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Futures beyond 'the West'? Autoimmunity in China's harmonious world

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Abstract. It has become fashionable among International Relations scholars to draw on the concept of 'autoimmunity', which some call 'the ultimate horizon in which contemporary politics inscribes itself'. To these scholars, most of whom draw on the thought of Jacques Derrida, such logics open systems up to a future to come. At the same time, they tend to identify such logics with Europe, America, Western modernity, and/or democracy. Implied, and sometimes explicit, in their accounts is the denial of autoimmune logics at work outside such an imagined configuration.

This article challenges that denial through arguing that the system of 'harmony', deployed in contemporary China, also works on an autoimmune logic. If autoimmunity opens up a system to the future, this is not only so for European democracy or its derivatives. Moreover, the expulsion of 'non-Western' others from accounts of autoimmunity undermines their rethinking of difference by falling back on an immunitary logic, denying China an open future. This exclusion is their condition of possibility. At the same time, this exclusion is what keeps open their promise of its future to come. Paradoxically, the exclusion of the 'non-West' is what keeps the idea of an autoimmune 'Western' or European democracy alive.

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Scholars have long expressed concern that common ways of thinking about difference in and beyond the discipline of Internetional Relations (IR) close down, rather than open up, alternative futures. Conceiving of others as not properly different, but either threatening or just behind in a historical queue, leads us time and again to imagine one developmental path where others will soon become like ourselves or be annihilated.[1] This type of thinking makes it difficult to imagine change and a positive

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[1] Literatures have shown various disciplines to rely on an imagination of others as 'behind' in a historical queue, including anthropology: J. Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); geography: D. B. Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005); international political economy: D. L. Blaney and N. Inayatullah, *Savage Economics: Wealth, Poverty and the Temporal Walls of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2010); and IR: N. Inayatullah and D. L. Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (New York: Routledge, 2004); K. Hutchings, *Time and World Politics: Thinking the Present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008). I discuss this problem in relation to the Chinese logics discussed in this article at greater length in A. H. M. Nordin, *China's International Relations and Harmonious World: Time, Space and Multiplicity in World Politics* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

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plurality in the world, and has been complicit with colonial and neocolonial global relations.[2] It imagines one single future, rather than an openness to a plurality of different futures that may come.

In response to this common and limiting way of thinking, scholars have tried to rethink difference. One set of such attempts have clustered around the motif of autoimmunity. Thinking about 'immunity' has been a staple of critical thought in the twentieth century, and autoimmunity is rapidly joining it.[3] Autoimmunity describes a double process whereby a subject, community, or system attacks or threatens its own protection. It is the system's own logic that turns it against itself. Scholars have seen in this double movement a different way of imagining difference, which complicates the logic of clear distinctions between threat and protection, inside and outside, self and other, that is fundamental to the imagination of those definite 'others' as expendable or 'just behind'. Operating according to a principle of intermingeled self-defeat and self-perpetuation, this logic keeps the system alive in its openness to the future and the other. Scholars have therefore been hopeful that autoimmunity can help us see how there is no self-identical self there in the first place, because the self contains elements of difference or otherness. This highlights our dependence on others in the world. It means that we must be open to others, and to the different futures that they may bring.

It is this promise of a genuine openness to the other and to the future that has drawn IR scholars to the concept of 'autoimmunity', and to examine such logics of contemporary world politics.[4] For some, the immunity/autoimmunity nexus has come to be understood as 'the ultimate horizon in which contemporary politics inscribes itself'.[5] Many have thus deployed the notion of immunity/autoimmunity, but arguably 'no one placed it more forcefully at the centre of contemporary politics than did Jacques Derrida'.[6] Derrida used autoimmunity to describe a number of things, most prominently a democratic system originating in Europe that in seeking to secure itself against a potentially dangerous future violates itself as the consequence of a non-recognition of the 'other' in the self.[7] IR scholars who have drawn on his

[2] G. W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987), p. 237.

[3] Niklas Luhmann, for example, made immunity the centre of his social systems theory. See N. Luhmann, *Social Systems*, trans. J. Bednarz, Jr, with D. Baecker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). Donna Haraway used an 'immune system discourse' to analyse postmodern bodies. See D. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 203–30. Jean Baudrillard described what he called 'autoimmune' anomalies, that he argued were a product of over-protection of the social body. See R. G. Smith (ed.), *The Baudrillard Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 59; J. Baudrillard, *Screened Out* (New York: Verso, 2002 [orig. pub. 2000]), pp. 97, 207. Recent translations of Roberto Esposito's writings into english have made another a body of work that centers on the immunity/autoimmunity nexus increasingly influential. See R. Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

[4] See, for examples, D. Bulley, *Ethics as Foreign Policy: Britain, the EU and the Other* (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 25–9; '"Foreign" terror? London bombings, resistance and the failing state', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 10 (2008), pp. 386–91; N. Vaughan-Williams, 'The shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes: New border politics?', *Alternatives*, 32 (2007), pp. 183–92; G. Osuri, 'Imploding singularities: For a critique of autoimmunity as political future', *Social Semiotics*, 16 (2006), p. 500; and S. Haddad, 'Derrida and democracy at risk', *Contretemps*, 4 (2004), p. 30.

[5] T. Campbell, '*Bios*, immunity, life: the thought of Roberto Esposito', *Diacritics*, 36 (2006), p. 2.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Readers objecting to my use of the term 'system' may prefer 'promise' or 'hope'. Either ultimately fails to grasp what we may mean by 'democracy' (or 'harmony'). Aware of the insufficiency of my language I nonetheless settle for 'system', for the lack of a better term. Interested readers may follow up on Derrida comments on the issue in J. Derrida, 'The reason of the strongest (Are there rogue states?)', in J. Derrida, P.-A. Brault, and M. Naas (eds), *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005 [orig pub. 2003]), p. 82.

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understanding of autoimmunity also share an empirical focus on logics that operate in or originate from a cluster of actors or activities that are variously described as 'Western', 'European', 'modern', and/or 'democratic'. Derrida explicitly claimed that the self-perfecting logic of autoimmunity (and the open future that comes with it) is specific to such a geo-politically defined system. The empirical focus of the wider literatures that have drawn on his notion to date have done little to challenge that understanding.

The task at this point is to question that claim. Is democracy really the only political system that operates on an autoimmune logic? Are there other systems that may display similar logics, and be similarly open to other futures? That is to say, could we find an example of another system which displays a similarly autoimmune logic, a system politically outside what is commonly understood by 'democracy', geographically outside what is commonly understood by 'Europe' or 'the West', with origins temporally predating what is commonly understood as the 'Enlightenment' or 'modernity' that is said to have inaugurated such a logic? What implications would it have for the openness of the future – and for contemporary thought on autoimmunity – if such a system could be found?

In answering these questions, this article challenges and builds on previous understandings of autoimmunity. It argues that the system of 'harmony', as deployed in contemporary China, also works on an autoimmune logic. Drawing on a range of primarily Chinese language texts by officials and academics, it argues that there is at least one non-European, non-democratic system that operates on a very similar logic to what Derrida and other thinkers of autoimmunity describe. If autoimmunity does indeed open up a system to the future, this is not only so for European democracy or its derivatives. The article furthermore explores the consequences of this finding for thinking about autoimmunity in IR scholarship.

The article progresses in four sections. The first section introduces the concept of autoimmunity in IR, its significance and its deployment. It outlines how the treatment of autoimmunity, particularly by Derrida and many of his followers in IR, positions an 'other' to the 'Western' or 'democratic' configuration they understand as operating on such logics. The second section outlines how the notion of harmony is conceptualised in contemporary Chinese policy and academic discourse. It explains my discussion in terms of a 'political elite', and provides evidence for my claims from official documents and academic texts. The third section argues that the system of 'harmony' currently deployed in China can indeed be characterised as autoimmune, and discusses the political implications of this finding.

The final section argues that the expulsion of 'non-Western' others from Derrida's and his followers' accounts of autoimmunity undermines their rethinking of difference by falling back on an immunitary logic, denying China an open future. These accounts fall prey to a logic that tries to immunise itself against its expunged other. This exclusion is their condition of possibility. At the same time, this sending off of its other in time and space is what keeps open the promise of its future to come. Put differently, without positing an 'other' in this way, there would be nothing that could come to European democracy and Enlightenment thought to challenge, change and revive it. Derrida's European democratic system cannot stay alive without 'killing' that other, and simultaneously imagining its (Asian) outside as an other that threatens to kill it. Paradoxically, the exclusion of the 'non-West' is what keeps the idea of an autoimmune 'Western' or European democracy alive.

