What Might a Global Security Studies Look Like?

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For a discipline with the word 'international' in its name, International Security Studies (ISS) is unfortunately not very international at all. An intellectual history of the field describes it as an 'Atlantic story', and for much of its evolution it was very much a tale of two continents. It remains a largely Western subject dominated by scholars based in North America, Europe, and Australia. This has shaped the study of security politics from its inception. The field was and remains steeped in Eurocentrism: it views the whole world through EuroAmerican history and experience, and presents the Western world as more developed, civilised, and/or morally superior. ISS is 'a product of Western power' and theorises international politics based on Western experience, which is presumed to be universal.

This Eurocentrism causes three problems. First, it leaves us with a partial account of the history and concept of security, which is presented as universal. Second, this then generates explanatory problems because we are only seeing part of the picture: the field 'mistakes "Western" experiences for the universal' and so fails to see different insecurities experienced elsewhere. Indeed, the field 'provides few categories for making sense of the historical experiences of . . . most of the world's population'– and for how those experiences have in turn shaped the world as we know it. This limits the discipline's ability to understand and explain international politics. Third and last, presenting particular experiences as universal has broader political implications – it reflects and reproduces existing international power (im)balances.

What we should do to fix these problems is less clear, with opinions ranging from tinkering around the edges or working to include a wider range of perspectives, to suggestions that we should just burn it all down and start over. In my paper, and in the book project on which it is based, I take a position somewhere in the middle. I think it is important to understand how Eurocentrism plays out in the context of International Security Studies: how it shapes and continues to shape thinking about security all over the world. At the same time, I wanted to find some way of moving forward, beyond critique. The paper takes an exploratory approach, isolating the concept of security that lies at the heart of the discipline. Starting by unpacking the different ways in which Eurocentrism has shaped our understanding of the concept of security, I then explore the idea of using China as an alternative starting point: to retrace security and its emergence in a different geographical context, in order to see what that can tell us about the concept itself.

Since taking power in 2013, president Xi Jinping has placed security at the heart of the political project. Announcing a new 'total concept of national security' with 'Chinese characteristics' in response to 'unprecedented challenges' facing China today, his security doctrine is enshrined in the Chinese constitution, illustrating its importance. So security matters in contemporary Chinese politics, but China fits neither the profile of the EuroAmerican experience that forms the basis of existing theory, nor the developing/Third-World/post-colonial experience that forms the basis of postcolonial work in ISS. This makes China a particularly interesting alternative starting point. The paper traces the emergence and evolution of the concept of security in China over the past century, writing a counter-history of security. In the process, I ask: *what can looking at China tell us about security?*

Provincializing the concept of security

EuroAmerican experience has been the foundation for theorising a concept of security that is presumed to be universal. This manifests in different ways depending on what theoretical approach you consider (see 'Towards a

global security studies: what can looking at China tell us about the concept of security?' for a detailed discussion of how Eurocentrism shapes the concept of security at the heart of different schools of thought in the discipline). Postcolonial critiques have provided a clear diagnosis of the problem, but have told us less about what a global security studies might actually look like. I argue in favour of provincializing security studies: a truly global security studies is of necessity a provincial one attuned to difference and similarity. I use Bhabha's theories of hybridity and Ling's theory of postcolonial learning to understand China in global context, to draw out how interactions with the rest of the world have shaped China's security concept to produce something that is almost the same, but not quite.

Bhabha shows how Eurocentrism has blinded us to the hybrid constitution of the international, masking the productive power of colonialism. Colonial power produced similarity in colonised spaces, creating hybrids that mimic the centre, but what may appear the same – *mimicry* – has both camouflaged and produced difference. It is 'almost the same, but not quite'. For Bhabha, hybridities have emerged through moments of transformation, so we need to explore the 'in-between space', 'the cutting edge of translation and negotiation'. This necessitates paying attention to both difference and similarity: the hybrid is by its very nature in-between. Ling introduced these ideas into IR, arguing that mimicry can be a survival strategy, a process of postcolonial learning, which produces similarity. She uses this to analyse the impacts of East-West colonial encounters in East Asia, resulting in a 'mutually produced hybrid' where 'each derives of and from the other'.

