

Understanding China's Growing Global Influence: Perspectives and Assessments

Muhammad Jahanzeb Akmal¹ and Raja Qaiser Ahmed²

Article Information			Abstract
Received:	April	19, 2025	From its aberration to classical Westphalian statehood features to global ascendancy, the key words such as ideational factors, identity, and normative structures, hold key to debate the growing global influence of China. The classical scholarship of modern statehood and international relations is pre-dominantly western, and it has its structural limitations to take on the key question of this research which goes as following: ‘<i>How to understand the increasing power and influence of China in the global arena?</i>’. So far, a conscious effort has been made to give Chinese International Relations’ scholarship an edge over the western literature as self -perception and identity politics holds key to understand the recent expansionist mood in global arena. Methodologically, the qualitative approach has been adopted to address the given question. As scholarship of international relations theories has been the key focus of the research so the key question has been first dealt in taking appraisal of causal and constitutive theories. The subsequent portion takes on the estimate of historicizing China’s Theory of International Relations. The last two sections have been focused on application of social constructivism to assess the China’s rise on global stage, and likewise the internal academic quest of China’s International Relations scholarship has been placed under the assessment to deliberate post-reformist International Relations Theory of International Relations. The research concludes on the note; that despite of its limitations still social constructivism provides a robust framework for understanding China’s foreign policy as a dynamic process of identity formation and normative adaptation, offering insights into its future trajectory in an increasingly interconnected world.
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1. Introduction

There has been an exhaustive debate going on to discuss the rise of China. Among the multifaceted reasons, the identity politics is at the centre stage. As it remains the most consistent feature of China's policies from 1949 to the date. It is imperative to mention here, that interplay of perceptions both at internal level and external level have been affecting the discourse of Chinese foreign politics. Particularly after 1978 when China had decided to adopt the reformist perceptive political policies, the subsequent years have been manifestation of the aforementioned state policy. So far, this research

¹ PhD Scholar, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Corresponding Author. Email: mjakmal@bzu.edu.pk

² Associate Professor, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: rqaahmed@qau.edu.pk

focuses on historicizing the varying trends of International Relations Theory within China and its impact on outlook of China as a state. The resultant role designation has not only been consistent with foreign policy preferences, but it also shaped the domestic political landscape in China over the years. Academically, three great debates of International Relations Theory are enlisted as *Revolutionaries vs Reformist (later Realist vs Reformist)*, *Realist vs Liberalist*, and *Liberalism, Realism (Causal Theories) vs Social Constructivism (Constitutive/Reflective Theories)*. The last theoretical debate in particular focuses upon the rise of China. It goes without saying that so far, officially none of Western International Relations Theory has been pronounced to be the most relevant to explain China's political trajectory. But the theoretical underpinnings of Social Constructivism such identity, perceptions, reference point, and social construction of knowledge comes close to explain the rise of China. So far, this research is based on first tracing the difference between causal and constitutive theories in terms of making sense of Chinese rise; then historicizing the various trends of International Relations Theory and its impact on State Functioning in China, and lastly it evaluates the relevance and shortcomings of Social Constructivism to explain the rise of China.

2. Literature Review

Traditionally, International Relations theory is typically divided into two: causal (problem solving), constitutive (reflective) theories. The predominance of these two theories is much anchored due to larger scholarship and audience in the discipline of international relations. It will be appropriate to look up for definition of tradition from *Oxford English Dictionary* before expounding into the details of this research, the tradition is defined as 'a long established and generally accepted custom or method of procedure, having almost the force of a law' (*Tradition Noun - Definition, Pictures, Pronunciation and Usage Notes Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at Oxford Learners Dictionaries. Com*, n.d.). In this regard, this will be safe to assume that anything 'traditional' is 'bound and observant by tradition'. The categorization of various theories in field of international relations is bound by their origin and immediate research agendas, so far, the traditional theories include realism and its off shoots, liberalism and its off shoots, and the English School. These theories inherit the classical teachings from Aristotle to Voltaire, and at times the proponents of traditional theories are bent upon reinterpreting these writings as if these were written for contemporary age (Soederberg, 2006). In addition to that, these theories are called traditional as they claim to possess the force of law, where for instance the realist logic of 'self-interest' and liberal logic of common-sense in face of 'absolute-gains' is among the various laws, which these two traditions claim to be omnipotent (Guilhot, 2017). On the other hand, the theories considered to be constitutive/critical/post-positivist include critical theory, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, feminism, normative theory, and historical sociology (Baylis & Smith, 2001). This will be worth probing question that, 'what makes them critical'? among multiple explanations, one is propounded by Steven Roach as he states, 'what makes critical IR theory "critical" is its self-awareness as a theory' an awareness reflective upon the critical/constitutive traditions of Hegel, Kant, Marx, Habermas, Butler, Derrida, and Michel Foucault (Roach, 2010). The fundamental difference between causal (problem-solving) theories, and constitutive (reflective) theories is furthered by their relative standpoint on epistemological and ontological reasoning, along with foundational and anti-foundational methodological underpinnings. In order to have a comprehensive understanding of the difference between the two traditions, this research may take on the questions of *causation, questions/premises, and inquiry into explanations/description*, should be done holistically.