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The significance of autoimmunity in IR

The logic of autoimmunity and the openness of the future

Scholars have increasingly drawn on 'autoimmunity' in IR because the term has helped them to think about alternative political strategies and the future. The impetus behind these deployments seems to be a reaction against the prevalence of linear thinking in the wider social sciences. This conceptualisation of difference is problematic for several reasons. Most immediately, it is often thought to imply a moral yardstick, where imagining others as behind comes to connote their lack in value. Moreover, it often implies childlike qualities, which in turn means 'they' need to be guided and socialised by 'us'. Even more problematic, perhaps, is the effect this move has on difference. The otherness of others – that which makes them unique and ungraspable to my language – is reduced to graspable difference, variations on a theme. This way of thinking about difference has serious consequences for our ability to imagine a different open future. The imagining of one single developmental path, where others will eventually become like us, robs others of their own past and future.[8] It turns difference into sameness, other into self. 'Their' future is no longer open to choices, it is already inscribed in the story. This of course robs 'us' of a different future too, because newness must be impossible without otherness: how could something different emerge from something that is all-encompassing and self-same?

In a context where this kind of thinking is common, various scholars have turned to logics of autoimmunity to better understand contemporary politics. Thinkers like Jean Baudrillard, Robert Esposito and Jaques Derrida see in this process a double and contradictory discourse of concurrent immunity and autoimmunity in endless circulation, where the system 'conducts a terrible war against that which protects it only by threatening it'.[9] Derrida explained autoimmunity as 'that strange behaviour where a living being, in quasi-suicidal fashion, "itself" works to destroy its own protection, to immunise itself against its "own" immunity'.[10] On this understanding he describes how 'the West' since 9/11 operates on an autoimmune logic where it is 'producing, reproducing, and regenerating the very thing it seeks to disarm'.[11]

It is clear that autoimmunity is understood as a threat to the system. However, it also brings to the system an openness to the future that keeps the system alive. This is what has attracted many scholars who want to think about the future in ways that do not fall back on the linear timeline they have found problematic. Derrida famously insists on the openness of the future 'to come' through highlighting the connection in French language of the terms for 'future' (*avenir*) and 'to come' (*à venir*). In doing so, he insists on the necessity of the absolutely singular other for the possibility to think time and any future at all. To Derrida '[a] foreseen event is already present, already presentable; it has already arrived or happened and is thus neutralized in its irruption.'[12]

[8] Massey, *For Space*, pp. 122, 124. Nordin, *China's International Relations and Harmonious World*.
[9] J. Derrida, 'Faith and knowledge: the two sources of 'religion' at the limits of reason alone', in J. Derrida and G. Vattimo (eds), *Religion* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), p. 46.
[10] J. Derrida, 'Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides – a dialogue with Jacques Derrida', in G. Borradori (ed.), *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 94.
[11] Derrida, 'Autoimmunity', p. 99.
[12] J. Derrida, 'The "world" of the enlightenment to come (exception, calculation, and sovereignty)', in J. Derrida, P.-A. Brault, and M. Naas (eds), *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005 [orig. pub. 2003]), p. 143.

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Therefore, '[w]ithout the absolute singularity of the incalculable and the exceptional, no thing and no one, nothing *other* and thus *nothing*, arrives or happens.'[13] Put otherwise, '[w]ithout autoimmunity, with absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen or arrive; we would no longer wait, await or expect, no longer expect one another, or expect any event.'[14] This is why Derrida and others insist on autoimmunity, not only as a threat to the system, but also as a condition of simultaneous possibility and impossibility of the future 'to come' (*avenir/à venir*).

Excluding 'non-Western' others from the autoimmune system

As indicated above, scholars associate autoimmune logics with a specific spatio-temporal configuration, related to 'the West' and European democracy. In Baudrillard's work, it is European democracy, the modern West, or sometimes consumer society more broadly, that are driven by the 'perverse' logic he describes.[15] Other places are excluded from such analysis in an attempt at 'radical exoticism'.[16] Esposito's analysis focuses on a logic of community at work in 'modernity', a term that many understand to be concerned with a specifically European or Western trajectory.[17] Derrida recognised that groups beyond such a cluster also contain autoimmunitary processes.[18] Nonetheless, and despite insisting that his claim is not Eurocentric,[19] he persists in privileging the names 'Europe' and 'democracy' as originating in the Enlightenment that he takes as inaugurating such self-perfecting logics.[20] Though China, for example, is recognised as joining the coalition formed around the United States after 9/11, Europe holds an exceptional position in this post-9/11 world, because Enlightenment Europe is seen as inaugurating the self-questioning Derrida lauds. This can be found, he claims, 'neither in the Arab world nor in the Muslim world, nor in the Far East, nor even … in American democracy'.[21]

Derrida goes so far as to suggest that the future to come that is opened up by an autoimmune logic is specific to Europe or democracy. Derrida's 'democracy to come' is chosen in acknowledgement of his debt to a historical and intellectual heritage. He claims:

> [o]f all the names grouped a bit too quickly under the category 'political regimes' (and I do not believe that 'democracy' ultimately designates a 'political regime'), the inherited concept of democracy is the only one that welcomes the possibility of being contested, of contesting itself, of criticizing and indefinitely improving itself.[22]

As Kimberly Hutchings has argued, this argument allocates universal relevance to Enlightenment thinking, albeit not identified with a universal end of history.[23] Victor Li sums up this attitude: 'Europe, in questioning itself, is exceptional; European exceptionalism, moreover, seems to be made possible only by the Muslim world or the

[13] Ibid., p. 148, emphasis in original.
[14] Ibid., p. 152, see also p. 157.
[15] Baudrillard, *Screened Out*, pp. 97, 207.
[16] A. H. M. Nordin, 'Radical exoticism: Baudrillard and other's wars', *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, 11 (2014).
[17] Esposito, '*Bios*'.
[18] Derrida, 'Autoimmunity', p. 115.
[19] Ibid., p. 116.
[20] Ibid., pp. 116–17.
[21] Ibid., p. 117.
[22] Derrida, 'Autoimmunity', p. 121.
[23] Ibid., p. 116; see also Hutchings, *Time and World Politics*, p. 168.

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Far East acting as exceptions to the spirit of critical questioning.'[24] A consequence of this attitude is the outright denial of an openness of the future in these other systems.[25]

Many of those who have more recently followed on this thought, and drawn on ideas of such autoimmune logics in IR, have also done so to discuss issues closely associated with a similar configuration. In these accounts, autoimmunity appears to emanate from 'Western' practice or thought. Dan Bulley, for example, draws on Derrida's autoimmune to study British foreign policy and democracy.[26] Nick Vaughan-Williams finds it in British border politics.[27] Bulley, Vaughan-Williams, and others like James Brassett and Marguerite La Caze follow Derrida and study it in recent acts of 'terrorism' in Europe and the United States.[28] Goldie Osuri sees it in orientalism generated by a current 'Western' system,[29] and writers like Samir Haddad and Alexander J. P. Thomson join this group of writers to explore its role in contemporary democracy.[30] A number of other sources could be cited to similar effect.

These are all excellent pieces of scholarship. They show that contemporary scholars have found the figure of autoimmunity to have significant explanatory value in a range of areas of concern in contemporary IR. They have drawn on the notion to complicate binaries such as successful/failed states, inside/outside nation states, cosmopolitanism/terrorism, and powerful/helpless. The most unsettling insight the concept of autoimmunity leads us to, as aptly summarised in Bulley's discussion, is that 'it is always a matter of the *self* revealing the impossibility *of the self* … it reveals that there is no *self-same* self in the first place'.[31] Most importantly for the discussion here, all these thinkers identify in autoimmunity an opening up to a future to come, an openness that the linear thinking about time tends to close down or deny. These discussions of autoimmunity in IR matter because they have contributed to a better understanding of these phenomena and because they have pointed towards new ways of responding to events like 9/11 or 7/7. The fact that the term has become increasingly used in academic circles is also a reason to critically examine its effects.

Taken together, however, these discussions also show that recent writing on autoimmunity in IR has done little to challenge its Eurocentric implications. As a body of literature, they are very much focused on the configuration of 'the West', particularly democracy and terrorism 'against' (or 'by') that system. The literatures concerned with autoimmunity to date seem to imply, and sometimes explicitly claim, that systems in times and places outside of this configuration might not or do not work on this logic. This claim matters because of the association of autoimmune logics with an open future.

That claim then needs to be questioned at this point. Is democracy really the only system that operates on an autoimmune logic? Are there other autoimmune systems

[24] V. Li, 'Elliptical interruptions: or, why Derrida prefers mondialisation to globalization', *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 7 (2007), pp. 141–54.
[25] Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, pp. 116, 120–1; Hutchings, *Time and World Politics*, p. 168. For a similar critique, see A. David-West, 'Derrida, terrorism, and communism: a comment on "Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides"', *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 5 (2009), pp. 226, 231.
[26] Bulley, *Ethics as Foreign Policy*, pp. 12, 25–9; Bulley, '"Foreign" terror?, pp. 386–91.
[27] Vaughan-Williams, 'New border politics?', pp. 183–92.
[28] J. Brassett, 'Cosmopolitanism vs. terrorism? Discourses of ethical possibility before and after 7/7', *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, 36 (2008), pp. 311–38; M. La Caze, 'Terrorism and trauma: Negotiating Derridean "autoimmunity"', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 37 (2011), pp. 605–19.
[29] Osuri, 'Imploding singularities', p. 500.
[30] Haddad, 'Democracy at risk', p. 30; A. J. P. Thomson, 'What's to become of "democracy to come"?', *Postmodern Culture*, 15 (2005).
[31] Bulley, '"Foreign" terror?', p. 390.

