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A Just Cause? The Eastern Interpretation of Just War Theory

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Non-western Theoretical Contributions in International Relations Theory: The Case of Just War Theory

The study of international politics and international relations has been a western-dominated one since its inception. From its beginnings in the post-World War I period to the current day, international relations theory and its related studies has been a field led by western academics such as E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz and Robert Keohane. However, just as other fields of academia, such as medicine and philosophy, have been pursuing non-western sources of knowledge in order to expand their field of study, international relations, as a discipline, has also begun to probe non-western theories of international relations in order to find new ways of looking at global politics. This endeavour however, has been a contentious one, with some arguing that non-western theory offers nothing truly unique to the study of global politics. This essay however, disagrees. This essay argues that non-western theories of international relations can offer unique perspectives and theoretical foundations on which to build further understanding of global politics today. In order to argue this point, this essay will focus on just war theory, an area governing the rules of war in international relations and compare the Chinese and Hindu views on just war theory and how each philosophical tradition offers a perspective that differs from the western just war tradition. This essay will then argue that western just war theory is unlikely to theorize such perspectives within its philosophical framework, making said non-western perspectives unique to the non-western tradition. Finally, this essay will then evaluate the similarities and differences between these two perspectives and analyse whether that the very notion of qualifying all non-western theory as a non-western; monolithic bloc is misleading due to the differences that exist between each perspective.

Just War Theory: Key Principles of the Western Tradition

In order to compare and contrast different perspectives on just war theory with the western tradition of just war theory, it is first necessary to lay out the principles of western just war theory. This essay would first of all like to recognize the over-simplification of the monolithic term of a 'Western' just war theory. Just as the non-western world is consisted of several different cultures and traditions, each with its own beliefs and traditions for waging war, the Western world is no different. The just war of Clausewitz for example, would be very different from the just war of Grotius, Rawls, or Walzer. Despite this difference however, this essay argues that the academic literature of the different strands of western just war thought have developed to encompass certain similar key principles, to the extent that while calling it a monolithic 'Western' just war theory might be an oversimplification, it is still nevertheless sufficient for a comparative analysis with non-western just war theory. Western just war theory can be divided into two main parts– *jus ad bellum* (right to go to war) and *jus in bello* (right conduct in war). In recent years, the issue of *post ad bellum* (a just post-war settlement) has been added as well, although research still focuses mainly on the first two components. *Jus ad bellum* governs the necessary criteria that must be met before a war that is declared can be considered just. Such criteria include, but are not limited to, legitimate authority, the need for a legitimate authority to declare the act of war (usually the state), just cause, the need for a proper reason to go to war, usually correcting a suffered wrong as well last resort, the declaration of war only after all other means of resolving the problem have been tried (Crawford 2003, 7). *Jus in bello*, on the other hand, refers to the criteria necessary for a just conduct of war and governs the actions taken by armies in war. Such criteria include, but are not limited to, distinction – the

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need to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, proportionality, the need to prevent excessive military damage and fair treatment which governs the treatment of prisoners-of-war and related issues such as torture (Crawford 2003, 7). While the long tradition of western just war theory cannot be limited or simplified to these concepts, for the purposes of comparative analysis and discussion, it is these key principles that this essay will focus on, in order to show how non-western theories provide their own unique and valuable perspective on these concepts.