On Causation, even though the difference between the causal and non-causal theories is quite known in literature of international relations, but the very genesis of this dichotomy has not studied in purview of etymology of cause itself. This has given way to implicit acceptance of Humean discourse of causation, which ultimately compels researchers to assume that causes or causal analyses imply, determinism, laws, and objectivism, along with referral to 'push and pull' factors to go for law-like generalizations. Kurki (2006), suggests the researchers of international relations to be aware of payoffs of Humean assumptions of causation, he rather suggests that 'we can also understand social scientific causal analysis as epistemically reflective, methodologically pluralist and complexity-sensitive'. So far, the overarching emphasis on empiricism by positivist/causal theories have set limits

on the concept of cause if it has not diminished it at all, so it remains an imperative to reassess the meanings of cause based on deeper ontological grounds. In this regard, philosophical realist aims at putting forth the new ontological framework about the objects of science, which in turn asks for both epistemological and methodological reassessment of 'scientific causal analyses. The scholarly contribution of Alexander Wendt, David Dessler, Colin Wight, and Heikki Patomaki as philosophical realist is worth referring to redirect meanings of cause (Kurki, 2006). Their subsequent contribution can be summarized as following:

- i. First, philosophical realist has helped reclaiming ontological conception of causation, as a result a radically anti-Humean ontological conception of cause has been brought forth, which suggests that causes must be assumed to exist as real ontological entities, and these are not mere creation of our imagination, but have real existence in the world outside our thought and observation. These causes are out there to be deciphered and analysed contrary to the view of Humean empiricist and sceptics' reflectivist.
- ii. Second, by virtue of reclaiming the ontological meaning of cause, the philosophical realists have helped the scholarly debates of international relations and social science to transcend the regularity dependence of Humeanism. As conventionally held by Humean Empiricism regularity is both necessary and sufficient for establishing the casual analysis, the philosophical realist on the contrary assign a new role to the observable regularities to be a part of scientific objective study instead of being whole of it. This in turn expands the scope and agenda of research in international relations and social science.
- iii. Third, the philosophical realist questions the regularity-determinism of the Humean empiricists in their construct of model of causation. The philosophical realist concedes to the idea that causal trajectory is complex and unpredictable. Therefore, the central focus of causal analysis should not be the analysis of independent variable, rather it should entail the study of complex interactions of compound factors.
- iv. Fourth, the surge of philosophical realist has resulted in redefinition of cause, quite devoid to scientific 'closed system' connotation. Resultantly, the causal analysis is defined not be abstract and 'scientific': rather scientific causal analysis is a 'refinement and extension of what we do in the practical functioning of everyday life'.

The above-mentioned debate has a visible impact on positivist vs hermeneutic and cause vs reason debate in social science and international relations. Despite of the fact, that philosophical realist has broadened the agenda of causal analysis but they still fell prey to the 'efficient causal reasoning', and as a result they are more prone towards 'pushing and pulling' factors of causal analysis. It brings them at odd with critical realist such as Bhaskar (2015), who claims that the said position of philosophical realist to be logical individualism. So far, Kurki (2006), asks for revisiting Aristotle to broaden the concept of cause. As it has been known to us that Aristotle presented the idea of four causes, *material, formal, efficient, and final cause* (Lear, 1988). An extensive revision can help the scholarship of social science to understand the constitutive causes of reality; material causes as something the world is made of, formal causes which shapes and defines matter, efficient cause as primary mover or a source of change, and final cause the ultimate objective for this craftsmanship which gives a seed to look up for causal analysis to begin with. After revising, the concept and misconceptions associate with the very word cause', now is the time to take a review of which type of questions are raised in causal and constitutive theories, that ultimately set these traditions apart from each other, as is described by their respective proponents.