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outside what is conceived of as the 'modern West' or 'European democracy'? In the next section, I turn to the Chinese system of 'harmony', specifically the 'harmonious world' that has been advocated by Chinese authorities and scholars, to argue that there is at least one non-European, non-democratic system that operates on a very similar logic.

Autoimmune logics beyond 'the West': China's 'harmonious world'

Harmony as a Chinese system

In conjunction with China's rise, scholars and policymakers have begun to ask how a rising China will reshape international norms. What would a world under Chinese leadership look like? What norms does China want to promote? The answer many Chinese officials, scholars, and organisations have given to these questions can be summarised in one word: harmony.

Every generation of leadership of the People's Republic has used set phrases to stamp their mark on Chinese politics. 'Harmony' rose on the Chinese IR research agenda after the previous Chinese president Hu Jintao launched it as an official policy concept around 2004–5.[32] Two key policies under Hu have been 'harmonious society' (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会) and 'harmonious world' (*hexie shijie* 和谐世界). At the time when Hu's harmonious policies were launched, Deng Xiaoping's 'reform and opening up' had been praised for bringing about the impressive growth of the Chinese economy. With it, however, came growing inequality, continued environmental degradation, and social unrest. Hu's rhetorical focus on harmony sought to calm unrest which risked growing to a point of dangerously challenging party rule.[33]

The term also had its precedents in foreign policy. As pointed out by William A. Callahan,[34] harmony was related to policy prior to Hu's major reuse of the term, both in academic debates on IR and wider social sciences[35] and in Jiang Zemin's speeches.[36] This policy and academic discourse draws on a long history of thinking about harmony in China. The concept has a central position in Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist thinking, and had a strong influence on Chinese systems of governance for millenia. The operative term for 'harmony' is *he* (和), which was more recently selected as the Chinese character that 'carries the most meaning for Chinese culture' by a popular Chinese magazine.[37] The concept featured heavily in the line of propagandistic mega-events that included the 2008 Beijing Olympics[38] and the 2010

[32] Hu Jintao, 'Build towards a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity', United Nations Summit, New York (15 September 2005); CCP Central Committee, *'Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu jiaqiang dang de zhizheng nengli jianshe de jueding'*, 4th plenum of the 16th Party Conference, Beijing (19 September 2004).

[33] T. Boutonnet, 'Vers une "Société harmonieuse" de consommation? Discours et spectacle de l'harmonie sociale dans la construction d'une Chine "Civilisée" (1978–2008)', PhD thesis (Lyon: Université de Lyon – Jean Moulin Lyon 3, 2009).

[34] W. A. Callahan, 'Conclusion: World harmony or harmonizing the world?', in W. A. Callahan and E. Barabantseva (eds), *China Orders the World? Soft Power, Norms and Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011), p. 257.

[35] See, for example, Liu Zhiguang, *Dongfang heping zhuyi: yuanqi, liubian ji zouxiang* (Changsha, Hunan: Hunan Chubanshe, 1992).

[36] See, for example, Jiang Zemin, 'Enhance mutual understanding and build stronger ties of friendship and cooperation', Harvard University (1 November 1997).

[37] J. Chin, 'The most "Chinese" Chinese character?', *The Wall Street Journal* (15 October 2010).

[38] G. R. Barme, 'China's flat earth: history and 8 August 2008', *The China Quarterly*, 197 (2009), pp. 64, 69, 78, 80, 84; J. Leibold, 'The Beijing Olympics and China's conflicted national form', *The China Journal* (2010), pp. 3, 9, 16, 18, 20–1, 24; K. Latham, 'Media, the Olympics and the search for the "real China"',

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Shanghai Expo.[39] In academia, it is often referred to as 'foundational' or a 'key concept' in Chinese thought.[40] Chinese IR scholars Ni Shixiong and Qian Xuming exemplify this attitude when they claim that:

> 'cherishing harmony', 'harmony with difference' and such thought penetrates the inner world of the Chinese nation, taking shape in the Chinese nation ardently loving peace, upholding a harmonious national disposition and values.[41]

Harmony, then, may be understood as an example of a system that has emerged from, and that is currently operating, outside what is understood as the 'modern West' and 'European democracy', and which predates both. Today, Xi Jinping has taken over after Hu as head of the Chinese party-state. Like previous generations of leadership, he has deployed his own slogan of choice, the 'Chinese dream' (*Zhongguo meng* 中国梦). This slogan has incorporated the notion of harmony and is part of constituting what Key-young Son has referred to as a discourse of 'harmonism', 'an expression of the ethos, identities, and norms of the East Asian political elite with respect to national, regional, and global governance at the specific historical juncture the world is passing through'.[42]

The political elite that Son refers to incorporates policymakers, academics, and other stakeholders. Academics in China are increasingly called to inform senior party members, who in turn inform the development of academic arguments. For example Hu, when he became General Secretary of the Communist Party in 2002, started collective study sessions for China's top decision unit, the Politburo, where IR scholars are invited to give lectures. A new Foreign Policy Council similarly brings officials and scholars together. Where some say scholars act as mouthpieces for politicians, others say it is scholars who put issues on the political agenda and act as a substitute for the kind of opposition we see in liberal democracies. What is clear is that the leading Chinese scholars discussed here have become part of the policy process that has expanded in the last decades to include increased influence from universities, research institutes, and other intellectuals.[43] Therefore, discussions of harmony in China are not best separated into 'policy' and 'academic' discourse, but analysed together as one system or elite discourse of 'harmonism', as proposed by Son.

Before proceeding to look closer at this dicourse of 'harmonism', four premises of my analysis are worth highlighting. First, the texts I examine are principally produced by 'insiders' of the system. The policy discourse discussed represents versions of

The China Quarterly, 197 (2009), p. 34; A.-M. Brady, 'Special section on the Beijing 2008 Olympics', *The China Quarterly*, 197 (2009), pp. 11–12, 14, 19, 24.

[39] A. H. M. Nordin, 'Space for the future: Exhibiting China in the world at the Shanghai Expo', *China Information*, 26 (2012), pp. 235–49; A. H. M. Nordin, 'Taking Baudrillard to the fair: Exhibiting China in the world at the Shanghai Expo', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 37 (2012), pp. 106–20; A. H. M. Nordin, 'How soft is "soft power"? Unstable dichotomies at Expo 2010', *Asian Perspective*, 36 (2012), pp. 591–613; W. A. Callahan, 'Shanghai's alternative futures: The World Expo, citizen intellectuals, and China's new civil society', *China Information*, 26 (2012), pp. 251–73; F. Schneider, 'The futurities and utopias of the Shanghai World Exposition: a multimodal discourse analysis of the Expo 2010 theme pavilions', {www.Asiascape.org} occasional paper series, 7 (2013); T. Winter, 'Shanghai 2010, in a tradition of mega-events, nation-building and modernity', in T. Winter (ed.), *Shanghai Expo: An International Forum on the Future of Cities* (London and New York: Routledge), pp. 25–43.

[40] Ba Xiang, *Hexielun* [On harmony] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2010), p. 3.

[41] Ni Shixiong and Qian Xuming, '*Xin diyuan zhengzhi yu hexie shijie* [New regional politics and harmonious world]', *Qinghua daxue xuebao (Zhexue shehui kexue ban)*, 23 (2008), p. 125.

[42] K.-Y. Son, 'Harmony, the supremacy of human agency and East Asia's mega-discourses for governance', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 5 (2012), p. 399.

[43] B. S. Glaser and P. C. Saunders, 'Chinese civilian foreign policy research institutes: Evolving roles and increasing influence', *The China Quarterly*, 171 (2002), pp. 603–4.

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harmony that made it to official documents.[44] Most scholarly materials discussed are written for Chinese language audiences at Chinese institutions.[45] Like 'democracy', 'harmony' is a norm that has gained widespread acceptance among political elites within a particular system, but this does not imply that they have a monopoly on articulating harmony.

Second, these Chinese political elites do not themselves articulate an entirely uniform notion of harmony. Just as 'democracy' means different things to different people, discussions of 'harmony' represent a diversity of opinion. Nonetheless, just as 'democracy' represents a cluster of dominant ideas or a system of governance, so too can we speak of a cluster of 'harmonist discourses that aim to challenge Western hegemonic discourses and create a new system of governance'.[46]

Third, this dominant version of harmony does not represent some truth about what harmony 'really means'. Rather, I focus on what 'harmony' does where it is deployed by the political elite. I pay particular attention to the implications of this version of harmony for thinking about diverse futures in relation to the autoimmune logics outlined above. Scholars argue that '[t]he policy discourse "harmonious society" and its foreign policy alter ego "harmonious world" has become the defining discourse of the Chinese Communist Party under Hu Jintao'.[47] 'Harmonism' thus provides the discursive backdrop of policymaking in contemporary China, just like elite ideas about 'democracy' do in Europe and the United States.

