

IN SEARCH OF CHINESE IR THEORY

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Introduction

From a “Western” perspective, International Studies in the PRC have long time not be seen as an academic discipline but as highly ideological field controlled by the Chinese state. This certainly holds true for the early period of International Studies following the founding of the PRC, when Marxism-Leninism and the ideas of Mao Zedong served as guiding theories. But after the decisions of opening up and reform in 1978, Chinese political scientists were encouraged to develop new theories and strategies, which would allow the PRC to realize her national economic interests through international cooperation. Moreover, the leadership change in 2003 lead to a further shift from perception of international constellations to active participation in international affairs and initiated new discussions about “Chinese” IR theory and methodology.

The first part of this paper deals with the problems of applying “Western” IR theories to the PRC and shows, why an interdisciplinary approach linking the field of political theory with the field of area studies is more adequate to understand the theoretical considerations and motivations underlying Beijing’s foreign policy decisions.

The second part summarizes the theory discussions that can be found in Chinese academic publications from the mid-1980s up to the present. Even if it seems that the search of a particular “Chinese” theory of International Relations is still ongoing, it is at the same time evident that central concepts of these academic debates influence and guide contemporary Chinese politics on the international level.

As conclusion, this paper will not try to define “the” Chinese IR theory, but instead argue that elements of the Chinese theory discussions have already become integrated in the international (theory) discussion. The concepts of building a “harmonious society” and the “peaceful rise” are only two popular examples.

I.IR and area studies

The genesis of the Chinese IR debate can not be understood without reference to the emergence of alternative IR concepts in the Post-Cold-War era, which were not restricted to the academic communities of non-Western states. The idea of defining a Chinese theory opposed to traditional IR methodology and theory which, in the Chinese debate, has been classified as US born ideological construct does not derive from Marxist-Leninist ideology, but shows direct links to global debates on parochialism and hegemony in IR theory building.

1.1.National concepts of IR theory

The dominance of Anglo-American theory building in the field of IR has already been revealed in the 1970s by Stanley Hoffman's essay on IR as "American Social Science" (Hoffman 1977:41-60) and further come under critic in K.J. Holsti's study on parochialism in IR textbooks (Holsti 1985). But up to the end of the Cold War, the focus of IR theories still lay on the question of war and peace between the two superpowers. The discussion of peripheral or alternative constructs of IR theory started only in the late 1980s.

Following the argument of critical IR scholars that classical IR theories were Anglo-American concepts reflecting national, not international, foreign policy and security concerns, these classical theoretical frameworks are not necessarily universally applicable. Neuman (1998) has shown that core assumptions of classical IR theory can not be used to analyse or to predict foreign policy behavior of Third World states. A basic assumption of realist theories - the anarchic structure of the international system and the therefrom deriving self-help system - does not fit for least developed countries.

Carlos Escudé argues that not anarchy, but hierarchy constrains external behavior of Third World states. The states he analyses do not have a strong central government, by contrast, their domestic system is often characterized by anarchy, whereas due to bi- or multipolar power constellations, the international system has a hegemonic structure. Another example for "conceptual misfit" of classical IR theories results from divergent views on the structures of the international system. This causes a sharp contrast between "the" international system and the international system peripheral states perceive (Escudé 1998: 55-76).

Referring to the East Asian region, the universal explanatory power of IR theory and methods has long time not been questioned. Ikenberry and Mastanduno even state that "Western theoretical frameworks have much to say about international relations in Asia - but ...variables

such as power distribution, hegemony, international regimes ...must be sufficiently context sensitive in order to capture the complexity of those relations" (Ikenberry / Mastanduno 2003:19). Although they seem to acknowledge the existence of a particular political culture and history in East Asia, they do not support the development of a new theoretical framework.

Recent research on Chinese foreign policy leads to a different conclusion. To understand Chinese foreign policy behavior and the role of the PRC in international relations, not only have existing frameworks of IR theories to be modified, Johnston and Ross even stress the need for "new" theory concepts, which focus on Chinese political culture and particular structures (Johnston / Ross 2006).

The influence of culture and identity is often neglected in mainstream IR studies, which as for example realism follow the idea of states as like-units without functional differentiation. Furthermore, traditional neorealist and neoliberal approaches focus primarily on material incentives and interests to explain states' foreign policy behavior, whereas studies on contemporary Chinese foreign policy show that psychological aspects and constructions of national self-images dominate decision-making in the Chinese context (see also Johnston / Ross 2006).

Studies on Chinese foreign policy and China's role in international affairs therefore often restrained from using established macro-theories of IR, as these could not explain unexpected or irrational shifts in Chinese foreign policy behavior. These early analyses started from the level of decision making as basic level of analysis. Assuming direct linkages between Chinese IR studies and foreign policy decision making, they tried to understand Chinese perceptions of international relations and perceptions of world order to explain China's external relations (Rozman 1987; Shambaugh 1991; Whiting 1989; Friedrich 2000).

In his study on EU-China-relations, Friedrich further modified basic theories of perception and image by introducing the new category of "articulated perception". He argued that perceptions which were formulated in Chinese academic publications did not always reflect political reality. Instead of explaining this phenomenon as lack of knowledge about structures and processes of international politics, Friedrich interpreted these Chinese statements as form of "articulated perception", which did not present political reality, but a Chinese vision of the international system and international relations (Friedrich 2000).