On Questions, the particular proponents of both causal and constitutive theories base their relative standpoint on both epistemological and ontological differences, which ultimately leads to methodological differences as well. But scholars, like Wendt (1998), are of his view that epistemological difference between the two camps is overstated and zero-sum game. In either case, the scope of inspecting the questions cannot be omitted from investigation, as a careful view of the

questions that both causal and constitutive theories ask can give us a proper view that why a particular school of thought looks at the world with a different viewpoint, and how it eventually sums up in explanation/description scheme. The subsidiary questions in either of the camp entails the fundamental question, 'how are things in the world put together so that they have the properties that they do?' (Kaplan, 1966). Not only these questions further establish the Great Divide among various theories of international relations, but they also settle the objectives of various research conduct. One of the fundamental differences between the natural and social world relies in its building blocks; the natural world is made up of material sources, whereas the social world is made up of ideas. Based on this ontological difference and epistemological compulsions the characterization of questions should be taken into consideration. Causal theorists have almost an overwhelming consensus to frame and answer questions based on 'why' connotation, whereas there has been a debate and divide on questions based on 'how' (Kaplan, 1966). Among the causal theoreticians those who are more aligned with empiricism prefer questions based on 'how' as they are more bent upon deductive inference. These questions in turn give way to three assumptions in pursuits of causal analysis of how X caused Y: 1) X and Y exist independent of each other; 2) X precedes Y in time, and 3) but for X, Y would not have occurred. The said scheme explains change in the state of some variable system (Wendt, 1998). So far, Robert Cummins proclaims causal theories as 'transition theories', as it encapsulates the transition of dependent and independent variables (Levine, 1987).

On the other hand, bounded by different objectives, constitutive theories are meant for putting up the questions to account for properties of things in a particular structure, where they exist. So far, these theories are suggested as 'property' theories (Levine, 1987). Unlike transition theories, the constitutive theories are considered to be static. Even though, the constitutive theories are meant to study the dynamic systems, both in natural and social science, but constitutive theories abstract away from these processes and take clues, in an order to explain how systems are constituted. So far, the constitutive questions are based on forms like 'how-possible?' or 'what' (*Designing Social Inquiry*, 2021). This is quite notable, that constitutive theories/questions are bound to make counter-factual assessment part and parcel of their research pursuit to hold the veracity of their research conduct. Keeping in view that necessity is conceptual or logical, instead of causal or natural. This takes us to assess the objectives of explanation and understanding that leading proponents of both causal and constitutive theories claim to be the central point of departure between the two schools of thought.

On Explanation/Understanding, if the first great debate of theories of international relations between the idealist and realist camp can be transcended to the questions that 'why do war occurs? And 'how can we eliminate/contain wars from the face of the earth?' The second great debate between the Traditionalist vs Behaviouralists can be transcended to the fundamental question 'Can we study politics scientifically?' The associated debates in preceding years paved the way between the positivist vs post-positivist camp, and the great divide between the natural and social world came at the heart of processes of theorizing and objectives that these theories entail. In this regard, one of the most significant academic input has been put forth by Hollis and Smith (1990, pp. 1–10), in their thought-provoking book, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*, when they suggest that social scientists have to make a choice between the two approaches or stories in their pursuit to search for knowable truth and that is based on account of an 'insider' and 'outsider' storyteller. The outsider's story is quite similar to that of natural science, and its gives perk of separating fact from practice which enables a researcher to explain the phenomenon quite effectively, this storyteller works on the principle of natural science and can rightfully labelled as positivist as he/she works on causal mechanism. Whereas the other storyteller accounts on making us understand what the events mean distinctly to that of laws of nature. This particular storyteller aims at recovering the individual and shared meanings that motivates actors to do what they did in particular instance. So far, an insider job is brought into the light the process of theorizing itself, and this will be a mistake for an insider to fall prey to causal mechanism and law-like generalization. The ultimate objective of the insider is to help us understand the processes under inquiry. So far, this is suggested that the differences between the positivist and post-positivist traditions are hard grind and almost impossible to reconcile, however the social constructivist does not agree with this assumption, and this is considered to be a middle range theory.

3. Methodological Considerations: Historicizing China's Theory of International Relations

There are three central questions that set the scope of Chinese theory of International Relations; first, should China open up to the rest of the world? Second how should China assess its national interest? Third, and the most important, can China rise peacefully? Ever since, China's has aimed at reforming and extending its role regionally and internationally, these questions have been at the heart of academic discourse of international relations, as it portrays a connection between China and international system/international society. It is imperative to mention here that the traces of China's role and status in International Relations can be traced back to Opium War in 1840, as by that point of time to the date the foundational questions such as, 'Who is Chinese nation?', 'Where does China stand vis-à-vis western dominated architect of statehood?', and 'How China can survive and rise up to the potential that it possess?' (Qin, 2011). This research in particular aims at investigating the response of China's IR scholarship, as it not only helps us to assess the merits/demerits of internal academic discourse, but it also helps us to have an oversight over development of International Relations in China from 1979 to the date.