Finally, I recognise here that all analysis must start from some position, and that that position is in some way arbitrary. In critiquing recent thought on autoimmunity for excluding China, I do not suggest that a body of thought could achieve wholeness without exclusions. Indeed, the focus on China in this article is only achieved by other exclusions. Nor does Derridean deconstruction pretend to be able to do without exclusion, but rather shed light on it and thereby put it eternally in question.[48] Yes, this article shows that Derrida is factually wrong when he claims that only Europe or democracy works on an autoimmune logic. Nonetheles, what is attempted here is not primarily a criticism of recent thought on autoimmunity for excluding China, but a demonstration of the possibilities that are created when this exclusion is 'brought back in'. What I hope my examination will achieve is to make visible the instability and

[44] I have processed all Chinese white papers published 1991–October 2014 in Chinese and English, Reports on the Work of Government 2000–13 and all documents using the term 'harmonious world' on websites of Chinese embassies in English, Chinese, French, Spanish, Portuguese, or German (166 embassies). I also discuss speeches by key leadership figures, especially at key state visits and gatherings in national and international bodies.

[45] I explore academic texts produced after 2005 that deploy 'harmonious world'. I have read all documents that mention 'harmonious world' authored since 2005 by any of the twenty-five scholars identified as the most prominent Chinese IR scholars in a recent study that are available via the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). See P. M. Kristensen and R. T. Nielsen, 'Constructing a Chinese International Relations theory: a sociological approach to intellectual innovation', paper presented at 'Innovation and Invention: China and Global Influences', St Antony's College, University of Oxford, (2011). I have also read all documents that mention 'harmonious world' published since 2005 in any of the most influential Chinese journals in this debate, available via CNKI, including: *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi, Guoji zhengzhi kexue, Liaowang, Xuezhi luntan, Dushu, Guoji jingji pinglun, Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu, Zhongguo fazhan guancha, Meiguo yanjiu, Jiaoxue yu yanjiu, Zhongguo yu shijie guancha, Zhanlue yu guanli, Xiandai guoji guanxi*, and *Guoji zhonglie*. I also discuss additional books, articles, theses, and conference papers.

[46] Son, 'Harmony', p. 400.

[47] Sow Keat Tok and Zheng Yongnian, '"Harmonious society" and "Harmonious world": China's policy discourse under Hu Jintao', in University of Nottingham China Policy Institute Briefing Series (2007), summary.

[48] I thank an anonymous reviewer for putting the point in these terms, and for highlighting its importance.

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impossibility of the wholeness that is aimed at in the harmony concept. Thus, while acknoweldging my own arbitrary starting point, the analysis here of both harmonious world and autoimmunity aims to show the 'snags, tears, and portals, inviting alternative paths',[49] that may offer room for 'thinking otherwise'.[50]

From harmony-with-difference to exclusive harmonisation

Hu made his definite launch of the 'harmonious world' concept to the UN at its sixtieth anniversary summit in 2005:

> [w]e should do away with misgivings and estrangement existing between civilizations and make humanity more harmonious and our world more colorful. We should endeavor to preserve the diversity of civilizations in the spirit of equality and openness, make international relations more democratic and jointly build towards a harmonious world where all civilizations coexist and accommodate each other.[51]

In December the same year, a white paper entitled *China's Peaceful Development Road* was published, expanding on the concept,[52] and in October 2007, the seventeenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) wrote the concept into its constitution, calling for the building of 'a harmonious world characterized by sustained peace and common prosperity'.[53] As can be seen from his speech to the UN, Hu wanted to associate 'harmony' with norms of diversity and multiplicity from the outset.

A number of texts have since developed the idea that 'harmonious world' should build on the notion of 'harmony with difference' or 'harmony without uniformity' (*he er butong* 和而不同).[54] In 2011, a second white paper was issued on 'China's Peaceful Development', which has since been widely cited and emphasised in the PRC's foreign policy work, including ministers' and ambassadors' speeches.[55] This white paper reiterated the themes of the previous reports, including the appreciation of 'harmony with difference':

> [t]he Chinese people have always cherished a world view of 'unity without uniformity', 'harmony between man and nature', and 'harmony is invaluable.' … Under the influence of the culture of harmony, peace-loving has been deeply ingrained in the Chinese character … Imbued with the belief that one should be as inclusive as the vast ocean which admits hundreds of rivers, the Chinese nation has embraced all that is fine in foreign cultures … The Chinese people have inherited the fine tradition of Chinese culture of over 5,000 years and added to it new dimensions of the times.[56]

A significant portion of the academic literatures on harmony and harmonious world also stress the importance of multiplicity and heterogeneity for *proper*

[49] M. Stern and M. Zalewski, 'Feminist fatigue(s): Reflections on feminism and familiar fables of militarisation', *Review of International Studies*, 35 (2009), p. 629.
[50] Ibid.; J. Derrida, 'Sending: On representation', *Social Research*, 49 (1982), pp. 294–326.
[51] Hu, 'Build towards a harmonious world'.
[52] State Council, 'China's Peaceful Development Road', Government white paper (Beijing: Information office of the State Council, 2005).
[53] Xinhua, 'CPC Constitution amendment advocates building of "Harmonious World"' (25 October 2007).
[54] Such speeches include Ambassador Wang Xuexian, 'A Harmonious World Begins at People's Heart', Second ASEM Interfaith Dialogue, Cyprus, 4 September 2008; Ye Xiaowen in Xinhua, 'Chinese official: Mutual appreciation, peaceful coexistence key to world harmony' (20 February 2008); Hu Jintao, 'Build towards a harmonious world'; Hu in Xinhua, 'Chinese president calls for building harmonious world' (24 September 2009).
[55] State Council, 'China's Peaceful Development', Government white paper (Beijing: Information office of the State Council, 2011).
[56] State Council, 'China's Peaceful Development', IV.

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harmony.[57] Many texts deploy the term 'harmony with difference' to express the need for difference in order to have the balance of separate elements that is harmony.[58] Respecting cultural multiplicity is emphasised as the only way to a harmonious world and the development of 'the civilisation of humanity'.[59] One proponent of harmonious world, Wang Yiwei, offers the concept as an alternative to the problematic time-space conceptualisation of difference in 'Western thought':

> [i]n their [Westerners'] view, patriotism and nationalism became separated into symbolically advanced and backward, sameness and difference. This is a typical case of the 'logic of taking initiative', the implication is 'your life is in our history' … Therefore, under the hegemonic speech system of the contemporary world, nationalism has already been derided by the strong, just as though a piece of clothing, worn out by developed countries, was tossed to developing countries.[60]

There is a concern here with the problematic imagination of other as 'behind' to which many of the texts that discuss autoimmunity also respond. Despite this concern, a vast majority of the literatures on harmonious world repeat similarly problematic moves, for example through arguing that 'harmonious world' is a 'natural extension and development' of 'harmonious society', where China builds harmonious society in the external arena.[61]

As the quote above from 'China's Peaceful Development' has already indicated, policy discourse also incorporates a strong and repeated suggestion that 'China' has privileged access to a 'proper' understanding of harmony, and is leading the world towards this end goal. In the same white paper, this form of being in the world carries forward the Chinese historical and cultural tradition:

> [t]he world has been believed to be a harmonious whole in the Chinese culture ever since the ancient times. This belief has a lasting impact on the thinking and acts of the Chinese nation, which is an important value that the Chinese people follow in handling interpersonal relationships, the relationship between man and nature and relations between different countries.[62]

Similarly, in the elaboration of harmony in 'China's Peaceful Development Road', 'China is working hard to bring about a just and rational new international political and economic order' and is 'working harder to get the rest of the world to understand China'.[63] Harmony, here, is a value specific to the Chinese people, state and civilisation, because of history.[64] It is something that 'China' understands, but that others need to be taught.

[57] See, for examples, contributions in Tao, Cheung, Painter, and Li, *Governance for Harmony in Asia*, especially K. P. Yu, 'The Confucian conception of harmony', pp. 25–6; Li Chenyang, 'Harmony as a guiding principle for governance', p. 49; and M. D. Barr, 'Harmony, conformity or timidity? Singapore's overachievement in the quest for harmony', p. 75.

[58] Examples are numerous and include Ni Shixiong and Qian Xuming, 'New regional politics'; Yu Xiaofeng and Wang Jiangli, '*Fei chuantong anquan weihu de "bianjie", "yujing" yu "fanshi"* [The "border", "context", and "form" defended by non-traditional security]', *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (2006), pp. 55–63; Fang Xiaojiao, '*Hexie shijie linian yu Zhongguo ruanshili jianshe* [The harmonious world concept and China's building of soft power]', *Jiaoxue yu yanjiu*, (2008), pp. 67–72.

[59] Ni Shixiong and Qian Xuming, 'New regional politics', p. 125.

[60] Wang Yiwei, '*Tanxun Zhongguo de xin shenfen: Guanyu minzuzhuyi de shenhua* [Inquiry into China's new identity: On the myth of nationalism]', *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (2006), p. 16.