Since the 1990s, growing integration in International Organizations and increased economic interdependence have caused a gradually restructuring of Chinese foreign policy decision making. To realize China's national interests on the international level, foreign policy and foreign strategy can no more rely on the above mentioned "articulated perception" of the international system. The transition from perception of international politics to active participation is therefore accompanied by detailed analysis of international affairs and new theory building efforts. But the still persisting understanding of IR theory as basis for foreign decision making explains that some Chinese IR researchers do not always make a clear distinction between IR theory and foreign strategy (see Feng, Tejun 2004:352-359).

Although Chinese scholars base their research on a terminology that seems to derive from translations of "Western" IR theories, this does not automatically mean that perceptions and strategies which underly contemporary Chinese foreign policy decisions are now based on mainstream IR assumptions and can therefore be understood as neorealist, neoliberal or constructivist turn in Chinese foreign relations. Although most studies on Chinese politics stress the neorealist character of China's foreign strategy, a view from the inside, based on Chinese academic publications, might lead to a different conclusion. Depending on the textual context and the author's intention, central theory concepts and terminology can witness a re-definition or sinification. The Chinese expression for "national interests" for example can be re-translated into English as "national interests" or "interests of state" (Yan, Xuotong 2005:12).

1.2. Challenging the Westphalian state?

Divergent meanings of central theory concepts illustrate the still constructed dichotomy between "Chinese" and "Western" state philosophy and the resulting conflict between the "socialist" Chinese system and Western "capitalist" Westphalian states.

The Chinese idea of "state", which serves as main unit of analysis in Chinese political theory, should not be linked to core assumptions of contemporary "Western" IR theories, as these often choose a liberal approach by analysing the role of non-state actors and including the sub-systemic level. Chinese foreign policy is, following the current orthodox understanding, under control of the Chinese party-state, there is no reference to individual actors.

However, it is quite difficult to give a clear definition of the Chinese understanding of "state", as there are competing approaches, some relying more on "Western" theory assumptions, others underlining the cultural aspect.

In the traditional Chinese world view, China represented the cultural and political center, which was surrounded by uncivilized barbarians. Symbolic obedience to the authority of the Chinese emperor was necessary precondition for the Chinese side to establish contacts with peripheral states. Traditional Chinese external trade relations with peripheral vassal states were based on the so-called tributary system. This system, modelled after the ancient Chinese lord-vassal relationship, was a highly ritualized institution with clearly defined rights and duties for the Chinese emperor and its vassal states (Fairbank 1968). The traditional Chinese idea of external relations thus emphasized “formal hierarchy among nations, while allowing considerable informal equality” (Kang 2003:164).

Western trade envoys were treated almost the same way as China’s peripheral vassal states and had to fulfill the kowtow as symbolic submission to the Chinese emperor. The Macartney mission in 1793, which symbolizes the first official attempt of a Western delegation to overcome the restrictions of the Chinese tributary system, ended with the rejection of the Chinese emperor to intensify trade contacts following the “Western” idea of international (trade) relations. It was not before the forced opening-up of China in the Opium Wars that the tributary system was replaced by a form of modern foreign relations. According to the Treaty of Nanking, China had to pay huge indemnities, to cede five ports to trade and residence of foreign merchants. But the following overturn of the Chinese tributary system and related new definition of Chinese state philosophy even outweighs material losses, as the Chinese self-perception as “tianxia” (all under heaven) was replaced by the modern idea of “guojia” (nation) (Levenson 1968).

This shows that China’s forced integration into the international system was accompanied by loss of its self-defined position as center of the civilized world. China’s status was reduced to the status of a state among many others. Following the national humiliation in the Opium Wars, Chinese intellectuals tried to redefine China’s role in the international system (“Self-strengthening movement”) and to overcome control by foreign powers. The first modern institution for (trade) relations with foreign powers, the “Zongli Yamen”, was thus planned as an interim solution to be abolished as soon as China’s independent and sovereign status would be reestablished. The first Chinese foreign ministry was just set up in the early 20th century. The struggle to overcome “unequal” relations with Western powers and to regain the lost status as “tianxia” is therefore often used to explain certain psychological orientations in contemporary Chinese foreign politics.

David Kang thus argues that the current political constellations in East Asia have to be understood as a form of hegemonic stability deriving from ancient structures of tributary

cooperation. In contrast to realist assumptions which predict conflicts and rivalry among rising powers in East Asia, this reference to Chinese political culture predicts stability as long as China plays a stabilizing role for the East Asian region (Kang 2003).

However, to use the term “hierarchy” in relation to Chinese foreign policy seems, from a Chinese perspective, quite irritating. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the main task in foreign policy was to avoid asymmetric external relations i.e. relations similar to those defined by the regulations in the “Unequal Treaties” of the Opium Wars. Rejection of all hierarchic and hegemonic tendencies – attributed to the USA and also to the Soviet Union after destalinization – has therefore been defined as normative key orientation in modern Chinese foreign policy.

