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An East Asian approach to temporality, subjectivity and ethics: bringing Mahāyāna Buddhist ontological ethics of *Nikon* into international relations[1]

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Abstract *While the theory of the Chinese School of International Relations (CSIR) has contributed new dimensions to IR such as the concept of relationality into theorisation practice, it also faces the same pitfalls as the schools of thought that precede it: it pays insufficient attention to the relationship between ethics and subjectivity despite its repetitive use of such concepts as 'morality' in its articulation of contemporary world affairs and insufficient attention to the ethical dimension of IR that makes this approach prone to dismissing the voices of 'others'. This ethical problem in CSIR emanates from inadequate consideration of temporality and its relation to ethics. However, introducing the present, or Nikon (而今), an Asian-originating case of temporality based on the Mahāyāna Buddhist ontological ethics, illustrates how this manifestation of Buddhist temporality offers solutions to mitigate the ethical drawback of the Chinese School discourses.*

Introduction

In the last ten years, a new trend in the discourse on international relations (IR), focusing on non-Western IR theories, has gained momentum. The Chinese School of IR as the main body of thought seems to be one of the forerunners of this trend, and related books and articles are successively and rapidly published.[2] While the theory of the Chinese School IR (CSIR) has contributed new dimensions to IR such as the concept of relationality, *guanxi*, into the theorisation practice, it also faces the same pitfalls as the schools of thought that precede it: it pays insufficient attention to the relationship between ethics and subjectivity, despite its repetitive use of such concepts of 'morality' in its articulation of contemporary world affairs (Qin 2016; Yan 2011; Zhao 2012). The lack of attention paid to ethics and subjectivity in the new discourse

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[2] Chinese School of IR theory' in this paper refers to a group of scholars in mainland China centred around the works of Yan Xuetong, Qin Yaqing, and Zhao Tingyang. For the detailed discussion of Chinese School scholars, see Ren (2016) and Qin (2020).

seemingly emanates from its lack of adequate critical engagement with the notion of temporality.

Temporality, subjectivity and ethics in the East Asian region are even more intimately related than in the Western context. This close relationship exists because ethics in Confucianism can be found in the sage kings' minds, negating their own subjectivities (Shih et al 2019; Angle 2009; Chan 2008).[3] As we will explain in this paper, the negation of one's subjectivity becomes possible only by concentrating upon a particular temporality that is peculiar to East Asia. While the main body of CSIR does not pay much attention to this ethical deficit, the sage figure of the selfless king has already been well articulated by the critical China Studies analysts (Ling 2014; Shih et al 2019).[4]

This paper argues that meticulously attending to Buddhist temporality will complement the critical China Studies analysts' contention of the selfless king and mitigate the pitfall of ethical argument in the CSIR discourses. In doing so, it will introduce four types of temporality by differentiating the linear from the cyclical, and quantitative from qualitative time, which will help to disentangle the multifaceted connection of different temporalities running simultaneously throughout IR discourse. It will also clarify the relationship between temporality, subjectivity and ethics, which leads to the implication that the act of disentanglement itself will pave the way to the desired selflessness. In this context, this study specifically introduces Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics, with its particular understanding of temporality *nikon* (而今), the present, which is neither linear nor cyclical.[5] Here, the concept of the present is directly related to ontology, which does not presume the separation of time and space. Introducing this concept has a substantial implication in the sense that it ontologically denies the self and other separation, thus ethically opening the 'self' to 'others' which seems to be persistently absent in CSIR theories.

To clarify this argument, this paper will start by illuminating the recent discourses of temporality, subjectivity and ethics found in the growing number of critical works in IR. Second, the article will explicate the four types of temporality mainly developed by a Japanese sociologist, Maki Yusuke, and its relation to ethics in detail. Third, it will concentrate on the IR literature of the Chinese School so as to elucidate the cause and effect of the lack of attention to ethics,

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[3] Whether 'negation' is an appropriate translation of *ziwo kanxian* (自我坎陷) is contestable. For example, Shih et.al. states that instead of self-negation, 'self-subduing' is more appropriate because it 'connotes the sage's decision to momentarily sacrifice his transcendence for the sake of awaken the population' (Shih et al 2019). See also (Angle 2009; Chan 2008)

[4] Here I deliberately distinguish 'Chinese School' scholars and 'critical Chinese Studies' analysts. The latter refers to IR scholars mainly from Taiwan who also draw their argument of IR on the Confucian tradition, but in a more critical manner (Chen 2011; Huang and Shih 2016; Ling 2014; Shih et al 2019).

[5] *Nikon* is sometimes pronounced as *jikon or shikin* with the same Chinese character. This concept was largely developed in Zen Buddhism within the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition by adopting the *Kegon* thought's *hokkai engi* which contends that the entire whole is a part and a part is the entire whole. Although the tern *nikon* is mainly used in Zen Buddhism tradition, similar concepts regarding the present temporality intermingled with spatiality is widely used in the Mahāyāna Buddhism in general. Therefore, we will use *nikon* throughout this article in order to distinguish the present of Mahāyāna Buddhism from the ordinary use of the term. For a detailed discussion of the Zen Buddhism and the Kegon tradition, see (Takasaki and Umehara 2018). For the variety of interpretations of the present in Mahāyāna Buddhism, see (Takasaki and Umehara 2018).*Nikon* was later developed into Kyoto School philosophy's 'eternal present' (*eien no ima*). For the application of the eternal present, see (Shimizu 2018).

subjectivity and temporality embedded in their argument. Fourth, it will present the Mahāyāna Buddhist concept of the present, *nikon*, which supposedly transcends the embedded binaries in the discourse of temporality. Finally, this work will apply *nikon* to the context of IR to draw some ethical implications for IR in the East Asian context.

