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China's Foreign Policy and Critical Theory of International Relations

Serafettin Yilmaz (姚仕帆)¹

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Abstract Informed by the ongoing structural shifts in inter-state relations, this study proposes Critical Theory of International Relations (CTIR) as a framework to analyze China's foreign policy doctrine. It holds that the critical method best reflects China's conceptualization of international relations due to its emphasis on the state's principal function to lead historical progress and emancipation, as opposed to traditional theories which either ignore the state and give priority to sub-state or supra-state structures, or do not recognize its potential to serve as an emancipatory agency. This essay, in this respect, represents an introductory attempt to apply CTIR to contemporary international relations, maintaining that China's material and ideational emergence signifies a radical transformation of the post-war global order and the role of the state.

Keywords Critical Theory of International Relations · The State · Emancipation · China's Foreign Policy · International Governance

During the Cold War, ideological rivalry between the opposing camps suggested that, albeit unpredictable and potentially catastrophic, political history remained fluid and receptive for potentialities. With the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc and triumph of the capitalist system in the 1990s, however, many analysts came to believe that international relations were now transformed into a more structured, rigid, and predictable form regulated in most part by the socially, politically and economically superior West.¹History appeared to

¹An account of this tendency has been given in Schweller and Pu [1].

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have finally reached post-ideology even though post-ideology did not necessarily mean non-ideology. Yet, over the past decade, two overlapping developments challenging the viability and sustainability of the unipolar moment have become increasingly visible: The first development has been characterized by the economic, technological and political emergence of China as a systemic parallel (and, potentially, an alternative) to the existing global order.² The second has been the relative decline of the United States in terms of its ability to give meaning to material, ideational and ethical history. Today, with these two significant phenomena becoming manifest and their consequences less predictable, a window has opened for the students of international relations to think deeply on the changing nature of inter-state relations and investigate the potentialities for and implications of a systemic transition or change. Accordingly, along with the conventional international relations theories that have come to explain global transformations, critical international relations theorists, too, are tasked to present their own account and understanding of the prevailing social reality Linklater [2].

This essay, in this respect, represents an introductory attempt to apply Critical Theory of International Relations (CTIR) to contemporary international relations, maintaining that China's material and ideational emergence signifies a radical transformation of the post-war global order and the role of the state. Generally speaking, traditional theories either ignore the state while giving priority to sub-state or supra-state structures or, albeit taking the state as the principal international actor, do not recognize its potential to function as an emancipatory agency. It is observed, however, that the contemporary foreign diplomacy of the Chinese state departs considerably from both of the above postulations and, lending empirical support to the basic arguments of CTIR, promulgates the idea that the state might serve as an emancipatory agent which upholds and promotes sovereign equality, territorial integrity, anti-hegemony and global harmony.

The significant convergence between China's foreign policy and the concept of emancipation underscores the departing point of this essay. Indeed, as will be discussed in the following pages, China's international relations doctrine exemplified by the modern China's "five principles of peaceful coexistence" draws on two basic rules. The negative rule, as indicated in Confucius' *Analects*, instructs "not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself." The positive rule which is built on the first one, on the other, advises that "we should not only do good things for others, but also respect others' understanding of the meaning of 'a good life,'" which means respecting others' choices no matter how they seem to deviate from one's own understanding of a good national life Shijun [3]. These principles suggest that the state can in fact function as an emancipatory (anti-hegemonic) actor and that the international realm can be liberated without abolishing, subjugating or significantly weakening the national realm.

Informed by the ongoing structural shifts in inter-state relations as particularly signified by the rise of China and the general inclination toward multipolarity, this research proposes a critical IR framework to analyze present day inter-state relations

² In this research, a distinction is made between parallel and alternative orders. A parallel order indicates systems' coexistence while an alternative order suggests the potential of one system overtaking the other, hence a more contentious relationship. In this sense, China's conceptualization of international relations is one of coexistence, a condition that allows multiple systems to survive.

and explores its relevancy and applicability to China's foreign policy doctrine as a model for a new type of global governance. This premise rests on the argument that China's material and ideational emergence indicates a potential transformation of the post-war global order and the role of the state. Accordingly, in the following pages, a detailed account of Critical Theory and the subsequent genesis of Critical Theory of International Relations is provided. Here, first, attention will be given to the issue of historicism in critical social philosophy, which is an essential feature that both theories share. Then, a significant point of divergence between the two schools, that is, the question of the state as either an oppressive or liberationist agency, will be discussed. In the final section, the Chinese foreign policy doctrine as a leading progenitor of a potential change in the modern international system will be analyzed. Here answer is to be sought to the question whether CTIR can satisfactorily account for China's global governance model as a parallel to or alternative for the existing international order.

