in nature. In contrast, Samuel Huntington's theory of the clash of civilizations connotes a qualitatively different threat,¹⁶ which is intellectual as well as ontological, because the laws of nature are not consensual across his civilizational divides, nor a relevant reference to inspire solidarity. It is in this very kind of context of civilizational discourse that critical reflections on the state of nature have become pertinent and timely again in the twenty-first century.

In a pluriversal world, however, neither the Huntingtonian clash of civilizations nor the Waltzian systemic likeness of all actors, both of which necessitate surveillance over and rivalry with ontological strangers, is apparent.¹⁷ After all, it is merely the philosophical technicality of managing strangeness that differentiates them from Confucianism. In fact, other imagined states of nature and humanity than Christianity and Confucianism are by all means present.¹⁸ *Ubuntu*, as a significant example most evident in southern Africa, provides a distinguishable lens relative to Christianity and Confucianism.¹⁹ According to this cosmology, humans are owned by their shared nature, which is not external to humanity as is the Christian God. Therefore, humans are who they are only if they sustain and nurture one another to reflect the necessity of life, each in their own consciousness of forgiveness and hospitality. The *Ubuntu* sense of solidarity arises from the self-dignity of individuals as the reification of the spirit within all beings. *Ubuntu* contrasts with the Confucian drive for a self-disciplining, little self to submerge (or transcend) individuality into benevolent kin relations.

For all three cosmologies, individual interests are subdued to the extent that relational solidarity is emphasized. Anxiety about strangers or aliens characterizes all relations, including Confucian ethical relations. The philosophical technicality of Confucian IR pertains to how nations constantly seek to camouflage strangeness and negotiate their extended kinship roles. Leading actors in the circle of former colonizer states mistrust China's role taking in the current international regimes, as Chinese representatives usually side with the majority of Global

South post-colonies, whose roles in the existing rule-based governance are neither voluntary nor stable. China typically relies on improvising specially arranged partnerships qua role relations in context with specific others, aggravating the image of a revisionist power that is undermining the multilateral order that was initially honed in the former colonizer states. Seemingly unfulfilled, expectations that China's rules and values be tuned into liberalism have reduced China to an estranging force.

Nevertheless, the quest for role relations, regardless of the leaders' styles or preferences, continues, so even rivalry must develop mutuality in order to proceed meaningfully. Thus, roles and role structures are not automatic. It takes intersubjective effort to improvise, preach, and practice. Role enactment requires the casting of other actors into certain *alter* roles and counter-roles, in addition to self-restraint. To be understood and pragmatic, altercasting relies on the prior relations between the self and the *alter*, from which the roles evolve. This is why the comparative state of nature and concomitant conceptualizations of the stranger, which inform the prior relations, are essential to the subsequent theorization of international relations.

Altercasting under the conditions of unspecified role expectations between strangers can be either spontaneous, where prior rights or kinships are perceived to exist, or contrived from ground zero, through mutual preaching and adjustment, obliged to by goodwill or sacrifice. Confucians use the metaphoric kin relations to naturalize benevolent relations between the peoples of the world. Metaphors invoke role making and role taking. Obliging and performing roles are thus essential to Confucian internationalism. European international relations are not qualitatively apart, to the extent that the state of nature is likewise a metaphor,²⁰ and the laws of nature that substantiate the social contract are by all means a role scheme, calling for socialization through role making and role taking.