Temporality, ethics and IR

The relationship between temporality and ethics seems to be attracting more attention in IR. Many works about the ethics of IR have directly and indirectly tackled the question of temporality and ethics (Amoureux and Steele 2016; Bell 2010; Burke 2007; Frost 2009; Myers 2013; Nyman and Burke 2016; Pin-Fat 2010; Sutch 2001; Widdows 2011; Amoureux 2020). Similarly, more books and articles on temporality have been published that explicitly and implicitly investigate its relation to the ethical dimension of IR in detail (Embry and Hughes 2017; Gunnell 1968; Hom, McIntosh, McKay, and Stockdale 2016; Hom and Steele 2010; Hutchings 2018b; Pocock 1960). However, when it comes to the context of East Asian IR, the research on temporality and ethics has not been fully unfolded. This is because the relationship between temporality and ethics inevitably involves the question of subjectivity in East Asia due mainly to the influence of local religion, and the relationship among temporality, ethics and subjectivity is extremely complex.

In the works of temporality in general, there tend to be two distinctive and mutually exclusive categories of temporality—*linear* and *cyclical*—by taking the arguments developed in prominent works of anthropology and sociology. This duality in temporality is also the case in IR. Hom and Steele, for example, argue that the field of IR is currently 'dominated by theories tacitly advancing either cyclical or linear-progressive visions of time' (Hom and Steele 2010, 272). By exemplifying Waltz's structural realism as well as liberal theories of IR, Hom and Steele successively contend that 'closed time', either cyclical or linear-progressive, is predominant in the mainstream theories of IR (Hom and Steele 2010, 272). In this, they indicate that Waltz's structural realism totally relies on cyclical temporality. The pervasion of the cyclical understanding of temporality in neorealism is because the assumed reality of international practice is purportedly characterised by the continuity and repetition of conflicts and wars caused by the characteristic uncertainty of anarchy (Hom and Steele 2010). In the discourses of neorealism, 'history becomes a quarry providing materials with which to illustrate variations on always recurrent themes … this mode of reasoning dictates that, with respect to essentials, the future will always be like the past' (Cox 1981, 131).

The CSIR theory, which is has been largely developed against neorealist IR, also seemingly adopts cyclical temporality. CSIR theorists argue that mainstream neorealist theories fail to provide a way to a stable international order and contend that an introduction of such Confucian concepts as *guanxi* (simplified Chinese:关系; Traditional Chines:關係—relationality, *wang* (王)—humane authority, and *tianxia* (天下)—all-under-heaven, is needed.[6] In doing so,

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[6] This does not mean that relationality has been solely developed by CSIR. Recent literature of relational IR has a wide range of diverse perspectives. See, for example, Nordin et al (2019) and Trownsell et al (2020).

however, they also implicitly assume that time flows cyclically. Zhao Tingyang, for example, writes that 'every continuous history witnesses certain fundamental issues or certain kinds of events that keep on recurring' (Zhao 2019, loc. 692/1564). Qin Yaqing frequently cites *yin-yang* dialectics in his argument of relationality (Qin 2018). Though Qin does not directly suggest that his argument is based on cyclical temporality, other Chinese scholars often interpret his articulation of *yin-yang* dialectics as being based on the idea of cyclical temporality (Liu 2012). However, the CSIR theorists' adaptation of cyclicality has a different, opposite motive to that of IR mainstream neorealism. While neorealists interpret cyclicality based on anarchy with a negative connotation, the CSIR theories view cyclical temporality a more favourable light. The reason for CSIR scholars' more positive view on cyclicality can be found in their primary conjecture that it is associated with peacefulness and the stable order that the recurrence of events guarantees. Here there is an ostensible preference of CSIR scholars for order and harmony over the dynamic progression of development and change (Nordin 2016).

Quantitative and qualitative temporalities

If cyclicality is the dominant norm in neorealism as well as CSIR, there is no use in using force to change the world because 'the future will always be like the past' (Cox 1981, 131). This being the case, why have some states tried to intervene, intrude upon and dominate other nations? What is the temporality behind the motivation for these aggressive actions? Here, we see some different temporality running beneath the cyclicality of anarchy. This is precisely the moment a more rigorous investigation into temporality in IR is needed.

Unlike IR literature, research on temporality has been among the most critical aspects of contemporary philosophical engagements and the same is true for Japanese philosophy (Bergson 1921; Heidegger 1962; Mactaggart 1908). Japanese philosophers, including those of the Kyoto School, repeatedly refer to the concept of time in their academic lives and have produced abundant works on this topic (Kato 2007; Kuki 2016; Nishida 1948; Okuda 2018; Uemura 2002). Among these, the prominent sociologist Maki Yusuke has contributed the most popular and widely accepted theory of temporality in Japan (Maki 2008). Maki's categorization of temporality is extremely detailed and suggestive; his argument can be summarized as follows.

