In China’s participation in international relations, there is no theory, only practice.

(Ni Shixiong, Feng Shaolei, and Jin Yingzhong, 1989)  

International Relations theory is an uncharted territory in China’s academia.

(Yang Yunzhong, 1994)

In a book review in *Millennium* in 1995, Steve Smith lamented the lack of our knowledge of the state of international studies beyond the Anglo-American sphere. He said, ‘Many readers ... will doubtless feel somewhat embarrassed, as I did, about knowing so little about what was being done outside a small geographical area.’ Ken Booth held a similar view when he said in 1995 that ‘International political theory has largely been Western ideology .... The West did not want a different theoretical future because it was dominating the practical present.’

Indeed, back in the 1960s, Stanley Hoffman pointed out that the discipline of IR was ‘born and raised in America’ and dominated by the United States because of its ‘political preeminence’.

For the sake of the growth of knowledge and the promotion of international understanding, there is a need to go beyond this parochial understanding of IR to accommodate non-Western views. In this respect the development of IR studies in China adds an interesting dimension to the existing body of knowledge. As IR is a relatively new academic subject in China, a lot of work needs to be done before a distinctively Chinese school of thinking emerges. The current Chinese understanding does not pose any significant challenge to the existing body of knowledge in the West. However, their differing views need to be taken into account, not least because what Chinese IR specialists think and champion is likely to influence foreign-policy-making in China and hence its external behaviour. As China grows strong economically, politically, and militarily, it is imperative to understand the Chinese thinking on IR.
Conclusion

This chapter concentrates on the development of an IR theory with Chinese characteristics. It traces the efforts made so far and discusses the Chinese arguments for and against such a development. What exactly are the Chinese characteristics and what is the status of theory in IR studies in China?

The development of an IR theory in China, like so many social-engineering feats in the country, is crowned with the phrase ‘with Chinese characteristics’. Witness the following:

- a socialist economy with Chinese characteristics;
- socialist politics with Chinese characteristics;
- a socialist culture with Chinese characteristics;
- modernisation with Chinese characteristics;
- agricultural modernisation with Chinese characteristics;
- a theory of higher education with Chinese characteristics;
- the study of diplomacy with Chinese characteristics;
- the study of international political economy with Chinese characteristics;
- a theory of international conflict with Chinese characteristics;
- international relations history with Chinese characteristics;
- peace studies with Chinese characteristics;
- political studies with Chinese characteristics;
- sociology with Chinese characteristics.

The origin of all these can be traced to Deng Xiaoping’s call for building socialism with Chinese characteristics. The phrase ‘with Chinese characteristics’ apparently confers some kind of authority or legitimacy within China and serves to protect users from personal attacks that may arise during political campaigns or struggles.

Deng’s socialism with Chinese characteristics is said to be a natural development and a logical extension of Marxism. It is a natural development because the liberalisation of thoughts and shishi qiush (seeking truth from facts), the philosophical bases of socialism with Chinese characteristics, are exemplars of Marx’s dialectical materialism. It is a logical extension because socialist market economy is said to be the greatest breakthrough in socialism and a major revision of traditional Marxism based on China’s experience. While a critique of the logic of these arguments falls outside the scope of this study, it is useful to point out that the development of IR studies in China is greatly influenced by political ideology and the practical considerations of China’s Party leaders.