The Chinese vision of world order instead favors a multipolar or pentapolar structure, consisting of the USA, Russia, Japan, the EU and China. Bilateral relations have to respect the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”, which prescribe symmetric structures as non-interference in domestic affairs, territorial integrity, national sovereignty and reciprocity.

The importance of symmetry for China’s strategic partnerships is also discernible in China’s policy paper towards the EU published in October 2003, which is the first official policy paper in the history of the PRC and the first statement to present a Chinese vision of future China-EU relations. Instead of presenting an optimistic conclusion and propositions for further cooperation, the strategy paper calls for an end of the EU’s arms embargo towards the PRC and forbids all political contacts with Tibet or Taiwan, as these issues are part of domestic policy concerns. Without these concessions, bilateral relations will not be intensified (Zhongguo dui Oumeng zhengce wenjian 2003).

Although Kang’s interpretation of regional stability in the East Asian context seems correct, the engagement of China in international affairs is often guided by more pragmatic strategies. Even if some Chinese scholars still see the tributary system as reference system for modern Chinese foreign policy after 1978, most Chinese publications conceive of the Chinese state as different from ancient times (expert interview, August 2007)¹.

To sum it up, the Chinese concept of state is shaped by two slightly divergent philosophical traditions. The first can be traced back to the self-image of “all under heaven”, the second is more inspired by the idea of modern nation-states. Both concepts exclude the individual and

¹ Some of these expert interviews contain confidential information. For more details, please contact the author.

non-state actors from foreign policy making and both do not conceive of the international system as anarchic. It is almost impossible to predict, which self-image as state will dominate Chinese foreign policy in the next decades. The search of a Chinese IR theory is still unfinished, so one could assume that the preference for one or the other state concept will vary due to shifting domestic and international power constellations.

II. Chinese debates on IR theory and methodology

Instead of first summarizing genesis and development of Chinese IR theory discussions, this second part starts with some reflections on two often quoted concepts of modern Chinese foreign policy to show, how international constellations and domestic challenges influence Chinese theory building.

2.1. “Peaceful rise” – Genesis and background constellations

From the Chinese perspective, the concept of “peaceful rise” is China’s strategic reaction to counter the so-called “China Threat Theory”, which is perceived as nothing more than a highly ideological construct to justify ongoing containment of China and interference in Chinese domestic affairs i.e. Chinese politics towards Taiwan, Xinjiang and Tibet. In his study on theory, history and strategy related to China’s peaceful rise, Hu Zongshan traces the discussion back to the year 1992 (Hu, Zongshan 2006:3). For the Chinese side, this year has a highly symbolic connotation, as it marks the beginning normalization of Beijing’s foreign relations in the post-Tian’anmen period. Following the Chinese interpretation, the economic and political rise of China, which further accelerated after Deng Xiaoping’s journey to the South, was opposed by the USA, Japan and Taiwan, who then became the main progenitors of the new developed “China Threat Theory”.

Although Gordon Chang has recently drawn a different scenario of China’s future development by predicting a political and economic collapse instead of an inevitable conflict with the USA (Chang 2001), Chinese analyses still regard “China Threat Theory” as the dominant paradigm among China watchers.

Confronted with the “China Threat Theory” and the therefrom deriving negative image as pernicious and destabilizing state, Chinese scholars speak of a new security dilemma. The negative image threatens China’s new international role as reliable mediator in regional conflicts e.g. the North Korea issue and questions China’s self-defined image as peaceful state-actor in regional as well as in global affairs. In the long-term perspective, this negative image could, if accepted by the majority of states, also delegitimize the Chinese party-state.

Because after the basis of political legitimacy had shifted from revolution and ideology (Mao Zedong) to pragmatism and primacy of economic development (Deng Xiaoping), good performance and active participation in international affairs, apart from economic prosperity and stability on the domestic level, have now become core elements of the CCP's power position.

In order to cope with the "China Threat Theory", which obviously hinders realization of Chinese national interests on the international level, Chinese scholars have proposed the idea of "peaceful rise". This theory-based concept states that positive contributions of China's rise to the world outweigh negative aspects, and that China is still far behind the USA in terms of comprehensive strengths and military expenditures. To cool down anti-Chinese sentiments, the concept of "peaceful rise" is based on traditional Chinese political culture, not on Marxist-Leninist or Maoist ideas. Referring to the aspect of benevolence in traditional Confucian culture, this model constructs a new self-image as peaceful and responsible great power (expert interview, August 2007).

The expression "peaceful rise" was first introduced by Zheng Bijian at the Bo'ao Forum in November 2003, where he held a talk on China's rise and its implications for Asia's future development. The concept was immediately integrated in China's foreign strategy, as Wen Jiabao referred to the "peaceful rise" already in his Harvard speech in December 2003. Few weeks later, Hu Jintao, commemorating Mao Zedong's 110th anniversary, emphasized the importance of "peaceful rise" for China's future foreign strategy. Hu Jintao quoted the concept together with the aspects of independence and sovereignty, the two key elements of modern Chinese foreign policy (see Hu, Zongshan 2006:5).

Until now, there is still no official definition of "peaceful rise", although this term is widely used to describe China's foreign policy and engagement in international affairs. This implies that the "peaceful rise" has first of all a symbolic meaning.