Maki momentarily adopts the traditional distinction between linearity and cyclicality as a framework for examining the concept of time. As another framework, he offers the distinction between quantitative and qualitative time. Quantitative temporality is supposed to be universal and objective, whereas qualitative temporality is concrete and subjective. While quantitative time is independent of a particular location, qualitative time is intimately related to a particular space. Maki argues that only after divorcing from a physical location does the contemporary understanding of abstract and universalized time become possible, be it linearity or cyclicality. The liberalist scenario for economic growth and civilization falls into the category of linear-quantitative as it does not have a clear beginning or end, while the Judeo-Christian tradition, which regards the Creation as the beginning and the Apocalypse as the end, is thought to be linear-qualitative time (Maki 2008). Like linear temporality,

cyclical temporality has two distinctive types. The cyclical-quantitative time-frame is epitomised by Confucianism, Buddhism (in the case of reincarnation) and Daoism. In IR, structural realism, world-systems theories, and the hegemonic stability theory also exemplify this temporality, and the CSIR theories are also a variant of it. Cyclical-qualitative temporality is a temporality based upon concreteness and bodily experience, which Maki exemplifies with the repetition of day and night.[7] According to Maki, what distinguishes these quantitative and qualitative cyclicalities is the feasibility of being located in inter-communal relations.

These four distinctive types of temporality reveal the way in which any particular action of an actor is driven by diverse motives, purposes, perceptions and desires on the basis of different temporalities. Barbara Adam expounds that the relative character of temporalities becomes evident once we start thoroughly investigating time and maintains that we seem to, more or less, 'weave in and out of a wide variety of times without giving the matter much conscious consideration' (Adam 1990, 3). Indeed, there is extreme complexity of temporality in IR. By investigating this complexity, it becomes clear that the thoughts, actions and decisions that actors make on one level of temporality may be connected to thoughts, actions and decisions formulated on another level. In this sense, 'weaving' is an understatement; we are living different temporalities simultaneously. For example, the realist presumption of cyclicality on the basis of anarchy may be sustained by such quantitative linearity as government officials' intention to become the world hegemony or nations' big corporations' determination for profit. On the basis of qualitative linear temporality, it might also be maintained by the researcher's intention in their personal life to achieve a certain goal of the intellectual profession such as to rise to prominence in the Academy, to obtain tenure in the university, or to promote their writings in the market. Alternately, their actions may be just because they are a good friend of the government official desperate for hegemony. In this case, the quantitative cyclicality of anarchy may be partially upheld by qualitative cyclicality, that is, everyday friendship.

The complexity of temporality in IR becomes even more evident when considering the poststructuralist and postcolonialist critiques of mainstream IR. Poststructuralists and postcolonialists contend that the 'outside' category in realist discourse is a representation of 'others', which is in contrast to the 'inside' category of the Western civilized 'self' (Walker 1993). Linear temporality of the 'self' is contrasted with the cyclical 'other' 'for the purpose of distancing those who are observed from the Time of the observer' (Fabian 2014, loc. 1085/5340). This practice of distancing linear-quantitative time from the cyclical-quantitative temporality is itself a linear-qualitative action, by which the 'self' establishes its identity, collectively or individually, and obtains an advanced and privileged status in relation to 'others'. With the practice of converting the spatial difference between the 'West' and everything else into linear temporality, 'the constructed temporal backwardness of the savages is equated with the imagined temporal origins of the European self in antiquity and the spatially distinct other is thereby converted into the temporally prior

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[7] Maki also interchangeably uses the expression 'repetitive-qualitative'. Japanese philosopher Uchimaya Takashi calls this temporality as 'relational temporality' (Uchiyama 2011).

self' (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004, 50). In fact, Friedberg once famously argued 'for better or for worse, Europe's past could be Asia's future' (Friedberg 1993, 7). Here, the ostensibly advanced 'European self' in the context of qualitative linearity is established by forcibly locating Asia in the quantitative linearity of the civilisational project to further the production process of their subjectivity. Takeuchi Yoshimi, a prominent scholar of Chinese literature, once criticised this practice as the contemporary project of the self-making of Europe (Takeuchi 2002).

The advent of IR with Chinese characteristics and the successive establishment of the CSIR theories can also be analysed with the complexity of temporalities. As is well known, the establishment of the CSIR is a result of the ceaseless effort of the Chinese scholars' qualitative linear intention to develop a Chinese style of IR by using quantitative cyclicality (Ren 2016). This political move appears to be partly an intellectual response to mainstream IR's ineffectiveness in explaining China's rise in contemporary world affairs and partly an attempt to establish the legitimacy of Chinese Scholarship as an independent and autonomous theoretical enterprise (Zhang and Kristensen 2017; Ren 2016). Xu Tao also explains that the motivating forces behind 'Chinese theory' and a 'China school' instead of 'IRT with Chinese characteristics' are 'the self-awakening of academic independence and self-awareness as a superpower of Chinese scholars' (Xu 2018, 29). Here again, quantitative cyclicality (the harmonious order of Confucianism), quantitative linearity (the advanced Chinese relationality and morality supposedly stipulating the harmonious order) and qualitative linearity (the establishment of potent CSIR theory) are intricately intermingled.