As Chakrabarty shows, European thought is 'both indispensable and inadequate' for understanding the experiences of non-Western spaces. Our task is not to reject European thought, but to explore how it has influenced, engaged with and transformed (in) non-Western spaces, and how it can be 'renewed from and for the margins', to provincialize Europe. In ISS, a EuroAmerican concept of security masquerades as universal. To move forward, we need to provincialize that concept by placing it back into its appropriate geographical and historical origins, recognising that it is particular and not universal. At the same time, we need to consider how it has influenced – and continues to influence – thinking and practice elsewhere. We need to take 'other' places seriously on their own terms, while not neglecting how colonial encounters and intertwined and overlapping histories have influenced thinking, producing similarity and difference. Hybridity, mimicry, and postcolonial learning have obscured difference in security concepts, enabling and masking Eurocentrism in the discipline.

Bilgin demonstrates that it is not enough to 'add the non-West and stir' – we have to understand the effects of historical Eurocentrism, both on the discipline and on how security is practised today in different parts of the world:

Many non-Western elites have embraced the 'standard' notion of security and utilized it in building national security states. What security studies had on offer (a state-focused approach to world politics and 'national security' as the language of state action) also served the interests of non-Western elites busy with state-building.

Policymakers and scholars in non-core places 'were no mere vessels but also merchants of the increasing production and consumption of 'standard' notions of security. In response, Bilgin suggests analysing the production of similarity, understanding the role non-Western actors have played in co-constituting ideas and practices we usually ascribe to the "West".

Almost the same, but not quite: security in the PRC

The paper traces first the emergence of the concept of security in China and later its evolution and transformation through three explicit security concepts. Drawing on postcolonial insights, it demonstrates that China's security concepts are hybrid, evolving out of multiple domestic and international influences. They have similarities with the security concept/s found in ISS, but they are not the same. Chinese elites actively and explicitly pursue conceptual innovation, transforming the concept to suit the changing needs and interests of the Party- state. They also contain Chinese influences and ideas that originate outside of the Eurocentric concept. When it comes to security, China has drawn on institutional templates from the Soviet Union and conceptual vocabularies from Europe and the United States, but neither are pure replicas. The analysis shows two core differences that endure: (1) the referent object of national security is not the state, but the party-state and (2) threats are not (primarily) external to the state. These differences are not merely of theoretical importance, they also shape policy: producing a discrete approach towards

security that has been overlooked in a discipline that uses 'Europe to explain Asia'.

China's security concept has multiple lines of descent: the term is imported from the West and in early periods we see elements of mimicry and postcolonial learning, but as security is 'vernacularised' it acquires both old and new meaning. Today, China's security concept retains the seeds of its multiple origins: a fear of disorder, a Maoist focus on the party-state, Western cold-war thinking, and more recent broadening to take in new threats in both Chinese and Western theorising and practice. Mimicry hides difference: at first glance, Xi's national security discourse appears similar to the concept presented in ISS. The term 'national security' is invoked to enable and legitimate the exercise of state power and stresses a heightened vulnerability and a growing sense of threat that is often seen in other states' discourse today. But taking postcolonial insights seriously reveals hybridity, a complex interplay of similarity and difference. Some shifts in China's concept of security occur in parallel with similar changes elsewhere: a broadening of the notion of threat in the 1990s and early 2000s, and later the growing entrenchment of risk analysis in security thinking. Yet the discipline's understanding of these conceptual shifts is based on EuroAmerican experience, and the failure to consider how experience in other states shapes the evolution of the concept of security overlooks other triggers for change. For example, in China, SARS was perhaps the biggest catalyst producing an expanded notion of threat.

Other aspects show significant difference. Chinese elites are not simply merchants of EuroAmerican notions of national security, but actively innovating to support their own interests. They pursue purposeful and explicit conceptual innovation, drawing on China's particular branch of Maoist-Marxist-Leninism that stresses continuous theoretical development and adaptation to Chinese conditions. They continually insist on the uniqueness of China's experience while leaving the precise nature of that uniqueness unclear. This in turn serves to support nationalist discourse and the idea of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics', both sources of authority for the party, signalling that 'Western institutions, definitions, and practices cannot be imported into China because they will fail to take root'. This allows rejection or revision of things which do not 'fit' – or serve the interests of the party-state.