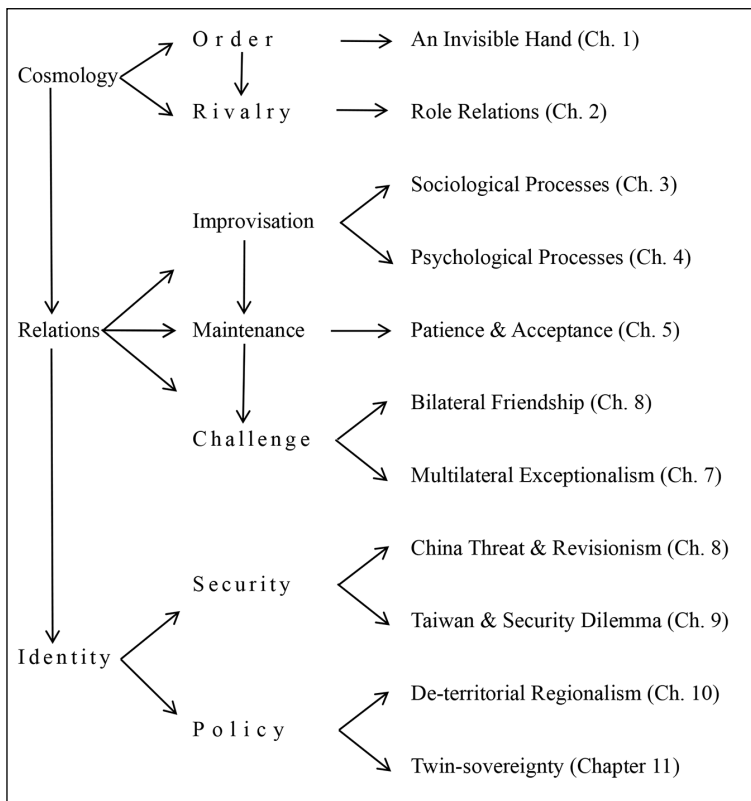
One of the aims of this book is to explain how Chinese (or, more specifically, Confucian) thought has coped with the anxiety about strangeness that gives rise to the contemporary Chinese as well as East Asian international policy and alludes to the theorizing of the post-Western IR. For convenience, the notion of relations is used in this book as an antonym for strangeness and refers to *the imagined (points of) resemblance*, which is intended to convey a condition of mutual constitution, informed by common kinship, natural rights, religion, desires, ideology, history, experience, ritual, mission, neighborhood, identity, affiliation, career,

and so on, whereby the actors are discursively or socially acquainted or intellectually comfortable with the presence of each other.

Structure: Cosmology, Relation, and Identity

This book follows the flow of (1) cosmology, i.e., the Confucian idea of *tianxia*; (2) relation and role in comparative perspectives; and (3) identities in China's internationalism (see figure I.1). Cosmology tackles the myth of totality and interprets the phenomena of existence. Cosmological views anywhere can testify to the widespread belief in the naturalness of all—the natural and the social, on one hand, and the past and future,

Figure I.1. Structure of the chapters. Created by the author.



on the other, being related—although the question of what relates them and how they are related varies across different cultures and religions, evolving into different relational configurations.²¹ Apparently, relationalities anchored in God(s), the universe, ancestry, destiny, a spirit, a path, historiography, and so on inevitably define the points of resemblance between people in different and sometimes contradictory terms and further socialize their respective populaces through roles to reproduce resemblance. In practice, roles are relatively easy for strangers coming from another relational configuration to learn and adopt, compared to a cosmological belief. Mutual expansion and coexistence that enable people to move beyond cosmological divides are macro consequences that are often ignored by role theorists, who conceive roles as merely a position, policy, or socialization mechanism. Encountering relational strangers through intersubjective role processes can cause the identity cycles of confusion, estrangement, restoration, and emancipation.

The first section of this book recognizes that no self-awareness can sustain nuances or complexities in the void of a collective cosmological root evolving from an ancient time, which attests to the ultimate power of relationality that transcends material capacity. The elusiveness of a cosmologically inspired order engenders a trajectory of contemporary values and institutions. Each considering their institutions and values normal and universal, cultural clusters easily regard one another as strangers. Strategic decisions are inevitable for all actors wishing to position, stabilize, and adapt such a self-in-relation, leading to what Anthony Giddens calls structuration.²²

The first section interprets the Chinese cosmology of *tianxia* (“all under heaven”) as if it were not an exclusively Confucian concept. I attempt an ontological-level translation—that *tianxia* is a system in which all are bound to be related.²³ Such a culturally indifferent translation creates an intersection through which the IR scholarship emerging from different communities can access each other’s cosmological sites and travel back and forth. Once discursively connected, *tianxia* expands the ontological horizon of the current IR through the addition of a relational dimension that the literature has hitherto neglected. Relationally, for example, *tianxia* enables any ready nations to simultaneously engage in hierarchy, mutuality, and governability by improvising reciprocal roles and equality, sovereignty, and governmentality by prescribing universal rules. The different kinds of international order and strategic style that *tianxia* accommodates can inspire and emancipate students of IR from a

fixation on power and the interests of nation-states to achieve a deeper self-understanding and explanation of the roots of the (mis)perceptions between rivals.