Virtue ethics, cyclical-quantitative temporality and subjectivity

By interrogating the complexity of temporality, it becomes possible to excavate and elucidate the intimate relationship between temporality, subjectivity and ethics. The investigation into the ethical question commences with a brief sketch of the discourse of global ethics. Kimberly Hutchings succinctly summarises global ethics by introducing four rationalist ethical theories and three alternatives (Hutchings 2018a). *Utilitarianism*, *contractualism*, *deontology* and *discourse ethics*, all presume that *reason*, whether instrumental or critical, is the foundation for materialising certain ethical principles. In contrast, *virtue ethics*, *feminism* and *postmodern ethics* question the rationalist assumption of unified and autonomous identities. Except for virtue ethics, they all subscribe to linear temporality in the sense that they have certain goals to achieve.

One of the elements that distinguishes virtue ethics from other discourses of ethics is its peculiar understanding of the spatial location of ethical principles. In ethics based upon linearity of time, the principles of ethics are regarded as universal, independent of individual experiences. However, virtue ethics characterises itself with a completely different assumption of the location of ethical principles, which it takes to be context-specific. Thus, the same act may be good or bad, depending on the context. In this sense, virtue ethics does not deliver any abstract or universal code of conduct or ethical principles. Rather, it posits that only by becoming virtuous can one judge a certain act as

right or wrong. The underlying presumption is that virtue exists only in virtuous minds (Hutchings 2018a).

The difference in location between virtue ethics and rationalist ethics is intimately linked to the difference in temporality. As argued above, the main presumption of temporality in neorealist IR is quantitative cyclicality. In fact, Waltz emphasises virtue in his argument of the 'virtues of anarchy'. For Waltz, virtue is not something possibly derived from the logic of anarchy, but rather anarchy is virtue. He maintains that anarchy 'limits manipulations, moderates demands, and serves as an incentive for the settlement of disputes' because states have 'strong reason to consider whether possible gains are worth the risks entailed' (Waltz 1979, 113–114). In this sense, there is no room to develop a new theory of virtue from this discourse unless neorealism drops the anarchy theorem.

While many forms of linear temporality such as liberalism entail the possible distancing practice of 'self' and 'other' and since neorealism does not seem to be willing to drop its insistence of anarchy, the CSIR theory has the potentiality for accommodating the virtue ethics of the 'other' nicely into IR. However, CSIR theories cannot successfully accommodate it in its current form without some extra efforts on temporality and subjectivity.

As mentioned, the discourses of the School rely on the positive appreciation of quantitative cyclicality. In this understanding of temporality, where society is presumed to be static and orderly, the present is often found in the past. Under this assumption, the longer one lives, the more experiences and knowledge of similar incidents they have, then the more wisdom they possess to tackle the current problems and tribulations. In fact, Confucius said 'if a man keeps cherishing his old knowledge, so as continually to be acquiring new, he may be a teacher of others' (Confucius 2016, 2:11). Wisdom, in this context, whether from inherited knowledge or personal experience, is considered to be more valuable than logical reasoning (Hutchings 2018a; Maki 2008; Zhao 2012).

To become virtuous enough to solve problems, a person is expected to cultivate oneself (Qin 2018). Here again, the quantitative cyclical order of society is backed by the qualitative linearity of the self-cultivation in individual lives. Self-cultivation on the basis of the linear-qualitative temporality is essential in this context. This is particularly the case in Yan Xueton's 'moral realism' and Qin Yaqing's constructivist relationalism (Qin 2018; Yan 2011). Successive emperors in Chinese history have exemplified this notion in their writings. Ancient Confucian thinkers believed that order and disorder in the world are exclusively determined by the 'moral cultivation of the political leader' and that the hierarchical order of society is built upon the Confucian presumption of the 'rule of virtue' (Yan 2011, loc. 523/6131; Arrighi, Hamashita, and Selden 2004). Here, the ruler of the system is supposed to be extraordinarily virtuous, which guarantees, in turn, the subordination of others (Acharya and Buzan 2017, 23). Confucius noted that 'he who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn toward it' (Confucius 2016, 2:1).

In the history of East Asian governance, the emperor was supposed to govern the world on behalf of heaven, *tian*, which means the 'united world'. The rulers were presupposed to be virtuous enough that heaven would trust them. However, if rulers were discovered to be incompetent and not virtuous

enough in maintaining order, heaven would abandon them, ultimately passing on the heavenly mandate *(tianming:*天命*)* to other rulers or even to another dynasty. The incompetence of an emperor, for example, would be followed by tragic incidents, including social disorder and even natural disasters. In such circumstances, either the emperor would resign, or a revolution *(geming:*革命; literally 'stripping the mandate') would replace them (Deguchi 2015). Thus, the practice of self-cultivation in qualitative linearity becomes key for the leader to achieve a virtuous mind 'that can maintain good relationships among people and good order in society' (Qin 2018, 190).

In this way, CSIR thinkers commonly equate quantitative-cyclical temporality with the stable social and international hierarchy that, they contend, emanates from the harmonious Confucian tradition. Many non-Western IR scholars agree that East Asian IR has been profoundly influenced by the hierarchical order and relationality characteristic of cyclical temporality, as exemplified by the tribute system (Kang 2010; Pan 2012). Further, this provides a far better approach to envisioning IR in the region, inevitably questioning conventional IR theories built predominantly on the Westphalian system of sovereign states (Kavalski 2018; Schneider 2014).