Non-western Perspectives—Legitimate Authority

This essay will first provide a comparative analysis of western and non-western perspectives on the concept of legitimate authority in *jus ad bellum*. In western tradition, a legitimate authority is usually defined as the state, with all its necessary definitions. As such, only state governments have the ability to wage war. In recent scholarship, additional criteria have been suggested as to what comprises of a legitimate state that can declare war as well. Such criteria have often been centred around the concept of limiting legitimacy to states in which justice can be legitimately pursued, through a fair and just legal system, without which the justice of war can hardly be debated (Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 2016). In comparison, when analysing the Chinese definition of a legitimate authority, we see a difference in the way legitimate authority is conceptualized. In analysing Confucianism through the works of Confucian scholars Mencius and Xunzi, there is a key focus not just on the political legitimacy of the state, but on the moral character of the ruler as well (Twiss and Chan 2012, 452). For Confucianism, just wars can only be waged if such wars are declared by a leader that possesses virtues of benevolence and humaneness (Twiss and Chan 2012, 452). Confucianism thus provides a definitive moral element to the concept of legitimate authority, arguing that there is a certain, fixed moral centre that states and state leaders must abide by in order to be considered legitimate authorities and thus declare war, which western concepts of just war theory do not cover in their definitions of legitimacy. This concept is further expanded upon and emphasized in Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, a Chinese military treatise written by Sun Tzu that discusses the very nature of war. In the *Art of War*, Sun Tzu argues that war remains the worst method of settling dispute for nations and by its nature is an unjust act (Lo 2012, 410-411). Sun Tzu further argues that while wars are unjust by nature, circumstances might necessitate virtuous rulers to wage war, and while this might not make wars just, such wars of necessity, declared by virtuous rulers, were morally acceptable (Lo 2012, 415-416). Sun Tzu thus goes further than the Confucian scholars in his analysis of the morality of rulers and its relation to warfare. While the Confucians believe that wars waged by a leader that possessed the virtues of benevolence and humaneness can be defined as just, Sun Tzu does not think so, and merely terms such a war morally not unjust and barely acceptable. Despite these differences however, a strong trend emerges from the Chinese analysis of the legitimate authority criteria in just war theory— with the moral character of the leader being of key importance in determining whether political authority, and thus the wars that it declares, are legitimate and thus just.

Besides the Chinese strand of thinking on just war theory, there is a particular focus on the moral character of leaders as a criterion for the determination of political legitimacy in declaring war in Hindu thought on just war as well. This can be seen largely in analysis of the *Ramayana*, one of two epic poems in Hindu literature. The *Ramayana* details the life of Rama, a prince and the human avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu, who goes through many trials and adventures and eventually wages war with the demon king Ravana. While there are many themes running through the poem, one of the key themes is Rama's right to lead his armies into battle with the demon king by virtue of his moral uprightness (Balkaran and Dorn, 2012). Rama is portrayed as a man of virtue, respecting the Hindu moral virtues of filial piety and respect for authority. His right to lead his armies and wage war is inseparable from this virtue (Balkaran and Dorn, 2012). While differing from the moral principles of benevolence and humaneness espoused by the Chinese strand of thought, we once again see the presence of a strong, defined moral principle that leaders must abide by in order to gain and maintain political legitimacy in Hindu just war theory.

Thus, it is clear that in both the Chinese and Hindu strands of thought on what constitutes a legitimate authority to declare and wage war, a clear difference emerges from the traditional western view. While western just war theory defines a legitimate authority as a state and its associated apparatus, in preferable cases one that is democratically elected, Chinese and Hindu thought argues that the legitimacy of the state and thus its ability to declare war does not stem from the authority granted to it by its people, but by the moral virtue that it must possess, before it can be considered legitimate. While what is considered moral differs in both strands of thought, the morality of the state and

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its leaders is very much a factor in establishing the legitimacy of authority in both Chinese and Hindu strands of thought.

Non-western Perspectives—Just Cause

Besides the concept of legitimate authority, non-western perspectives on the issue of just cause differ significantly from western just war theory as well. In the current scholarship on western just war theory, just causes of war are often limited to wars of self-defence, in contrast to wars of expansion. There are further debates on the issue of the responsibility to protect people in other states from tyrannical rule as a just cause, as well as the issue of pre-emptive strikes and whether they are considered to be part of a defensive operation, but western just war theory generally excludes any ideas that promote expansionist warfare, be it for economic gains or spreading certain political ideals, as a just cause for war. This concept however, differs significantly in certain philosophical strands of Chinese thought on just war theory. In analysing the Neo-Confucian model of thought, dominant in the late Song and Ming dynasties, there is a clear justification of wars that are waged to correct so-called barbaric behaviour by external states that tramples on the benevolence and moral excellence of the Chinese ruler based on Confucian principles (Zhang 2015, 204-205). While not advocating wanton wars of aggression and arguing that states which violate the moral principles of Neo-Confucianism should be given the chance to mend their ways, it is clear that Neo-Confucianism clearly advocates for the use of war for political expediency. Such wars are clearly not wars of self-defence, and are wars that are fought to ensure that other states behave in accordance with a certain political and moral ideology (neo-Confucianism). However, the neo-Confucians believe that such wars are just, due to the moral superiority of their political and moral system. As such, it is clear that in Chinese thought on just war, specifically the Neo-Confucian strand of Chinese philosophy, non-defensive wars in order to reassert or establish the authority of a morally superior idea can still be considered under the umbrella of just causes for war.