It is pertinent to mention here that the indigenous response of IR theory within China has been largely the response to the corresponding Western IR theory. The combination of both identity and reform factor has given way to distinct pattern of the IR discourse within China (Qin, 2011), which resulted in shaping three debates among Chinese IR scholars:

- i. First debate has been largely dominated by orthodox vs reformist scholars; the time period of this debate can be bracketed from 1980 to 1990's. The question of opting for opening up for the rest of world of staying confined within its locale has the sustained traces in academic discussion. Later on, this debate turned the tables between newly rising realist scholars' vs reformist scholars, who aimed at discussing the challenges and prospects of China's commitment to be interest determined nation or ideologically motivated state.
- ii. Second debate has been largely dominated between the realist vs liberal scholars on the question of recognition of national self-interest and how to pursue its augmentation. It is obvious to mention here that the realist was bent upon pursuing the material power aspect, whereas the liberals were more prone to assimilate with international institutions, the decade of 1990's along with initial few years of twenty-first century can be marked under the influence of this debate.
- iii. Third debate has been largely dominated by tripartite contention among realist, liberals, and social constructivist both inside and outside academic circles of International Relations Theory. The focus of this debate has been upon the question of peaceful rise of China. The claims and counterclaims make the larger scope of this ongoing debate. Even though, the traces of this debate are dated back to later part of 1990's but it is almost become an exclusive agenda of academic discussions since 2000 to the date. In the light of these debates, this research looks further into the prospects of China's realization of national and international goals.

The focus of prospective debates and further discussions are anchored on the question of China's identity *versus* international society. So far, an effective study of International Relations Theory within China can be studied in following three headings.

3.1 China as a Revolutionary or a Normal Nation-state

The year 1978 marks China's departure from proletarian revolutionary state to normal nation-state in international system, when the Chinese policy makers categorically decided that economic well-being should be ranked above the political ideology. So far, CCP's communique of the Third Plenary Session in 1979 reads, 'the priority of the whole party should be shifted to socialist modernization', as China was making strategic adjustment with international system. This shift has (Sanzhong, n.d.) been the single most outstanding step in China's foreign policy to create and maintain a favourable international environment, which ultimately paved way economic development in China. The initial probe was moved by the question: how should China understand the overall international situation? Was it war or peace that is defining feature of international system in 1979? Till that point of time, China's understanding of international politics can be referred to Leninism, particularly Lenin's argument that the world was in the era of war and revolution, meaning that imperialism was war and that the only proletarian revolution could eliminate imperialist war. So far Orthodox scholars remained committed to the prophecy of Lenin, 'Countries want independence, nations want liberation and people want revolution' (Lenin, 1993), subsequently China's foreign policy and international relations theory remained pre-occupied with political consolidation and war preparedness. The belief on Lenin's stance was so hardwired that the instrumental communique of the 3rd Plenary Session of the CCP, the reformist camp did not dare to absolutely ignore the war factor for devising foreign policy. The immediate impact that is worth mentioning, is startup of debate of alternative and reinterpretation of Lenin's theory. This was the time when the journal of '*Reference on World Economics and Politics*' published 15 articles within a year i.e., 1982-83, (Qin, 2011, p. 236) which were based on posing questions to reinterpret Lenin's theory. The focus of these articles remained on three aspects: first, whether capitalism was dying or it is adoptive enough to cope with changing international system, second, whether war is continued to dominate international system or it is peace which is working at pace in international system, and the third, what has the leading priority of world in terms of making choice for economic development of making alliance for war preparedness. In the light of these concerns the reformists gained currency in China's foreign policy making and international relations theory.

Even though, the notion of economic development was gaining space in Chinese academic discourse of IR and foreign policy preferences, but this was not possible with gradual cautious scale. In 1977 Deng Xiaoping said, 'world war could be postponed', and same was the line adopted in 1982 CCP's Twelfth Congress. Even though, this was the heightened time of Cold War rivalry, so China was not absolutely dismissive of new strategic underpinnings but somehow the possibility of trusting international system to work for peace was finding its prints in China's international relations perspective. So far, Deng argued in 1985, 'It is possible to have no large-scale world war in the relatively long period of time and it is hopeful that world peace can be maintained'. (Deng Xiaoping Wenxun, 1993) However, in preceding years by the Thirteenth Party Congress in 1987 the major shift of placing peace and development on China's domestic and international policy fronts took place. This gradual shift from war to cooperation resulted in shaping China's foreign policy in subsequent years. This debate took the new turn in which the reformist was replaced with Chinese Realist scholars to contest with Orthodox scholars. The debate between the Chinese realist camp and Orthodox camp took shape in 1990's after translation of seminal work of Hans J. Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz. This was for the first time that Western International Relations leading realist camp was finding its way in China's international relations discourse. The most arduous task that Chinese Realist camp had to deal was to undo the very conception of self-interest, which was traditionally believed to be representative of ruling class's self-image in international realm. This has been the dividing factor between the proletariat and bourgeois states, and as China and its key policy makers had fresh memory of national interest defined in terms of representative class's self-interest, so far, a revision was inevitable if the debate of International Relations Theory has to go any further in China. In this regard, Yan Xuetong's book *An Analysis of China's National Interest* (Deng, 1998) was considerably first of its type, as it laid down three basic assertions:

- i. First, this will be a mistake to take national interest to its face value as representative of the class, state, or dynasty's interest. This cannot only be defined on ideology as well. It should rather be defined and understood as combination of interests per se of that of, the ruling and the ruled, which includes security, economy, political, and cultural interests.
- ii. Second, national interest should be dealt as independent variable, it should not be taken as dependent variable to international system/ international society. This gives comparative leverage to people at helm of affairs to navigate national self-interest independently, without an absolute compliance of international compulsions.
- iii. Third, national interest comes first than any other consideration or liability that a leader or nation holds dear. If the international system's modalities are aligned with national interest, there is no harm in accepting it, and if it is otherwise, there is no harm in ignoring it altogether.

It is on the credit of above-mentioned points of Chinese Realist camp that long standing question of China's identity vis-à-vis international system started to find the answer and subsequent policies in following years. The details of which are part of the next discussion.

3.2 China as an Extension of Hobbesian Power or Lockean State?

After settling down the paramount importance of national interest, the realist camp in China's international relations theory has to deal with the liberal counterparts. The realist stressed the importance of power in an anarchic international system, whereas the liberals advocated the international institutes anchored cooperation. This gave way to translation of liberal classic works within China in a year bracket of 2001-02, which includes Keohane's *After Hegemony*, *Neorealism and Neoliberalism*, likewise Keohane and Nye's *Power and Interdependence*, and Rosenau's *Governance with Government*. The academic rift between the realist camp and liberal camp gained momentum in following years, jointly the proponents of both school of thought published almost 70% of international relations research articles based on these two strands. In the same manner, Wang Yizhou published *An Analysis of Contemporary International Politics*, which played a crucial role in introducing liberalism in China (Zhang et al., n.d.). Even though, all strands of liberal international relations theory have been explored during this period of time, but neoliberal institutionalism stands the most influential in this category.

The following debate had one theme and two basic focal points. The theme was China's national interest and the focal points were: what was China's most important national interest and how China should realize it? Based on their comparative standpoint both realist and liberals started working on pinpointing China's national interest and ways to consolidate it. The first response to this objective was tabled by the realist camp, which based its arguments of relative position of China in international system, and strategic compulsions induced by anarchic system. The particular focus remained in highlighting the proximate issues of survival and sovereignty with focus on Taiwan, Tibet, and Nansha Islands, the success story of US and NATO in Kosovo was being quoted as an eye opener for China's foreign policy choices.(Yan, n.d.). The recipe to ensure China's survival and sovereignty was to ensure economic strength which should ultimately fill the gap between of its military might with rest of the world. The leading discourse of these scholars have taken impression from Kenneth Waltz (*The Long Game*, 2021).

Even though, Chinese liberals did not disagree with realists in terms of recognizing China's national interest and means to attain it, but they did not concede to the idea that structure-derived understanding of world with focus on traditional threats can take China and its foreign policy any further (Su, 1997). They rather argued that such myopic understanding of international system will further aggregate threats to China's national interest. So, they insisted that aspects of non-traditional

security threats should be given due importance if China aims at making formidable progress in world affairs. Their principal stance against realist camp can be enlisted as following;

- i. First, even though traditional security was considered to be matter of significance for China's national interest but an equal emphasis was laid upon the economic development as well. As the onus of traditional security waned after end of cold war. This turned out to be major shift in national goals as were envisioned by Deng Xiaoping.
- ii. Second, the liberal camp through their academic input gave currency to complexity of international system and actors involved in it. Significant focus has been added to the meanings and processes of globalization, with the suggestion that there has been fundamental shift in international system with end of Cold War, so it is advisable for China to better adopt with it as soon as possible, to avoid lagging behind.
- iii. Third, by the dissuasion of US-Soviet rivalry and bipolarity, the problem of international level has made their way through in international political discourse, such as IO's, IGO's, and environment, so this was suggested that China should better adopt with changing international realities.
- iv. Fourth, as the nature of new threats in international system are transnational in its formations, so no country can single handedly tackle it. So, China should make a choice to open up with rest of the world.