To define China's rise not as threat to but opportunity for world peace, Zheng Bijian argues that the main intentions of China's "peaceful rise" are not struggle for hegemony or military expansion, but to find strategies to cope with major challenges resulting from China's ongoing modernization project. High-speed economic modernization has already lead to energy shortages and environmental pollution, not to forget social aspects of the transition from planned economy to market economy and privatization of former state-owned companies. According to Zheng Bijian, the model of China's peaceful rise, which has not yet become reality, reflects experiences of early European industrialization and modernization

and stands for a new development model, which is characterized by low consumption of resources and low pollution, a new social policy and interdependence and cooperation in global affairs (Zheng, Bijian 2005:3).

Apart from this rather utopian concept, other Chinese scholars use the term “peaceful rise” to underline the importance of regional cooperation and stability in China’s domestic modernization plans. They argue that regional conflicts with Japan or open confrontation with the USA would have a destabilizing effect on China’s political and economic system and should therefore be avoided (see Wang, Jisi 2004:3-21). This understanding of “peaceful rise” is a more pragmatic answer to the “China Threat Theory” and serves national interests, as it devaluates negative interpretations of Chinese foreign policy behavior.

2.2. Chinese harmonious society

The idea of “harmonious society” was first mentioned during the 16th Party Congress in 2002, but the debate on its concrete contents only started in late 2005, when the 11th Five-Year-Plan, which focuses on sustainable development and counter-measures to cope with socio-economic externalities of China’s modernization programme, was issued (Zheng, Yongnian 2005:8). The ongoing expert debates in the PRC use the official statements of the Chinese President Hu Jintao as point of reference. The Chinese news agency “Xinhua” quotes Hu Jintao’s definition of “socialist harmonious society” as including the aspects of “democracy, rule of law, fairness, justice (...) and harmony between human society and nature” (Hu, Jintao, 20-02-2005, Xinhua).

Chinese studies on contemporary IR concepts relate the concept of “harmonious society” to Hu Jintao’s speech on a “harmonious world” at the 60th anniversary of the UN in September 2005 (Hu, Jintao 15-09-2005). Referring to Hu Jintao’s “harmonious world”, Chinese IR researchers argue that the concept is an updated version of the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”, relying on Jiang Zemin’s UN speech on a “better world”, held at the UN in 1995 (Yu, Sui 2007:9).

This clearly shows that the idea of “harmonious society” already existed in inner-Chinese debates as idealized model for domestic politics, but later was also developed towards a new model for global governance.

As the terminology derives from passages in the Confucian classics (i.e. Liji; Datong), “harmonious society” and “harmonious world” are often understood as “Chinese” contribution to governance concepts. Concerning domestic politics, the idea of harmony is deeply rooted in Chinese political culture and is commonly understood as basic element of

political legitimacy. In ancient times, the Chinese emperor, mediator between heaven and world, was enthroned by the “heavenly mandate”. If he did not perform the rituals or acted against the laws of heaven, the world came into disharmony. Social unrests and natural disasters were seen as indicators for misbehavior. As ultimate consequence, the emperor lost his mandate and a new dynasty was established (see Miller 2000:17-18).

Overall, on the level of domestic politics, the concept symbolizes an approach to cope with increasing social tensions and regional disparities. The CCP plays a leading role in the construction of a domestic harmonious society, and this new task – together with the tasks of preserving domestic peace and stability and defining the framework for sustainable economic growth – has now become defined as another central aspect of the CCP’s political legitimacy.²

On the global level, four central aspects are attributed to the concept. First, the idea of a “harmonious world” stresses the need for multilateral structures to realize common security interests and peace. Second, cooperation structures should benefit development and economic prosperity of all states involved, therefore, the international trade system should be based on fair and equal structures and rejection of all kinds of discrimination. Third, in opposition to Huntington’s clash of civilizations, the Chinese concept calls for dialogue and exchange between different cultures and civilizations. International interactions should become a mutual learning process, states as global competitors should seek common ground while preserving (cultural) differences. Fourth, the reform of the UN should be carried on to establish and maintain a fair and reasonable world order (Man, Zhengang 2006:53).

It is only too obvious that the theory concept is still open for definition and can easily be adopted to changing constellations. Chinese scholars still struggle to come to a common understanding of the concept and its meaning for future Chinese foreign policy. At the conference on “Globalization and harmonious world”, which took place in October 2006, Chinese IR researchers tried to define the underlying meaning of “harmonious world” by linking it to current Chinese policy issues. One main finding of the conference was to describe the concept as Chinese answer to challenges of globalization and as normative concept for a post-Westphalian world structure (Liang, Shoude / Li, Yihu 2007:7).

Moreover, Chinese conference participants underlined the interdependence of “harmonious world” and “harmonious society”, which in a globalized world should not be treated separately, as the Chinese vision of “harmonious world” on the one hand reflected Chinese

² There have been several decisions of the Central Committee on strengthening the party’s governance capacities, which were republished by Xinhua Press (2005) as appendix to a collection of speeches and articles concerning “harmonious society” (Xinhua (2005), Constructing a socialist harmonious society. Xinhua Press).

national development interests, but on the other hand should benefit world society (Liang, Shoude / Li, Yihu 2007: 7-8).