Wars of a non-defensive nature fought to defend a morally superior idea is a concept that is defended by Hindu concepts of just war theory as well. Such ideals can be seen in the discussion over just cause in the Ramayana. In debating a just cause for starting a war against the demon king Ravana, the gods implore Vishnu to take action as Ravana is killing ascetics and sages of the Hindu religion (Balkaran and Dorn 2012, 664-665). It is emphasized that in persuading offensive war against Ravana, the Ramayana does not just condemn the violence and evil that Ravana is committing, but condemns the targeting of said violence towards ascetics of the religious principle of Hinduism as well. This specific attack on sages and ascetics, teachers and keepers of ideas, is emphasized as a legitimate just cause for offensive war.

As such, while defence of a morally superior idea is not outright stated in the Ramayana, it can be inferred from its wording and the emphasis it places on the evil that is the targeted killing of ascetics and sages. For Hinduism, wars of an aggressive nature against evil that seeks to eliminate the teachers and keepers of a morally superior idea is a just cause for an offensive war and a legitimate form of punishment for evil. As such, it can be argued that in Hindu just war theory, wars of a non-defensive, punitive nature fought on the basis of morally superior principles, in this case Hinduism, is a just cause of war as well. As such, it is clear that in the concept of what constitutes a just cause for war, non-western thought, in the case of Chinese and Hindu philosophy, differs quite significantly from the western tradition. While wars fought to reassert the moral superiority of a particular political or religious philosophy are generally not considered just in the western tradition, this is not the case for both Chinese and Hindu thought and both argue that wars of a punitive nature to correct behaviour in alignment with the principles of a defined, morally superior principle is justified.

Non-western Perspectives: Reproducible within a Western Theoretical Framework?

Thus, this essay has established two strands of thought in which non-western just war theory differs from the western just war tradition. In looking at *jus ad bellum*, both Hindu and Chinese philosophy place utmost importance on the moral nature of the leader as a necessity before a war can be rightfully declared and both Hindu and Chinese philosophy argue that the necessity of upholding a morally superior ideal or principle can be established as a just cause for wars of a punitive nature or wars of expansion. However, while this essay has established that a non-western conception of just war theory differs significantly from the western tradition, in order for this difference to

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be considered a unique addition to just war theory as a part of international relations scholarship, it must be further established that the principles and arguments established in non-western thought are unlikely to be theorized in future analysis of just war through a western just war tradition. While this essay cannot prove conclusively that the perspectives generated by non-western just war theory will never be generated through the western just war tradition, this essay does argue that it is possible to at least show that through the trends in western just war scholarship and the principles that it holds central to its tradition, it is unlikely that that western just war theory would theorize said perspectives, thus making non-western perspectives of just war theory a contribution to international relations scholarship that is not just different, but unique as well.

First of all, this essay shall analyse the non-western viewpoint of moral character as a form of political legitimacy for leaders before a just war can be declared, and argue how it is unlikely that western just war theory, in its modern day incarnation, will theorize such a requirement based on its principles. Theories are not formed in a vacuum, and just war theory is no exception. Western just war theory, as part of the philosophical tradition of the west, reflects to a certain extent the developmental path that western philosophical path has taken and in turn, influences other areas of philosophy as well. It is thus necessary to trace this influence in order to understand why moral character is unlikely to be theorized as a requirement in western just war theory. This essay argues that there is one key principle in the western philosophical tradition that is arguably the greatest influence on why the discussion of western just war theory is unlikely to focus on the moral character of leaders as a principle of just war.