However, the CSIR theories have a drawback regarding the ethics of leaders or kings. This is particularly evident in the discourse of Yan Xuetong's moral realist discourse. As Yan argues, there are two different modes of leadership in the Confucian context: *wang* ('humane authority':王) and *ba* ('hegemony':霸) (Yan 2011, loc. 3626/6131). *Wang* is known as the sage king and is supposedly supported by an 'ultra-powerful moral force' whereas *ba* is based on physical power and domination. In Yan's argument, the virtue of humane authority resonates with the Confucian idea of sage kings who are morally capable of subduing themselves and returning to propriety through self-cultivation. Subsequently, the *tianxia* will ascribe perfect virtue to them and accept their authority (Confucius 2016; Yan 2011). However, in a concrete political context, how can we recognize that a leader is virtuous holding *wang* instead of *ba*?

The problem of virtue ethics in the CSIR is the absence of a strict definition of virtue and self-cultivation. Although authors repeatedly refer to morality and ethics, they fail to provide in their works a convincing explanation of what morality actually means or what the goal of self-cultivation is (Qin 2018; Yan 2011). While a convincing case on virtue in the CSIR discourses is lacking, critical China Studies analysts are well aware of what the virtuous mind of a sage king in the Confucian context means, that is, the state of mind of selflessness. Shih Chih-yu et.al., for example, suggest that there is a 'requirement for the leadership to be perceived as selfless' by the population 'in order to maintain ruling legitimacy and social order' (Shih et al 2019, 122).

> For a leader and their state to exercise self-restraint, this would not only prevent them from becoming tyrants domestically but also reduce the chances of them being perceived as a threat in terms of foreign policy. Self-restraint, in this sense, would serve the goal of pacifying relations among the warring states, with them reassuming their named duties within an order represented by the 'selfless' Zhou emperor (Shih et al 2019, 6).

This selflessness is a decisive prerequisite for *wang* distinguishing itself from 'self-centric' *ba* (Huang and Shih 2016, loc. 3567/4952). These arguments explicitly articulated by critical China Studies analysts make clear that the self-less king is the goal of the process of self-cultivation. In sum, good leadership in the Confucian context is defined as 'selfless' (Shih and Huang 2016, loc. 4368/7203). Indeed, as is well-known, similar concepts of selflessness have been spread across much of Asia (Ong 2004; Shahi 2018; Shimizu 2011).

However, this 'selflessness' in the concrete context is still problematic. Indeed, it seems to be quite difficult to objectively prove that a leader is virtu-ous, holding *wang* instead of *ba*. There are a number of historical events in Asia in which virtue ethics was abused. For example, the second-generation of Kyoto School philosophers adopting quantitative-cyclical temporality and the hierarchical order of Confucianism during WWII took the political position that Japan, as the reification of cyclicality and stable order, already *was* the realization of virtue and morality (Kosaka, Nishitani, Koyama, and Suzuki 1943; Trownsell et al 2020). They argued that Japan's morality was inclusive and harmonious, and was superior to the linear progressive idea of Western civilization (Osaki 2019; Shimizu 2015). What was behind this narrative was an immediate need to establish the Japanese 'self' to fight against the 'West' which is largely formulated on the basis of qualitative linearity. However, as the Kyoto School philosophers placed Japanese morality within the linear-quantitative temporality framework of civilisation and development, a peculiar understanding of Asian geopolitics was comprised. They argued that other Asian nations were unaware of the importance of Japanese moral superiority and were lagging behind Japan, and thus should be trained and disciplined to become like the Japanese (Kosaka et al 1943). As such, Japan was narrated as having a responsibility to teach, train and discipline the other Asian nations, which became the justification for Japanese imperialist aggression. Here, it is clear that quantitative cyclicality (the harmonious order of the Japanese empire), quantitative linearity (the superior Japanese morality supposedly pro-viding the foundation for the alleged harmony) and qualitative linearity (the establishment of the Japanese 'self') constituted a complex triangle.

This tendency of using quantitative cyclicality to establish the 'self' of quali-tative linearity can also be seen in the way CSIR narratives are prone to disre-garding China's frequent conflicts with 'others' in history. It is well-known that Chinese empires led by supposedly selfless kings have perpetrated many violent acts against the northern tribes although this fact has been rarely inves-tigated by CSIR scholars (Krishna 2017). The northern tribes are 'cultural others' with a 'different compartment to territory, statehood, and (Chinese) civ-ilizational or cultural values' (Krishna 2017, 99). In emphasising the alleged superiority of the morality of Confucianism, the CSIR theorists fail to suffi-ciently recognise the historical relation between China and northern tribes. Here, we see that quantitative cyclicality (the harmonious order of Chinese empire), quantitative linearity (the superior Confucian morality and civilisa-tion, supposedly the foundation for the alleged harmony) and qualitative lin-earity (the establishment of CSIR's 'self') formed a complex triangle.

What is important in the context of ethics to 'others' is that the power of self-making inherent in qualitative linearity is often prone to being perpetrated when alleged harmonious quantitative cyclicality and selflessness of the leader

figure are integrated with the quantitative linear interpretation of superior and inferior morality. In this, the discourse of the virtue ethics of cyclicality easily becomes an unethical discourse of 'othering'. This explains why such issues as gender inequality, minority rights, indigenous struggles and human rights are undeniably absent in CSIR discourse (Blanchard and Lin 2016; Ling 2016). In fact, L.H.M. Ling succinctly emphasised in her critique of CSIR that the 'one aspect…bind[ing] IR and the 'Chinese' school' is 'patriarchy' (Ling 2016, loc. 486/7203).