One question posed on the conference has not yet been answered: Should the “harmonious world” be understood as idealized vision, which never will become reality, or should it be further modified to become a realist development paradigm for future world politics? (Liang, Shoude / Li, Yihu 2007: 9).

2.3. Background – IR research in the PRC

Historical overviews on Chinese IR studies, which were published since the 1990s, do not give much attention to the Maoist period, but often begin with the late 1970s, when academic research on IR methodology and theory was strengthened as result of the decisions of opening up and reform in 1978. Although “theory” concepts of the Maoist period are mentioned in most studies as part of Chinese foreign policy, priority is overall given to reorganization of IR studies in the post-Maoist period.

Instead of undertaking a discussion of IR concepts in the early Maoist period, Chan and Song base their short overview of Chinese IR on the institutional organization structure. Their study shows that official interest in IR studies was directly related to shifts in international constellations. During the 1950s, only the Renmin University had a “Department of Foreign Affairs”, but it was the Sino-Soviet conflict which caused further institutionalization of IR research (Song, Xinning / Chan, Gerald 2000:15-16). Due to Zhou Enlai’s efforts and the CCP Central Committee’s decision on strengthening research on foreign (not international) affairs, new departments of “International Politics” were established at Renmin University, Peking University and at the Fudan University in 1964. These departments had a strong country and issue related research orientation and each department had a clearly defined research programme. IR researchers at the Renmin University studied international communist movements and socialist state systems, whereas the Peking University focused on national liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The Fudan University in Shanghai was the only research department to analyze and reflect Western capitalist states. Theory and methodology played no important role, as research followed the pattern of “background; process; prospect” and only reflected some basic assumptions on imperialism, colonialism or Marxist-Leninist writings on war and peace (Zhao, Kejin / Ni, Shixiong 2007:54-55).

Also in the late 1960s, new research institutes were installed under control of different Chinese ministries and foreign languages universities were set up (Song, Xinning / Chan, Gerald 2000:15-16).

The move away from Soviet IR paradigms and research agendas towards more independent Chinese IR research structures was followed by the definition of “Chinese” perceptions of world order and the structure of the international system. Mao Zedong’s theory of the “intermediate zone”, which was composed of all European, Asian and African states caught between the two superpowers, the USA and the Soviet Union, was redefined as theory of “two intermediate zones” during the early 1960s. Mao further differentiated between Asia, Africa and Latin America as one intermediate zone, and European and capitalist states as the other intermediate zone in the bipolar (USA/SU) world system (see Ye, Zicheng 2001:128-131).

These theory-based perceptions and interpretations of world order were the first steps towards Mao Zedong’s so-called “Three World Theory”, which can be traced back to the early 1960s, but which was first officially presented in 1974. Following Mao Zedong’s explanation, the first world in his theory of world order comprised the USA and the Soviet Union, the second world was represented by Japan, Europe, Australia and Canada, whereas the third world consisted of the remaining socialist, least developed states and former colonies. China, in this model, was classified as socialist state and part of the “third world”, opposing hegemonic claims of the USA and the Soviet Union (Ye, Zicheng 2001:131-134).³

The launching of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) posed an abrupt end to political research in the PRC. Most institutes were closed and Chinese political scientists, branded as counter-revolutionaries, were persecuted or sent to the countryside for reeducation. After this sharp interruption, IR research was restored and developed in new directions. Due to Deng Xiaoping’s politics of opening-up and reform in 1978 and the CCP’s decision on reform of the higher education system in the early 1980s, Chinese IR Studies entered a new development stage. Between 1980 and 1987, primary and secondary Western IR literature was introduced by the translations of Chen Lemin, Chen Hanmin and Ni Shixiong/ Jin Yingzhong. Among the first translated works were "Contending Theories of International Relations" by Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff and "The Theory and Practice of International Relations" by William Olson (Ni, Shixiong / Xu, Jia 1997:11). Specialized academic journals were set up in the mid-1980s. Up to 1987, already more than 60 articles on IR theories, most

³ For an interpretation of “Three World Theory” and its implications for Chinese foreign policy see also Yee, Herbert S. (1983), “The Three World Theory and Post-Mao China’s Global Strategy”, in *International Affairs* 2 (Spring 1983), 239-249.

of them still summaries of mainstream IR theories, were published (Ni Shixiong / Xu, Jia 1997:12). At the same time, due to the reform of the education system, “Contemporary World Politics, Economics and International Relations” was introduced as new compulsory course for all university students (Song, Xinning / Chan, Gerald 2000:16).

The idea of developing an independent IR theory with Chinese characteristics came into appearance during the first Chinese conference on IR theories in 1987 and was also raised at the following Chinese IR conferences in 1991 and 1993 (Ni Shixiong / Xu, Jia 1997:12).

Hu Menghao contrasted socialist and “bourgeois” Western IR theories by stating that the former aimed at realizing the socialist project, whereas the latter only served Western imperialist interests (see Song, Xinning / Chan, Gerald 2000:18).