This key idea is the concept of moral relativism, also known widely as cultural relativism, which has a long history of development in western philosophy. Moral relativism is the concept that moral judgments are unique to only a particular standpoint, shaped by culture, history and society, and that no standpoint is more privileged than any other (Tilley 1998, 275). In summary, it is the point of view that there is no universal moral philosophy that is the definitive way to differentiating right from wrong that everyone should follow and that all the different kinds morality are equally valid. This concept is hardly explored in Hindu and Chinese philosophy, which both offer a fixed view of certain virtues that are right and certain vices that are evil. In contrast, moral relativism has a long tradition in western philosophy, from Plato to Nietzsche to more recent philosophers such as William Sumner. While not a dominant form of thinking, it is still a well-developed principle in the western philosophical tradition and can explain why western just war theory is unlikely to theorize moral legitimacy as a requirement for just war.

Moral relativism argues that there is no definitive way to define who is moral and who is not. If that is the case, it is impossible for just war theory to come up with a singular definition of what a moral leader is or is not, as all views on moral nature are equal and not privileged over the other. Moral relativism appears to be a separate branch of philosophy from just war theory. How then, has it influenced just war thinking in the western tradition? This essay argues that the influence of moral relativism in just war theory can be traced to communitarian influences, such as noted just war theorist Michael Walzer, who is a communitarian. While communitarianism and moral relativism are two separate ideologies, they share many similarities. Communitarianism argues that political theory is grounded within the traditions and cultures of particular societies and that there is no universal theory. Similarly, communitarians argue that moral standards are dependent on societal norms and that there is no fixed, universal morality (Jordaan 2011, 2366). The influence of communitarianism on Walzer is clear, who argues actively for this point of view. As such, by theorizing a singular concept of what constitutes just war, Walzer is already going against the communitarian concept on universal morality. Walzer thus understands the necessity that the principles that he espouses as just are not further dependent on factors that are dependent on a next-level analysis of a fixed morality, which in his view would weaken the argument further. With Walzer being a noted just war theorist who has shaped discourse in modern times and has framed its discussion (Sutch 2009, 513), it is thus likely that due to moral relativism's influence through Walzer's communitarianism, morality as a form of political legitimacy is a concept that is unlikely to be theorized in the western just war tradition.

As such, having shown that western just war theory is unlikely to theorize moral character as a requirement for leaders as a criterion for a just declaration of war, this essay shall proceed to argue why wars of propagation of a morally superior idea, the second difference in non-western just war theory, is unlikely to be theorized within its principles as well. Propagation of self-proclaimed morally superior ideas is not new in the western history. From the Christian missionaries to the age of colonization, there has been a history of the western world seeking to impose the

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so-called superior principles of the western world on the rest of world. However, if one looks at the history of western just war theory, there has always been an opposition to the imposition of ideas as a just cause for war. Francis de Vitoria, arguably the 'father' of the western concept of international law, outlined this in his writings, arguing that difference of religion, and the refusal to accept Christianity by the Indians, was not a just cause for war. Such ideas were expanded upon by other western historical just war theorists such as Hugo Grotius. This has established a strong tradition of opposition to the idea that propagating a morally superior principle can be conceptualized as a just cause for war in the western just war tradition. That tradition, while still strong today, has grown to incorporate ideas on cosmopolitanism and communitarianism as well. The communitarian opposition to wars to defend morally superior ideas stems from the influences of moral relativism, as mentioned above. Communitarians believe that there is no, one universal moral idea that is privileged over others. If that is the case, then the existence of a morally superior idea that is better than others and needs to be spread or defended is philosophically unsound for communitarians (Jordaan 2011, 2366). Walzer, a noted communitarian, for example, argues that spreading democracy, the so-called superior alternative to other forms of political government, is not a just cause of war in any way. This ties in with his greater argument against universalism and the fact that even the belief that there is a universal, morally superior idea that should be accepted universally is problematic. If even the belief is problematic, then it goes without saying that war waged for such a shaky belief cannot be just (Sutch 2009, 516).