[61] Hang Lihua, '*Hexie shijie shijiao xia de Zhongguo waijiao* [Chinese foreign policy from the viewpoint of harmonious world]', *Gaige yu chuangxin* (2010), p. 20.

[62] State Council, 'China's Peaceful Development', IV.

[63] State Council, 'China's Peaceful Development Road'.

[64] For examples of claims that such a harmonious nature is based in Chinese history, see State Council, 'China's Endeavors for Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation', Government white paper (Beijing: Information office of the State Council, 2005); State Council, 'China's Political Party System', Government white paper (Beijing: Information office of the State Council, 2007), I; and State Council, 'China's Peaceful Development'.

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In such linear writing about harmonious world, a number of these texts explicitly deploy the imagery of 'backwards countries' or 'countries lagging behind'.[65] Together with China's 'basic conditions' and its fundamental national and long-term interests, the alleged Chinese cultural predisposition to harmony is said to have created the 'innate force' driving China's peaceful development. Its vision of a harmonious world is said to align with the 'global trend', where 'those who go along with it will prosper and those who go against it will perish'.[66] Once the story has been told, or more often the assumption has been made, of 'China' and (some) Chinese having privileged access to harmony, it seems only natural that China's elites should be the forerunners of global harmonisation.

Accordingly, a significant number of scholars are explicit that the aim of harmony theory, or sometimes what they see as Confucianism more broadly, is the 'ultimate goal of harmonizing the world'.[67] To achieve such harmonisation, starting from a world of contradiction and difference, contradiction needs to be resolved.[68] To Liu Dongjian, for example:

> to realise harmonious society, the most important thing is the need to properly harmonise the relationships of three aspects, namely: the contradiction between people and nature, the contradiction between people and people, the contradiction between the people and the government. If it is possible to achieve a proper resolution to these three aspects of contradiction, then there can be a society facing harmony.[69]

Although he at first does not appear to see the possibility of a final resolution to contradiction that Liu's 'harmonise' seems to imply, Qin Yaqing also argues that only the melting away of contradictions can lead to a harmonious world:

> harmonious world is also an order that incessantly melts away contradictions. International society inevitably realises all sorts of contradictions, old contradictions are resolved, new contradictions can appear again, the era of globalisation is especially this way.[70]

Yet the appeal of solutions is strong also for Qin, and solutions remain to him the key point of harmony in the text: 'only by constructing a harmonious justice foundation for common existence and common development can the fundamental problems of international society be genuinely resolved'.[71] Similarly, to Wang Yizhou, there is increasing possibility in a harmonious world to use international law and practice to resolve differences.[72] Wang, Liu, and Qin take somewhat different views on the nature of contradiction, but they share with each other (and with the literatures on harmonious world more generally) a focus on the resolution of contradiction and divergence.

In a similar way, it is common for scholars who analyse harmony to begin by stressing that it should be a tolerant, open, and equal form of 'harmony with difference', only to go on and list the ideas or ways of life that should definitely be

[65] Wang Yiwei, 'Inquiry', p. 16.
[66] State Council, 'China's Peaceful Development', IV.
[67] Li Chenyang, 'Harmony as a guiding principle', p. 49. For the notion that various or all aspects of society need to be 'harmonised' within the larger whole, see also R. C. Neville, 'Harmony in government', in Tao et al., *Governance for Harmony*, p. 69.
[68] It is worth noting the resonance of this language of 'contradictions' with Marxist texts.
[69] Liu Dongjian, '*Hexie shehui yanjiu shuping* [Review of research on harmonious society]', *Jiaoxue yu yanjiu* (2006), p. 43.
[70] Qin Yaqing, '*Hexie shijie: Zhongguo waijiao xin linian* [Harmonious world: Chinese diplomacy's new concept]', *Qianxian* (2006), p. 31.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Wang Yizhou, '*Zhongguo waijiao shi tese* [The ten characteristics of Chinese diplomacy]', *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (2008), p. 14.

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excluded, rejected, and/or transformed in order to achieve or protect harmony. For example, Qin Zhiyong argues that ways of being as diverse as 'extreme individualism, money worship, hedonism, Anarchist mentality and concept in the Western culture are resolutely to be guarded against and rejected.'[73] In a similar vein, Ni Shixiong and Qian Xuming argue that we need to respect civilisational differences, but oppose (those we designate as) terrorists and make everyone understand China (or China's view), while accepting only *advanced* culture in China.[74] Notable here is that Ni and Qian are writing in Chinese to a Chinese audience, who will be all too aware of who are 'terrorists' in contemporary China – those imagined as ethno-civilisational others in border regions like Tibet and Xinjiang who are seeking autonomy from Chinese rule. The culture associated with these groups are also regularly portrayed as 'backward' as opposed to the 'advanced' cultures that should be accepted.[75]

Kam Por Yu also stresses that harmony is not unprincipled compromise, and endorses Confucius' view that 'the gentleman stands his ground, and is not moved by popular opinions, much less be shaped by them', which is why 'the *right* kind of harmony is achieved by referring to some principles of proper conduct … [n]ot all claims can be treated as equal'.[76] Another article by Ding Sheng draws on Mencius as a thinker whose ideal is a king that through benevolence has 'no rivals in the world'.[77] To Confucius, writes Ding, the virtue of noble families is that they 'do not worry about poverty, but worry about discontent'.[78] He quotes Sun Zi's notion that 'to subjugate the enemy's army without doing battle is the highest of excellence'.[79] We can see this attitude mirrored in Chinese society under CCP rule today. The CCP has overseen a remarkable shift in economic governance that has pulled astonishing numbers of people out of poverty (where, admittedly, it may be argued they found themselves because of the CCP in the first place). It appears, however, that the party-state's main response to China's income inequality has been to push for further growth accompanied by campaigns to be 'harmonious' rather than envious of others. One example of this may be the nationalist 'eight honours and eight shames' campaign (*ba rong, ba chi*), which urged China's citizens to build a harmonious socialist society by 'living plainly, working hard'.[80]

Harmony as holism and assimilation

As can be seen from the above, many of those who articulate harmony in the Chinese political elite discourse equate 'harmonious' with 'consensual'.[81] Literatures on harmony moreover typically stress the values they associate it with as 'the only correct

[73] Qin Zhiyong, 'Cultural construction of a harmonious society', in Guo Sujian and Guo Baogang (eds), *China in Search of Harmonious Society* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2008), p. 67.
[74] Ni Shixiong and Qian Xuming, 'New regional politics', p. 125.
[75] Lafitte, 'Tibetan futures: Imagining collective destinies', *Futures*, 31 (1999), § 4, 5, 6; B. Kaltman, *Under the Heel of the Dragon: Islam, Racism, Crime and the Uighur in China* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), p. 2.
[76] Yu, 'The Confucian conception of harmony', p. 22.
[77] Ding Sheng, 'To build a "harmonious world": China's soft power wielding in the global south', *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 13 (2008), p. 196.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., p. 197.
[80] S. P. Camicia and J. Zhu, 'Citizenship education under discourses of nationalism, globalization, and cosmopolitanism: Illustrations from China and the United States', *Frontiers of education in China*, 6 (2011), pp. 607–11.
[81] See, for example, B. A. Rockman, 'Open politics and disharmony', in Tao et al., *Governance for Harmony*, p. 199.

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goal and the only reachable goal',[82] or argue, in the context of 'harmonious world', that 'choosing "peaceful rise" is on the one hand China's voluntary action, on the other hand it is an inevitable choice'.[83] The idea of harmony as an 'inevitable choice' is prominent also in policy documents, where the 2005 'China's Peaceful Development Road' states that China 'endeavors to play a constructive and locomotive role' and 'strive constantly to … promote human civilization and progress'.[84] The 'inevitability' of this endeavor is again based on the particularism of Chinese history and culture:

> [i]t is an inevitable choice based on China's historical and cultural tradition that China persists unswervingly in taking the road of peaceful development. The Chinese nation has always been a peace-loving one. Chinese culture is a pacific culture. The spirit of the Chinese people has always featured their longing for peace and pursuit of harmony.[85]

In 2011, 'China's Peaceful Development' also placed renewed emphasis on the argument that 'China's Path of Peaceful Development Is a Choice Necessitated by History'.[86]