Security 'with Chinese characteristics' has two core differences to the Eurocentric concept of security that survive throughout the period studied here. First, although China uses the term 'national security' and at times talks about the survival of the state, the underpinning referent object of security is not the state. Instead, the thing to be protected is the party-state. Liberal-democratic states that form the basis of theorising about security are based on a clear separation between the state and the government: national security is about securing the state rather than any particular government. In contrast, China is a party-state, with the CCP controlling every branch of government, the armed forces, and the judiciary. National security here means political security, maintaining the status and power of the CCP and the system they have built. The basic unit is not the territorial state and all those who reside within it, but the party-state and its supporters. Thus we are talking about party or regime survival rather than the survival of a state.

This has a profound effect on security policy, enabling a wider and more authoritarian range of policies and control, and shaping a more expansive understanding of threat. Even where a more 'conventional' understanding of security that stresses military threats is used, this operates differently because the People's Liberation Army is a party organ that exists to protect the CCP, not the state. This is a concept of security not found in the Western security literature, and reveals the importance of both ideology and political system in shaping the concept of security. There are likely parallels here to other revolutionary states, but also with some postcolonial semi-authoritarian states.

Second, as can be seen throughout the period traced here, China's security concepts do not clearly distinguish between internal and external threat. In Western theorising and practice, national security has conventionally referred to external threats. Although there are similarities with Western shifts in the post-9/11 era, this blurring between internal and external dates back much further in China, seen in imperial legacies as well as Maoist practice. Chinese thinking was not founded on a Westphalian notion of geographical sovereignty where inside/outside is the most meaningful distinction. In the early revolutionary period, ideology became the core distinction: the threat was anyone who was against the revolution. As the republic becomes consolidated, the threat evolves to become anyone against the regime or party-state.

Throughout the period studied here, 'inside/outside' is less important for understanding threat, and in Xi's more recent discourse the impossibility of separating foreign and domestic threats and challenges is a central feature. Through most of the century (1926-2022), studied in the paper, internal threats are considered more significant, and while the terminology changes political dissidents remain a central threat throughout. This has a clear impact on policy, shaping resource allocation: since 2011 China's domestic security budget exceeds the budget for external defence. The People's Armed Police, which has duties centred on internal security, has also been restructured and incorporated under the Central Military Commission, strengthening party control. Consequently, analysing security in China through theory based on Western territoriality gives only a partial picture of what is happening. This shows the importance of history and culture in shaping the concept of security.

Looking ahead

In order to be truly global, we must provincialize security studies. Eurocentric theorising has obscured difference, and as a result security studies has underestimated the impact of history, culture, ideology and political system on the concept of security. It's hard to generalise from a single case study, but the differences present in China's concept of security suggest the universal model that underpins most current theorising is at best partial. Rather than suggest that China is uniquely different, I argue that security everywhere is differently different. Eurocentrism, hybridity, and mimicry have served to obscure fundamental differences in how security is understood and how it operates in different places. Accounting for history, culture, and ideology reveals the limits of universal theorising. Western states share similarities in terms of their approaches to security, but these similarities do not necessarily represent something universal in the concept of security: it may simply reflect similar history, culture, and political systems. There may also be more differences between Western states than we usually recognise. This has implications for the future of security studies.

We need more empirically grounded research that reflects on the particular, rather than the universal, conceptualisation and manifestation of security. This might focus on comparative trends, like comparing security concepts in revolutionary states, or within sub-regions with connected history and culture. It could also consider how non-Western states shape global or local security practice, drawing out the complex interconnections between states in the Global South or between the Global South and the North. In the case of China one particularly under-researched area is how Chinese theory and practice has influenced approaches to security elsewhere. For example, Maoism has shaped revolutionary movements across the world, from the Middle East to South America. Meanwhile, we are only just beginning to understand the impacts of the spread of Chinese security technologies abroad. Finally, the changes implemented under Xi Jinping have reshaped Chinese domestic politics, but in April 2022 Xi proposed a new *Global Security Initiative* (*quanqiu anquan changyi)* that may indicate interest in expanding Chinese thinking on security abroad. The Western concept of security has been universalised: the task is now to provincialize it, by taking 'other' places seriously on their own terms.

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