The second section recognizes, however, that, in a pluriversal world, many cosmologies coexist in parallel as well as co-constitutively. Self-identity is challenged by strangers who subscribe to different cosmological beliefs. Role making and role taking to accommodate the “other” and emotional mobilization to affirm the self together yield two processual aspects of relational policy. Consensual mutual acceptance is never guaranteed or long-lasting, however, so patience becomes intrinsic to relational maintenance. In typical dialectics, tolerance toward indulgence and measured control of dispute inform the minimal level of friendship, on the one hand, while self-righteous disengagement or intervention commits to an allegedly prior order, on the other.

The second section illustrates the theoretical potential, pertaining especially to the reciprocation between relational theory and role theory, two presumable allies that oblige nations to relate. In contrast to the Christian notions of the state of nature, relationships spawned by *tianxia* rely on their subscribers to improvise roles for each other. By empowering the weak parties involved in a situation of power asymmetry, mutually agreeable roles either neutralize or camouflage the strangeness between the related actors, regardless of their relative power status. Three strategic options arise to avoid strangeness affecting their interaction: (1) Role making and role taking require patience, which marks a Confucian feature of IR and accepts nonsolutions as a plausible prescription for any emerging symptoms of estrangement. On the other hand, (2) a readiness to sanction upon betrayal and perform anger is less emotional than pedagogical, its sole purpose being to deter others from terminating a perceived role relation. In these processes, (3) gift giving, or ritualized sacrifice, a Confucian technique designed to cast others in role relations, appears essential to international policy at all levels, in pursuit of maintaining and restoring norms to which others have already committed.

Abandoning the existing literature's point of view by unlearning its assumptions about international politics, the last section focuses on ontological identities. The discussion recognizes that observing deviance in values and institutions as a threat nevertheless reveals incongruent interpretations of relational identity caused by a cosmological fixation. The nationalist quest for unity can appear suppressive from a liberal values and institutions point of view. The socialist quest for emancipation

from imperialist legacies can likewise appear as an antagonistic gesture. When a self-concept is examined with suspicion from the perspective of unfamiliar liberalism, defense against its perceived ideological attack can easily incur the charge of revisionism. Consequently, a quest for coexistence of identities strikes the nerves of power competition.

The last section interrogates such politics of identity. This force occasionally alludes to involuted relations, which arise when roles are unilaterally improvised and imposed by self-centric policies without a minimum of negotiation or concomitant self-restraint. Such self-centrism appears most serious where others are deemed members under the leadership of the same group, belonging to which is conveniently considered a privilege as well as a duty. Given that multiple belongings, such as socialism, Confucianism, and liberalism, are common for every relational self, strategizing the priority among belongings, especially when belongings cut across national boundaries, is dangerous politics. The politics of separatism is thus more about ontological than physical security; belongings are invented and denied, leading to the political elite's apprehension of lost legitimacy, considering that the past colonialism, ethnic diaspora, provincialism, and Cold War legacies likewise generate multiple sources, rendering integrative nationalism practically implausible. Even where the imagined boundaries tentatively converge, the Right/Left, modernity/tradition, and central/local dichotomies are familiar divisions that plague the national identity, not to mention the constant realignments between these forces. Maintaining a balance between these different relations and broadening their horizons may provide a solution to involution, but they call for creatively improvising roles. Historically, a cycle of boundary spinning and closure has resulted, testifying to the unstable processes of expansion and coexistence.

A Note on Methodology

The research undertaken for this book was based on three traditional methods: metaphors, case studies, and interpretation. Part One begins with the metaphors of the "state of nature" and the game of *weiqi* to position the cosmology of *tianxia* on a comparative platform. That said, the role and its reification through gift giving are the most frequent metaphors throughout the book, assuming prior scripts, *alters*, and imagined audiences in all actions. Thus, relations are role relations, emotions are

role emotions, and identities are role identities. Case studies are heavily applied in every chapter. North Korea and the US are the two corporate actors most prominent in the book, whose relations with China are reviewed and deconstructed in several chapters. Other notable topics include relations with South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Russia, India, and Vietnam, all involving the US-China rivalry to varying extents. Finally, the book borrows the interpretative heuristic to attend to the historical background, context, and social and psychological necessity when analyzing classical literature, policy documents and statements, and interviews. The binary of the empirical and the normative is inappropriate for this book, as a selected cosmology evolving into norms and institutions to create observable patterns of behavior is the foundation of both the empirical and the normative.