Taking this notion back to Kam Por Yu's and Ding Sheng's proposals above, the idea of their vision of harmony as an 'inevitable choice' lends an uncompromising edge to the argument. Not only is there a tendency in the literatures on harmonious world to fear discord and opposition. The insistence by many on harmony as a tolerant, open, and equal form of 'harmony with difference' is laudable, but it is all too often undermined by positioning harmonious world as the inevitable endpoint of development. Once harmonious world has been positioned as the only correct goal, the temptation is to start singling out disharmonious elements, those who harbour 'terrorist' intentions or lack 'advanced' culture to contribute with. Indeed, the openness and friendly interaction between cultural, national, and civilisational units is still based on some principles of proper conduct. As Yu tells us, these principles must not be defined by popular opinion. The overwhelming sense we are left with, instead, is that it is those who *properly understand* harmony that must decide on those principles, on whose claims should be treated as equal. There are strong assertions that *the Chinese* have privileged access to such understanding, but that (some of) its population consists of backwards low-quality people whose opinions should not sway the mind of the sagely 'gentleman'. The implication is that the Chinese political elites that developed 'harmonious society' and 'harmonious world' are to decide on such standards. Acting harmoniously, in such a story, means acting in a way that is not discordant with the views of the Chinese political elites. If everyone behaves harmoniously, an end-state can be imagined where everyone complies with, or is co-opted by, the Chinese elite's notion of what is an advanced culture and a 'win-win' solution: a harmonious world. As in Ding's account, it is a state where any enemies or opponents have been *subjugated* and thus vanished as such. This is an attitude recognisable from policy documents, where the point of 'active communication' and 'enhanced cooperation' is to create a form of harmonious relation that meant 'elimination of differences'.[87] In practice, this

[82] Qin Zhiyong, 'Cultural construction', p. 73.
[83] Liu Jianfei, '*Heping jueqi shi Zhongguo de zhanlve xuanze* [Peaceful rise is China's strategic choice]', *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (2006), p. 38.
[84] State Council, 'China's Peaceful Development Road'.
[85] Ibid.
[86] State Council, 'China's Peaceful Development', IV.
[87] State Council, 'China's Human Resources', Government white paper (Beijing: Information office of the State Council, 2010). For a similar attitude in other party-state documents, see State Council, 'China's Ethnic Policy and Common Prosperity and Development of All Ethnic Groups', Government white paper (Beijing: Information office of the State Council, 2009).

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'elimination of differences' is precisely what is feared by many from China's ethnic minorities, particularly in areas like Xinjiang where relations have been frought and violent. In these areas, many in the Uyghur ethnic minority population resent attempts at being integrated into the party-state's vision of 'ethnic unity' on Han Chinese terms.[88]

From the above discussion, we can see that the idea of 'harmony' is not simply considered a local affair. Instead, we end up with a holistic idea of harmony. To some authors, holism is based in the notion of 'harmonism' (*hehe zhuyi* 和合主义), which one author describes as follows:

> in Chinese culture, 'harmony' (*he* 和) has many layers of meaning of 'kindness' (*heqi* 和气), 'reconciliation' (*hehao* 和好), 'amity' (*hemu* 和睦), 'peace' (*heping* 和平), and so on, and 'unity' (*he* 合) also has the many layers of meaning of 'merging into one' (*heyi* 合一), 'being agreeable' (*heyi* 合意), 'co-operating' (*hezuo* 合作).[89]

In this combination, a concept of harmony is used that emphasises 'merging into one' or 'unification'. Following on such an understanding, Fang Xiaojiao claims that harmonious world builds on a feeling of *Tianxia*-ism.[90] *Tianxia* litterally means 'All-under-heaven', and refers to an Ancient Chinese understanding of world order, which has been recently redeployed as a 'better' understanding of world order.[91] Fang describes *Tianxia*-ism as:

> admitting differences, stressing that different civilisations, states of different development levels, different social systems and ideologies can get along in harmony and peace. This kind of peaceful thought respects multiplicity and difference, it is not the unification of *Tianxia*, but is mutual forgiveness, mutual respect.[92]

Despite this recognition and seeming rejection of *Tianxia* as a form of holism, however, harmonious world is then said to incorporate the interests of both self and other:

> in this sense, the thought embodied in harmonious world expressed a new concept of Chinese diplomacy, it is Chinese traditional culture and universal world value notion, China's own interest and the other's interest, the outcome of combining the goal of harmony and the method of peace.[93]

Similarly, to Li Baojun and Li Zhiyong, *Tianxiaism* means an identification with all of humankind, where there is no differentiation or distinction between people and no ethno-national classification.[94]

There is then an emphasis on wanting to preserve diversity of some sort, but the proud declaration that the Chinese 'nation has embraced all that is fine in foreign cultures' raises the question of the aspects of (foreign) cultures that were not deemed 'fine' by China's political elites. Elsewhere, it is clear that the 'mutual learning' and

[88] D. Tobin, 'Competing communities: Ethnic unity and ethnic boundaries on China's north-west frontier', *Inner Asia*, 13 (2011), pp. 7–25.
[89] Zhang Yunling, '*Guanyu goujian hexie shijie de sikao* [Reflections on building a harmonious world]', *Dangdai Yangtai* (2008), p. 5.
[90] Fang Xiaojiao, 'The harmonious world concept', p. 70.
[91] For a sample of literatures that discuss current deployments of 'Tianxia', see Zhao Tingyang, 'A political world philosophy in terms of All-under-heaven (Tian-xia)', *Diogenes*, 221 (2009), pp. 5–18; W. A. Callahan, 'Tianxia, empire and the world: Chinese visions of world order for the twenty-first century', in Callahan and Barabantseva (eds), *China Orders*, pp. 91–117; Nordin, 'Space for the future', pp. 235–49; 'Radical exoticism'.
[92] Fang Xiaojiao, 'The harmonious world concept', p. 70.
[93] Ibid., p. 71.
[94] Li Baojun and Li Zhiyong, *'"Hexie shijieguan" yu "baquan wendinglun": yi xiang bijiao fenxi* ["Harmonious world outlook" and "hegemonic stability theory": a comparative analysis]', *Jiaoxue yu yanjiu* (2008), p. 82.

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'integration' that the party-state calls 'harmony' may have a decidedly less 'equal' or 'democratic' appearance than what is immediately obvious. When discussing the harmony of 'ethnic unity', for example, a 2009 white paper demands:

> all China's ethnic groups, in the big family of the unified motherland and on the basis of equality, are required to … promote peaceful coexistence and harmonious development, continuously strengthen and develop socialist ethnic relations based on equality, solidarity, mutual assistance and harmony, devote all to the construction of socialist modernization, and make our country strong, our nation thrive and our people happy.[95]

The proposition, then, is that all should be equal, but that they should be so according to the party-state's standards (as expressed in slogans and concepts like 'peaceful coexistence', 'harmonious development', 'mutual assistance and harmony' and 'the construction of socialist modernization'). In the period that harmonious society and world have been promoted, however, waves of riots and self-immolations carried out by members of China's ethnic minorities should make it abundantly clear that not everyone wants to be equal on the Chinese party-state's terms.[96]

Similarly, a white paper on *China's Political Party System* used 'the multi-party cooperation system' to exemplify harmony with difference, because '[i]t reflects the fine cultural tradition of the Chinese nation, which features all-embracing and harmony while reserving differences'.'[97] Although it certainly does allow for people not to join the CCP (which in fact consists of a privileged minority), it seems ludicrous to argue that China's sixty years of CCP rule represents some form of equality between parties. Rather, it exemplifies how hierarchically organised the party-state version of 'harmony with difference' is. In this hierarchical ordering of difference, other parties are reduced to rubber-stamping centrally made decisions in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), and real opposition is staunchly and often violently opposed as in the cases of Liu Xiaobo or the Dalai Lama. Both these critical individuals have been labelled as not 'harmonious' by the party state, in efforts to delegitimise their respective causes.[98]

The politics of harmonisation

Contradictions and depoliticisation in harmony

With Hu's speech to the UN and the subsequent white paper, the foundations were laid for the vast proliferation of 'harmonious world' that has since been seen, precisely in order to 'get the rest of the world to understand China'. After 2005, the term became a staple in the PRC government's work reports,[99] in white papers on its

[95] State Council, 'China's Ethnic Policy', III.
[96] E. Wong, 'Riots in Western China amid ethnic tension', *The New York Times* (6 July 2009); Cui Jia, Liu Lu, and Chen Jia, 'Self-immolation acts condemned by deputies', *China Daily* (8 March 2012), p. 5.
[97] State Council, 'China's Political Party System', I.
[98] For an example in the case of the Dalai Lama, see Xinhua, 'Chinese political advisors: Dalai Lama not harmony promoter but trouble maker' (11 March 2009). For a discussion related to 'harmonious world', see Callahan, 'Conclusion', p. 173. For a press release which equates supporting Liu with not being harmonious, see Embassy of PRC in the US, 'Chinese Embassy spokesman Wang Baodong: Don't politicize the Nobel Peace Prize', *USA Today* (10 December 2010).
[99] Since 2000, the only mention of harmony in a government work report prior to Hu's 2005 speech to the UN was by then Premier Zhu Rongji in 2003. Harmony gained significantly more prominence in Wen Jiabao's 2005 work report. The work report in the subsequent year, the first one after Hu's speech to the UN, mentioned 'harmonious world' for the first time. Work reports in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, and

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relations with the world,[100] and in speeches by government officials including then President Hu,[101] Premier Wen Jiabao,[102] Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi,[103] as well as lower ranking officials[104] and ambassadors.[105] Current President Xi Jinping also deployed the concept in his period of grooming for takeover after Hu's retirement in 2012.[106] 'Harmonious world' has been used to motivate and promote a plethora of things and positions, from the party-state's stance on border politics,[107] the Nanjing massacre[108] and cyber-control,[109] to Chinese language and Confucius Institutes,[110] the twelfth five-year plan[111] and fashion.[112] It has been deployed for similar purposes and retaining the same formulations in numerous languages.[113] The coherence of the

2012 continued to use 'harmonious world' as a marker and descriptor of the government's foreign policy ambitions. The work report of 2013, after Xi Jinping's leadership takeover, used the term 'harmony' repeatedly, but not 'harmonious world'.