Critical Theory and Historical Progress

Critical Theory of Society was born in the works of theorists associated with the Frankfurt School of Thought – although these scholars derived their ideas from a broad spectrum of earlier philosophers such as Kant, Hegel and Marx. Over time, the social and political philosophy of the Frankfurt School has gone through reformations and, as a method of radical reasoning, Critical Theory came to offer a new mode of Marxian thought to address the needs of its particular historical moment which was characterized by the rise of fascism, the eventual demise of the Marxist political theory and the resilience and viability of the post-war bourgeoisie states across Europe Bottomore [4]. In the face of the apparent fall of the class-driven revolutionary politics, it was understood that the proletariat was not able to serve as an agent of meaningful change; thus, especially in developed capitalist societies, one needed a new mode of thinking to account for the emerging notions of global citizenship, interconnectedness and the capitalist state Habermas [5].

Thus, Critical Theory set out to critique “both of the contemporary social sciences and of the social reality...” that failed to produce the results envisioned in Marxist philosophy while it continued to refer to Marx's central concepts such as structural contradictions, ideology and cultural transformations.³ It, consequently, attempted to infuse Hegelian idealism with orthodox Marxist materialism by approaching the world in its historical and territorial context and investigating potentialities for a higher state of being. In another word, Critical Theory preserved certain analytical and contextual characteristics common to all Marxian strands as its diverse scope extended from Classical Marxian and Gramscian theories to more recent Frankfurt School while it diverged from traditionalist-positivist theories on multiple accounts.⁴

First of all, critical thought rejects the traditionalist-positivist premiss that social reality is constructed as a value-free, universal and unchangeable truth. Rather, it perceives the society to be susceptible to change under continuous external and internal

³ Bottomore, *The Frankfurt School*, pp. 76–79.

⁴ Ibid.

influence. Accordingly, being a theory with a “practical dimension” (or, a theory of potentiality and territoriality), other than identifying “the sources of domination in actual social practices,” it lays out an action plan and vision for a better society Leonard [6]. If, for one reason or another, historical progress does not take place as anticipated while the conditions are in place, the critical theorist should refer to immanent critique to identify the ideologies and dogmas that shroud the contradictions in dominant political systems and keep them from being subject to radical transformation Antonio [7]. The anticipated change for a better state of being, as Marx observes, takes place if the internal contradictions are objectively uncovered – as opposed to the Hegelian critique which presupposes that existing social and political reality is the result of rational self-determination, hence, justified. In a sense, immanent critique involves an examination of both the empirical social practice and the understanding (or ideology) that informs that practice.⁵

Expectedly, arguing for systemic or system's change is bound to generate certain reactions on part of the economic and political forces of status-quo because the established order which sustains the structures of domination instinctually opposes to be disempowered by the emerging forces. In that regard, what the critical method envisions for the overall society remains potentially disruptive even though it does not necessarily promote destructive change or war but rather emphasizes emancipation. As a revolutionary program, emancipation requires liberation of human thinking from false convictions and ideologies, holding that when present economic and political contradictions are identified and examined properly, peaceful transition to a higher order becomes a potentiality Agger [10].

It must, then, be noted that Critical Theory does not merely seek ways to describe social reality with the aim of fixing and, thereby, preserving it. Rather, it examines existing conditions under the light of values such as justice, freedom and happiness. It thus remains historically cognizant of the underlying material and ideational structures that give rise to what is perceived to be the substantial reality. If the social reality is found to be conducive to oppression and injustice (systemic contradictions), the critical method first identifies them and then offers strategies for change. In this respect, Critical Theory differs radically from other conventional approaches to society whose main function is to re-create prevailing social and economic structures by identifying and correcting their faults Hoffman [11]. Critical theorist examines “the existent in its historic context” and compares it “with the claim of its conceptual principles” to critique How [12] the persisting discrepancies and anomalies, and to ultimately “transcend them” by revealing potential orders that could be realized on a higher plane.⁶ Nonetheless, when critical traditions think of man and woman to be unchained, they “[do] not envision an endless horizon of possibilities,” or normative utopias, entirely divorced from real social conditions Ingram and Simon-Ingram [13]. In fact, critical analysis requires that, when taking facts into account as they appear to the empirical eye, one also has to reflect upon the historical and territorial context Lukacs [14]

⁵ Theodor Adorno, on the other, endorses both Hegelian and Marxian modes of immanent critique, maintaining that even though social practices involve certain structural contradictions, they might as well hold a conceptual unity since social reality is rational. See, O'Connor [8] and Buchwalter [9].