Buddhist temporality and the question of subjectivity

Then how does a person properly engage with 'others' in the context of ethics and IR? How is it possible to mitigate the drawback of the discourse of IR on quantitative cyclicality? As mentioned above, critical China Studies analysts are well aware to bring up the question of others in their argument on the self-lessness and morality in the Confucian context by pointing out the violent Chinese empires' acts against the northern tribes. They contend that the cause of the violent actions of China towards others resides in Confucianism itself because 'Confucianism does not teach relationships outside of one's close circles' (Shih et al 2019, 102). This is the point, Mahāyāna Buddhism may make a good contribution.[8] While only a few studies have been conducted on Buddhism and IR (S. Chan 2001; Ling 2019; Nanomaivibool and Shih 2016).[9] Buddhism embodies a fertile ground for addressing the question of ethics of selflessness in IR. By directly addressing the question of the self's existence, a question with which Mahāyāna Buddhism has been engaging for more than two millennia, Mahāyāna Buddhism may offer a path to the ethical engagement with 'others' by making selflessness possible.

First, Buddhism does not have the rigidity of social relations or subjectivities typically found in quantitative temporalities. In the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, particularly in Zen Buddhism, *Nikon*, the present—an important concept of time and the ultimate form of qualitative temporality — represents a

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[8] Buddhism has two distinct traditions: Theravāda and Mahāyāna. Although both traditions take *engi* relationality seriously, there is a difference in terms of the bearer of Buddhist virtue. In Theravāda Buddhist tradition, practised monks are the only people who can possibly attain a virtuous mind and, thus, be liberated from suffering. They are the only saints who know the impermanence of reality. It is here that the Confucian sage kings and Theravāda Buddhist saints overlap; both are supposed to have attained a transcendent state of mind, thereby becoming eligible to be virtuous. Like the sage kings in the Confucian context, the saints in traditional Theravāda Buddhism must lose themselves to grasp moral transcendency. It is a desire to maintain and protect their subjectivity that causes them to negate and harm others. Here, the action of losing oneself is the ethical conduct of the sage kings of Confucianism and saints of traditional Theravāda Buddhism. However, this does not mean that they would actively engage with those on the margins of society. Rather, their action is aimed to achieve the highest state of mind to become virtuous. However, recently there is a collaborative movement of Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism that seeks to actively engage with social issues in Asia, called 'engaged Buddhism'. See, for example, (Queen and King 1996).

[9] This is partly because there are a variety of Buddhist sects that sometimes contradict each other, making it difficult to articulate Buddhism as a single discourse, and partly because it sometimes conflates with other systems of thought, such as Daoism and Confucianism. The treatment of Mahāyāna Buddhism in this paper is limited to concepts shared by the whole range of Mahāyāna Buddhist sects. For the eclecticism of Buddhism and other religions, particularly Confucianism (Iwata 2017).

way of relating to others: the dynamic temporality based on *engi* (縁起) relationality.[10] Here, the term *en* (縁) literally means relation, while *gi* (起) means to occur. Therefore, *engi* plainly means an 'occurring relationality'; thus relationality in this context is not given or embedded in the social context; it simply occurs unexpectedly in the present.

Unlike the conventional understanding of relationality, which assumes that a relationship can form only in the presence of two (or more) beings, the Buddhist understanding of *engi* relationality is radically different in a sense that it is *engi* relationality that makes subjectivity possible. This may appear to the audience as coming close to the argument of Jackson and Nixon on the relation *before* states (Jackson and Nexon 1999). Indeed, the Buddhist contention that relationality precedes entity is similar to their argument. However, *engi* relationality goes even further to argue that relationality is the main cause of being, and it constructs the subject and object through the process of occurring in the present, *nikon* (而今) . Therefore, *engi* relationality is presumed to take place *without* entities, and in the next moment it disperses. The *engi* relationality does not endure, and the self and other dissolve into nothing. In this sense, it is different from processual relationalism, which assumes that entities are still entities that will endure with their properties and attributes, even though they are produced through the processes of relations (Jackson and Nexon 1999). The concept of *engi* is vividly captured by Nishida Kitaro, the founder of the Kyoto School philosophy. Adopting *engi* relationality, Nishida argues that neither what we think of as a 'flower' nor the observing self exists prior to the action of seeing: *engi* relationality *is* the act of seeing, and there is no observer or observed in the moment of *nikon*, just the act of seeing (Nishida 1947, 90). In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the reason why we think that 'I' endures is because of the *bonno* (desire:煩悩) caused by the illusion of continuing reality. Mahāyāna Buddhism particularly focusses on the Buddhist concept of *ku* (emptiness:空), which literally means that reality is empty, and everything we think exists is, by any means, impermanent. Thus, what we consider permanent is only an illusion, and this illusion is the function of language. Therefore, through such practices of Zen, *yoga* and mindfulness, Mahāyāna Buddhism encourages its followers to become aware of the reality of impermanency and to break the spell of language (Fujii 2017).