Within China, both on account of practice and theory Liberal institutionalism dominated rest of the debates, as it furthered the debate of national interest of China and proposed co-efficient means to attain it through participation and integration in international institutions. The significance of this discourse can be rectified by China's major foreign policy shift in terms of joining international institutions such as World Trade Organization, and almost 89 research articles were published in favor of liberal institutionalism in one of the leading journal of China, *World Economics and Politics*, from 1998 to 2005 (Qin, 2011). This will not be a mistake to suggest. The realist has helped China to recognize its national interest and challenges to attain it, whereas the liberals have helped China to streamline its energies and strategize its potential to address the structural disadvantages. So, in a sense, in an anarchical international system these two great debates of IR theory have provided option for China to either adopt the Hobbesian nation-state, or to internalize the rational Lockean actor, willing to join and gain in international institutes by first accepting their rules and regulations and then to have its due place in international politics. The resultant feature of this policy shift helped China a recognizable place in international politics, but the challenges and narratives associated with its rise are one of the most significant point of attention for international politics, which makes the third part of on-going discussion.

3.3 China as a Revisionist Challenger or a Status Quo Power

By the turn of 21st century, social constructivism joined in the prevailing debates of Chinese international relations theory between realism and liberalism. Although, social constructivism scholars have their natural inclination more towards liberalism but they did not absolutely subscribe to the idea of rational argument in pursuit of China to be an active member of international society. In this regard, the translation of *Social Theory of International Politics* by Qin Yaqin in year 2000 and subsequent articles have given way to third round of debate of international relations theory in China. Even though, the question of rise of China has been part of western academic discourse since 1990's in shape of book *The Coming Conflict with China* by Bernstein and Munro, articles such as *Clash of Civilization* by Samuel P. Huntington, and John J. Mearsheimer's book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, had implied that China with rapid growing material power, would be inevitably the challenger in international system (Wang, 1995). Internally, the debate regarding rise of China and the potential challenges that it has to face been augmented by Zheng Bijan's speech in 2003, where he said, 'China's road to a strong and prosperous power was a road of peace, a new path of 'peaceful

rise', he further argued, 'China would not repeat the road of previous rising powers, which had disrupted the international order, engaged themselves in violent expansion and started systematic war for world hegemony' ("The 'Peace' in China's Peaceful Rise," 2015). Zheng Bijan's use of term 'peaceful rise', gave way to new debate among Chinese IR scholars. China's flagship journal, *Social Sciences in China*, organized thematic research overview to debate about peaceful rise of China and its counter arguments. It is however, interesting to mention here that the mainstream literature of power politics has also influenced hard core scholars in China's as well, when they were moved to state, 'Can a sheep rise peacefully among a pack of wolves?' (Yan et al., 2004). With reference to the 2500 recorded human history with the dictum of 'might is right' and how can an existing hegemon afford rise of a new hegemon even in the guise of peaceful prospects. So far, they suggested China to stay militarily prepared and give up illusion of peaceful rise.

In the meantime, Liberals have followed Robert Keohane's institutional approach and argued that China should get more integrated into the international system, and China has much to gain by abiding by the norms of international institutions. Being a member of international institutes, China will have the maximum benefits of global economic trade, and this will render a positive restraining influence both on China and powers which opposes its rise. Constructivist in Chinese academic circles are agreed with liberals that China has much to gain by participating and integrating in international system (Wang, 2003). However, Chinese constructivist goes beyond the liberal emphasis on China's membership of international society rather than international systems. They argue that by integrating in international society China has not only gain economically, but it has also got sense of approval in terms of associating itself with international norms. This has resulted in making significant shifts of foreign policy within Chinese foreign policy making ranks, now China is more of a status-quo power than a revisionist state, and its interest is not purely defined in terms of pure political-military perspective but it has started to make comprehensive policy, and its strategic culture has been turned from conflictual to a more cooperative one. To sum up, Chinese proponents of constructivism argue that China's peaceful rise will eventually rely on its identity. As it qualifies all the essentials to be ranked as a responsible member of international system. Resultantly, the major focus of Chinese research input has been around the focus areas of ideas, identity, and international norms.

4. An Assessment of China's Rise through Social Constructivism

International society provides the context for state's existence. This context is both constraining and enhancing simultaneously. Both the attributes of international society and constraints shape the identity, role, and expectations of respective states. Resultantly, the templates of behaviour are significant to study for sake making a better assessment that how does a particular state sees itself and how does the rest of world portrays an image of it? (Kachiga, 2021, pp. 141–144). In case of China, the political interest to trace the trajectory of China's ascendancy to power based on the international society's assumptions, template, and expectations, is present both within and outside. There has been exhaustive literature available to discuss the rise of China through theories of realism and liberalism, but the central question of identity remains unanswered, so far social constructivism presents an alternative yet influential discourse to study rise of China in recent history. The following discussion will be based on a quick revision of social constructivism, how it helps us to understand the rise of China, what does it suggest about China's proximate and distant security concerns, and what are the theoretical limitations of social constructivism that are worth considering in this particular case.