Ni Shixiong and Xu Jia take the claim for defining a Chinese IR theory as indicator that IR studies in the PRC already reached a new development stage. Apart from translations and critical discussion of Western IR, Chinese scholars began to publish their own studies on world politics. In the 1990s, further professionalization of Chinese IR studies resulted in almost innumerable amounts of Chinese IR articles. The search for Chinese IR, initiated in the second half of the 1980s, lead to heated discussions among Chinese scholars on IR theory building and IR methodology (Ni Shixiong / Xu, Jia 1997:14).

Chinese scholars saw themselves confronted with the dilemma of how to combine central aspects of Chinese socialism with scientific assumptions to form a new analytical framework. Historical materialism still had to serve as guiding theory, although it was commonly acknowledged that without giving up Marxist ideas, new instruments for IR analysis had to be defined. Although (some) Chinese researchers accepted these normative preconditions for theory building, no common concepts and definitions could be found concerning core assumptions, units of analysis and methodology. Divergent views were also expressed concerning the meaning of “Chinese characteristics” (Ni Shixiong / Xu, Jia 1997:14-15).

During and after the year 1989, although most sub-fields of Chinese social sciences became targets of the political campaigns against spiritual pollution and so-called “peaceful evolution”, no real restrictions were placed on Chinese IR studies. Moreover, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the resulting collapse of the bipolar world structure without directly following establishment of a new global power structure paved the way for further extension of “Chinese” IR theory building. During the years 1989-1991, “Chinese” visions of a new world structure focused on strategic orientations of the USA as last remaining old

superpower. Some Chinese scholars expressed their concern that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the socialist system of the PRC would become the main concern of US foreign engagement. But at the same time, other groups of Chinese scholars noted the rise of new powers as Japan, Europe and the PRC that would in the near future definitely challenge US power monopoly. The normative idea of multipolarity gradually replaced Cold-War debates on bipolar confrontation and hegemony in world politics.⁴

Not domestic but international reactions to the events of 1989 shaped academic discussions among Chinese political scientists. Only after 1992, when Deng Xiaoping's journey to the South and declaration of adherence to reform policies fueled the (re-)establishment of external relations, Chinese abstract theory concepts became adjusted to the new structures of China's international environment. To realize China's interests, i.e. economic prosperity and modernization, a stable regional and international order had to replace the old bi-or unipolar power structures. Chinese IR analyses thus looked at prospects of multipolarization and the role of the USA. Deng Xiaoping's writings on "peace and development" were understood as new paradigms which should guide Chinese theory concepts of world structure.

In the 1990s, based on (normative) analyses of the international system, the PRC began to establish "partnership relations", which should allow the PRC to pursue her national interests by following a "soft power" approach and avoiding open (military) conflicts. According to Chinese definitions of "partnership diplomacy", China's bilateral relations should benefit both sides and be based on cooperation instead of confrontation. To avoid the revival of bipolar power constellations, partnership relations should not be directed against a third state or group of states (Jin, Zhengkun 2000:20).

After 1992, most Chinese IR studies were policy-oriented, as China's diversified external relations required detailed knowledge of the international system and redefinition of foreign strategies. Confrontation with the USA about the Taiwan issue, the incidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the collision between a US and a Chinese airplane in 2001 added new pessimistic assumptions to Chinese theory and strategy considerations.⁵

⁴ For an excellent (English) overview concerning recent developments see: Wang, Jisi "International Relations Studies in China Today: Achievements, Trends and Conditions." A Report to the Ford Foundation. www.irchina.org/en/pdf/IRSC_wang_jisi_english.pdf (10.05.2007)

⁵ id.

2.4. Chinese publications on IR theory

After the Qingdao IR conference in 2004, a first comprehensive survey on the state of Chinese IR theory was published, which did not try to define an orthodox theory framework, but presented a collection of contemporary IR studies in the PRC. The book is divided into four parts, beginning with IR concepts of China's political leaders (Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin) and ending with meta-theoretical discussions of problems and prospects in developing (Chinese) IR theories (Fu, Yaozu / Gu, Guanfu 2004).

The first part summarizes genesis and development of central Chinese IR concepts before the background of China's external relations and international strategy. This historical overview explains, how changes in international power constellations forced China to modify its foreign policy considerations. Emphasis is given to the idea of peace in international relations, whereas ideas of class struggle, export of revolution or ideological conflicts between socialist and capitalist systems are not mentioned. This reveals that the papers of the Qingdao conference do not present the historical development of IR concepts. Only such an eclectic reading of Chinese views on IR allows to avoid the already mentioned dilemma of combining ideological and pragmatic IR concepts, as only concepts are quoted which justify or explain current foreign policy.

The second part deals with structures and patterns of the international system in the Post-Cold-War period. Research in these sub-fields does not necessarily cover abstract models of global order, but concentrates on China's national interests. Among the main research topics are China's international status, patterns of modern diplomacy and China's external relations as well as regional and global security issues.

The third part of the book presents examples for issue-related theory building. Of major concern for modern Chinese foreign policy and foreign image campaign is the concept of "peaceful rise". Inspired by Paul Kennedy's "The Rise and Fall of Great Powers", Chinese scholars try to develop a new road map to explain and justify China's rise to great power status. The following chapters of this third part then discuss the role of the USA and US foreign policy after 9/11.