⁶ Hoffman, “Critical,” pp. 236–237.

without which “the disclosure of alternative possibilities would be a hopeless endeavour Kompridis [15].”

By disclosing the structures that create systemic rigidities and contradictions, critical inquiry aims at revealing the “possibilities that contrast with actual conditions,”⁷ a task that stands at the core of its emancipatory agenda, thereby separating it from other idealist or “problem-solving theories” Cox [16] that reduce concepts such as freedom and happiness into ahistorical states of mind and, as such, justify and legitimate the institutions and practices that might in fact be responsible for the injustice and unfreedoms. Thus, whereas traditional systems are alienated from the real structures of society such as national and international classes and economic, social and political institutions which help renew outmoded social relations, critical methodology sets out to promote awareness of the imperfections in the prevailing order, referring to historical dialectics as a method to inform the struggle for system reformation or change Horkheimer [17].

Historical dialectics allows the examination of the “social forces of political order and transformation” as they relate to particular conditions, tensions and oppositions between individuals, groups and the states Roach [18]. Even though dialectics as understood in critical philosophy does not situate itself in mechanistic determinism and predict radical social transformation with a singular historical direction, it nevertheless maintains “that the past and present do not neatly extend into the future without any flippage”⁸ since the material elements involved in the process of progress bar history from reproducing itself into an exact form of its former condition Hutchings [19]. The material relationship between human being and the nature “provides a basis for the subsequent development of an historical, dialectical conception of the world” that consistently produces new potentialities that are better than the dominant social reality Gramsci [20].

Critical Theory holds that historical change comes with its resolution as contextualized in various levels of sociopolitical existence, including national and international. According to Gramsci, historical necessity “is closely connected to that of regularity and rationality,” that is, “necessity in the speculative-abstract and in the historical-concrete sense,” which requires the presence of “an efficient and active *premiss*” to be operationalized in material history Gramsci [21]. When the need for a new order grows sufficiently, the material conditions for its actualization would be firmly in place, as well, since history does not bring about false impulses. Indeed, for Horkheimer, to be considered critical, a theory should clearly explain the present reality, be able to single out the actors to challenge and change it, and tell how the future should look like Horkheimer [22]. Imagining global emancipation with the state as the leading agency, then, arises from such historical necessity and renewed optimism toward the possibility of positive change in the larger global context. Critical Theory of International Relations, in this case, extends the task of Critical Social Theory into the realm of inter-state relations.

⁷ Kompridis, “Disclosing Possibility,” p. 348.

⁸ Agger, *Critical*, p. 9.

Critical Theory of International Relations: Situating Emancipation in the International Realm

Critical Theory of International Relations follows up on the conceptual development of Critical Social Theory which underwent a number of reformulations as global and local conditions influenced the outlook of its primary representatives. Especially, the ideas of state and potentiality have been greatly shaped by the changing sociopolitical landscape during the 20th century across the Western world and beyond Cox [23]. This, however, does not mean that CTIR relies particularly on a utilitarian perception of historical progress. On the contrary, it acknowledges that social reality is one of a dialectics in which material circumstances greatly influence human being's relationship with the nature and the state. For instance, the expansion of critical thinking into the international realm coincides with the perceived loss of "its original audience" with "the integration of the proletariat into the capitalist system Marcuse et al. [24]."