The fluid and changing subjectivity are also articulated in the *guanxi* cyclicality (Qin 2018). Yet, as quantitative cyclical temporality and hierarchy are the standards, and future events are often regarded as the reproductions of the past, subjectivity in *guanxi* relationality is often controlled by the fixed roles. This is because *guanxi* relationality is presumed to stand between the preexisting roles embedded in the dominant hierarchy, each of which the subject plays. Therefore, while *guanxi* relationality does suppose fluid subjectivities, in the Confucian discourse, it is roles that are presupposed in the international community prior to relationality. How to relate with others is inherited from past experiences and accumulated knowledge, and each actor is expected to

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[10] The original Sanskrit term is *pratityasamutpada*. *Engi*, to be precise, refers to the causational relations. Buddhism always focuses upon causation and reason in analysing the reality. Here, 'each factor of the causal chain should be regarded as empty'. Ling (2014) interprets engi (yuan qi in Chinese) as 'the self "flows" into others through intersubjective reverberations'. For a detailed discussion, see Katsura (1997, 25) and Ling (2014, 120).

follow the rules and norms drawn from the lessons. In other words, while 'self', or subjectivity, is fundamentally fluid and flexible, it is often formed and sustained by the action of performing roles. For example, a father becomes a father through his actions while playing the role of a father; likewise, Japan as a nation-state becomes Japan only when it performs Japan's role as a nation-state in the given hierarchy or international structure. In this reading, while the roles in the hierarchy in this context are given according to the rules and morality of Confucianism, it is precisely their actions in performing these roles that control their subjectivities.

Engi relationality, by contrast, presumes no preexisting history or planned future but only the present in which concrete time and space are intimately intermingled. In this, time and being are inseparable. There is no relationship between them, but they are the same. In other words, time is already being, and all beings are time, a vision sometimes referred to in some critical engagements with temporality (Adam 1990; Izutsu 1991, 2008; Minami 2011); this is an ultimate form of qualitative temporality, neither linear nor cyclical.

This understanding of the present, *nikon*, is decisively differentiated from the civilisational quantitative linear temporality that desperately anticipates a predictable and manageable future. It is, as noted above, different from the quantitative cyclical temporality which persistently assumes a fixed and recurring history. On the contrary, the present often appears to represent the threat and obstacle to the existing temporality (Maki 2008). It disturbs the foreseeability of linear temporality and the stability of cyclicality, which is the reason why it is often described as a risk.

On the contrary, Mahāyāna Buddhism demonstrates a positive appreciation of *nikon*, maintaining that it embodies the possibility of a new beginning (Minami 2011). The importance of the present providing a new beginning has already been widely articulated in the literature of temporality in politics and IR. Interestingly, many critical assessments of linear temporality frequently refer to the present moment, similar to Buddhism. Hutchings, for example, states that 'an alternative view, which conceives world-political time in terms of immanent, nonlinear, plural "becoming" opens up the analysis and judgement of the present(s) of world politics in interesting ways' (Hutchings 2008, loc. 83/4978). Takeuchi also argues that 'the present is not a point in history that has no extension but a point from which history emanates' (Takeuchi 2002, loc. 178.4320). For Hanna Arendt, the present, or between past and future, is the moment of new beginning, and this reasoning about the present formed the foundation of her concepts of plurality and the 'public' (Arendt 1968, 1998). For Hom and Steele, it is an 'open time', which refers to the temporality of indeterminacy (Hom and Steele 2010). Similarly, Solomon states that 'acknowledging the multiple temporalities that comprise the present' is to recognize that 'the present is never fixed, homogenous, or incontestable' (Solomon 2016, loc. 220/9418). In these arguments, the present is favourably narrated in terms of a new beginning and novelty because it is always supposed to encompass the possibility of transcending prevailing paradigms and encouraging creativity by promoting 'creative destruction' (Hom and Steele 2010, 290). By incorporating it into a Daoist world view, Ling states 'there are only becomings' (Ling 2014, 42). However, what makes *nikon* salient among

these works on temporality is its relation to subjectivity that is not presumed to endure; thus, it loses its attachment to ego.

Buddhist ethics towards 'others'

As noted above, the CSIR theory still encounters the same pitfall as the mainstream neorealist IR, particularly concerning human rights, minority rights and gender inequality, all related to the aforementioned issues of 'others'. The Confucian sociopolitical order, on the basis of its quantitative cyclical temporality, does not seem to secure or even be concerned with the lives of those who reside on the margins or outside their theoretical horizon. Quantitative cyclicality only provides ways to avoid conflict and maintain the ostensibly harmonious relationality already established among the powerful. Therefore, the CSIR theory does not answer the question of what sort of ethics IR should provide in relation to the 'others'.