The fact that no reference is made to other "poles" of the Chinese multipolar system lets assume that a unipolar structured international system has been accepted as political reality. As multipolar structures have not yet been established, Chinese theories, which have to advise foreign policy decision making, have returned to old patterns of US hegemony and reflections of war and peace.

The fourth part is dedicated to problems and prospects of Chinese IR theory in the 21st century. Three chapters discuss the influence of Western IR on Chinese IR studies and summarize trends towards the definition of IR theory with “Chinese characteristics”.

In this context, the Chinese IR expert Feng Tejun describes the importance of IR research for developing an effective foreign strategy, which allows realization of national interests on the international level. Feng recognizes the need for scientific policy analyses. But as he sees IR theories as products of national power considerations, he opposes unmodified adoption of Western (“US”) IR theory and proposes Marxism-Leninism as “guiding idea” (zhidao sixiang) for Chinese theory and strategy (Feng, Tejun 2004:352-359).

Xiao Huanrong’s recently published book on IR research in the Chinese context tries to give a more general overview by summarizing divergent views of Chinese scholars (Xiao, Huanrong 2005). However, some interpretations and conclusions do not fit into “mainstream” understanding of Chinese IR research. Concerning genesis and development of IR Studies in China, Xiao constructs the following two development stages: During the initial stage, from the beginning of reform politics in 1978 up to 1989, former restrictions on IR research were lifted and new concepts and ideas were introduced into the Chinese academic discussion. At the first Chinese conference on IR theories, taking place in Shanghai in 1987, Chinese scholars for a first time discussed ways of developing alternative IR frameworks by reflecting mainstream IR theories and methodological aspects. But apart from these controversial discussions, in the 1980s, most Chinese publications on IR theory were translations and annotations of “Western” theory concepts.

According to Xiao, the year 1989 has to be understood as a turning point in the ongoing search of “Chinese” IR theory. Following Xiao’s argumentation, after 1989, translations and overview introductions of mainstream “Western” IR theory were more and more replaced by critical examinations of underlying national interests and strategic orientations of those states, in which these mainstream theories had been designed (Xiao, Huanrong 2005: 2-5). But apart from reservations concerning “Western” theory products, the end of the Cold War and the possible restructuring of the international system seemed to allow the rise of new powers and thus lead to new approaches in the fields of IR theory and foreign strategy.

In contrast to the historical background given by Xiao, Ni Shixiong and Xu Jia divide Chinese IR research in three stages, the first ranging from the late 1970s to 1987, and the second from 1987, the year of the Shanghai IR conference, to 1993. During the last stage, starting from

1993, after normalization of bilateral relations and lifting of most sanctions imposed after 1989, theory discussions in China more and more reflected particular Chinese IR concerns. But Ni Shixiong and Xu Jia also point out that there are still contending schools favoring competing IR models (Ni, Shixiong / Xu, Jia 1997).

2.5. IR theory with “Chinese characteristics”?

Among Chinese IR scholars, there is still no common understanding of the widely used term “Chinese characteristics”. Chinese overviews on the search of IR theory name three sources of “Chinese” theory constructs. The first source are Marxist-Leninist IR approaches, which officially still should serve as guiding ideas for the search of Chinese IR theory building. According to Zhao Kejin and Ni Shixiong, it is the older generation of Chinese IR scholars (Chen Qiren, Liang Shoude, Feng Tejun), which refers to Marxist-Leninist approaches and related methodology. Guided by dialectical and historical materialism, early IR (theory) studies analyzed aspects of political economy, (neo-) imperialism and North-South dichotomies (Zhao, Kejin / Ni, Shixiong 2007:55-56).

Due to shifting domestic and international constellations, “Western” IR concepts became a second source of contemporary Chinese IR research. Apart from translations of “Western” IR theories since the mid- 1980s, there is now also a large amount of comparative IR theory studies in Chinese (see for example Jin, Yingzhong / Ni, Shixiong 1992).

It seems that the new generation of Chinese IR scholars often interprets Marxist-Leninist IR approaches as research patterns of the first generation of Chinese IR researchers and takes these works only as historical background of their academic field. Moreover, there is a remarkably tendency to relate research orientations of modern and contemporary Chinese IR scholars to “Western” IR schools, mainly realism, liberalism and constructivism. Chinese experts still avoid to use the term “Chinese” school, but rather add that in the Chinese academic context some mainstream theory assumptions might have become slightly modified. Although Chinese scholars discuss the possibility of Chinese IR theory and methodology, research of IR issues is still based on mainstream (realist) assumptions (expert interview, August 2007).

Chinese history and diplomatic experience is the third potential source of modern Chinese IR theory building and at the same time also serves as reference point for Chinese scholars, who defend the definition of a “Chinese” IR theory as the only way to realize Chinese national interests on the international level. Research in this subfield includes foreign strategy and

political philosophy in ancient China as well as studies on CCP foreign policy and diplomatic history (see Zhao, Kejin / Ni, Shixiong 2007:58-59).

Political theory in the Chinese context had long time been understood as defining guidelines for policy decisions, not as constructing abstract models and frameworks for analysis. Since the 1990s, though Chinese IR Studies are still highly policy-related, some groups of Chinese scholars began to propagate the development of more abstract IR concepts (Ren, Xiao 2001:1). Even if the problem of finding a common definition for “IR with Chinese characteristics” has not yet been solved, Chinese scholars further began to discuss more ontological and epistemological aspects.