However, even on the cosmopolitan end of the spectrum, where there is a belief that there are universal values that should be the accepted norm, using the propagation of said values as a justification for war is contentious. The historical principles of laws of a universal nature were established by Immanuel Kant, where he argues that the way to perpetual peace is through the creation of laws by a federation of free states, where every one of these states is republican, as defined by Kant in a certain way (Constitution Society 2016). Thus, Kant does establish a universal ideal that needs to be spread—the concept of a Kantian republican state, in order for perpetual peace to be established. However, even at his most extreme, he does not advocate the use of force to spread these ideals, arguing for peaceful communications of ideals and stating outright that no countries have the right to interfere in the political affairs of other countries (Constitution Society 2016). Within this framework of universalism established by Kant, modern scholars such as Rawls have argued for the principle of universal liberal ideals and the creation of peace through the adoption of said ideals by different states, thus creating an ideal society of 'peoples'. However, Rawls does not cover how to deal with states which do not comply with said universal ideals, or 'outlaw' states. However, succeeding cosmopolitans who have focused their research on Rawls work have also argued that the very principles that govern Rawls' theories means that the propagation of such ideals is not a justifiable reason for war (Shue 2002, 318). Instead, cosmopolitans argue that the only reasonable way to integrate the treatment of outlaw states within Rawls' framework of universal ideals is to reduce the content of said principles and to loosen the regulations and rules set within it so as to broaden the amount of states that could embrace these ideals as a result of their less demanding terms (Shue 2002, 318).

Thus, it is clear that, while not impossible, it is highly unlikely that western academic scholarship, within its framework is able to theorize or conceive the propagation of ideals as a just cause of war. Even on the most extreme end of the spectrum, where cosmopolitans argue for the adoption of a universal morally superior ideal, there is little to no argument for the use of war to spread these ideals being justified. Even arguments outside the cosmopolitan-communitarian debate, such as the democratic peace thesis, which argues that democracies are less likely to fight each other and thus conducive to peace, do not argue that such wars spreading democracy are thus just. As such, spreading morally superior ideals as a just cause for war, a non-western concept in just war scholarship, can be considered a unique addition to international relations theory due to its difference from western theory and the fact that western theory, within its established framework, is unlikely to theorize it as a just cause of war.

The non-western Perspective: A Homogeneous Viewpoint?

As such, this essay has established that not only does non-western views on just war theory differ from western traditions of just war theory, such theories are unlikely to be developed through the western tradition of just war scholarship as well, making non-western just war theory a possible unique addition to international relations scholarship. The answer of whether non-western theory has anything unique to contribute to the study of international

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politics is thus, based on what this essay has argued so far, a resounding yes. However, in analysing the statement, this essay further questions the validity of grouping all non-western international relations theory as a homogenous entity under the label of 'non-western' theory. Just as western theories on international relations are divided into schools such as the English School, Realism and Liberalism, one must ask the question of whether non-western theories differ from each other to the extent that grouping them under the homogenous label of non-western would be a hindrance to the accurate analysis of said theories. While this essay cannot speak for every non-western theory, in its analysis of Chinese and Hindu just war theory, this essay argues that there is a strong enough differentiation in the principles of these two theories that categorizing them under a label of 'non-western just war theory' would be an oversimplification, despite the similarities between them pointed out in this essay.