Hence historical materialism and class theory as a methodology is inseparable from CTIR which holds that revolutionary members of the international realm are politically conscious of the total social reality, the oppressor and the oppressed being the primary actors. Accordingly, the oppressed would eventually evolve into an active agency within the system and, instead of seeking to become an extension of the existing international order, strive for a better alternative in an attempt to re-construct or replace it. In a sense, the self-awareness of being an oppressed subject of international history is a by-product of the persisting social and material discrepancies. Critical IR program responds to this reality and aims to give action a direction in the hope for a radical change in international socioeconomic and political structures.⁹

Essentially, CTIR views the international realm as composed of individual liberationist states and state blocs that stand in opposition to anti-historical forces (other states, blocs, and institutions). Based on this understanding, it offers a critique of realism for ignoring sub-state dynamics and of orthodox Marxism for being negligent of the state's capacity to function as a progressive force, holding that it is possible as well as necessary to relate to historical materialism as an expression of the state (and the language of the masses) that helps realize human being's socio-political capacity. Thus the deep chasm remains between Critical Theory which argues for liberation and emancipation at the expense of all other restraining forces (including the state) and Critical Theory of International Relations which argues for the emancipation of the international realm by and for the liberationist nation state so that it may continue to function independently from all hegemonic structures.

It should be noted that the question of the state has lingered across all Marxian traditions, starting from Marx's own view on its role, even though these views are far from offering a commonly agreed conception of the (capitalist) state. Classical Marxism in general remained highly critical of the state, perceiving it as a political unit with little or no potential to lead a meaningful change toward the actualization of human liberation. Although Marx did not provide a comprehensive theoretical analysis of the state in what Jessop calls "a fragmented and unsystematic series of philosophical reflections," he nonetheless maintained an instrumentalist view of the capitalist state as a means for class politics and domination Jessop [25]. What made the state possible was

⁹ Lukacs, *History*, p. 23.

the particular need to promote the forces of production to ensure that class relations would be sustained Sweezy [26]. Marx anticipated that the industrialized state would in time wither away as the working class gained political awareness and ultimately ended the rule of dominant classes Levine [27]; Roach [28].

As Marxist theory developed and new strands emerged, the idea of state gained a more central place in Marxian political analysis. Gramsci, for example, introduced the concept of hegemonic state, a more sophisticated and resilient political entity than perceived by Marx, Engels, and later, by Lenin, which, informed by base-structure, effectively utilized superstructure Germain and Kenny [29]. Therefore, in Gramsci, the state becomes a consensual institution in addition to being a coercive one. The hegemonic state seeks legitimacy internalized by the masses through cultural norms and moral codes (false consciousness) instigated by the established forces such as intellectuals and the media. In this regard, Gramsci disagrees with historical and economic determinism found in orthodox interpretations of Marxism Femia [30].

While drawing eclectically on the Marxist tradition in its perception of dialectical materialist progress, CTIR differs considerably from the various Marxian political theories in its approach to the state. First and foremost, Critical IR views the state as the highest sovereign form of polity. International organizations or civic groups, in this respect, are only collective expressions of the state agent on various national and/or international matters. Secondly, provided that materially and technologically capable, the state could act as an independent entity individually or within a historical bloc in opposition to the hegemonic state or group of states and their apparatus. And thirdly, unlike the proponents of “a new global order characterized by nonterritorial forms of political community,” Payne and Samhat [31] CTIR in its true sense consigns the task of emancipation to the state, holding that if the state is not the supreme political expression that amalgamates and embodies all non-state forms of power, then emancipation cannot proceed. Under this conceptualization, radical social progress is not only possible, but also required and the state is to work to enable this change. What, then, these premises signify is an idea of emancipation rooted in transformative action by the state agency, that is, praxis of theory Rasmussen [32].

That said, introducing the idea of liberationist state into critical social analysis leads to a number of problematics, including the question of “how a politics of universal emancipation might make inroads into the divisions between sovereign states.”¹⁰ In another word, how would the realist/positivist paradigm be reconciled with the critical/emancipatory paradigm? Cox notes that what relates Critical Theory to international realm is its concern “with the problems of real world.”¹¹ What it aims for is not much different from “problem solving” or positivist theories, as far as practical misgivings toward the world conditions are concerned. On the other hand, CTIR approaches the international system from “a perspective which transcends that of the existing order...,”¹² hence the question of potentiality.

¹⁰ Linklater, *Beyond Realism and Marxism*, p. 27.

¹¹ Cox, “Social Forces, States and World orders,” p. 210.

¹² *Ibid.*

It, thus, differs structurally from idealist theories in such a way that, although it “allows for a choice in favor of a social and political order different from the prevailing order... it limits the range of choice to alternative orders which are feasible transformations of the existing world.”¹³ Therefore, while Critical IR stretches across positivist and normative perspectives, it remains both historical and transformative. A continuous search for a better existence is what moves the critical inquiry; historicism enables a degree of realism while idealism encourages to think beyond the present conditions in favor of higher possibilities.