[100] The term 'harmonious world' was central to 'China's Peaceful Development Road' (2005), and 'China's Peaceful Development' (2011). It is given a foundational position at the outset of others, such as State Council, 'China's Endeavors'. In general terms, 'harmony' has featured in white papers at least since the early 1990s, but saw a sharp rise in popularity after 2005. In the 14 years before 2005, 22 white papers used the term 'harmony', and 19 did not. In the 7 years after 2005, 30 white papers used the term, only 7 did not. From Hu's retirement to the time of writing, 3 white papers have used the term, 5 have not.

[101] For example, Hu Jintao, 'Jointly Create a Better Future for World Peace and Development', New Year address delivered by Hu Jintao, Beijing, 31 December 2009; Xinhua, 'Chinese President calls'.

[102] For example, Wen Jiabao, 'Expo Spirit Forever', Expo 2010 Shanghai China Summit Forum, Shanghai, 31 October 2010.

[103] For example, Yang Jiechi, 'Advance China's Diplomacy amid Peaceful Development', Symposium on China's Peaceful Development white paper, Beijing, 15 November 2011; Embassy of PRC in USA, 'Symposium on "China's Peaceful Development" is Held in Beijing', 16 September 2011.

[104] For example then Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, Wu Bangguo, 'Report on the work of the standing committee of the National People's Congress', Third Session of the Eleventh National People's Congress, 9 March 2010; then State Councilor Dai Bingguo, 'China Is Committed to the Path of Peaceful Development', Symposium on China's Peaceful Development white Paper, Beijing, 15 September 2011; and Ye Xiaowen, then head of the State Administration for Religious Affairs of China (SARA), Xinhua, 'Chinese official'.

[105] For a small selection, see Chen Duqing, *'Parceria Estratégica entre a China e o Brasil* [Strategic Partnership between China and Brazil]', XIX National Forum, Rio de Janeiro (2 May 2007); Embassy of PRC in Chile, 'Se inaugura Salón Confucio en el Instituto Nacional [Inauguration of Confucius Institute in the National Institute]', 7 April 2011; Wang Yingwu, *'La Chine suit fermement la voie de développement pacifique* [China firmly pursues the peaceful development road]', Embassy of PRC in DR of Congo, 30 September 2011; Embassy of PRC in Germany, 'Photoausstellung über Expo 2010 in UN-Außenstelle in Genf [Photo exhibition on Expo 2010 in UN-branch in Geneva]', 27 April 2010; Ding Wei and G. Cubeddu, *'Quarant'anni d'amicizia "Parlarsi sinceramente, ascoltarsi reciprocamente"* [Forty years of friendship "Speaking frankly, listening to each other"]', 30 Giorni, 6 July 2010; Embassy of PRC in Mexico, 'Celebran Aniversario del EPL en la Embajada de China en México [Celebrating the anniversary of PRC in the Embassy of China in Mexico]', 2 August 2011.

[106] See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 'Xi Jinping and Le Hong Anh Jointly Meet with the Youth Representatives of China and Vietnam', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 22 November 2011.

[107] State Council, 'China's National Defense in 2008', Government white paper (Beijing: Information office of the State Council, 2009), VIII.

[108] Embassy of PRC in UK, 'Chinese Embassy Holds Film Reception in Commemoration of the 66th Anniversary of the Chinese People's Victory Against Japanese Aggression and the 80th Anniversary of the "September 18th Incident"', 27 August 2011.

[109] Liu Xiaoming, 'China's Perspective on Cybersecurity', Second Worldwide Cybersecurity Summit, Embassy of PRC in UK, 2 June 2011.

[110] Embassy of PRC in Chile, 'Inauguration'.

[111] Liu Xiaoming, 'The 12th Five-Year Plan: China's Scientific and Peaceful Development', Royal Institute of International Affairs, London (18 March 2011).

[112] Embassy of PRC in UK, '"Fashion Shenzhen" Won Great Popularity in Britain Ambassador Liu Xiaoming Couples Attend The "Fashion Shenzhen" Event at London Fashion Week', 23 September 2011.

[113] A number of PRC embassies make such examples available, for example in French: Wang Yingwu, 'China follows'; Italian: see Ding Wei and Cubeddu, 'Forty years'; German: Embassy of PRC in Germany, 'Photo exhibition'; Spanish: Embassy of PRC in Mexico, 'Celebrating'; and Portuguese: Chen Duqing, 'Strategic partnership'.

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politics that can be developed from 'harmony' should therefore not be overstated. Indeed, it is similar to 'democracy' in that it can be rhetorically deployed for multiple purposes, including ones that may appear to many quite contrary to its own purported aims.

The party-state version of harmonious world has then been deployed to 'do' various concrete things in Chinese international politics. At the level of imagining difference, it appears to share our concern here with multiplicity and openness. However, groups and cultures are described in ways that correspond with David Kerr's 'blending diversity under universalism',[114] which tends towards an imagination of difference as hierarchically ordered, and sometimes as something that should be eliminated. The future harmonious world is envisaged as an 'inevitable choice', and China is imagined as having a privileged position in the construction of this future because of its purported harmonious nature based on history. It is inevitable, yet needs to be constructed and fostered.

Against this background, 'harmonious world' is said by some to indicate 'an increasingly confident China relinquishing its aloofness to participate and undertake greater responsibilities in international affairs'.[115] Nonetheless, the term remains to a significant extent a 'catch all' phrase of friendly connotations. 'Harmonious world' may be useful precisely because of its vague and elusive implications, that nonetheless speak to both Chinese and non-Chinese sensibilities. Indeed, 'who could argue against global peace and prosperity?'[116]

Nonetheless, what emerges from accounts of harmony as articulated in China in the last decade is a tension in the harmony concept between its need for multiplicity on the one hand, and its presupposition of universalisability on the other. Bart Rockman has suggested that harmony may be a 'necessary glue without which neither a society nor a polity are sustainable', but that 'complete social harmony is ultimately suffocating and illiberal'.[117] Jacob Torfing has also taken issue with predominant understandings of harmony in Southeast Asia that he argues present a 'post-political vision of politics and governance that tends to eliminate power and antagonism'.[118] Drawing on Laclau and Mouffe, he understands such a post-political vision as both theoretically unsustainable and politically dangerous. It is unsustainable because power and antagonism are inevitable features of the political dimensions of politics. Therefore politics:

> cannot be reduced to a question of translating diverging interests into effective [win-win] policy solutions, since that can be done in an entirely de-politicized fashion, for example, by applying a particular decision-making rule, relying on a certain rationality or appealing to a set of undisputed virtues and values. Of course, politics always invokes particular rules, rationalities and values, but the political dimension of politics is precisely what escapes all this.[119]

Politics, then, unavoidably involves a choice that means eliminating alternative options. Moreover, although we base our decisions on reasons and may have strong motivations for choosing what we choose, we will never be able to provide an ultimate ground for any given choice – in Derridean terms, such grounds will always be

[114] D. Kerr, 'Paradoxes of tradition and modernity at the new frontier: China, Islam, and the problem of "different heavens"', in Callahan and Barabantseva (eds), *China Orders*, p. 171.
[115] Tok and Zheng Yongnian, 'Harmonious society'.
[116] Callahan, 'Conclusion', p. 262.
[117] Rockman, 'Open politics and disharmony', p. 207.
[118] J. Torfing, 'Harmony through network governance?', in Tao et al., *Governance for Harmony*, p. 257.
[119] Ibid., pp. 257–58.

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indefinitely deferred. Therefore, 'the ultimate decision will have to rely on a skilful combination of rhetorical strategies and the use of force'.[120] The acts of exclusion that politics necessarily entails will produce antagonism between those who identify with the included options and those who do not. For this reason, the attempt by the promoters of harmony to dissociate harmonious politics from the exercise of power, force and the production of antagonism, claiming a harmony where everyone wins and no-one looses, is bound to fail.

Moreover, the post-political vision of politics and harmony is dangerous because its denial of antagonism will tend to alienate those excluded from consideration. This, Torfing writes, will tend to displace antagonistic struggles from the realm of the political to the realm of morals, 'where conflicts are based on non-negotiable values and the manifestation of "authentic" identities'.[121] Such non-negotiable values would be the opposite of the cooperative harmony sought.