4.1 Crux of Social Constructivism

Constructivism is regarded to be a social theory rather than a substantive theory of international relations. The conceptualization of relationship between agents and structure is at the heart of social constructivism. It gives us theoretical insight of mutual relationship between states and international structure. The main points of social constructivism can be traced as following (Baylis & Smith, 2001, pp. 152–157):

- a. Contrary to the substantive theories which offer causal explanations; claims, hypotheses, and quires of 'what' and 'why' to decipher the patterns in international politics, social constructivism quite akin to rational choice theory offers framework of analysis to under the social processes of world politics, where agent and structure are symbiotically associated with each other.
- b. Social constructivism is credited with giving us insight about the preferences that particular state is endowed with by its own position an international setting, without determining any particular preference in fixed manner.
- c. Unlike impression of rational choice theory that is marked in neo-liberalism and neo-realism, social constructivism suggests scholars to delineate principal actors, their interest, and capacities, within the ambit of normative structure of international politics.
- d. Constructivism is considered to be an extension of human consciousness in international politics, it entails commitment to idealism and holism in realm of international politics.
- e. Constructivism believes on the vitality of ideational foundation of state and its associated components, but unlike idealism it does not claim these ideas to be psychological in nature, rather it suggests these ideas to be social.
- f. Constructivism does not believe on law-like generalization and objective essence of concepts like Balance of Power and Anarchy, it does not subscribe to the idea that any such concepts are universally present and effective, it rather suggests that the application of these ideas is dependent upon on state's own choices.
- g. Constructivism concedes with principles of holism and structuralism. Its scholarship agrees that international structure cannot decomposed into properties of already existing actors. In the same senses it warrants impact of agent over structure and vice-verse.
- h. One of the major arguments of social constructivism is based on social construction of reality.
- i. When it comes to the rules, social constructivism delineates and debate about the interplay of regulative rules and constitutive rules. In the same sense social constructivism gives authenticity to the logic of consequences and logic of appropriateness.

4.2 An Assessment of Post-Reformist International Relations Theory of China through Social Constructivism

Any formidable Chinese International Relations Theory is not yet placed, so far both causal and constitutive theories offer theoretical assessment of China's ascendancy to power, and in this regard this particular part of research will be based on social constructivist assessment. It is imperative to mention here that Chines approach to international relations will be rooted in epistemic culture and history which shapes its identity, as that of Western world in general and America in particular. So far, multiple interpretations will come at play in terms of defining and describing the role of China in today's world. As it is the case, for the realist the structure of international system is predetermined, so far, a reinvention is not what is desirable. Whereas, for the constructivist, the altering functionality of international structure gives way to reassessment and reformulation of international politics. This means altering rules and conditions which guide the behaviour of actors is significant to study and understand. If the identity of a particular agents is warranted to alter, it has certain potential to impact the structure as well, and this gives the students of international relations, an enhancing insight to varying nature of academic and practitioner debates within China since 1978 to the date. Comparatively a simple explanation of any such transition can be encapsulated by power transition theory, but it has been backed up with the certain sense of power augmentation. Whereas, in case of China the identity process both in revolutionary phase and reformist phase is quite entrenched in

influence projection historical process, so this makes social constructivism a viable framework of analysis (Kachiga, 2021).

There has been plethora of literature available which discusses the change of identity in case of China, but it entails the central question that which particular Chinese identity is being mentioned in here? In our attempt to define national identity of China, we may render ideas of Wendt (1999), in which he divides identity to four sub-categories; *corporate identity*, *traditional identity*, *regime identity*, and *role identity*. On the collective operationalization of these components, this is difficult to trace down the national identity of China and particularly the national identity as it further gives us insight to understand the foreign policy of China, so the perception of China about itself, its role, and rest of the world will ultimately determine the fate of Chinese rise in the world politics. On the constructivist mode, a student of international relations can make a better sense out of Chinese reform policies from 1978, its capacity to deal with outstanding issues, liberalization of its economy, capability to answer the internal challenges, and composed response to both traditional and non-traditional transnational security challenges.