Viewed from critical perspective, contemporary international order represents a totality of ideology, institutions and material power: ideology offers a world view, institutions help internationalize it, and material power creates incentives for the order to be continuously desired by the national elites that manage ways of thinking in their respective societies. The particular “fit between material power, ideology and institutions” prevails on both national and international plane.¹⁴ Just as the tendency for localized social inequality and oppression is generated at the process of the distribution of resources and wealth, at the international level, too, systemic disparities and unfreedoms are of economic nature, which in turn facilitate the subjugation of mass politics. On the other hand, the doctrine for emancipatory international relations, first, distances itself from the political structures of domination, then identifies their material and ideological essence, and finally present alternatives in their place. It argues that transforming the state from its present condition as the representative of global hegemonic interests that subjugate lesser powers would be achieved not by weakening and abolishing the state but by empowering and inculcating it with the required methodology, awareness, and emancipatory spirit.

It is seen that the landmark developments of the post-war era such as the emergence of regionalization movements, the built-up of economic and security communities transcending national borders, and the advancement of supranational institutions at the cost of states' sovereign power to manage their affairs independently have failed to improve the way international system functions but rather enabled further consolidation of the US-led West as an hegemonic entity. It has been witnessed recently in the case of the crisis in Ukraine that unilateral action by a collective security institution would easily disturb regional-international equilibrium and develop into a full scale struggle for influence. Obviously, without strong governments promoting and working toward a new form of global governance, peoples across the emerging nations will remain vulnerable to unilateral action by powerful states since present day international relations is asymmetrically structured. Thus, the ideas of emancipation and progress are meaningful only if they are considered within the context of a viable state or bloc of states – a disempowered society would not be able to act as a catalyzer for meaningful change. It appears that China's emergence allows to think about the potentialities for a higher international order in which the cause of human liberation is greatly assisted by the state.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Cox, “Social Forces,” p .225.

China's Foreign Policy and Critical IR Theory

Particularly with the opening-up in the post-Mao years and greater exposure to international system, China's foreign policy has come under larger scrutiny.¹⁵ Controversy over the question of continuity and change persisted along three lines of argument: The first line held that China's foreign diplomacy changed constantly and often radically. Others, however, maintained that foreign policy remained consistent ever since the World War Two, unaffected by the changes in leadership Ng-Quinn [35]; Robinson [36]. Still, a third strand, which this study finds to be a more realistic presentation of the Chinese foreign policy discourse, argued that while certain aspects of foreign policy such as "its basic organizing principles, its general goals, and its style" remained constant, issue-specific policies and relationships with specific countries underwent changes Harding [37]. China's conceptualization of foreign policy, according to this line of argument, evolved into an integrated model of international governance systematization composed of "both substantive values and norms and operational code Kim [38]." Normative values helped define the state of the world and guided the policy makers as to the expected course of action.

China's international relations doctrine can be analyzed under two broad historical categories. In the Cold War era and more specifically after the Sino-Soviet split, Beijing adopted "a two-fronts strategy of anti-imperialism and anti-revisionism Cheng and Wankun [39]." With the collapse of the bi-polar global system, the characteristics of Chinese foreign policy took on a more pragmatist and less ideological tone, increasingly centering on the idea of a multipolar power configuration in which state actors respected national sovereignty, tolerated socio-political differences, and observed strict non-interference. Criticizing the dominant world system as conducive to widespread injustice, China's leadership has come to see this posture as a correction of past colonial policies of which itself was a victim. Speaking along these lines, at the 12th National Congress of the CCP held in September 1982, party secretary Hu Yaobang stressed that "at present, the major forces threatening the peaceful existence of various countries in the world are imperialism, hegemonism and colonialism."¹⁶ The liberationist conceptualization of global governance has also been voiced in many other major multilateral platforms such as the 1996 China-Russia Joint Statement, which read,

The trend towards a multipolar world is developing... However... hegemonism, power politics and the repeated imposition of pressure on other countries have continued to occur. Bloc politics has assumed new guises... All countries, big or small, whether they are developed, developing or with an economy in transition, are equal members of the international community. People of every country have the right to choose independently, in the light of their respective national conditions and free from outside interference, their social system and course and mode of development.¹⁷

Thus, China's conceptualization of global politics has remained one of a flux, "strongly influenced by its values, culture and self-image of its role in world politics Hu et al. [40]." Over time, the initial ideological tone that demanded an overthrow of

¹⁵ For an overview of China's foreign policy since the foundation of the Republic, see, Kim [33] and Zhao [34].