To both Rockman and Torfing, then, complete or perfect harmony will defeat harmony and create disharmony. In this way, the excessive production of harmony is what produces the disharmonious elements that come to threaten it. We can see this happening in contemporary China, where the 'harmonising' policies enforced under the 'harmonious society' slogan have produced a range of oppositional movements, from Chinese youth mocking harmony online[122] to the increasing number of self-imolations we currently witness in and around Tibet.[123] Numerous scholars argue that in order to imagine harmony, we need to imagine heterogeneity and multiplicity. We can now add that the problematic organisation of difference that remains in imaginations of harmonious world eliminates the multiplicity in the here-now that is a prerequisite for harmony.

What these renditions of harmony show, I believe, is that the tensions in and logics of harmony are very similar to the ones that are described by Derrida and others in terms of the autoimmune. What we see in these accounts is an irresolvable contradiction, which mirrors the autoimmune logic outlined at the beginning of this article. Harmony must *by definition* be universal, but its universalisation *by definition* makes harmony impossible. In this respect harmony works on a self-defeating and self-perpetuating logic that is very similar to what we saw described in the 'modern West' and in 'democracy'.

Sending harmony away (and back again)

To further understand the implications of the autoimmune nature of harmony, we can draw on Derrida's discussion of autoimmunity in relation to the term *renvoyer*. This term means resending, sending away, sending back (to the source), and/or sending on.[124] Derrida explains that the autoimmune process 'consists always in a renvoi, a

[120] Ibid., p. 258.
[121] Ibid.
[122] A. H. M. Nordin, 'Bordering on the unacceptable in China and Europe: "Cao ni ma" and "nique ta mere"', in J. C. H. Liu and N. Vaughan-Williams (eds), *European-East Asian Borders in Translation* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 166–81; A. H. M. Nordin and L. Richaud, 'Subverting official language and discourse in China? Type river crab for harmony', *China Information*, 28 (2014), pp. 45–65; A. H. M. Nordin, 'Un-innovative censorship, innovative resistance: the Internet, forbidden words and the humorous homonyms of egao', in N. Horsburgh, A. Nordin, and S. Breslin (eds), *Chinese Politics and International Relations: Innovation and Invention* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 175–98.
[123] C. Buckley, 'Tibetan monk burns to death in China protest-group', *Reuters* (16 March 2011).
[124] Haddad, 'Democracy at risk', p. 37.

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referral or deferral, a sending or putting off'.[125] Thus, the autoimmunity of harmony in space demands that harmony be sent off elsewhere, excluded, rejected. It must be expelled under the pretext of protecting it, precisely by rejecting or sending off to the outside the disharmonious elements inside it.[126] As we have seen, such exiling does not take place only in democracy, as Derrida and others implied, but also in harmony. It is the expulsion of internal ills that has been promoted by Hu's harmony. It has been criticised by theorists of difference in IR. Moreover, 'since the renvoi operates in time as well, autoimmunity also calls for *putting off* [*renvoyer*] until later elections and the advent of democracy'.[127] So too does it postpone the coming of harmony. Here, truly 'harmonious' behaviour by the Chinese government is postponed until more harmonious times. China needs to become strong *first*, be in control of harmony on the inside *first*. This *renvoi* shows that there is no essence to harmony, no self with which harmony can be self-same. To paraphrase Derrida, this double renvoi (sending off – or to – the other and putting off, adjournment) is an autoimmune fatality or necessity. It is inscribed *directly in* a harmony devoid of self-sameness. It is a harmony of which the concept remains free in the play of its indetermination. It is inscribed directly in this thing or this cause that, precisely under the name of harmony, is never properly what it is, never *itself*. For what is lacking in harmony is the very meaning of the selfsame. It defines harmony, and the very ideal of harmony, by this lack of the selfsame.[128]

The autoimmune Chinese system is not only a process by which harmony attacks a part of itself. This *renvoi*, moreover, consists in a deferral or referral to the other:

> as the undeniable, and I underscore *undeniable*, experience of the alterity of the other, of heterogeneity, of the singular, the not-same, the different, the dissymmetric, the heteronomous.[129]

By undeniable, here, Derrida also means that it is only deniable. The only way that it is possible to protect meaning is through a sending-off (*renvoi*) by way of denial. Harmony, like democracy, is what it is only by deferring itself and differing from itself. Although it strives to self-perfection through self-critique, harmony can never achieve the indivisibility that it claims as its prerequisite. To the extent that it tries to do so, it must enforce its law with force (disharmony). In this sense, it is impossible.

Conclusion: the autoimmunity of autoimmunity

In this article I have shown the claim that 'democracy would be the name of the only "regime" that presupposes its own perfectibility' to be highly questionable.[130] There seems to be little impetus to call the Chinese processes and ideas that I have examined above 'democracy'. Yet, they operate on the same autoimmune logic that Derrida and others take as giving 'democracy' its future. I have argued that Chinese 'harmony' is autoimmune in a similar manner, and its openness to the future to come should be recognised.

[125] Derrida, 'The reason of the strongest', p. 35, emphasis in original.
[126] Cf. Ibid., pp. 35–6.
[127] Ibid., p. 36.
[128] Cf. Ibid., pp. 36–7.
[129] Ibid., p. 38, emphasis in original.
[130] Derrida, 'Autoimmunity', p. 121.

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If we can detect an autoimmune logic at work, not only in the 'modern West', Europe and democracy, but also in China's harmonious system, we have cause to revisit accounts of the autoimmune and ask how this may affect our understanding of such accounts. We have seen how notions of autoimmunity purport to offer a way of thinking beyond a problematic logic that closes down the openness of the future. Yet their own treatment of other systems falls into the same trap. If the possibility of the future hinges on autoimmune logics at work in a given system, then the denial of such conjoined self-defeat and self-perfectibility in a system means denying that system the possibility of a future. It means denying that system the possibility of change.

Through showing the autoimmune logics at work in harmony, I have aimed in this article to show how such a future is also open for China. By extension, we can imagine the possibility of such a logic at play also in other systems, in other times and places. Against this background, it remains important to recognise the Western-centric move in thinking about autoimmunity, including by Derrida. His denial of a future to systems other than that of his own spatio-temporal configuration is as problematic as that of other accounts. It is time then to ask: What is the function of this expulsion of China or the Far East from accounts of the autoimmune?

In querying this expulsion we can draw again on Derrida's notion of the renvoi, echoing the above discussion of harmony. Contemporary thought on autoimmunity immunises itself against Chinese thought precisely through its renvoi in time and space. It maintains its claim to exceptionality through purifying itself and pretending to a clean time and space where 'Western thought', 'democracy', or 'modernity' can be treated in isolation. In this way, thought on autoimmunity performs the very thing it describes: its account of autoimmunity is itself autoimmune. It operates on a non-recognition of the other in the self. It tries to expunge its other, precisely through a renvoi. This other of the 'modern Western' autoimmune must be expelled under the pretext of protecting it, precisely by rejecting or sending off to the outside the disharmonious or 'non-Western' elements inside it.[131] Moreover, since the renvoi operates in time as well, autoimmunity also calls for *putting off* [*renvoyer*] until later the recognition of this other in the autoimmune logic.[132] This *renvoi* shows that just as there is no essence to harmony, there is no essence to the autoimmune, no self with which the autoimmune system can be self-same. In Derrida's very own texts, this double *renvoi* is another autoimmune fatality or necessity.

It is worth highlighting again that deconstruction never pretended to do without exclusion, but rather to draw our attention to particular exclusions and put into question their stability. In this article I have drawn attention to the particular exclusion of Chinese thought from Derrida's understanding of the autoimmune. I have aimed to shed light on the openness of the Chinese system of harmonism. This shedding light has come with its own selective obscuring, exclusions and closures, which are no more stable or secure than those I have discussed in this article. Put differently, I have aimed to open autoimmunity up to this openness of Chinese harmony, this expunged other. This openness, of course, is not separable from closure. The immunitary logic is the condition of possibility of autoimmunity.[133] Without differentiation, hostility or exclusion in some form, with total sameness, holism or inclusion, everything would fall back into the One. That would mean the

[131] Cf. Derrida, 'The reason of the strongest', pp. 35–6.
[132] Cf. Ibid., p. 36.
[133] Again, I thank an anonymous reviewer for putting the point in this way and for highlighting its importance.

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end to change, to time, to life – because, again, how could anything new emerge from something that is all-encompassing and self-same?[134]

For this reason, a second effect of the *renvoi* of the (Chinese) other from autoimmunity is the promise of a future to that very autoimmune modern 'West' and European democracy that has expelled it. The positioning of this non-Western, non-democratic other figures as a threat and an opportunity *vis-à-vis* this 'West', this 'democracy'. It is an other to which contemporary accounts try to immunise themselves, but to which this thought cannot achieve absolute immunity. Through the threat of infiltration it poses to an autoimmune democracy and modern West, it paradoxicaly offers that system the opportunity for openness and hospitality to the potential coming of this excluded other. Perhaps the denial of a future to this excluded other of contemporary thinking of the Western autoimmune system is precisely what makes the future of that modern Western democracy possible.

[134] Nordin, *China's International Relations and Harmonious World.*

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