In the same sense, China can be regarded as constructivist as it believes in change both at the unit level and structural level. Even if we do not stretch to classic history, the China's role and identity from 1949 to the date has been testimony to the fact, that state's identity and cultural understanding of itself and rest of the world can change for good, so China adheres to the principle of change for the agent. Quite consistent with the ideas of Wendt China's foreign policy is aligned with the notion that relationship between agent and structure is not independent of each other, so far through its rapport and relations with others in the system, in recent times China is making headway. It will be pertinent to mention here that all these processes changes transform the structure as they necessitate adjustments of norms and replacement of old with the new ones. As in words of Wendt (1999, p. 336), "Structural change occurs when the relative expected utility of normative versus deviant behaviour changes", so far China is not oblivious to the structural realities altogether.

Generally, few constructivists' scholars address China's regional strategy with the special focus on the ideational factors which are shaping Beijing's behaviour but some of the constructivist are of their view that China's national identity is at the heart of its foreign policy approaches. (Liu, 2010). Rozman argue that since 1990s China aspired to follow the 'great power identity' (Rozman, 1999) and this persuasion has shadows of several factors which include the perception of other powers such as United States and the interaction among the great powers and the most important one which scholars like Michael Leifer, Andrew Nathan and Robert Ross described as China's historical background which has traces of victimization at the hands of Western Imperialism. Nathan and Ross suggest that in comparison of American and Chinese nationalism there are certain contrasts, the former is self-confident while the latter has national feeling of humiliation in the shape of 'century of humiliation' when China was exploited by western imperialists in 1840s (Chong, 2014, pp. 947–949). China's economic rise offered the opportunity to wipe out that feeling of national humiliation and to replace it with national pride.

For constructivist the rise of China and its behaviour towards other states is not about Beijing's economic or military might but it is more of the perception problem. Some Constructivists such as Kang holds optimistic approach regarding China's rise and its acceptance by the neighbouring states, Kang suggests that since East Asian nations have same policy of non-intervention in domestic affairs and sovereignty and Southeast Asians share ethnical, historical and cultural ties with China hence, they have accommodated China's rise rather than balancing it. However, Kang fails to make clear that why sovereignty, identity along with other factors in Chinese history translates its current national identity (Kang & Kang, 2007). For China sovereignty is important since Beijing always refuse any intervention of multinational institutions to address the questions of sovereignty in South China sea, but it remains unclear that which aspect of sovereignty identity is important, the great power identity or the formation of China's identity. Kang also could not answer the possibility of China's unquestioned power status and the continuity and relevance of the 'peaceful' rise in that scenario.

The constructivists such as Muthiah Alagappa has different views regarding China's rise and the perception of East Asian nations. Alagappa argues that China's military and economic competition is viewed differently by the neighbouring nations, to few it has created a sense of mistrust and fear and raised security concerns, but the others do not perceive it a threat and there are some which are threatened to some extent. For countries like Vietnam and Taiwan, the rise of China is a threat but other like South Korea and Thailand has accommodated China as the great power and do not consider it a threat. Indonesia and Malaysia have concerns over South China Sea dispute and the existence of economically sound Chinese diaspora in their states (Alagappa, 1998).

4.3 Limitations of Constructivism to Explain Rise of China and its International Relations Theory

Constructivist has offered a valuable social dimension of China's rise which was missing in the mainstream debates of realism and liberalism. However, the scope which the Constructivists offer is narrow and address the two aspects, the first one is the dominance of Western perspectives on the available literature addressing the China's regional cooperation in East Asia. The approach of Chinese policymakers towards other East Asian powers and the regional cooperation has been addressed independent of its relation to regional role and self-identification. The questions associated with Chinese perception of the region and the shared regional identity and its relation with China's identity (both great power identity and sovereignty identity) influence Chinese policy making but there is lack of theoretical and systematic depth to explore Chinese sources and to address these aspects (Liu, 2010). There is inadequate literature on Chinese perception and the available such as Gries addresses the Chinese perception but lacks theoretical and systematic depth (Sun, 2005). Constructivists do not come up with the answer that why material interests are least important than ideational factors in shaping China's cooperative behaviour towards regional states and how the regional cooperation is shaping Chinese sovereignty perception and shaping outlook of Chinese regional strategy.

5. Conclusion

Keeping in view the trajectory and potential of Rise of China, this will be safe to assume, that China is all set to replace US as superpower. Self-restraint, as it happens to be the prime feature of China's foreign politics, but how long China can sustain with the same posture is matter of concern. Identity politics has undoubtedly played a great role for China to consolidate its position internally and externally, but for rising on global stage the daunting challenge to preserve a cultural appeal for rest of the world is still far from reached. In the same sense, this will become imperative for China to manifest its official perspective on particular strand of international relations theory which may give an idea that with which ideational and material perspective its aims at taking lead of global affairs.

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