Qin Yaqing’s study on the “core problem” in Chinese IR marks the shift from meta-theoretical discussions towards theory building. Qin Yaqing first defines three preconditions for “Chinese” IR theory:

(...)it should be based on (local) Chinese culture, historical tradition and practical experience; it should be universally valid, that is, it should transcend local tradition and experience; its core assumptions must be distinct from those of other theories (Qin, Yaqing 2005:62)

After summarizing and outlining the differences concerning the core assumptions of American and British IR concepts, Qin Yaqing presents his idea of “core assumption” in the Chinese context. He starts by defining China and its role and status in the international system, by stating that “China is a rising socialist country, transforming from a state outside the international system to one inside it” (Qin, Yaqing 2005:68).

From this core assumptions derives the question, how this rising socialist state can become integrated in already existing structures of the international system. Qin Yaqing then argues that no mainstream theory approach fits the Chinese idea of “peaceful rise”, as concerning the restructuring of power constellations on the international level, realism would predict a systemic war. Although liberalism and constructivism would allow a non-violent solution, Qin Yaqing stresses that their assumptions are based on US diplomatic history and thus could not predict China’s future development and integration process.

Coming back to Qin Yaqing’s preconditions, the “peaceful rise” of China, the “core problem” of “Chinese” IR theory (Qin, Yaqing 2005), is defined as national development model, based on ancient Chinese political culture and related to national policy concerns. Being first a

Chinese model, it should in a second step become a more abstract model, describing not only China's rise, but also peaceful integration of other peripheral states (Qin, Yaqing 2005:69).

Qin Yaqing's theory considerations show one way to combine already existing foreign policy concepts – “peaceful rise” and “harmonious world” – into an overall framework to define China's foreign orientation and role in world affairs.

Conclusio

The search of a new Chinese IR theory is still ongoing. Different theory concepts have been developed, which range from complete Westernization of Chinese IR studies up to the establishment of an independent “Chinese” IR theory. Competing approaches in Chinese IR concepts result from the divergent educational background and ideological orientation of their progenitors. The adoption of “Western” IR theory for example is mainly proposed by Chinese scholars, who were educated at American or European universities, whereas the older generation of Chinese IR scholars is not familiar with Western theories and methodology and often relies on Marxist-Leninist and Maoist theories.

Instead of establishing an independent “Chinese” IR framework, many Chinese IR researchers favor the integration of mainstream IR theories and Chinese IR concepts. However, as aspects of traditional Chinese philosophy are not always compatible with core assumptions and units of analysis of mainstream macro-theories, Chinese academic publications on IR theory avoid a definition of this “mixed” theory framework. The main task of contemporary IR theory discussions is to develop concepts, of course reflecting China's national interests, which can be integrated into international debates. These Chinese IR concepts do not question the existing structure of the international system. Maintenance of peace and stability is given priority over revolutionary ideas of global system change, as China is now integrated into the international system and therefore will act according to the given economic and political structures (expert interview, August 2007).

The above described theory concepts of “peaceful rise” and “harmonious society” are part of China's attempt to confront hard power politics (attributed to the USA) with the “Chinese” soft power approach. Even if there is still a huge gap between articulated foreign policy concepts and political reality, the Chinese terminology is often quoted in global discussions. But although these IR concepts are part of the China's vision of great power relations and world order, most Western language studies do not pay enough attention to the underlying normative aspects. Studies on China's “rise” are often not more than compilations of

domestic and foreign politics analyses i.e. political, economic, military and diplomatic aspects (see Sutter 2005; Brown 2000).

On a more abstract level, Chinese research on IR methodology and theory building might also contribute to the development of new research paradigms, as the confrontation between existing IR concepts and political culture might lead to alternative, maybe also more universal theory frameworks.

The concept of “peaceful rise” is of course a “Chinese” development model. But as the “peaceful” rise of peripheral states – be it Asia, the Arabic World or Latin America – is not part of mainstream theories, these theory-based discussions are of global concern.

Academic research in China is based on detailed and critical analysis of the rise of great powers from around 1500 up to 1900. In 2006, CCTV broadcasted a documentary concerning the rise, fall and new rise of “great powers”, which reflects both academic and political discussions (for example CCP seminar on the rise of great powers in 2003)⁶.

Concerning world order and structure of the international system, Chinese researchers point out that the realist assumption of anarchy in the international system does not describe political reality. They further explain that unipolarity and hegemonic tendencies dominate the system, but that a stable and peaceful future world order would only be possible by allowing multipolar power structures. The idea of “harmonious world” defines normative rules for future global interactions and stresses once more the aspect of cooperation.

In contrast to visionary and utopian discussions, on a more pragmatic level, the “state” remains the main actor in international politics. Nevertheless, the above mentioned ancient model of China as “all under heaven” and the idea of global harmony might still influence China’s self-definition and self-image concerning its role in international affairs.

⁶ For an English discussion of the documentary see Green, Stephen (2007), “The world according to CCTV”, in *Far Eastern Economic Review* (March 2007) 2, 41-45.

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