¹⁶ Quoted in, Y. S. Cheng and Wankun, "Patterns and Dynamics of China's International," p. 183.

¹⁷ See the full text, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/51/plenary/a51-127.htm>

international system by force has been replaced with a more pragmatic call for the reform and reordering of the prevailing unequal international relations without causing deep systemic fluctuations.¹⁸ The state maintained revolutionary characteristics in terms of its vision of the place the Chinese civilization-state should occupy on the global political-economic landscape whereas, along with the exponential material growth, its relationship with the rest of the prominent global actors evolved from one of an ideological/normative unity of an order that aimed to overthrow the entire system to the promotion of more cooperative and expansive ideas. Apparently, the early Republic's overt anti-hegemonic discourse withered away under the weight of internal and external developments (a significant shift in foreign policy paradigm that coincided with the country's aggressive push for economic and social development) while the underlying dynamics have proven somewhat immutable as the successive leaderships as well as the larger academic community have kept on calling for a renewal or reform of the international system with an emphasis on the ideas of mutually respecting political sovereignty and avoiding wars of aggression, viewing the state as the natural primary actor in upholding these principles Blum [41]; Wang [42].

An investigation into China's foreign policy within the context of critical methodology involves three main premises: First, transition from a lower state of existence to a higher one is "*objectively or theoretically possible*." Second, such transition is "*practically necessary*." Third, for this transition to occur, the agents (state and society) must adopt "the critical theory as their self-consciousness and *act on it* Geuss [43]." The states-system is not an atomistic domain entirely set apart from national and international society, but an organic part and extension of the two. It is only set apart from the international domain with its claim of sovereignty and from the individual with its claim of legitimacy to govern. Situated between the local and universal realms, the state is to be an agency of change by reforming the international realm and, thereby, ensuring better social and economic conditions for the individual. This does not mean that, in its search for a higher order, the state would have to renounce from "its technical interests in power and control."¹⁹ Universal justice would be achieved while state interests (which are, ideally, nothing other than public interests) were preserved when/if the community of states agreed on and upheld ethical standards such as non-interference and non-aggression.

Drawing on the model formulated above, when China is thought as a leading agent for a parallel (or alternative) conceptualization of international governance, the first stage refers to the present day, US-led international order. China's economic and political development indicates that such a transition is objectively possible since both material and ethical justifications for it to happen now exist. The economic, political and technological emergence of non-Western states is an objective indicator of this historical-potential that is not merely limited to one state. The second stage requires that the above transition should also be a historical-necessary. At the present time, the mostly unattended calls for reforming international organizations, widespread but abortive objections to interventions and breaches of sovereignty, and the subsequent disillusionment over persisting social and economic deprivations etc. refer to such historical-necessary. And lastly, demands for change have to be organic, arising

¹⁸ Cheng and Wankun, "Patterns and Dynamics of China's International," p. 183.

¹⁹ Linklater, *Beyond Realism and Marxism*, p. 21.

naturally and in relation with the concrete material reality. Thought in the case of China, emancipatory politics is clearly driven by the technical-moral state that reflects the demands for radical change by the increasingly vocal masses and intelligentsia. In this regard, emancipation flows from international to national with the state as its principal catalyzer although, admittedly, the process is far from being complete. Practically speaking, emancipation for social groups would remain a distant idea without the state's active involvement since the hegemonic structuring of the world order could not be penetrated and changed meaningfully and satisfactorily by the individuals or individualized social groups. A future order then would most likely emerge from the underlying economic units (national and international), or social forces and, in the final analysis, all would have to be informed and guided by (as well as accountable to) the state they sprang from.