Mahāyāna Buddhism also subscribes to virtue ethics, but this is different from the virtue of Confucianism in terms of purpose. While Confucian tradition assumes virtue as the accumulated, hereditary knowledge and experience designed to establish social stability and order, Mahāyāna Buddhist virtue is to know and encourage others to know the impermanency of reality and to act accordingly to liberate everyone from suffering. The impermanency is a logical consequence of *engi* relationality and *ku* itself is regarded as ethical in the sense that it facilitates opening oneself to unexpected 'others'. Imagined permanence and established subjectivity is, foremost, a consequence of *bonno.* It is this earthly desire which exhorts us to uphold and protect the subjectivity that often forces us to discredit and harm others. Unlike the rational economic man assumed in general social sciences like economics and politics, supposedly the driving force for economic and civilisational dynamisms, Mahāyāna Buddhism contends that desire-driven beings simply do not know the reality of impermanency, and are thus destined to suffer the fear of insecurity and the everlasting anxiety of losing wealth. Here, the action of losing oneself, thus losing the desire to safeguard oneself, can be considered ethical conduct. In this context, understanding *ku* is, first and foremost, an ethical act. Rather than negotiating with others to obtain profit, *ku* prompts one to accept others and embrace difference by critically engaging with the 'reality' we think of by negating one's subjectivity. Therefore, ontology is ethical in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Two types of implications arise for IR researchers adopting the Mahāyāna Buddhist ethical ontology: epistemological and ethical. Researchers can draw an epistemology for comprehending the world of impermanence from Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the world is ever-changing as it is essentially empty. This Buddhist logic of ontology allows researchers to encounter the world without the intervention of preexisting categories and concepts embodied in the language of IR on the basis of quantitative temporalities. Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics promotes the practice of unlearning abstract theories and taken-for-granted hypotheses (Bilgin and Ling 2014; Said 1978), and a researcher reifying Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics can find a way to understand what the reality is through *engi* relations and the negation of the self. From this point of view, we can perceive that time as we know it, be it cyclical or linear, is also an artificial construct through *engi,* in tandem with

being. Then how is it possible to epistemologically materialise Mahāyāna Buddhist ontological ethics in the research of IR? One possibility is to concentrate on the narratives of people's suffering. By unlearning the prevailing meta-narratives of IR, it is possible to learn different realities from their narratives in the moment of *nikon*. Rather than applying IR theories of quantitative temporalities to interpret stories to prove that the researchers' contentions are correct, be it realism, liberalism or Confucianism, sharing the moment with those suffering by avoiding the intervention of temporalities other than *nikon* would give a better idea of the issue concerned (C. C. Chen and Shimizu 2019; Hagstrom and Gustafsson 2019; Kishi, Ishioka, and Maruyama 2016; Ling and Nakamura 2019). This is precisely the practice that CSR theorists need to mitigate their theoretical weaknesses. Like the figure of the sage king in Confucianism, Mahāyāna Buddhism encourages researchers to lose their desire and subjectivity, and thus their temporality, and stay in the moment of *nikon* with others. Staying in *nikon* benefits and reinforces the CSIR theories' quantitative cyclicality-based argument by providing a better chance to recognise the plight of not only the people inside Confucian society but also of those outside it. This is imperative in the sense that for a researcher investigating the world, those 'others' actually reside inside of the target of inquiry.

This epistemological implication leads to the question of ethics. Ethically, to ease the pain of local people suffering from territorial disputes and inter-state violence, for example, Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics encourage politicians, diplomats and researchers to share their pain by allowing *engi* relationality to form in the *nikon*. Rather than making diplomatic agreements in remote places with comfortable accommodations which end up reproducing meta-narratives of quantitative temporality, the sage—a diplomat or researcher — should physically share *nikon* with those who are suffering so that new *engi* relations can occur. This practice of sharing *nikon* requires the negation of their subjectivity and desire based upon linear and cyclical and quantitative and qualitative temporalities for *engi* relationality to take place. This is precisely the reason that contemporary Global IR is important. As Acharya and Buzan argue, there must be a collaboration between IR scholars and area studies scholars in developing IR theories (Acharya 2014; Acharya and Buzan 2019), not only to pluralise the discipline and democratise IR but also, perhaps more importantly, to enable an understanding the plight of people living on the margins through the expertise of area studies specialists who have better opportunities to experience *engi* relations with concrete lives. This type of collaboration should be expanded to diverse fields such as anthropology, sociology and cultural studies, in which researchers have been engaging with difficult tasks such as understanding and speaking for others (Alcoff 1991; Kishi et al 2016).

Conclusion

The recent development of non-Western theories has brought a new dimension to IR. The concept of relationality seems to be imperative for contemplating the ontology of IR. However, this article argues that the discourse of non-Western IR cannot fully materialise its potentiality without addressing the question of ethics in relation to others. In fact, contemporary theories of relationality have paid insufficient attention to the nature of cyclical temporality

and its relation to ethics. Inadequate analyses of temporality in Confucian discourses have neglected many cases in Asian history of the abuse of the virtue ethics. The subsequent assertions by the powerful about inclusiveness and harmony often end up 'othering' the nations allegedly lagging behind. This results in an unquestioned ignorance regarding the 'others' of East Asian IR, such as women, ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples and victims of wartime sexual violence. In this way, the discourses of cyclical temporality risk 'othering' those existing in the margins.

Mahāyāna Buddhism provides a way to mitigate the pitfall of quantitative cyclical temporality by explicitly focussing on the temporality of the present, *nikon* and ontological ethics as the logical consequence of it. By taking *ku* and *engi* seriously, Mahāyāna Buddhism encourages researchers to critically engage with reality from the point of view of *nikon*. *Nikon* not only prompts us to critically interrogate such well-known artificial constructs as nation-states, sovereignty and anarchy, but it also clarifies the idea that a variety of temporalities, on which those artificial constructs are based, are themselves artificially constructed. Mahāyāna Buddhism encourages researchers to conduct investigations of contemporary world affairs on the basis of ontological ethics. Rather than living comfortably in locations remote from 'others', we are to actively engage with them in the moment of *nikon*. Without this critical insight into temporality and ethics towards others, the CSIR theories may run a risk of being incorporated into the blunt hegemonic discourse of the Westphalian game like the Kyoto School.

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