As an example, this difference is seen when comparing Hindu and Chinese just war theories on the concept of *jus in bello*, or the conduct of war. The Chinese concept of just war theory is much more concerned with the principle of distinction, between non-combatants and combatants, arguing that the righteous and just army does not harm non-combatants. Chinese just war theorists also make great references to the treatment of enemy provisions, cities and buildings, arguing that the just army does not pillage or steal from civilians (Lo 2012, 418). It however, makes little to no reference on any rules as to how combat and war between soldiers should be conducted. For Chinese just war theorists, any form of combat, be it trickery or open battle, seems to be permissible, insofar as it minimizes cost. In Hindu just war theory however, we see less an emphasis on the concept of distinction, and more of a discourse between honourable and non-honourable forms of combat and the righteousness of said methods. While the concept of distinction is hardly written about in the Hindu just war tradition, the twin concepts of *Kutayuddha* and *Dharmayuddha* elaborate greatly upon the type of combat that should occur in a just war (Roy 2007, 235-240). While *Kutayuddha* argues for a more varied way of waging war, advocating both open combat and the use of spies, poisonous weaponry and other unorthodox methods, *Dharmayuddha* argues that a just war should contain nothing but honourable battles, fought between armies on open plains, on equal positions, while banning the use of unorthodox weaponry such as fire arrows (Roy 2007, 235-240). Furthermore, in their analysis of the *Ramayana* as an introduction to Hindu concepts of just war, Balkaran and Dorn argue that one of the key moments in the text is when Rama slays the demon Valin by shooting an arrow at him while Valin is engaged in combat with another warrior, and the debate that follows regarding this act as Valin lay dying (Balkaran and Dorn 2012, 676). The amount of importance attached to the debate of whether Rama's act was just by the text once again signifies the struggle within Hindu just war theory on the importance of the forms of combat as a principle of just conduct in war.

Besides their differences in the concept of *jus in bello*, Chinese and Hindu theories also differ in the type of reasons they argue provide for the conduct of just war as well. While Hindu just war theory focuses on morality as an end in itself, taking a more philosophical and religious slant to the reasons for just war, Chinese just War theory emphasizes much more on morality as a means to an end in war. For Chinese just war theory, just conduct of war serves not just a moral end, but a political end as well. For Hindu just war theory, justice and morality in war is an end in itself. It is emphasized, and carried out, because it is the just thing to do and a representation of a Manichean battle of good against evil in terms of Hindu mythology (Roy 2007, 234). Just war is thus the religious good against unjust war's religious evil. However, Chinese just war theory, while also emphasizing benevolence against tyranny, does not express the just conduct of war in such Manichean terms as good and evil. Furthermore, Chinese just war theory places much more importance on the practical and political benefits of waging a just war, arguing that a ruler who conducts war justly will win friends and political allies, as well as make his subjugated enemies easier to control due to the benevolence he treats them with (Lo 2012, 420). The emphasis on the philosophical morality of war as compared to the political benefits of just war thus differs greatly in the Hindu and Chinese just war tradition as well.

As such, it is clear that there are significant differences in the principles and concerns of Chinese and Hindu just war theory that grouping them under a homogeneous label of 'non-western' theory would be an inaccurate classification. This essay thus argues that any attempt to classify all non-western theory under a unifying label oversimplifies their principles and makes for an inaccurate study of said theories, with such an attempt being a form of orientalism at best.

Conclusion

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In conclusion, this essay reiterates its argument that non-western, or rather Chinese and Hindu theories on just war, as a subset of international relations theory, does provide unique perspectives for the study of international relations theory. This essay has shown how in both Chinese and Hindu just war theories, great importance is placed on the morality of the leader and the defence of morally superior ideas as a basis of justice, while also showing that said perspectives while different from western scholarship, are also unique in that the theoretical frameworks established by western scholarship are unlikely to conceive similar principles. Furthermore, this essay has also shown that despite their similarities, Chinese and Hindu just war theories contain enough differences that putting them under a homogenous label of 'non-western'; theories is detrimental to their study. Of course, this essay does acknowledge that Chinese and Hindu theories do not cover the entire scope of non-western theory and the insights of other international relations theory such as the Islamic or the African view cannot be understated, In a period where non-traditional powers such as China and India are rising to challenge western hegemony and referring more and more to their own ancient traditions of scholarship rather than just following western theories, it has become all the more important and useful to incorporate such theories into mainstream academic study so as to gain a greater understanding of the conduct of international relations today.

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