It appears that China's criticism toward the existing international system is not anti-hegemonic in the sense that, historically, anti-hegemonic powers are willing to declare open war against the hegemon. That said, China has indeed employed a geopolitical and economic "delegitimation rhetoric" and assisted it with certain "cost-imposing strategies" that, even though not openly anti-systemic, still challenge the existing order Schweller and Pu [44]. China's foreign policy conceptualization and multilateral efforts that include the establishment of the BRICS Development Fund and the AIIB to the launch of the One-Belt, One-Road strategy suggest that even though Beijing does not intend to threaten the unipolar system directly, it intends to actively build up an economic and security system parallel to it. China's diplomatic activities in recent years indicate that what China has achieved so far would not be conceivable had it been consent with the contemporary international order.

It is seen that China does not merely rely on the "existing institutionalized channels to contest" the international system, but strives to create its own structures even though it may be too early to paint these as strictly anti-hegemon.²⁰ So far, China has played leading role in the establishment of a number of security and economic cooperation frameworks across its near periphery and beyond. Obviously, alternative institutionalization under a different set of goals is liberationist because this offers other nations with alternatives to choose from. For awareness of the world situation does mean little if there is only one option or if the rest of the proposed options are too weak, irrelevant or remain on paper.

In response to the status-quo oriented global forces, foreign policy conceptualization of the Chinese state as a potential agent of global emancipation enables policy makers to locate the contradictions and suggest parallels or alternatives to the prevailing structures that are socially, economically, and politically oppressive. Accordingly, immanent critique and emancipatory foreign policy doctrine are related. The lack of a clear view of an alternative international system due to the existing systemic rigidities and oppositions raises the question whether China will be able to formulate a global model that both appeals to the larger international audience and is practically applicable. A satisfactory answer to this question has yet to be seen on the ground but early signs indicate a growing desire for a viable systemic alternative.

²⁰ Schweller and Pu, "After Unipolarity," p. 53.

Conclusion

Although informed largely by Marxian historical dialecticism and Gramscian philosophy of praxis in its conceptualization of material progress and active consciousness of socio-economic contradictions, as opposed to these traditions, Critical Theory of International Relations attempts at accounting for the existing sociopolitical reality by investigating the possibility of a higher international existence in which the emancipatory idea is promoted and guided by the revolutionary state rather than exclusively by the oppressed classes that are antagonistic toward the idea of state. Placing the state at the center of emancipatory politics, CTIR envisions a higher global order in which international class differences are reduced and a wider and more equal representation is ensured for each and every member of global society. However, the thesis of liberation proposed by the critical theorists does not refer to the past in the form of a longing or to the future in the form of an abstract ideal. Rather, it deals with here and now, holding a positive view of the future possibilities for the politics of emancipation to materialize. Indeed, for liberationist political theory, locating the emancipatory agent is as important as locating the direction for historical progress.

In this essay it was argued that China's foreign policy doctrine can be better understood under the critical paradigm, which, unlike orthodox IR theories, gives a more complete picture of the country's historical experience and practice. This study, thus, has proposed the Critical IR framework to analyze present day international politics, especially great power relationship which is particularly exemplified by the rise of China as a potential systemic alternative to the post-war global order. It has been maintained that China's conceptualization of international governance is not based on a transformation of individuality into a mass organized and held together by an ideology that is sustained through coercive application of hard power. On the contrary, it is based on an idea of a diffused and multilateralized structuring of diverse world orders and regimes that maintain equal relationship. Hence, in this study, the significant conceptual parallel between China's international relations discourse and the emancipatory project delineated under the Critical IR paradigm has been stressed.

At the center of China's foreign policy doctrine stands the task of reconstructing great power relationship into multiple poles, ensuring elasticity for the periphery at each core and basing the core-periphery interaction (of particularly economic and political nature) on the long-promoted principles of anti-hegemonism, non-intervention, peaceful coexistence and harmony.²¹ The vitality and applicability of these emancipatory ideas draw both on the vast historical experience of the long 20th century and the material rise of the Chinese state. Indeed, if any hope for a new type of international governance is to be expressed, it must rest on the empirically verifiable economic indicators which, in turn, determine the ideational structures. The economy-ideas nexus, thus, is the most vital linkage that makes the study of China's international relations doctrine under CTIR a feasible effort. Having identified this linkage, the next task for the students of Critical IR is first to probe extensively the question of 'state as an emancipatory agency' and then construct an alternative Critical IR perspective to account for the contemporary political history more holistically.

²¹ These principles have been laid out on numerous communiqués and other policy statements. For a discussion on these, see, Hao and Hou [45]; Glaubitz [46] and Womack [47].

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