

One of today's most common assumptions about international politics is that the future belongs to China. What we do not often talk about is how different voices within China imagine a future Chinese world order. Today there is an ongoing discussion among scholars, writers and other commentators about what China's role in a new future world order should look like.

What Hu Jintao's policy concept "harmonious world" means is unclear and the domestic implementation of "harmonious society" has been markedly disharmonious. One consequence of Hu's focus on the vague harmony concept has been the emergence of a lively debate about what a harmonious world could mean. Chinese commentators have responded very differently to this question. One controversy is between economist Zhang Weiyang and the "new right", advocating a minimal state, and the "new left" often represented by Wang Hui, who believe that the state should remedy the injustices created by privatization and globalization.

Hu's leadership has also been associated with a strong resurgence of the idea that China should develop its own theories and models for international relations. Two ideas being discussed internationally are the Beijing consensus and the China Model, which have become part of China's "discourse of greatness". Both concepts are vague and mean above all to not be like the "West": not to abandon the state, not to embrace full-blown neoliberalism, not to do what you are told to do by other countries. One key individual in the debate is Yan Xuetong. He argues that China's role as a superpower will benefit the world, as it will be a human *wang* 王 superpower based on political authority, rather than a hegemonic *ba* 霸 superpower based on economic and military strength and exemplified by today's United States. Another important thinker is Zhao Tingyang, who advocates "All-under-Heaven", *Tianxia* 天下, as a holistic and hierarchical system where the leaders' exemplary moral appeal can convert "the bad" to be like "the good". A third influential professor is Qin Yaqing, who argues that it is inevitable to build a unique Chinese theory of international relations. He argues that relationships, or *guanxi* 关系, are China's contribution to global politics.

Of course it is unclear how these debates will affect China's international behavior in the future, but in recent years these commentators are increasingly called to inform the president, prime minister and other senior party members. Some see China's intellectuals as a substitute for a political opposition. This year, Hu steps down from party leadership, most likely handing over to Vice President Xi Jinping. We can expect that Xi develops his own policy concepts, most likely based on the ideas discussed in this talk. We can continue to expect harmony, mutually beneficial cooperation and respect for difference between civilizations to be central to Chinese rhetoric.

China's public intellectuals are influential, more accessible than other actors in the political system and can offer British players a chance to discuss, influence and win support for ideas of socio-political issues. Therefore, British actors have good reason to be more aware of what China's social commentators have to say.

Recommended reading:

1. Mark Leonard (2008) *What Does China Think?* Highly accessible discussion of the dynamic between policymakers and intellectuals, including Zhang Weiyang, Wang Hui and Qin Yaqing.
2. William A. Callahan and Elena Barabantseva (2011) *China Orders the World: Normative Soft Power and Foreign Policy*. Includes chapters by Yan Xuetong, Zhao Ting Yang and Qin Yaqing in English, as well as critical analyses of concepts like "harmonious world" and *Tianxia*.
3. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (2010) *China in the 21st Century: What Everyone Needs to Know*. An easy to read and exceptionally well-balanced introduction that untangles common misunderstandings about China today.